

UNDER THE LIGHTS

GERTRUDE C. FORD CENTER FOR THE PERFORMING ARTS THE UNIVERSITY OF MISSISSIPPI

FALL 2016

UM's first lady champions the arts, joins Ford Center's steering committee

BY CHRISTINA STEUBE

Sharon Vitter is a pharmacist by trade, but her desire for a well-rounded educational experience left plenty of room for her love for the arts.

Vitter, wife of University of Mississippi Chancellor Jeffrey Vitter, began to gravitate toward the arts as a young child. On weekends, the Kansas native would spend time at her grandparents' house watching "The Lawrence Welk Show," a variety show featuring music and dancing. The early exposure to artistic expression soon turned into attending performances with her family.

"We grew up on a farm, so there weren't the opportunities like there are now to go to the theatre, but we would always go to Starlight Theatre, which was an outdoor theatre in the Kansas City area," Vitter said. "At 8 or 9 years old, my parents would take my siblings and me to a few shows a year, mainly musicals such as *Peter Pan*."

Vitter said her parents genuinely loved going to the shows and being involved in theatre and music, which they passed on to their children. Her father, especially, enjoyed taking Vitter and her siblings to big musical performances in the area, such as *Fiddler on the Roof*, *My Fair Lady* and *Guys and Dolls*.

Additionally, Vitter played the saxophone from sixth grade through her sophomore year in college in the marching band, her sister played clarinet, one brother played trombone, and the other played the trumpet. Vitter fondly remembers playing in the Marching Jayhawks her freshman year at the University of Kansas, which included on-field performances at the Liberty Bowl.

"It was just important to [my parents] that we experienced that part of arts," she said. "I think growing up with that being important in their lives naturally made it important in our lives."

While she most enjoys listening to classical and jazz music because it allows her to imagine stories and artworks or reflect on other parts of life, her love of the arts has expanded to many other aspects. Vitter said she's had the opportunity to travel the world, visiting the Louvre in Paris, Monet's garden in Giverny, France, and the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, Spain, and she's developed a special appreciation of all forms of artistic expression. Most recently, Vitter has gotten involved with the Gertrude C. Ford Center for the Performing Arts.

"We go to as many of the shows and performances that we can, given our travel, and we've enjoyed those," she said.



JEFFREY S. AND SHARON VITTER

She's also becoming involved in the Ford Center by serving on its steering committee, which includes several members of the Lafayette-Oxford-University community, to offer input and ideas on the center's direction and how to present the best opportunities for Ole Miss students and Oxford residents.

"She's asked a stellar, very fascinating group of people, and I think she's just wanting to hear people's opinions," said Vitter about Julia Aubrey, director of the Ford Center. "She's interested in other people's thoughts as we move forward. The Ford Center celebrates its 15th year in 2017, so we're starting to think about a celebration. Anybody who is interested in doing a good job wants to know what their peers are doing and wants to keep up with the times, so I think she's looking for us to help be her eyes and ears."

Aubrey said she is excited that Vitter has accepted a role on the strategic planning committee and looks forward to working with her to develop new ideas for the Ford Center.

"Sharon and Chancellor Vitter have been supportive of our presentations, and their active participation has made a positive impact on our university community and audiences," Aubrey said. "Through her life experiences, Mrs. Vitter brings a broad perspective on the importance of the arts in our society. She will help guide the Ford Center as we explore ways to develop and expand our goal to enrich the intellectual and cultural environment of the University of Mississippi and the region."

Earlier in November, Chancellor Vitter announced a plan to create an art corridor near the Ford Center and the University of Mississippi Museum, which will offer more space to display artwork and historic artifacts as well as educate and expose students and young children to theatre and artistic expression.

Exhibit depicts Mississippi through poems and photos

BY CHRISTINA STEUBE

The Gertrude C. Ford Center for the Performing Arts is featuring an exhibit exploring the natural beauty and complex culture of our state titled “Mississippi.”

Poet and University of Mississippi professor of English Ann Fisher-Wirth and photographer Maude Schuyler Clay collaborated on the exhibit, which has been a few years in the making. Clay began to share unpublished photos of Mississippi with Fisher-Wirth, who was inspired by them.

“As I would behold them, voices would start speaking themselves in my head,” Fisher-Wirth said. “These voices, all from Mississippi, would tell me their stories. And that is how the poems came into existence.”

The exhibit includes 22 poem and photograph sets depicting a variety of landscapes and people across the state. The characters speaking through the poems span across all socioeconomic classes, ages, genders and races. Daniel Uncapher of Ridge & Furrow Press in Water Valley printed the poems on letterpress.

“Mississippi, where I have lived for the past 28 years, suffers from severe environmental degradation that cannot be separated from its history of poverty and racial oppression,” Fisher-Wirth said. “Yet the state also possesses

great natural beauty and a rich and complex culture, one interwoven from the many voices that have made up its identity. ‘Mississippi’ explores both this degradation and this beauty.”

Clay said Fisher-Wirth chose the photos for the exhibit based on the images that spoke to her. She hopes visitors of the exhibit will see the complexity of Mississippi through these photos and poems.

“It turns out that the images had definite voices and there was a story each one told. I believe its power resides in the combination of each image and its accompanying poem,” Clay said. “Perhaps [visitors] will see, in addition to the place being hauntingly beautiful, how mysterious, dichotomous and complicated Mississippi can be. Combining literature and art is something I have always been fascinated by, and I think we made a noble effort in adding to that tradition.”

The Ford Center will host a theatrical presentation based on the exhibit Monday, Feb. 13, to be performed by members of the UM theatre department.

Fisher-Wirth is also director of the environmental studies minor at UM, teaches poetry workshops and seminars, 20th-century American literature and courses in environmental literature. Her fourth book of poems is *Dream*



FISHER-WIRTH, CLAY

Cabinet (2012), and she is co-editor of the groundbreaking *Ecopoetry Anthology* (2013).

Clay was born in Greenwood and studied at UM and the University of Memphis. The first cousin and protégé of acclaimed photographer William Eggleston returned to the Mississippi Delta in 1987. Her latest book of photographs is titled *Mississippi History*.

“Mississippi” runs through February in the Ford Center gallery. For more information about upcoming events, visit fordcenter.org.

HAPPENING AROUND THE FORD CENTER

Enjoy a glass of wine during intermission!

Ford Center patrons now have the option to enjoy a glass of wine during intermission at selected events. Tickets for wine service are available before the show and at intermission. The wine is served only during intermission.

New video display in Ford Center lobby

Keep up to date with events in the Ford Center through the new lobby video display. Installed in August, the display rotates slides of upcoming shows and has a scrolling calendar of Ford Center events.



Pokémon GO

In July, the Ford Center discovered that it had an important role in a new phenomenon that was sweeping the world. The Ford Center is a Pokémon GO gym! For days after the game was released, people gathered at the Ford Center to train their Pokémon and fight to capture the gym for their team.

The Pokémon GO creators chose cultural and historical landmarks as locations for the gyms, which explains why the Ford Center was selected. We hope that Pokémon GO players will visit our gym and check out what's coming to the Ford Center while they are here.



Camille A. Brown & Dancers to perform, hold workshops

Camille A. Brown & Dancers will perform at the Ford Center on March 2, and will hold workshops and lectures for university students and the Oxford community on Feb. 28 and March 1.

Led by choreographer Camille A. Brown, the company is recognized for its introspective approach to cultural themes. Brown's work uses elements of modern, hip-hop, African, ballet and tap dance to tell stories that connect history to contemporary culture and foster dialogue. Brown has won multiple awards for her choreography including four Princess Grace awards, a Jacob's Pillow Dance Award and a 2016 Guggenheim Fellowship.

The Ford Center is working with the Center for Inclusion and Cross Cultural Engagement and the Student Activities Association to plan residency activities for Camille A. Brown & Dancers and to engage students during the company's visit.

For more information, visit fordcenter.org.

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"The university is doing a lot in terms of exposure to the arts," Sharon Vitter said. "Student theatre seems to be thriving, the Department of Music has held interesting performances recently, and of course the Ford Center is doing well, so many good things are going on. It's important to let people know what's happening so people will take advantage of all the opportunities there are on campus and at the Ford Center. I think theatre and arts are a good way to educate people on what life was like before. I think the arts keep everything vibrant and relevant."

She added that students and other members of the Ole Miss and Oxford communities have an immense opportunity to take advantage of the arts that are so conveniently located.

"You can walk to the museum, and you can walk to the theatre. Everyone is busy, balancing schoolwork or balancing a job, family and careers, but you can take an hour to go to a performance or do something fun," she said. "I would encourage students to take advantage of all the opportunities they have while they're students. It's an inexpensive way to spend an evening with friends or have a date.

"I can't imagine not living in a college town because you get spoiled with all the great events going on, and the university performances are usually low cost, so it's easy for the students to get out and attend productions of music and theatre and that sort of thing."

UPCOMING

Gingerbread Village

Dec. 1-16, 2016

In the Mood, a 1940's Musical Revue

Tues., Jan. 24, 2017.....7:30 p.m.

Fauré Quartett

Tues., Feb. 7, 2017.....7:30 p.m.

Aquila Theatre In Agatha Christie's Murder on the Nile

Tues., Feb. 14, 2017.....7:30 p.m.

Camille A. Brown & Dancers

Thurs., March 2, 2017.....7:30 p.m.

42nd Street NATIONAL TOUR

Sun., March 5, 2017.....7:30 p.m.

Benjamin Britten's Albert Herring, UM Opera Theatre with the UM Orchestra

Sat., April 22, 2017.....7:30 p.m.

Sun., April 23, 2017.....3:00 p.m.

Sleeping Beauty

Russian National Ballet

Tues., April 25, 2017.....7:30 p.m.

UM Box Office moving to the Ford Center

The UM Box Office will move to the Ford Center while the Student Union is being renovated. It will close on Dec. 21 and reopen Jan. 3 in the box office at the Ford Center. Hours for the box office will remain the same, Mon.-Fri., 10 a.m. - 4 p.m.

It's not too late to support the Ford Center this year!

*Join the Friends of the Ford Center!
Already a Friend? Increase your giving!*

Maximize your tax deduction with a gift to the Ford Center Endowment and help ensure great programming for future generations.

[www.umfoundation.com/
FordCenterYearEnd16](http://www.umfoundation.com/FordCenterYearEnd16)

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for the Performing Arts

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Director's Note

I am happy to report that our new season is well underway and has received many positive comments. The shows have been well attended, and the variety of offerings has resonated with young and mature audiences.

We hosted comedian Lewis Black on the Ford stage with resounding success. The audience laughed throughout the entire performance, enjoying Black's sardonic exaggeration of politicians and their foibles. A sold-out crowd relived the '80s and sang along with the national tour of *Fame*, and the Grammy award-winning Los Angeles Guitar Quartet treated us to an amazing performance. These four artists are masterful musicians and were delighted to be able to be "unplugged" in our acoustically brilliant main hall.

The young performers who presented *The Princess and the Pea* charmed the young and young at heart. I believe live theatre is an important part of any child's education and intend to increase the number of theatre-for-children performances next season.

Our mission is to present quality arts programming that appeals to a diverse audience. We also strive to be a leader in the arts for our community and region. With that in mind, we are working on initiatives that will expand our mission to create, incubate and curate collaborative arts projects.

Watch for the "Mississippi" exhibit coming soon, featuring the photos of Maude Schuyler Clay and poetry by Ann Fisher-Wirth. UM theatre students directed by René Pulliam will give a performance based on the exhibit. And this summer, the Ford Center will sponsor the Youth Music Theatre Workshop



from June 12 through June 23 with a special component on Mississippi music. This event ushers in a special north Mississippi celebration of the state's bicentennial on June 24.

Our goal is to open our doors as often as possible and welcome everyone into this wonderful facility. Look for much more to come with musicals, plays, chamber music, opera and dance. Check our website, sign up for our app, and watch the newspapers and magazines for our many activities. The Ford Center was built for you to enjoy!

I have an open-ear policy as well as an open-door policy. Let me know what you are thinking. You can reach me at 662-915-6669 or jaubrey@olemiss.edu.

Julia A. Aubrey

Julia Aubrey

