

LIVES

The Show Goes On

Lusette (Andy) Smith '72 tells about her path from stage manager to computer programmer to software engineer and technology consultant.

Interview by Kristine Thompson

Lusette (Andy) Smith '72 first stepped onto a stage when she was 10 years old. *Alice in Wonderland* was the play and she was given the part of the Two of Hearts. "I got it simply because I was the shortest," she says, with a chuckle.

That modest role marked the beginning of a lifelong interest in theater. Over the years, however, she found she was well suited—and perhaps better suited—to working behind the scenes. "I quickly moved from acting to stage managing," she says. "I think it's because whenever I auditioned for a show, I was often 'invited' to work backstage."

She began a career that took her to professional stints on, off, and off off Broadway. Then, decades later, she transitioned to a career in the computer technology industry.

There are similarities to both fields, which require strong problem-solving skills and teamwork.

"Regardless of whether it's an actual theater production or a computer program, the show always has to go on," says Smith, who retired from BEA Systems/Oracle Systems in 2014.

1970 Smith moves into Theta Delta House for the summer—a fraternity house with room to spare for her and a few other leaders of the University's summer theater program, then in its third year.

1971 Eight students involved in summer theater—including Smith and her future husband, **Ed Smith** '72, whom she met in an introductory psychology course their first year—rent a house on South Plymouth Avenue.

"The University gave each of us a stipend of about \$50 per week. That money went fast. So, we would go to the store, buy a couple of loaves of day-old bread, peanut butter and jelly, and bologna and cheese. Every morning, we'd slap on the peanut butter, spread the jelly on the other side, and then off we'd go."

Summer theater programs back then were eclectic. "We did everything from Gilbert and Sullivan to Broadway shows to obscure contemporary productions to Shakespeare."



CAREER CHANGER: Technology consultant Lucette (Andy) Smith—pictured with her husband, Ed, whom she met at Rochester—is a former stage manager of on- and off-Broadway productions.

1972 After graduating with a bachelor's degree in English, Andy heads to Syracuse University, where she enrolls in a master's program in theater stage management.

She leaves after a semester. "Academia was no longer the place for me."

1973 Andy and Ed move to New York City. "Times Square was just beginning to turn over then. A production house called

Playwrights' Horizons—which later became one of the off-off-Broadway theaters with the best reputation—took over an old burlesque house. I ended up organizing its prop shop and then became one of its stage managers.”

1976 Andy and Ed get married.

1976 Andy serves as a production assistant for the New York Shakespeare Festival, now known as the Public Theatre.

As she works her way up to production stage manager on and off Broadway, she collaborates with performers who later make it big, including Meryl Streep, Robert Guillaume, Raul Julia, William Hurt, Sam Waterston, Michael Moriarty, and Estelle Parsons.

1981 While Andy is between stage management jobs, a friend encourages her to take a computer aptitude test at New York University. She does it on a whim.

“I didn’t have anything going on that day, so I decided to take the test. I remember there being a lot of puzzles on the test and that I was done much faster than other people in the room.”

NYU accepts Andy into its 12-week-long computer programming certification program. “The computer industry was in its infancy. There weren’t any computer engineering degrees back then, so it was a lot of on-the-job training.”

Andy lands a job with Thomson McKinnon Securities as a computer programmer. “I thought I got that first computer job because of the certification program, but years later I found out it was really because of my Rochester degree.

“The supervisor and hiring manager were both graduates of the US Naval Academy at Annapolis. During their required summer cruises, they had come into contact with Naval ROTC midshipmen from across the United States. They both felt that U of R students were the only ones who could hold a candle to their Annapolis colleagues.”

She never did remind them that she was an English major, not an engineer like most of the University’s ROTC participants.

1986 The Smiths move to Boston. For the next 10 years, Andy works at Computer Associates International, PowerSoft, and Sybase in a variety of positions spanning computer programming, computer engineering, system analysis, and customer training.

1996 The Smiths move to the Washington, D.C., area, where Andy holds leadership positions as a software engineer and instructor at BEA Systems/Oracle Systems. Highlights include managing projects for the Department of the Navy and working with clients such as Boeing, the Census Bureau, and the Internal Revenue Service.

2003 The Smiths, having continued their mutual love of theater throughout their careers, start hosting young artists affiliated with Wolf Trap National Park for the Performing Arts, just a few miles down the road from their home in the D.C. suburbs.

“For 15 years, we’d take in an opera singer, stage manager, or vocal coach. It was a great way to get to know a different generation and get the inside scoop on the opera world. It’s been quite rewarding to follow these artists over the years and see their careers flourish at places such as the Metropolitan Opera, the Vienna Opera, and elsewhere.”

2018 Now retired, the Smiths move to the heart of D.C. to be closer to the theater, symphony, opera, and ballet. 📍

A Chance Encounter across the Pond

At a University of Oxford, England, formal dinner earlier this year, **Angela Remus** '16, a master’s student in refugee and forced migration studies at Kellogg College, happened to be seated near a “DPhil” (the Oxford equivalent to a PhD) student named Chris Jones, a curator with Salomons Museum in Tunbridge Wells. Much to her surprise, Remus learned that Jones had studied abroad at Rochester in 1970.

Remus followed up with Jones, which inspired, as he said, “a mad search for memorabilia” from his Rochester days. Jones found a sachet of sugar with the Meliora seal on it and a blue and yellow pennant that “the moths have got to.” Jones recalled math and European history classes, living in Hill Court, his room number—Fairchild 234—his roommate’s name, and even a small cat called Ivan.

In an email to Remus, Jones noted, “I really enjoyed my term there. It may have been a very narrow section of American life, but it was a very intense experience—first time I ever had pizza, an awareness of the Vietnam War way beyond what we had in the UK, a culture that was both very familiar but also very different.”

“Rochester connections pop up in the most unexpected places,” added Remus, who graduated with a dual major in Spanish and international relations at Rochester, and was elected to Phi Beta Kappa during her junior year. She, too, studied abroad as an undergraduate—in Spain and Malawi.

—Kristine Thompson

A Patent and a Milestone

Joseph Marron '81 '86 (PhD) has more than 20 patents to his credit. But the latest issued to the principal engineering fellow at Raytheon Space and Airborne Systems has a special significance.

“Coherent Ladar Using Intra-Pixel Quadrature Detection” was the 10 millionth patent issued by the US Patent and Trademark Office. To mark the occasion, President Donald Trump personally signed the patent, and the patent office rolled out a new patent cover.

Marron, who earned both of his Rochester degrees in optics, compares the achievement to someone who buys a lottery ticket every month. “Eventually it hits,” Marron says.

The patent is for a new way to obtain real-time readings from large laser radars. The technology has a variety of applications, including in autonomous vehicles, medical imaging devices, military defense systems, and space and undersea exploration.

A statement from the patent office notes, “More than just a number, patent 10 million celebrates the rich history and strength of the American intellectual property system dating back to the first US patent, signed 228 years ago by George Washington on July 31, 1790, and issued to Samuel Hopkins for a process of making potash, an ingredient used in fertilizer.”

—Bob Marcotte



The Art of Crafting Your Job

A national arts leader, Emil Kang '90 took his first job as a gallery receptionist and made it his own.

Interview by Jeanette Colby

You graduated as an economics major with several lucrative offers. Why did you take a job as an art gallery receptionist?

As a child of immigrants, I was actually raised with the expectation that I would be a doctor. At Rochester, I met my pre-med requirements, at the same time pursuing an economics major and an art history minor. It was art history professor Grace Seiberling who had the greatest impact on me. Up until that point, I had really been a student of memorization and regurgitation. She helped discover my ability to express original thought and interpretation and to worry less about “being right.” She supported my interest in art history, and when I asked her about careers in the arts, she encouraged me to pursue a job at an art gallery.

What did your job involve?

I worked at Eli Wilner & Co., which specializes in 19th-century period frames, and talked with collectors and gallery owners all the time on the phone. I was the first person they talked to. Through my experience with Professor Seiberling, I had formed opinions on art. As clients called, I was able to develop even further my ability to see art and to explain what I was seeing. Soon I found that collectors would call me and ask how I was doing, and if there was anything I saw recently that I liked, and why. I was able to build relationships, through mutual knowledge and interest in art, and a network of advocates around the world in the field of art and art collecting.

How else did your education prepare you for the job?

Professor Seiberling really pushed me. Her belief in my own thinking made me feel, for the first time, that I had the ability to research and analyze subject matter. I also think that a real gift that I received at Rochester was to acknowledge that my curiosity would lead me someplace valuable. I think that a lot of people follow on a path that they think is practical or



GIFTED: Kang, who discovered a passion for art history as an undergraduate, says the “gift” he received at Rochester was learning that “my curiosity would lead me someplace valuable.”

FIRST JOBS

Alumni share stories about their first post-Rochester jobs.

Emil Kang '90

Major: Economics

Minor: Art history

First job: Receptionist, Eli Wilner & Co., New York City

Current job: Executive and artistic director of Carolina Performing Arts; professor of the practice; special assistant to the chancellor for the arts, University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill. Member, National Council of the Arts, appointed by President Barack Obama in 2012 to a six-year term.

that they assume is somehow preordained. They're not being given the opportunity—either by themselves or by loved ones—to actually pursue the things that they find interesting.

What do you know now that you wish you'd known when you started out?

The most important thing is to discover one's voice. As people started to see the value in my opinion, it shaped my own sense of self and my own confidence about my contribution to the world. Those things are really very valuable as a young person, when you're trying to find your own way, to know that the things you have to say actually matter to someone.

Are there things you learned in your first job that you still draw on now?

Absolutely. I've been in the arts my whole life now, and my own interpretive abilities in evaluating art—my ability to hear music, see dance, to see theater, to see paintings, sculptures—really extends from that experience. **R**

What was your first job after earning your Rochester degree? We'd like to hear from you, whether you are in that first job now or would like to share recollections in hindsight. We'd like to know how your education prepared you—whether directly or in the most unexpected ways. Write to us at rochrev@rochester.edu with “First Jobs” in the subject line. Please include your title at your first post-Rochester job, your employer, and a brief synopsis of what you do—or did—there.

Up Close with Kaveh Rastegar '01E

A sought-after bassist provides a glimpse into his musical world.

Interview by Kristine Thompson

Kaveh Rastegar '01E, songwriter and master of the upright and the electric bass, has performed with hundreds of musicians, played on countless recordings, and written or cowritten songs for artists from Bruno Mars to the Grammy-nominated jazz ensemble Kneebody, which he cofounded at Eastman with classmates **Adam Benjamin**, **Shane Endsley** '97E, and **Ben Wendel** '99E. He's been part of John Legend's band for five years and had a small role in the film *La La Land*, which Legend produced.

This summer, he releases his solo debut, *Light of Love* (Ropeadope).

"Everything really took shape at Eastman," says Rastegar. "I was around such an incredible cast of unique

What was one of your most memorable experiences on tour?

A few years ago, I was on a California tour with Colin Hay, former front man of Men at Work. And there's Paul McCartney, in the front row. After the gig, Paul came back stage and hung out with Colin, the drummer, keyboard player, and me. He was so friendly and interested in everyone around him.

Any other surprises?

I once got locked in a car trunk just minutes before playing in front of 80,000 people at a crowded stadium in Palermo, Sicily, with Luciana Ligabue. Before each performance, the band had to move from our backstage locker room to the concert stage. That night, a rather small sedan showed up. The only room for the drum-



WRITE IT DOWN: "Write down your dreams, no matter how crazy," says Rastegar. "Then, keep checking that list."

and fantastically interesting and talented musicians. For me, it was kind of like when Harry Potter goes to Hogwarts and sees other kids like him. It opened up my mind, my heart, and my playing."

What songs first grabbed you?


So many. The first song that I ever learned by ear on the bass was "Fascination Street" from the Cure's *Disintegration* album. That bass line was so cool. Joni Mitchell's "Silky Veils of Ardour" from her album *Don Juan's Reckless Daughter* is another great tune. Talking Heads' "Big Country" from *More Songs about Buildings and Food* always brings me back to a special time in my life. The Rolling Stones' "Gimme Shelter" from *Let It Bleed* always makes me feel energized—it's a powerful tune in every way.

mer and me was in the trunk. Everyone got out, doors slammed shut, but, in the hustle and hurry, no one remembered us. It took some finagling to figure out how to get out fast, and I lost my pants in the process. Crazy!

What would surprise people to know about you?

I speak Italian fluently, enough French to get by, and a little Spanish and Farsi. My father is an Iranian immigrant, so I picked that up from him.

What advice do you have for aspiring musicians?

Write down everything that's important to you. Write down your dreams, no matter how crazy or unattainable they may seem. Then, keep checking that list. If you take the time to articulate them in writing, they become more real, more doable. 

Kaveh's Playlist

Here's what Rastegar is listening to now:

"Tangled Up in Blue"

Bob Dylan
Blood on the Tracks

"Equatorial"

Lô Borges
Via Lactea

"Coming in Hot" (2002 remastered version)

Peter Tosh
Wanted Dead or Alive

"Long Distance Love"

Little Feat
The Last Record Album

"Can't Take a Joke"

Drake
Scorpion

"Hit it and Quit It"

Funkadelic
Maggot Brain

"Spirit"

Al Jarreau
We Got By

"Going Down"

Freddie King
Getting Ready ... (World)

"Didn't I (Blow Your Mind This Time)"

The Delfonics
The Delfonics

"Powa"

Tune-Yards
Whokill