



## Sweet Victory

“It feels like the world has not stopped moving,” says Mark Ferrandino ’99, ’00 (MS), Colorado’s newly elected speaker of the House.

By Karen McCally ’02 (PhD)

**MARK FERRANDINO** ’99, ’00 (MS) CALLS HIS election to become speaker of the Colorado House of Representatives “overwhelming and humbling.”

His rise to the speakership has made national news. Come January, he’ll become the first openly gay House speaker in a state that 20 years ago legalized discrimination against gays and lesbians.

Just last May, Ferrandino, a Democrat who has represented south-central Denver

▲ **DOUBLE VICTORY:** Ferrandino’s election as Colorado’s first openly gay speaker of the House is a victory for him as well as a milestone for Colorado legislative politics.

since 2007, championed a bill in the House making it legal in the state for same sex couples to form civil unions. Under the leadership of then speaker Frank McNulty, who represents the Republican stronghold of Douglas County in a state with a solid base of religious conservatives, the bill—which had passed the Senate, had the strong backing of Gov. John Hickenlooper, and enough committed Republican votes in the House to pass—never reached the floor for that final vote.

“After what we went through last year people were eager and excited to work on campaigns to change our direction,” says Ferrandino, who framed the failure of the civil unions bill to become law as an issue of subverted democracy as much as an

issue of equal justice for gays and lesbians. The Democrats took over the majority on Election Day, and named Ferrandino, who had been the Democratic leader since November 2011, speaker of the House two days later.

A native of Nyack, N.Y., Ferrandino arrived in Colorado only in 2004. After completing a double major in economics and political science and a master’s degree in public policy analysis, Ferrandino moved to Washington, D.C., where he worked in the White House in the Office of Management and Budget. He began dating Greg Wertsch, a federal law enforcement officer with the Department of Homeland Security. When Wertsch was offered a job in Colorado, Ferrandino went with him.



Ferrandino moved quickly up the state party ranks. In 2005, he became treasurer of the Colorado Democratic Party and in 2006, landed a position at the Colorado Department of Health Care Policy and Financing as a senior budget analyst. In 2007, he was named Colorado Young Democrat of the Year and in 2010, when he'd become the ranking Democrat on the Colorado legislature's Joint Budget Committee, the party named him a Rising Star.

Wertsch, still his partner—the two are also the new parents of a baby girl—has been a steady source of support. “He knew when we met that I wanted to run for office. He’s been very supportive—though not always supportive of the pay cut I took when I ran for the legislature,” Ferrandino says dryly.

“I’m a numbers guy,” he says, referring to his passion for budgetary issues, which will be a priority in January.

Not surprisingly, another key issue will be civil unions. He plans to reintroduce the bill on day one of the new session. **R**



**HOT IN TENNESSEE:** Nashville’s Alias Chamber Ensemble, which includes four Eastman alumni, has won accolades for its innovative repertoire as well as for its service to the community.

## Creating a Buzz in Nashville

“The initial idea was that we would play music with our close friends and give back to the community,” says **Zeneba Bowers** ’94E, ’96E (MM), artistic director of Nashville’s Alias Chamber Ensemble.

Eleven concert seasons later, that’s still the idea. But the ensemble’s impact has been more substantial than that modest goal might suggest.

The 12-member ensemble includes four alumni from the Eastman School—violinist Bowers, harpist **Licia Jaskunas** ’91E (MM), and the husband-and-wife team of percussionist **Chris Norton** ’83E, ’86E (MA) and horn player **Leslie Boggs Norton** ’84E.

Their first recording, *Hilos* (Naxos, 2010), was nominated for a Grammy Award, and, coinciding with the release of their second CD, *Boiling Point* (Delos Records), Nashville Mayor Karl Dean declared last September 25 as “Alias Chamber Ensemble Day.”

In a press release, Mayor Dean lauded the ensemble as “one of the nation’s only all-volunteer ensembles of accomplished professional musicians which donates 100 percent of its concert proceeds to community nonprofits with ‘no strings attached.’”

Indeed, “No Strings Attached” is how Alias has described its benefit concerts, in which the ensemble performs and the intermission features the nonprofit director on the stage addressing the gathering. All ensemble members play a role in selecting nonprofits to sponsor, and the group

performs three concerts a season.

“It’s challenging for musicians, with our unpredictable schedules, to volunteer the way most nonprofits want,” says Bowers. “The ensemble allows us to do something we love artistically, but also to contribute to the community.”

Bowers, Jaskunas, and Leslie Norton all have “day jobs” in the Nashville Symphony Orchestra, Bowers says, while Chris Norton serves on the music faculty of nearby Belmont University.

She notes that the group has retained all but one member since it began in 2002. “That’s pretty awesome for a group of musicians who are performing three concerts a year for free,” says Bowers. She adds that one reason for the members’ loyalty to the group is their shared sense of ownership. The musicians not only choose the nonprofits, but also the group’s repertoire—something orchestral musicians don’t ordinarily have the opportunity to do.

The process—in which all members’ preferences are taken into account—can result in some eclectic shows. But Bowers says that’s not a problem.

“I guess the general theme for our concerts is, ‘Our musicians love this music!’” she says. And that works well with American audiences. “We’re used to having Italian for lunch and, say, Peruvian for dinner. We’re used to that kind of diversity.”

—Karen McCally



#### GENRE BENDER?

The German expressionist classic *Metropolis* is a sci-fi masterpiece, says Kimmel.

## What's Alien About Science Fiction?

Less than many people think, says movie critic Dan Kimmel '77.

Interview by Karen McCally '02 (PhD)

MOVIE CRITIC **DAN KIMMEL** '77 HAS GOT A yellow jacket in his bonnet. The former president of the Boston Society of Film Critics, cochair of the Boston Online Film Critics Association, and media professor at Suffolk University says there's one movie genre that's never gotten its due: science fiction.

In 2011, he made his case in a polemic, *Jar Jar Binks Must Die . . . and other Observations about Science Fiction Movies* (Fantastic Books). It was nominated for a 2012 Hugo Award, among the most prestigious honors in science fiction writing.

The one-time *Logos* humor columnist returns to Rochester every five years to speak at the Class of 1977 dinner. His first novel, *Shh! It's a Secret: A Novel about Aliens*,

*Hollywood, and the Bartender's Guide* (Fantastic Books), is set to come out early in 2013.

#### Why do science fiction films need an advocate?

Whenever there is a serious television show or movie with science fiction elements, you will inevitably read a review with a director or one of the stars or the writer, "It's not really science fiction. Yes, we use time travel and spaceships and killer robots. But it's not really science fiction. It's really about people." Oh really? One of my favorite films of the last 15 years is *Gattaca*. It's set in a near-future society, where basically all babies are born with designer genes. The protagonist was born the old-fashioned way. There's a chilling scene: He's born and they draw his blood. They



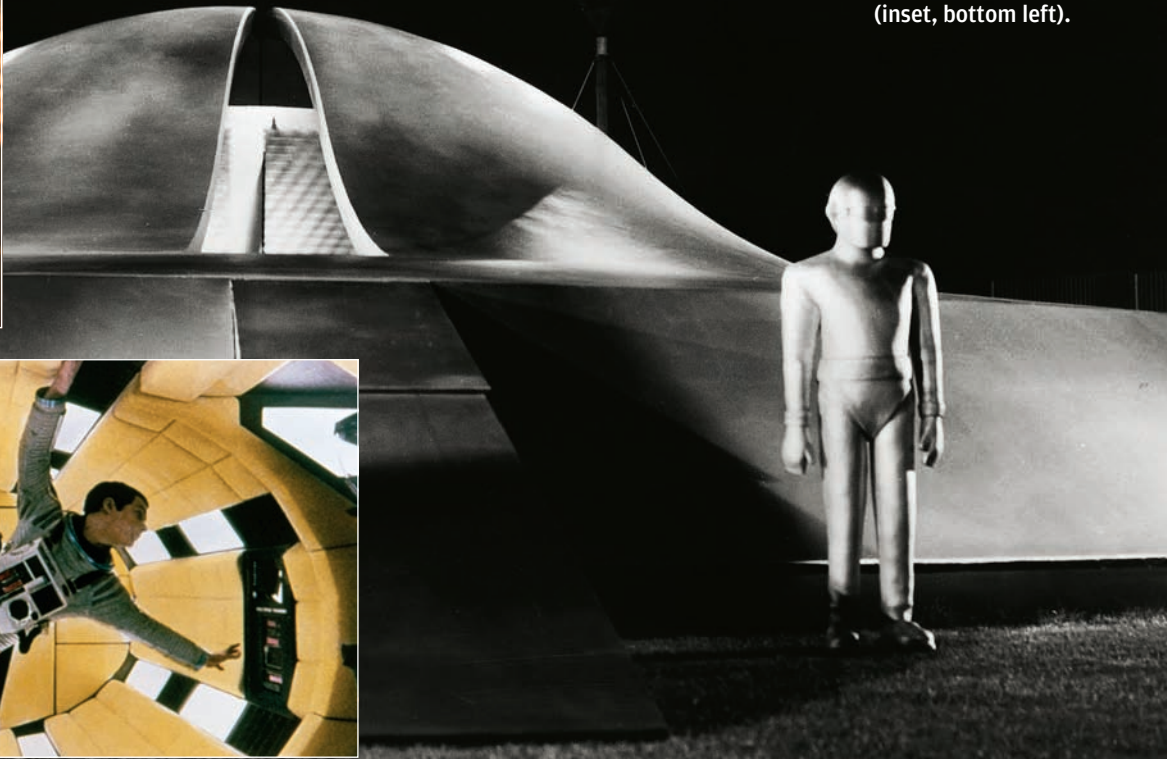
CRITIC: Sci-fi addresses serious themes, says Kimmel.

say he's going to have bad vision and he might have a heart defect. His whole life is written for him, just from his DNA. And we're so much more than our DNA. I show that movie to my students and they love it. I had one come up to me and say, "I never thought I would cry at a science fiction movie."

#### You've had a lot to say, in this same vein, about *Metropolis*.

Yes. When *Metropolis*, by the great Fritz Lang, generally acknowledged to be one of the greatest filmmakers of all time, was restored to its original length about three years ago, one of the German film archivists who was working on restoring the film gave an interview to the *New York Times* and he said, "Well, now that we can see the complete film, we can

**RECOMMENDED:** Kimmel's favorites include *The Day the Earth Stood Still*, *Blade Runner* (inset, top left), and *2001: A Space Odyssey* (inset, bottom left).



see that the science fiction trappings are really very thin." This is a movie with a mad scientist, a killer robot, and a dystopian future! A more recent example is *The Time Traveler's Wife*. It's a romantic film and it's also science fiction. You can read the interviews—"Oh no, it's not really science fiction. It's really about the relationship between the characters." That would be like Clint Eastwood saying, "*Unforgiven* isn't really a western, it's about the characters."

#### So why the dismissive appraisals?

Even in fandom, somebody famously noted that the golden age of science fiction is when you're 12. Which is true, because that's when a lot of us get into it. But science fiction is really by adults, a lot of it is written for adults, and when it comes to junky sci-fi movies, I point to a quote by the great science fiction writer Theodore Sturgeon. An interviewer said to him, "Isn't it true that 90 percent of science fiction is just crud?" And Sturgeon said, "Yes. Ninety percent of anything is crud."

#### Why does it matter what genre critics and others assign—or don't—to a film?

First, let's talk about what genre does. Genre offers a set of tools to tell stories about us and our lives. It allows us to talk about things in code. And so for westerns, that means that *High Noon* could talk about the Hollywood blacklist without ever mentioning communism. And for science fiction, *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* could do the same thing. So you see a movie like that—a critic now might say, "Oh it's about pods from space"—but I'm sitting there saying, "Wow, this is about some really interesting ideas that they really couldn't talk about directly in 1956 because somebody would have yelled, 'Commie!'" There would have been pickets in front of the theater. But it's pod people, so we can get away with it.

#### You just completed a science fiction novel—Shh! It's a Secret: A Novel about Aliens, Hollywood, and the Bartender's Guide?

It's due out in January. The premise is first contact between Earth and this other planet. And now it's a year later. They've been exchanging scientists, exchanging ambassadors. And the son of an alien ambassador comes out to Hollywood and wants to be

#### Kimmel's 'Baker's Dozen'

So what are the must-see science fiction films? Kimmel provides a "baker's dozen." One note: "Where there are multiple versions, I go with the earlier one. Except for *The Fly*," Kimmel says. "In that case, I favor the 1986 remake."

- *Metropolis* (1927)
- *Bride of Frankenstein* (1935)
- *Things to Come* (1936)
- *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (1951)
- *The Thing* (1951)
- *Forbidden Planet* (1956)
- *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956)
- *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968)
- *Colossus: The Forbin Project* (1970)
- *Sleeper* (1973)
- *Blade Runner* (1982)
- *The Fly* (1986 remake of the 1958 original)
- *Gattaca* (1997)

in the movies. It's about the friendship between the movie executive and the alien as they're working on what turns out to be a top secret movie project. So, yes, it's about people. But it's also science fiction. **R**



## Varied Sentences

In the courtroom of Georgia Superior Court Judge Asha Jackson '97, sentences can range from life terms to book reports.

By Karen McCally '02 (PhD)

FOR SEVERAL YEARS NOW, **ASHA JACKSON '97** has been gaining recognition as a civic leader in Atlanta, where she grew up. After graduating from Rochester and spending three years in New Orleans earning her law degree at Tulane, she returned to her

▲ **RISING STAR:** At Rochester, Jackson was chief justice of the All-Campus Judicial Council. In February 2012, Georgia Gov. Nathan Deal appointed her a superior court judge in populous DeKalb Co.

hometown to clerk for DeKalb County Superior Court Judge Michael Hancock. She made partner at one Atlanta firm and was swiftly recruited by another. All the while, she pursued multiple other projects in the community, including founding the Atlanta Urban League Young Professionals and serving on multiple boards.

After Judge Hancock retired in January 2012, Georgia Gov. Nathan Deal appointed Jackson as his successor.

"This is my dream career," she says. "I always wanted to be a judge."

Appointed at age 36, Jackson is among

the state's younger superior court judges. In Georgia, the superior courts are the highest trial courts and the only ones with general jurisdiction. And DeKalb County is a populous and fast-growing area that encompasses East Atlanta as well as Decatur.

Jackson spends most of her time working with a civil, criminal, and domestic caseload of about 1,500 cases pending at any moment. Reflecting a microcosm of the community, the cases can be small or quite large.

"On the civil side, they can involve very large amounts of money and property. On



the criminal side, felonies,” she says. “You have to know how to move cases.”

She points to her litigation experience, which she says “allows me to run a very efficient courtroom.”

Her colleague, Judge Cynthia Becker, agrees. Becker also came to the bench from a private firm. “Asha and I have had a lot of conversations about how we can improve the process, not just for us, but for everyone,” she says.

A senior colleague who recalls Jackson’s days as a young law clerk for Hancock, Becker adds, “I’ve always been impressed by Asha’s intellect, energy, and personality. It sounds funny to say personality. But Asha has one of those personalities where you know she’s going to be a leader.”

The maximum penalty in Georgia is death, and Jackson says the toughest sentence she’s handed down is life plus 115

years. “A man robbed, raped, and assaulted a minister on church grounds when she opened the sanctuary door to hand him some resource materials,” says Jackson.

She works with many less serious offenders, and in this area, has already made a distinctive contribution to the bench. She’s created the Pinnacle Project for first-time, nonviolent offenders between the ages of 17 and 25.

“I decided there needed to be another level of intervention. So I took it upon myself to provide that,” she says.

Project participants still meet with a probation officer and still serve out their sentences, she notes, but adds, “they also meet with me.”

Jackson arranges presentations for the group, but also assigns the probationers reading and book reports. “Right now, they’re reading *Cooked*,” she says, referring to *Cooked: My Journey from the Streets to the Stove* (William Morrow, 2008), by Jeff Henderson, a one-time San Diego cocaine dealer who’s now a successful Las Vegas chef. When the group meets in her chamber, as it does every three months, they’ll present their book reports and receive their next reading assignment.

“A lot of offenders I work with want to be what they see in the media,” she says. Not that that’s always a bad thing. Last fall, Jackson went on *The Mills Connection*, a popular Atlanta television talk show, and admitted to something she said “might sound corny.” She decided she wanted to be a judge in elementary school, after watching *People’s Court*.

“I wanted to be Judge Wapner,” she told host Carla Mills. “I sat and I watched his technique and I thought, ‘I can do this.’” At the Southwest Atlanta YMCA afterschool program, a young Asha Jackson and her playmates played court. “Every time someone said, ‘let’s play court,’ I had to be the judge.”

“I knew I couldn’t just jump into that position,” she says. “I set out on a path.”

Her appointment came after a grueling selection process in which she was chosen among 35 other contenders.

A committee of lawyers and judges screening nominees came up with a short list of four. Each of the four finalists met with the governor and his team of lawyers. Governor Deal made the final choice.

In 2014, she’ll face another hoop: an election.

Says Becker: “She will do very well there, too.” 

## In the News

### EASTMAN ALUMNI NOMINATED FOR 55TH ANNUAL GRAMMY AWARDS

Four alumni of the Eastman School are among the nominees for the 55th Annual Grammy Awards, to be held in February at the Staples Center in Los Angeles.

Recording engineer **Robert (Bob) Ludwig** ’66E, ’01E (MM) received two nominations in the category of Best Engineered Album, Non-Classical: one for Ryan Adams’s *Ashes & Fire* and another for Jason Mraz’s *Love is a Four Letter Word*. Ludwig was also mastering engineer for two albums nominated for Album of the Year: Mumford & Sons’ *Babel* and Jack White’s *Blunderbuss*.

Soprano **Renée Fleming** ’83E (MM) was nominated for Best Classical Vocal Solo for *Poèmes*, her recording of songs by Ravel, Messiaen, and Dutilleux.

Composer and pianist **Bill Cunliffe** ’81E (MM) was nominated for Best Instrumental Composition for his *Overture, Waltz and Rondo*.

Librettist **Gene Scheer** ’81E (MM), ’82E (MM) was nominated for Best Contemporary Classical Composition for the concert drama *August 4, 1964*, which he wrote with composer Steven Stucky.

### ALUMNA NAMED U.S. GREEN CHAMBER OF COMMERCE PRESIDENT

**Irene Berkowitz Stillings** ’61 has been named president of the U.S. Green Chamber of Commerce. The chamber, established in San Diego in 2011, is a nationwide network of businesses and community organizations. For the past 10 years, Stillings has been the executive director of the California Center for Sustainable Energy, an organization she’ll continue to serve as director emerita.

### WHARTON SCHOOL RECOGNIZES DAVID NASH ’81M (MD)

**David Nash** ’81M (MD), the founding dean of the Jefferson School of Population Health, has been awarded the 2012 Joseph Wharton Social Impact Award from the University of Pennsylvania’s Wharton School of Business. Nash, who earned an MBA from the Wharton School after graduating from the School of Medicine and Dentistry, was cited for helping to shape the medical industry through his dedication to medical education and health care.