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PASSPORT TO  
EDUCATION

INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS BRING GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES TO CAMPUS

WCU'S NEW MIXED-USE FACILITY  
ALREADY IS LEAVING A MARK

INNOVATIVE EMC PROGRAM  
CELEBRATES ITS BIG 4-0

SOLAR ECLIPSE WILL DARKEN  
THE SKIES OVER CULLOWHEE



## TRUE GRIT

### A MUSIC ALUMNUS IS HITTING THE HIGH NOTES AS AN OPERA PERFORMER AND EDUCATOR

By RANDALL HOLCOMBE

Mitchell Hutchings '07, who returned to campus as a guest artist in November 2011, hits the right notes in this scene from a university production of "Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street."

**Mitchell Hutchings '07** has demonstrated his operatic skills at Carnegie Hall and in locations as far-flung as the Czech Republic, but one particular vocal performance sticks in his mind. It occurred when Hutchings, a native of the small Union County town of Waxhaw, was a high school senior in 2002. His father had battled malignant melanoma, a particularly vicious form of skin cancer, for 17 years. "I was in the room with my father," Hutchings said. "I held his hand and sang to him. When I stopped singing, I realized he had passed away."

Hutchings said his father's long fight with cancer and eventual passing was the most stressful situation he has experienced, before or since. After his high school graduation, he attended a local community college for a year and then transferred to WCU to major in music with a concentration in vocal performance. "I chose WCU because my high school music teacher said Dr. Robert Holquist would be a positive influence on me. She was right," he

said. Holquist, who retired from the university's music faculty in 2011 after a three-decade career, was Hutchings' vocal teacher and mentor. "There were days when I wanted to give up, but Dr. Holquist was always there to cheer me on and help me persevere," Hutchings said.

After receiving his bachelor's degree in music at WCU, Hutchings matriculated at Florida State University and graduated from that institution in 2010 with a master's degree in vocal performance. He is now completing academic requirements to earn his doctor of musical arts degree from the prestigious Eastman School of Music in Rochester, New York, and he also serves as assistant professor of voice and opera, and director of the lyric opera, at the Greatbatch School of Music in Houghton, New York. Already in his vocal career, Hutchings has performed with opera companies throughout the U.S., and at age 28 he made his Carnegie Hall debut as a soloist in the Mozart Requiem with the National Sacred Honor Choir. He is married to

composer and WCU alumna **Sarah Reneer Hutchings '07**.

Hutchings returned to Cullowhee in October to accept the WCU Alumni Association's Young Alumnus Award as a part of Homecoming festivities. Association President **Robin Pate '97** told the audience at A.K. Hinds University Center that Hutchings "is putting his immense talents to good use and is representing this university with great success as he continues to progress as a performer and educator." Hutchings said he was honored to receive the recognition, but expressed to the audience that for him success is not measured by awards, but by an individual's ability to fall and then rise again. "I would certainly rather see grit in the eyes of my team at work and my students than awards on a wall," he said. "If you are in a position to mentor, look for those who have a passion and a powerful motivation to achieve an objective. They will not let you down." ■