

## Music Professor Receives Fulbright to Research, Lecture in Thailand

Contributed by Lindsey Phillips  
07/15/2008

John Latartara

OXFORD, Miss. - John Latartara has studied Thai music for several years, and thanks to the Fulbright Scholar Program, he is preparing to spend five months researching Thai melodies at their source.

Latartara, assistant professor of music at the University of Mississippi, leaves July 22 for Bangkok, where he is to lecture at Mahidol University and conduct music theory research. Latartara is one of the first UM faculty members in music to receive the award and is among about 800 U.S. Fulbright Scholars who are to travel abroad this year.

"We're very excited and pleased and proud for him," said Charles Gates, chair of the Department of Music. "It's certainly a reflection of his good work. He has developed an expertise in a particular area of sound analysis and music theory that constitutes cutting-edge research."

Latartara's research includes performance analyses of centuries-old Thai melodies using "traditional Western theoretical approaches" and nontraditional methods such as spectrographic technology, "which visually shows the sound structure of the music," Latartara said.

"One of the things I'm interested in doing - which I've already started - is taking specific pieces of Thai music and analyzing different performances of that same piece to show how it changes depending upon the instrument, the performer and the genre, sort of tracing what is structural in the melody with what is not," he said.

George Dor, an ethnomusicologist and UM associate professor of music, said he is not surprised Latartara received the award. (Ethnomusicology is the study of music as it relates to culture.) Latartara's cultural research spans the music theory and ethnomusicology categories, and he has published his work in *Ethnomusicology*, a top journal in the field, Dor said.

Latartara, who earned his bachelor's, master's and doctoral degrees from the New England Conservatory of Music, has taught music theory at UM for five years. He previously taught at his alma mater, Wheaton College and Southern New Hampshire University and took his third trip to Thailand last summer to speak at an international convention.

He also married his wife, a Thai native who will accompany him on the trip, in the country.

"This will be the longest time I've ever been outside of the United States, which I'm really looking forward to," Latartara said. "I think it'll be a great experience to get a different perspective on the world in that way. I'm looking forward to making a lot of friends in Bangkok and Thailand, looking forward to meeting a lot of the Thai musicians and just trying to make the most of it."

He hopes to use his experiences to benefit UM students when he returns for the spring semester.

"One thing that I think is important and that these experiences bring not only to the individual but also the institution is international connections," he said. "To have that global perspective and those international connections and to be able to relate that to my students within the field of music will help enrich their musical studies. The more I learn about another culture's music, another country's music, the more I understand my own music, the classical music that I love."

Gates agreed that the trip should provide opportunities for the department's students.

"When faculty are engaged in innovative research, it energizes their own teaching, it serves as a model for students and it's part of that development of new knowledge," he said.

The Fulbright Scholar Program is sponsored by the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs of the U.S. State Department. Developed to share and increase international knowledge, the program selects scholars based on academic work and leadership skills. More than 44,400 U.S. scholars have worked abroad and more than 46,100 scholars from overseas have traveled to American universities as part of the Fulbright Visiting Scholars program since its creation in 1946.

For information about the UM music department, go to <http://www.olemiss.edu/depts/music>.