

Alums on *America's Got Talent*

Quartet makes it to final round



Sons of Serendip is a quartet of BU alums: (from left) cellist and vocalist Kendall Ramseur (CFA'12), pianist and guitarist Cordaro Rodriguez (LAW'12), lead vocalist Micah Christian (STH'13), and harpist Mason Morton (CFA'12).

JACKIE RICCIARDI

THE MUSICAL QUARTET SONS OF Serendip had performed together in front of an audience only once before they auditioned for the television show *America's Got Talent*—in front of 3,000 people at Madison Square Garden. The group—lead vocalist Micah Christian (STH'13), harpist Mason Morton (CFA'12), cellist and vocalist Kendall Ramseur (CFA'12), and pianist and guitarist Cordaro Rodriguez (LAW'12)—performed a soulful, understated rendition of “Somewhere Only We Know,” taking the audience by storm and wowing judges and viewers alike.

After 15 weeks of stiff competition, the group made it to the September 16 season finale, when they were one of six acts competing for \$1 million. “You always win us over, because you

have pure, raw talent,” Howard Stern (CGS'74, COM'76), a judge on the show, told them. Judge Howie Mandel hailed the quartet as “the most talented people we have in this contest.”

In the end, a magician won the prize. But Sons of Serendip came away with something else, according to judge Mel B: “You now have a platform to do whatever you want.”

“We never imagined we’d be here and finish in fourth place,” Christian said following the quartet’s elimination.



COURTESY OF SONS OF SERENDIP

The band's name is a reference to the serendipitous circumstances that brought each member to Boston University as a graduate student. Ramseur wasn't even sure he'd go to graduate school, but once on campus, he reunited with Rodriguez, a childhood friend he grew up with in Charlotte, N.C. Christian almost decided to forgo his acceptance to the School of Theology in favor of taking a job with Teach for America, but changed his mind at the last minute. He met Rodriguez and Ramseur when he hired them to accompany him at a choral concert. Morton, who earned an undergraduate degree in harp from Rice University, says the first person he met in Boston was Ramseur and he wound up living with him and Rodriguez.

"Our story helps us to feel that in some way we belong together," Christian says.

The friends hadn't planned on forming a musical group. Christian and Rodriguez were pursuing careers outside of music, Morton was teaching harp at the James P. Timilty Middle School in Roxbury, Mass., and Ramseur was honing a solo career as a cellist.

Last spring, Christian suggested that they audition for *America's Got Talent*. They faced long odds. Before that, their only perfor-

mance had been a concert at Simmons College in front of a group of about 20. They were one of 100,000 acts trying out for the hit reality show.

WEB EXTRA
Watch a video of Sons of Serendip performing Leonard Cohen's "Hallelujah" at bu.edu/bostonia.

Ramseur describes the quartet's style as a fusion of R&B, hip-hop, and classical. Their musical influences are equally eclectic, and range from Yanni and film composer Hans Zimmer to India Arie and Amos Lee—all making for a distinctive sound that defies genre, and as Morton puts it, "feeds the soul more than entertains."

SAMANTHA PICKETTE (COM'15)



CYDNEY SCOTT (2)

Aaron Goldberg, BU's director of Athletic Bands (inset), got a call from a casting agency hoping to fill 100 uniforms for a parade scene.

Faking It with Johnny Depp

BU Band in Whitey Bulger biopic Black Mass

The musicians marched in their trademark scarlet-and-white uniforms. The drum line kept rhythm. The color guard twirled flags. A hundred students marched in perfect unison down a city street. Then someone yelled "Cut!" and the scene for the film *Black Mass*, with Johnny Depp playing Boston mobster Whitey Bulger, was done.

Aaron Goldberg, BU's director of Athletic Bands, got the call last June from a local casting agency hoping to fill 100 uniforms for a St. Patrick's Day parade scene. "I was worried because so many people were off campus at that point," he says. "But within 14 hours, we had over 200 interested people, and there were almost 300 by the next day." The band that appears in the film is actually a hybrid of about 50 band members, 30 band alumni, and 20 students from other colleges and high schools.

The group had only one rehearsal before the shoot. "We rushed through memorization of the piece, the Irish folk tune 'The Garry



Owen March,' which was fairly simple thankfully, so we could get outside and practice marching, because most of us had never marched with each other," Goldberg says.

Although the real St. Patrick's Day parade is held in South Boston, this one was shot in Lynn, which was deemed to have the long-gone grittiness of Southie in Whitey Bulger's day.

Filming began at 6:30 a.m. "We simply marched up the street behind a float," says BU Pep Band manager Jennifer Gough (SAR'16). "We did the same thing several times."

Band members had practiced marching different ways so they'd be ready for whatever was needed. "Turns to the left, right, wide intervals from student to student, short intervals—we experiment-

ed with every way possible so we could be prepared for whatever the movie people asked," Goldberg says.

What band members hadn't anticipated, however, was that they would simply pretend to play, so the audio could capture the actors' lines. "I cannot tell you how hard it is to get 100 students to be perfectly in time going down the street in utter silence," Goldberg says.

"The drummers had to fake play without hitting their drums." In all, the band marched through 28 takes between 6:30 a.m. and 6:30 p.m., a 12-hour gig for which they were paid nothing, although they were given \$2,500 for transportation costs and another \$2,500 for dry-cleaning the uniforms.

The film, scheduled for release in September 2015, is based on the book *Black Mass: Whitey Bulger, the FBI, and a Devil's Deal*, cowritten by Dick Lehr, a College of Communication journalism professor, and Gerard O'Neill (COM'70). IRENE BERMAN-VAPORIS (COM'14)