Marie Elizabeth Oliver
Welcome to *La Louisiane*, conversations brought to you by the official magazine of the University of Louisiana at Lafayette. I'm managing editor Marie Elizabeth Oliver. Today, we're welcoming special guest, Scott Durbin, an assistant professor in UL Lafayette's School of Music and Performing Arts and leader of the school's music business program. You may also know him as a founding member of the Emmy Award-winning children's band, Imagination Movers. Welcome, Scott.

Scott Durbin
Oh, thank you. It's my pleasure. I'm so glad to be here.

Marie Elizabeth Oliver
Well, we're very excited to have you. I know over the last 22 years your band, Imagination Movers, has recorded more than 250 songs. That's, crazy, just to think about — 76 TV episodes, which are now available on Disney+, not to mention international and U.S. tours that have brought you everywhere from Lollapalooza to Festival International here in Lafayette. So, I was just curious. You know, it's been a long journey, multiple decades. What's been your favorite part of this journey so far as a professional musician?

Scott Durbin
Well, I think, off the bat, I'm sort of a pedestrian musician, so I'm not like a very good musician. It's so funny, because when we did the show, anytime you sort of had to lip sync your songs that you had wrote, it was hard because I'm not one to be able to — I play piano on the on the show and mandolin, but I have to look at my hands and sing. But when you're doing it for television, you have to play to the camera.

Marie Elizabeth Oliver
It's hard enough with the piano, you're already thinking about two hands.

Scott Durbin
Exactly! Then I have to think about the camera and where my blocking is and all this angling. So, it was a lot. But, you know, as far as being a musician and doing stuff 22 plus years with the Movers, I think the key is being able to do it with my friends. Our relationship started as friends, and I'd known Smitty since high school. I went to high school with him, and so we've known each other for a long time, and had this wonderful idea to create a local, live-action kids show that really kind of succeeded beyond our wildest dreams. So, we climbed the mountain, and we're on the other side. But the fact that we have remained friends, that we still enjoy writing songs together, performing, I think that's one of the prouder aspects of the Movers. Is just that we've been — we've maintained this wonderful friendship through the duration of nothing to something and even post Disney and still existing and succeeding. It's one of the things I'm most proud of.

Marie Elizabeth Oliver
That's great. And you're still recording?

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Scott Durbin
Yeah, we still record. We released an album called "Blue Skies" last year. We have a song called "Ice Cream Sandwich" that a lot of people really like, and so we perform that live. We'll be doing that this coming up weekend, and so it's a lot of fun. It really is.

Marie Elizabeth Oliver
Amazing. Well, in addition to all of that, I know you served as a Grammy U mentor this past year and are still kind of in process of doing that, correct?

Scott Durbin
That's correct. So, it runs from November to May. The whole program does and yeah, I'm paired with a mentee who is interested in the music industry, and I've been a Recording Academy member since 2004 so 20 plus years doing that. And I think this was the opportunity where I wanted to have that experience so I could apply it to the students here at UL to make it beneficial for them. And if you don't know, the Grammy U is sort of the Recording Academy's professional membership for emerging professionals and creatives. And so, if you're 18 to 29 and you're interested in that, the Grammy U is definitely something I would encourage you (to do). And I've had a wonderful relationship with my mentee, and I'm taking a lot of that experience and of course, working with our students here at UL.

Marie Elizabeth Oliver
Yeah, so I know the music industry has evolved a lot since you started. How do you prepare students? I know in the music business program; these are all people who are coming knowing they want to kind of be on that business side or at least toe the line between the two.

Scott Durbin
Well, I mean, I think one of the wonderful things here at UL is that we have the music business concentration. We have music and media concentration, and then we have the new recording arts concentration. So regardless of wherever you think, as a student or a young person, you're proficient in or interested in, we have the opportunity to really kind of address what you want and put you in a position so that when you do leave UL, you're really grounded and have a purpose in what professional direction you want to be. So, with that being said, I think as coordinator of the music business program, the music business is, like you said, it's dynamic. It's moving at lightning speed, especially with AI and all of that. You know, the whole rights management that's involved with artificial intelligence as it relates to music is still evolving. And so, even the copyright.gov, they're doing this three-part report the last the second part came out just a week ago. And there's another one coming out about how they'll treat anything created via AI, whether it be, you know, is it copyright protected? Because it's not human authorship, all of those issues are — all these things that are emerging. And so, I've got to stay on top of this in order to really see how our students can benefit from all of the changes that are happening, all the issues like rights management and even revenue streams that might come from it. So, I need to be on top of my game, because what is relevant now, six months from now, could be obsolete, so it definitely keeps you on your toes. But there are certain base issues that haven't changed but are still in flux. So, it's definitely a wonderful kind of field to be in, because it is dynamic. It does keep you on your toes.

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Marie Elizabeth Oliver
What are students most surprised to learn about coming in, when they're talking about the business side of the industry?

Scott Durbin
I think, for me, the surprise is really just kind of understanding basic copyright and, you know, with music, it becomes complicated because there's two sides. So, you have the sound recording, and then you have the underlying composition of the musical work. And so, these two copyrights really begat four roles in the industry: artist, label, songwriter and music publisher, and all of the business is predicated on these four roles that are really based on those two aspects of copyright. So, I think the surprising thing is how simple everything is. It really starts with the two aspects of copyright, but then how complicated all of that can be. So, you might have an artist-manager who's working on behalf of the artist who is exploiting the sound recording with their label, if they're a part of a label. So, I think they look at it as sort of these building blocks and how simple it is, but how complicated it can be, especially when you're talking about synchronization or licenses or anything like that, just how kind of in the weeds you get.

Marie Elizabeth Oliver
Right, and you've been on all — I'd imagine — kind of on all sides of that in your own.

Scott Durbin
In my own, my own career. I think part of why, you know, my background was in education, and then, of course, the Movers sort of took on a life its own. And then I got into music business, in particular, to really look at our experiences and see the obstacles that we had to overcome, or even the ways we might have been taken advantage of, contractually or what have you, and made sure to educate myself so that I can share that with other individuals, students in particular, so that they can avoid some of the things that we had to deal with, so that they may be more educated and then make more informed decisions.

Marie Elizabeth Oliver
Well, yeah, that makes a lot of sense.

Scott Durbin
It's like, “learn from my mistakes,” in short.

Marie Elizabeth Oliver
I mean, those are the best kind of teachers, the ones who have actually been there and done it and can mentor you in that way.

Scott Durbin
And I've been so proactive with the Movers, because even though we are in this children's genre, family genre, our ascent is essentially a DIY. We did grassroots. It was like an indie band, which we all do consider ourselves in indie or an alt band for kids, but we did basically everything you would imagine. And I think it was our tenacity and passion for having this idea that was research based, that we

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wholeheartedly believed in. And I think that passion allowed us to say “no,” and allowed us to really, kind of see the fruits of our original vision manifest in the show. For example, I think 80% of what you see on our show is really that original idea that was born out of a Lakeview neighborhood in New Orleans.

Marie Elizabeth Oliver
So that's so cool. Well, if you're just joining us, this is Marie Elizabeth Oliver, managing editor for *La Louisiane*, and I'm here with Scott Durbin, member of the Imagination Movers, and assistant professor in UL Lafayette's School of Music and Performing Arts. So, you mentioned Lakeview. I know New Orleans was a big part of the Movers and you as a musician. Now you're here in Lafayette. I was just curious, what do you feel like inspires and draws in so many musicians here in South Louisiana, in Lafayette and New Orleans? Is there something about the culture? Or what have you noticed?

Scott Durbin
Well, it's the water. No, I think for me, both cities like, New Orleans, Lafayette, have musical identities that are steeped in culture and tradition, whether it be jazz or blues or Cajun and Zydeco, and I think that those identities really inform the community and allow the community to know that the music is authentic, but then it can also diversify. So, it doesn't have to be Cajun and Zydeco. There's a spirit and appreciation for music here, like in Lafayette, that extends far beyond just those two genres that you know goes into alt rock or indie rock, or any aspect, any genre: heavy metal, you know, all of these are really appreciated, and they have strong communities here. And I think that's what I love about Lafayette in particular, is these communities appreciate and love music regardless of the genre. And, there's a band like Void, that's a metal band out of Lafayette that just gets so much support. And then even people who go away, who come back, realize and appreciate the music here more so than I think they thought originally. They leave, and then they realize what they have.

Marie Elizabeth Oliver
Absolutely, I can say that personally. Even KRVS in general, when you're away, being able to tune into something and, I think that's what they say on the commercials, "It sounds like home."

Scott Durbin
Yeah, it does. It does so, I mean, even, you know, my son went to university in the northwest, the Pacific Northwest, and as soon as he graduated, he wanted to come back here to Lafayette and just recognizes the spirit. And he's a musician himself, and really the music culture and heritage and history here, and he loves it here, you know.

Marie Elizabeth Oliver
And so, a boomerang.

Scott Durbin
Exactly, totally.

Marie Elizabeth Oliver

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Well, speaking of local music, I know that part of what you do with your students each fall is a project called Hodgepodge. Can you share a little bit about that?

Scott Durbin
Yeah, so I work with Jonathan Shirley, who's the director of operations at the LEED Center, which is the Lafayette Entrepreneurship Economic Development Center, and he and I work together. It's an interdisciplinary project that provides our students the opportunity for student agency where they really control their learning. So, we sort of encourage them to put together Hodgepodge, which is a musical showcase that works to serve disparate genres. So, I think our first one, we had Amis du Teche, which is a new traditional Cajun band that's female led. We had Good Problems, which was a hip-hop collective that was born out of the School of Music. And then we had an indie band play, Sunkissed. And so, the students do everything from sponsorship, creating underwriting, or getting underwriting for the program, for the showcase, to artist liaisons, to marketing and promotion. And I think the whole idea is, really, you learn from doing, and the more opportunities we can give our students to apply their learned concepts and precepts in a real-world kind of experience, they're going to take away the fruits of that labor forever. And so, the more opportunity we can give our students to “do” is really kind of our objective, and my objective as an assistant professor here.

Marie Elizabeth Oliver
So, is that something that you kind of hope to continue?

Scott Durbin
That's the goal. The goal is to really scale it. So, we've done two years. This past year, students raised over $2,000 to underwrite that showcase. And the hope is that we can scale it. It's been at the Blue Moon for the first two years. And we'd love to scale it so that eventually, three years down the road, we have a national act that headlines it. We still have a local act, but that we can really kind of create a bigger platform in which students can apply their learning and do so in a way that moves maybe from a Thursday to a Friday or Saturday and really brings in even more people. But it's really been one of those things that I'll see a student in the hall, and they can't wait to get into the music business entrepreneurship class, to be part of that experience, because it is a sort of a non-traditional class. It's not like a passive learning environment where you're listening to me lecture. You're really kind of like, “Hey, these are the pockets. These are really the ultimate responsibilities. Go and do it.” And then we sort of maintain and act as resources for students.

Marie Elizabeth Oliver
And I bet for them to be able to say in a job interview or on a resume, or even if they're going to go out and kind of be independent contractors, to have that experience is huge.

Scott Durbin
Yeah, exactly. And I mean, I think that's one of the things that I'm most proud of is really what students do after they leave UL. And I'm so fortunate and blessed to look at students who've succeeded in our program and are in the real world now. You know Alex Franklin, who works for Warner Chappell in L.A., and he works as a supervisor for sample clearance. And so having all these students who are going out into the real world and succeeding, and if asked, they're proud that they came from UL, is something

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that, I think is just — it makes every day that much more appreciative when you can kind of see people succeed that came from here.

Marie Elizabeth Oliver
Absolutely. And I'm sure they're paying it forward, too.

Scott Durbin
They really are. And I have Alex, who's going to speak this semester to my students, and you know all of those who go in, and even local, like Sydney Ducharme, who's a radio host here in Lafayette, and she also does social media for Town Square, but they all speak so highly of the program, and are all willing to give back to the program. And I think that's what makes the whole — you know, the whole circle — come full circle worthwhile is to see those individuals succeed.

Marie Elizabeth Oliver
Yes, absolutely. Well, thank you so much for being here, and thank you for listening to this conversation with La Louisiane, the official magazine of the University of Louisiana at Lafayette since 1989. I'm Marie Elizabeth Oliver, managing editor. I hope you'll join us again next month for more discussions with members of our university community. You can listen to an archive of this interview by visiting louisiana.edu/magazine. KRVS is listener supported public radio for Acadiana, a service of the University of Louisiana at Lafayette. We'll see you next time. Thanks!

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