



# Voice of Experience

“From early on I knew I was to be a man in show business who is also a Christian. I want to be a person who is full of excellence and is using his gifts successfully and being salt and light in whatever situation I’m in.”

If you have watched television or movies within the past 20 years, you’ve probably heard Amick Byram’s voice.

As one of the premiere singers, stage actors and voice actors in Hollywood, Byram’s resume sparkles: he opened in *Les Miserables*’s first run in Los Angeles, starred opposite Glenn Close in *Sunset Boulevard*, was in *Phantom of the Opera* on Broadway and has lent his voice to everything from the *Lion King* to *Shrek* to *The Simpsons*.

And for the past four years, Byram has been a part-time faculty member at Vanguard and directed plays and musicals for the University’s acclaimed theater program.

“Amick matches Vanguard’s vision as well as anyone,” says Sue Berkompas, VU’s theater director. “He’s an authentic believer with amazing talent. He’s great for our theater department, and for the university itself.”

Byram came to Los Angeles from a military family in Oklahoma, where he’d swept statewide singing competitions and flourished in regional theater. After graduating from Oral Roberts University with a degree in business, he moved to Los Angeles with hope and ambition, but not much knowledge about show business.

“I could never picture myself in a coat and tie, in a sales or executive

position,” he says. “The only thing I could see myself doing was something in the arts, on stage, singing or acting. ... I knew if I was ever going to have a chance at doing what I really wanted in show business, it had to be now.”

He rented an attic in Pasadena and spent his scant money on headshots, acting class and gas. Then he got involved in a workshop at a local theater and “got some spectacular training right away,” he says.

He also met his future wife, Cassie, there. They were cast as Tony and Maria in *West Side Story* “and we’ve been in love ever since,” he says.

Byram began doing studio session work, taking advantage of his outstanding vocal and sight-reading skills. His big theater break came when he was cast in the Los Angeles premiere of *Les Miserables*.

“That was a lightning strike, to be in *Les Mis*,” he says. “In one fell swoop I was in another level of theater. I was doing the very latest hit show, which is exciting, and performing to packed houses and making triple the money.”

He did the show for more than a year, then helped found a jazz quartet whose two albums were nominated for Grammys for best vocal jazz group.

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Amick Byram performing at the opening of a museum at Masada in Israel. "It was nothing short of thrilling," he says.

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His television career took off, too, and he was cast in a show called *Superior Court* for three years. But his most well-known role was as Ian Troi, father of Counselor Troi, on *Star Trek: The Next Generation*. For that, Byram was included in the Star Trek encyclopedia and has his own Star Trek trading cards.

Through all the success, Byram and his wife have remained committed to their faith.

"From early on I knew I was to be a man in show business who is also a Christian," says Amick. "I want to be a person who is full of excellence and is using his gifts successfully and being salt and light in whatever situation I'm in."

He's had plenty of opportunity. In the 1990s Byram cast, directed and recorded all the vocals for the movie *Shrek*. He was the singing voice of one of the hyenas in the *Lion King*. He sang the role of Moses in Dreamworks' animated feature film, *The Prince of Egypt*. He has done vocal work on about 100 episodes of *The Simpsons*. He tours with Dennis de Young, lead songwriter and singer for the group Styx, and performs live with a 40-piece orchestra during parts of de Young's show. On stage, Byram has

directed five world premieres of new musicals including an \$8 million production of *Ben Hur*.

In 2003, Byram directed his first show for VU, *Brigadoon*, and went on to direct *Into the Woods*, *Schoolhouse Rock*, *The Secret Garden* and *How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying*.

"I knew about Vanguard but didn't know it had such a wonderful theater department," he says. "It's one of the best theater departments in the country and getting better and better all the time. I'm very honored to be associated with Vanguard. I like all it stands for: high quality education in a Christian context. You will be hard pressed to find as good a theater program like this anywhere."

His professional work continues to gain attention as well. This spring Byram was invited to perform with a full orchestra for the opening of a museum at Masada in Israel. The event was televised nationally and made Byram an instant celebrity there. A DVD and CD of the concert are being produced. Byram also wrote a song called "You'll Never Be the Same" which was a huge hit with Israeli audiences.

"It was nothing short of thrilling," he says.

"The music was quite spectacular, and the story [of Masada] is so compelling. To be there and do a concert where all this took place was a very emotional experience for the audience and myself."

Recently, Byram released a new CD, *Encounter*, with each song representing a dramatic moment in the life of a person from the Bible. Most of the songs are fully orchestrated and Byram is backed by members of the London Philharmonic Orchestra. Byram also recently sang on a new Disney movie, *Enchanted*. He is continuing to produce theater and entertainment, mostly on live stage.

Directing at Vanguard gives him the opportunity to give back to the younger generation, he says.

"I look at [the students] and see me twenty years ago," he says. "There was no person to help me when I was that age, to guide and direct from a Christian point of view, how to operate in the business. I feel like it's a part of my life and what God's having me do to give back and train the next generation of people, especially Christians. I'm concerned they be of the highest caliber and competing in the world. I feel I'm doing my part to see that happen."