

Student Lobby Day In Albany A Special Issue

The Stony Brook

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Statesman

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A Tale of Two Students Groups



The Student Association of State Universities, above, chose banners and old style protesting, while students with the New York Public Interest Research Group, right, took their case directly to the legislators on Monday.



SASU and NYPIRG Use Different Methods in Fight for Restoring Student Aid

Coverage Begins on Page 2

Signing Up for the Battle

Student Lobbying Marks Beginning of Activism for SUNY

A Near Miss For Protesters

By JENNIFER KESTER
Statesman Editor



SASU Protesters, left, marched into the lobby of the Capitol, just missing George Pataki, who was just finishing a news conference



Albany, March 1 - Students from all over New York State gathered here Monday in a grassroots effort to turn the tide against Governor George Pataki's budget proposal to cut \$133 million out of the Tuition Assistance Program, which provides financial aid to many on the Stony Brook University campus.

The efforts were led by two separate student led groups, the New York Public Interest Research Group and the Student Association of State Universities, whose approaches to taking on the proposed cuts were very different. Students led by NYPIRG took their case straight to individual legislators, while SASU chose the route of protest - through the lobby of the Capitol Building.

The purpose of the latter effort, said NYPIRG's Legislative Coordinator Blair Horner, was to "persuade lawmakers to our position and do two things: to state clearly the governor's cuts, which we don't like, and to get [each legislator's] position clearly stated."

Nearly 400 students from across the state took part in NYPIRG's Lobby Day activities, which included each student sitting to talk with state legislators and senators or their aides in some 207 meetings set up for today.

Approximately five to eight students attended each meeting with a NYPIRG leader for the twenty lobby sessions. The team leader initiated the meetings and explained to the legislator the purpose of calling the meeting. Then the students shared personal stories about how the financial aid cuts impact them.

"I come from a single family income and because of my mom's salary, I really depend on TAP, but with the cuts, I may have to drop out of school," Stony Brook student Glenn Given told Assemblyman Steven Englebright, who is on the higher education committee and represents the district that surrounds Stony Brook University.

Students also pointed out that those with children,

By PETER GRATTON
Statesman Editor

Albany, March 1 - As members of SASU came an escalator leading to the lobby of the Legislative Office Building holding placards calling for the restoration of TAP funding, they knew they had just missed out on directly confronting the governor responsible for the cuts.

Governor George Pataki had just finished a news conference with other dignitaries, including Senate Majority Leader Joseph Bruno, announcing a new consortium of New York dairy farmers. A number of corporate owners of the larger farms were in attendance.

After finishing the news conference, and taking questions from reporters, the Governor made a beeline for the elevators, just seconds before the student protesters finished making their way down the escalator.

Needless to say, the 27 students were very disappointed.

"It sucks that we just missed him," said SASU President Kirsten Swanson as the protesters began their march around the lobby while yelling chants for more funds for higher education.

The approach SASU took was very different from the legislative lobbying that NYPIRG performed during much of the day. SASU students in attendance, though, were disappointed by the lack of attendance in their own ranks.

"It's really sad that people are apathetic," said Heather Wilbur, a SASU representative from Stony Brook, "when it comes time to do work, they bail out."

Swanson said that only 27 people showed up for the protest effort, with just six from Stony Brook. She said that the low numbers were not an indication that SASU's work was unproductive.

"The people here are excited quality people," she said, "They know the issues, and they can teach each other when they go back to campus."

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Above, students from colleges across New York sign up for NYPIRG's Lobby Day. Some of these students would need help to find their way around the Legislative Office Building, below.

Photo by Peter Gratton, Photos on Page 2 and below by Michael Kwan

jobs and other commitments would have a hard time balancing their time with other responsibilities. "Raising the credits will be very hurtful. My father passed away and he was the main provider of the household. I helped take care of him when he was sick and taking 15 credits would have been impossible," said SB student Victoria Ortiz, to John Conklin, the legislative director for Senator James Lack. After the meeting, Ortiz, who has attended three other lobby days in past years, said she was unsure of its effectiveness, "We spoke to a staff person," she said, "they are not ready to make any commitments."

The pledges students sought were specific answers to questions asked by the team leaders to the legislator

or representative on their stances on the governor's budget proposals and other SUNY related issues.

The Governor's budget calls for \$133 million in cuts to funding for the Tuition Assistance Program, including a cap on the top award the poorest of students can receive from 90% of tuition to 75%. In addition, under the Governor's proposal, students would need to take a minimum of 15 credits to qualify for full-time status for financial aid. In some cases, students pressed their concerns over related issues, including the fall in the number of SUNY's full time professors and the need for more funding for opportunity programs.

In most cases, students got the commitments from legislators that they sought.

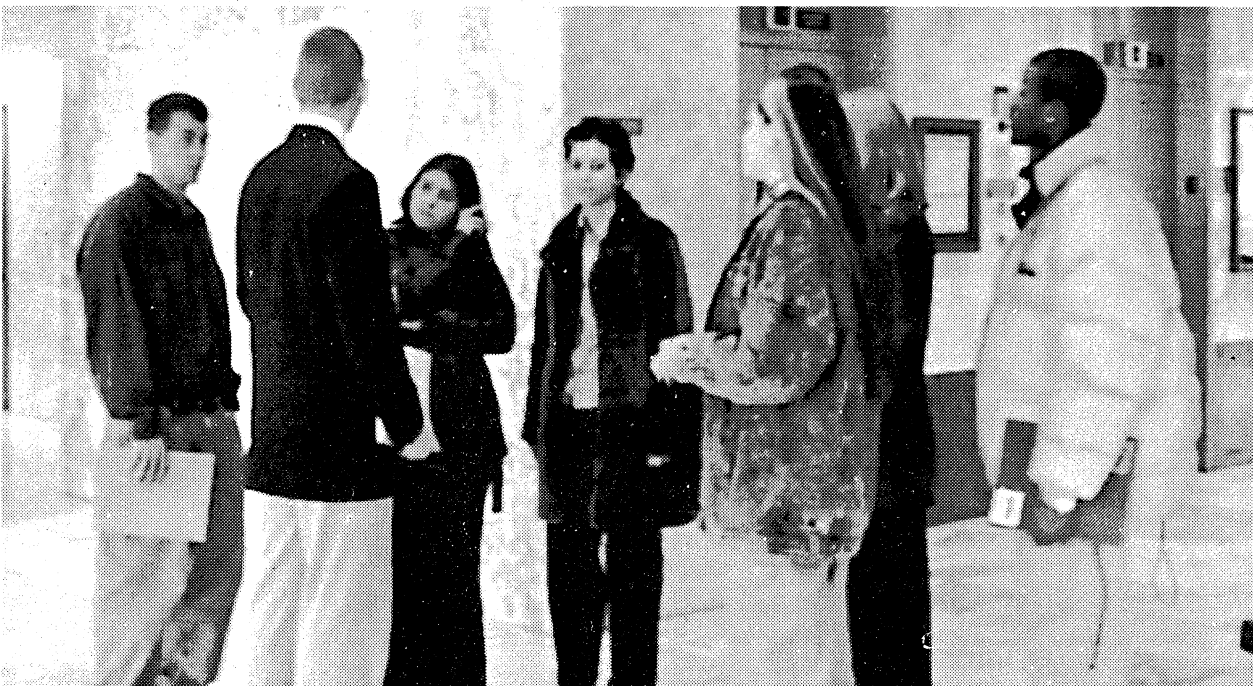
"Our primary goal is to put TAP back to where it was before and work from there," said John J. Demarest, a spokesman State Senate Majority Leader Joseph Bruno.

Assistant Republican Leader Thomas Barraga was also optimistic about the eventual restoration of TAP during the coming budget process. "This is a front-runner issue. We are going to restore TAP," he said.

Horner said that lobbying efforts like today's were essential if students were going to get their message across to those who govern them. There is a perception among lawmakers, he said, that few students vote and are not a large political force. "The more people participate in the system the more it responds to their needs," he said. "There is a reason why the governor decreased Department of Motor Vehicles fees last year and not tuition: drivers vote," he said.

Some legislators also felt that student action was important in spreading their message. "It is always good to know what the students feel and what their priorities are," Demarest said about the lobbying, "It puts a face on the students." Englebright also stressed the importance of the lobbying efforts, but said that students should concentrate their efforts on the state senate where he said support was weakest for student concerns.

Pataki, for now, stands by his budget proposals, saying in an interview today that he still supports what he called the "necessary" cuts to TAP. The Governor also said that the new 15 credit standard would be helpful to students, getting them out of college earlier to begin earning money in the workforce. "We think it's good for them," he said.



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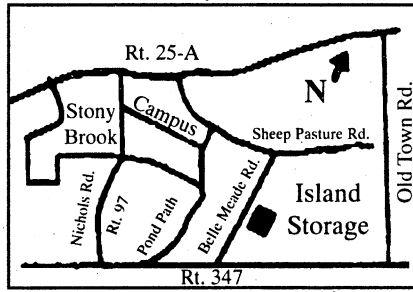
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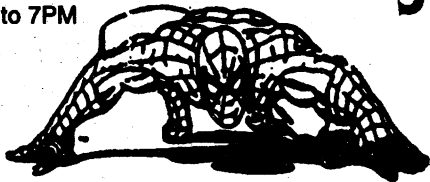
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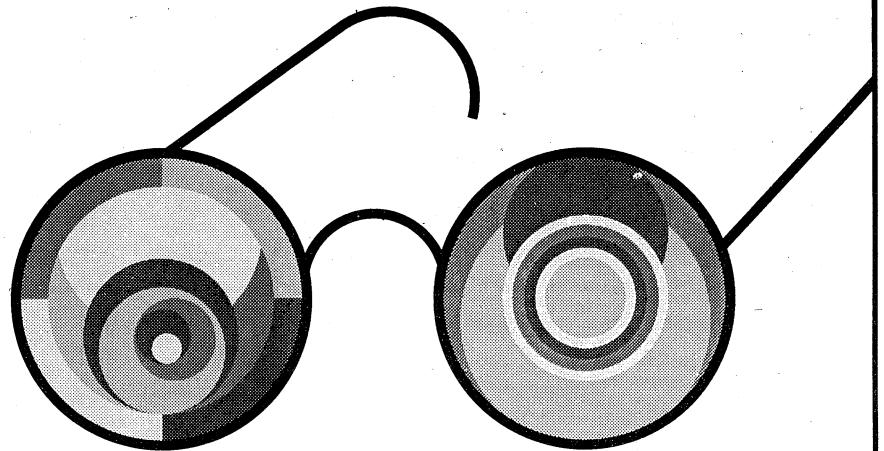
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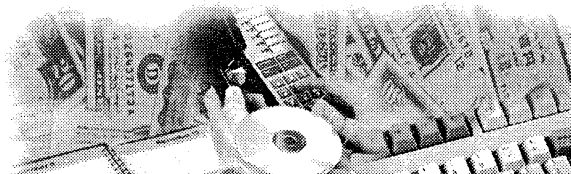
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The View from the Bus

Students Discuss Their Lobby Day Efforts

By MICHAEL KWAN
Statesman Editor

Albany, March 1 - As hundreds of students prepare to descend on the capital for NYPIRG's Higher Education Lobby Day, bleary eyed Stony Brook students, some still dressed in pajamas, boarded a bus bound for Albany in the brisk predawn air.

"Some of my suitemates are involved, and they told me it would affect me directly," said Freshman Durinda Webb, adding with a smile that one of the reasons she was going was because "I thought I'd like to see how well I can operate on four hours of sleep."

Sixteen students joined New York Public Interest Research Group Project Coordinator Todd Stebbins and 360 students from each of the 19 colleges with NYPIRG chapters across the state, to lobby against the proposed TAP cuts in Governor Pataki's budget. NYPIRG holds day-long activities several times during the year, each for a different purpose, such as last Monday's Higher Education, and next month's Earth Day.

"Todd forced me to go," said Junior and NYPIRG intern Omar Purcell about his real reasons for going, adding that it was part of his studies as a political science major, and that he enjoys doing the work.

There was supposed to be a total of sixty students in SBU's contingent; however, many had to stay behind because of unexpected tests or illness. All did not go well for those that did manage to make the trip.

Minutes outside of Albany, those who managed to stay awake heard a snap, and loud sputtering as the bus ground to



Despite a bus breakdown on the way up, all 17 of the Stony Brook students made it to Albany. Below, students wait for their next lobbying meeting in a synagogue across from the legislative building.

Statesman/Michael Kwan

a halt on the New York Thruway. Apparently, an oil line in the bus's engine had sprung a leak.

After about fifteen minutes of waiting, another filled with Hunter College students also bound for Lobby Day, pulled along side. Stebbins and company quickly switched buses, and were off on the road again.

Shortly, they arrived at "The Church," a synagogue that served as a base of operations for the day. Here, they checked-in and waited for the day's meetings to begin.

Each meeting gave students a venue to share their feelings about cuts to higher education and this year's proposed TAP cuts. They were designed to allow each student to meet with their home district's assemblyman and senator. "It's important for students to voice their opinions on all issues, especially on those that affect us directly," said student Brad Hausman.

The day was a typical one in Albany.

A press conference announcing the ratification of the Northeast Dairy Pact, which will eventually help New York's ailing dairy farms, was held.

Tourists got lost in the Capitol Building.

SASU, Student Association of the State University of New York, held a small protest against the

proposed TAP cuts.

A Senate session was held.

And other groups lobbied legislators.

However, it was not as though the students did not make a difference. "I think it was definitely a success," said Stebbins, "Every single legislator was lobbied today, and the majority supported our fight against the governor's proposed budget."

Late in the afternoon, as the Capitol area started to get quiet and the day's business came to a close,

students who had spent the day lobbying boarded their buses bound for the long ride home.

Stebbins, and the other project coordinators across the state, will eventually have to follow up on the promises that legislators gave and do additional lobbying.

"Our job isn't done yet," he said, "Formulating the budget is a long and lengthy process. As legislators crunch the numbers, they're susceptible to change their minds about the proposed higher education cuts. This is where we need to keep that pressure on the entire budgetary process."

Students Lobby for First Time

By KAT FULGIERI
Statesman Staff

Albany, March 1 - The experience is one that many initially find frightening, yet all who participate claim that it is a fulfilling one.

Many of the students who went to Albany to lobby Monday were returning for a second or third time. However, many were first time venturers into the world of lobbying.

Stony Brook Freshman, Durinda Webb, went with her suitemates because she was "passionate about preventing cuts to TAP." She

explained that the issue lay close to her heart, because it was one that would have a direct affect upon her. After her first lobby meeting, in which she expressed her feelings on the TAP issue to her district Assemblyman, Webb was happy to note that "it wasn't too bad."

Webb's Team Leader, Diana Fryda, an experienced lobbyist who has been volunteering for five and a half years, said that lobbying is fun, and becomes more enjoyable with each experience because "I learn

Continued on page 8



I. B.
is coming...



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Not Making A Difference

We know it is almost impossible to believe, but the degree of apathy on this campus has hit an all-time low. As if it wasn't bad enough that only a fraction of the huge population that inhabits this school can muster up the energy to attend events that effect them (Senate elections, Polity meetings and rallies for safety, to name a few), now they are blowing off events they actually commit to.

This past Monday was Lobby Day. For those of you that choose to ignore the opportunities that could enrich your life, make a difference in others and ultimately save yourself money, this was the trip to Albany sponsored by Stony Brook's chapter of NYPIRG to appeal to our state's legislators for relief from SUNY's substantial tuition increase over the years and from the TAP cuts proposed by Governor Pataki in his latest budget. The trip was free, it only cost you some sleep by leaving at 5:30 a.m. and a day's worth of classes. Hardly a hefty fee to pay in exchange for the chance to sit face to face with your lawmaker and beg for mercy as your higher education quickly slips from the list of NY's top priorities.

But in perhaps the most pathetic act of indifference on this campus yet,

Low SBU Student Turnout for Lobby Day

only sixteen of the sixty people that signed up for the trip actually showed.

The reason? Well besides laziness, it seems that a mysterious epidemic of pink eye broke out among the sixty that signed up, claiming ten of them and blinding them for the day, rendering them unable to go voice their concerns about getting ripped off by their university. Apparently, it was wildly contagious. But not only did some of the sixty allegedly wake up with puss-filled eyes, a bout of amnesia claimed the other thirty. In their excitement about getting a free trip to the state capital, the other thirty totally forgot about the tests they had that day. Either that or they lost their syllabus. But when their thrill had subsided, they decided to disregard the promises they made to Todd Stebbins, NYPIRG's project coordinator, who went crazy organizing everything to ensure a seat on the bus for the people who signed up. They also helped to make Stony Brook look pathetic in Albany: A school with a student body totaling

somewhere near 18,000 could only spare a mere sixteen people to represent the wants and needs of college students across the state?

But ultimately, the only people who are being screwed in the long run for this blatant act of nonchalance are the students themselves. Maybe next year's tuition bill will come with an extra hundred bucks tacked on. Or worse yet, maybe you have become accustomed to the help you get from TAP, only to have it suddenly disappear with the burden of paying it solely in your lap.

Frankly, sixty is a measly amount of people to show interest in an event like this. But to add insult to injury, by cutting that number down to sixteen is simply inexcusable. As students, this is the time of our lives to make a difference in any cause we fight for. We have the time, the means and most importantly, the drive. Tuition prices and the state of higher education are issues that directly effect us now. How can we idly stand by and let our wallets get drained while the people that run this state approve of the degradation of its future, the young people?

If attendance to organizations, events and clubs hinge on free pizza, we have a much more serious problem. We have a future of indifferent, ignorant and lazy leaders.

Fighting the Skateboarding Ban

To the Editor:

I am writing regarding the no-skateboarding policy that is in effect on this campus. I have been referred to the Vice President, Mr. Gary Matthews, but it seems that he does not have the authority to allow students to skateboard on campus.

As a campus student who does not have a car, it is not easy for me to go off-campus to find places to skate. If you did not know, Public Safety treats me like a criminal for

me to court, all of this they do without any consideration to the fact that I am a paying student here. I am not saying that all Public Safety officers are hostile, but most of them who confront skateboarders tend to be that way. To me they are not "Public Safety" but instead "Public Bullies."

I do not know what Public Safety thinks about skateboarding, but to me it is a sport just like any other. It is like soccer, basketball, or football (to which you are building a stadium) all of which

weird seeing them when I do not have my skateboard with me; bottom line is I get chills every time they are around.

To solve the problem of campus skate restrictions I have a few suggestions:

1) Eliminate the ban on recreational skateboarding for Stony Brook students.

2) Build a skate park on the campus (which can have many positive effects on the community). It would show that Stony Brook supports one of the fastest growing and most popular "alternative sports."

3) Designate a place on campus that we can skate freely (possibly the Roosevelt Quad Courtyard, or the old handball court in G-Quad).

I realize that I am only one voice on this campus, and that not everyone appreciates skateboarding. Perhaps though if we could change the attitude of the security on this campus away from animosity, then skateboarders would not be perceived to be filling the very stereotypes placed upon them. It is sad that I feel like an outsider to the Stony Brook community simply because I play a different sport than most of the campus.

Jeremy Logan

"I see the way Public Safety treats me as a discrimination against skateboarders."

skating on campus. They do not see me as a student but rather as an invader of the community. I belong to this community, I pay a hefty fee to belong to this community, and do not appreciate being treated like a crook by the very officers who are here to keep me safe. I see the way Public Safety treats me as a discrimination against skateboarders. They scream and yell at me, they have tried to take

many students here enjoy playing even though they are not on a team. Skating can be dangerous, but so can all sports. It is my freedom to choose the sports that I am going to play. There used to be a lot of skateboarders on campus but most of them have been scared away by the way Public Safety treated them.

To Public Safety I am one of the last cockroaches that they feel they must extinguish, and I am forced to run from them every time I see them. It even feels

Students Get Their First Lobbying Experiences

Continued from page 5

what to expect. No experience is ever the same as another." Fryda has made lobbying a major part of her life. Her concern for higher education has led to local lobby visits and extensive research.

Another experienced lobbyist, Suzanne Durocher, the NYPIRG project coordinator from SUNY New Paltz agreed with the sentiment that lobbying gets easier with experience, "Your purpose gets less shaken each time you go in to lobby." After meeting with Assemblyman Steve Englebright, she explained that the job is much easier when you are dealing with a politician who is on your side. Citing Englebright as an example, Durocher brought up the fact that the politicians who are most likely to see your point are the ones that are "easies" to present your case to.

"It's hard to lobby when the person you are talking to keeps trying to circumvent the issue" said Derocher.

Hunter College student, Weneis Santana, also attended lobby day for her first time. She was extremely

determined to fight cuts to the Tuition Assistance Program (TAP). Though her parents subsidize a great deal of her tuition, she explained that TAP gives her

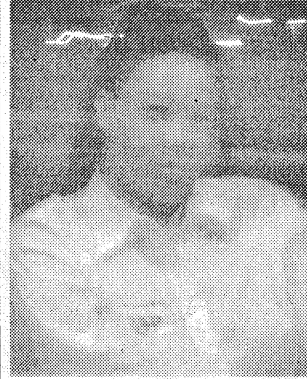
more aid than she can afford to lose. "It was worth it because I feel like I did my part to fight," said Santana.

Indeed, the fight was one that was made up of many parts. The political lobbying was done by students who had their minds set on making progress. Everyone involved did their part to talk to the politicians, with some students making up to six trips to the Albany Legislation building.

"Your purpose gets less shaken each time you go in to lobby."

Campus Voices

What did you learn from lobby day?



"I learned about the entire process."

Talia Paul
Sophomore, English major



"I learned that the government proposed budget will most likely not pass. And higher education will at least mostly be restored."

Brad Hausman
Junior, Economics major



"The staff of legislators are easier to talk to than legislators themselves. Legislators are as slippery as people say."

Durinda Webb
Freshman, Psychology major

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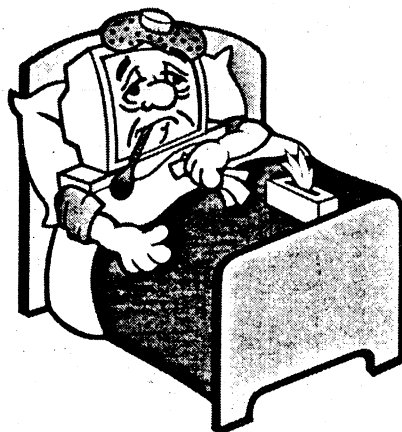
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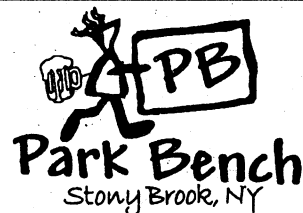
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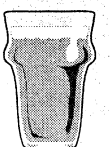
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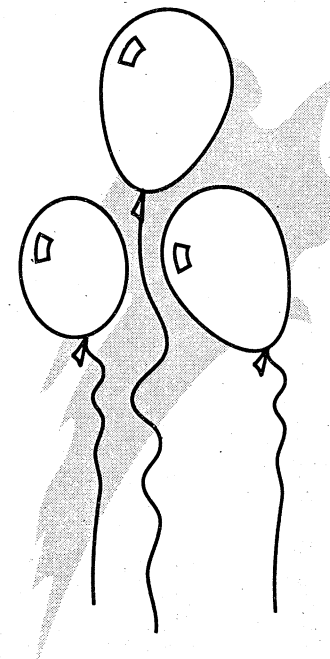
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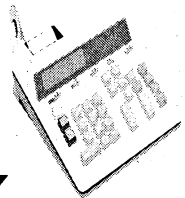
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Features

Digging into Celtic Roots

*Hesperus to Play at Staller on Sunday
at 7:30 p.m. in the Recital Hall*

By PETER GRATTON
Statesman Editor

Even though her group plays an early type of Celtic music long ago forgotten in the popular music genre, *Hesperus* co-coordinator Tina Chancey says that its performance this Sunday at the Staller Center will be a "pretty cool program."

The ensemble will perform with Bonnie Rideout, a Scottish fiddler who is the three-time US Scottish Fiddle champion.

Rideout used to play early music, like that to be performed on Sunday, during her college days, but soon gave that up to play the violin and classical music more in demand.

"I'm indebted to the teachers who taught me the value of reading music and the discipline of learning the masters," she said, "But the more I played 'serious' music, the more I missed my fiddling."

Rideout's talents will come in hand in a musical format that calls for musicians to improvise from the written text, a point that both Rideout and Chancey says is what makes the music fun to play.

"The neat thing about early music is that it's different. You're supposed to improvise and make the tune your own," Chancey said.

Hesperus, which also includes co-coordinator Scott Reiss, was founded 20 years ago. The group began by performing Baroque and American Colonial music. Since then, its repertoire has expanded to include medieval and Renaissance music, and even classical blues, such as Machaut and Gershwin.

Chancey refused to say which one of the styles was the group's favorite perform. "Whatever we are playing now," she said, "that is what is our favorite."



The Merchant - For Less Than a Pound of Flesh

Members of ACTER, A Center for Theater Educations, will be performing "The Merchant of Venice" on the Main Stage of the Staller Center this Friday and Saturday.

The story of "The Merchant of Venice" is well known, centering around a wealthy heiress, Portia of Belmont, who is being wooed by several suitors. Portia has pledged to marry whichever of her suitors who is able to decide from caskets of gold, silver and lead the one which contains her picture. Bassanio, a prodigal young Venetian, also loves Portia and asks Antonio, a rich merchant and Christian money lender who loves him, to loan him a large sum of money. Antonio, who doesn't have on hand this kind of money, borrows the sum from a Jewish moneylender Shylock, a

business rival and enemy. As collateral for the loan, Antonio agrees to Shylock's "merry bond" -

a pound of his flesh.

The night that the loan is procured, Lorenzo, a young

Christian friend of Bassanio, elopes with Jessica, the daughter of Shylock. Jessica then steals her father's money and jewelry, leaving Shylock with a wrath he will direct the next day at Antonio, who has been left penniless after his ships have sunk. Shylock demands the pound of flesh. The rest of the play prods through attempts by Shylock's daughter to humiliate her father and release Antonio from his debt.

Homer Swander, the founding director of ACTER, said that despite the complexity of this and all of Shakespeare's plays, there is a simplicity to the works that cuts across different audiences and time periods. "We do not seduce you or distract you with an operatic spectacular," he said, "In the simplicity lies the heart of Shakespeare's gift to us all."



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