

Greece native's career hits abundance of high notes

By Mike Latona
Staff writer

ITHACA — When supper time rolled around at the Wells household, Jennifer was never too difficult to find. All her parents had to do was stick their heads out the window and listen.

"I was always the loudest kid in the neighborhood," admitted Wells, recalling her childhood in the Rochester suburb of Greece. "I sang all the time."

Several years later, Wells still devotes about five hours per day to singing. Except now her voice isn't simply loud.

It's also the foundation of an already successful career that appears to be only growing larger.

Now 23, Wells recently embarked upon the first year of a prestigious graduate assistantship at Ithaca College. She has landed a leading role in an opera next February, and also sings at a number of church functions in the Rochester area.

It all began in her junior year at Greece Arcadia High School, where Wells admitted her voice "came out of nowhere. It just started happening."

After winning some singing competitions as a senior, Wells moved on to Ithaca after her 1989 graduation from Arcadia. While working toward dual bachelor's degrees in voice performance and music education, Wells also sang opera on campus. During visits back to Greece she began performing during holiday services at Our Mother of Sorrows Church. That led to wedding and fu-



Jennifer Wells recently began graduate work at Ithaca College after earning two bachelor's degrees there last spring.

neral engagements; to date, she estimates that she has sung at 60 weddings.

"Church has been a big part of everything," said Wells.

However, her musical progress hit a snag when she was forced to cut back her singing due to a prolonged throat problem in her senior year. Although her voice is now as strong as ever, Wells acknowledged that the experience taught her never to take anything for granted.

"I learned a valuable lesson — that I can't depend on this to always happen," she said. "Now I wake up and thank God that my voice is here today."

Following completion of her bachelor's studies at Ithaca College last spring, Wells now serves as assistant to Ithaca's director of choral activities. Her graduate assistantship covers all tuition expenses and also provides a stipend.

Wells remarked that she is enjoying

the leadership that comes with her new duties.

"For five years I was auditioning and nervous, and now I'm judging. It's kind of cool," she said.

In February of 1995 she will perform with the Ithaca Opera Association as a lead singer in Giancarlo Menotti's "Amelia Goes to the Ball." She is also slated to perform with Ithaca College's choir next spring at Lincoln Center in New York City.

Despite her many successes, Wells feels that her greatest achievements may still lie several years up the road.

"In the real world, they don't want to hear you audition for a leading role in a big opera until you're 35," said Wells, who noted that a typical opera singer's voice doesn't become settled until about that age.

A mezzo-soprano singer, Wells explained, "I have a very large range, but I have nice low notes as opposed to a thin, high sound."

Even if the opera life doesn't pan out, Wells is still confident that some sort of successful music career lies in her future. She is now paid for all church-related performances; she has student-taught at several Rochester-area schools as well as Immaculate Conception School in Ithaca; and she has also begun giving private lessons.

Most likely, she will end up "teaching at the college level, because that's very conducive to performing at the same time," she said.

"I feel like I've got myself covered in a lot of ways," she concluded. "I'm having a ball. I'm so happy right now."

Anonymous 4 to perform at Sisters of St. Joseph's benefit on Nov. 13

PITTSFORD — During a review of one of this group's performances, the *Chicago Tribune* wrote: "There is no more beautiful music on this earth."

A four-woman vocal group specializing in classical and medieval music, Anonymous 4 will bring its music to Pittsford for the Sisters of St. Joseph's fourth annual Holiday Benefit. The performance is scheduled for Sunday, Nov.

13, at 3 p.m. at Nazareth College Arts Center, 4095 East Ave.

Originally formed in 1986 to experiment with the sound of medieval chant and polyphony, Anonymous 4 has become renowned for its astonishing vocal blend and technical virtuosity. In addition presenting concerts regularly at St. Michael's Episcopal Church in New York City, Anonymous 4 has performed

throughout the United States and Europe.

The group's most recent release, "An English Ladymass," was named 1993's Classical Disc of the Year by CD Review and has spent much of 1993-94 on Billboard's classical chart. Anonymous 4 will perform "An English Ladymass" at the Nov. 13 show.

The 13th- and 14th-century chant and polyphony that make up "Ladymass" are taken from a votive mass to the Virgin Mary as it might have been offered at Salisbury Cathedral in England. The program will include motets and poetry read in the Middle English of Chaucer's time.

In reviewing "Ladymass," a writer for *American Record Guide* wrote that the group's members "produce some of the most exquisitely beautiful, expressive singing I have ever heard. Their united sound is refined, delicate, suave, yet full of passion and confidence. Surely this is the sound of heaven."

The ensemble takes its name from the designation given by musicologists to an anonymous 13th-century Englishman who, as a student in Paris, wrote about the vocal polyphony then being performed at the Cathedral of Notre Dame.

A writer for *Fanfare* magazine noted that: "Communicating the meaning of the music they sing to the audience is very important to Anonymous 4, and they are particularly careful to choose texts which they can believe in, not necessarily in a narrow dogmatic context, but from a broader spiritual context — Mary as a universal archetype, as mother, and feel that perhaps this is part of what brings their music across to the broader audience which they have reached."

Tickets for the performance are available at \$25 for general seating, and \$50 for patron level with reserved seating.



(Clockwise from top) Susan Johann, Ruth Cunningham, Marsha Genesky and Johanna Rose are the Anonymous 4.

Tickets are available through the Sisters of St. Joseph Development Office, 716/586-1000, ext. 151, and at the following locations: Music Lovers Shoppe, Border's Books and Music, Jay Scutti Plaza South, and Village Green Bookstores in Rochester, Greece and Perinton.

Proceeds from the performance will benefit the ministries and retirement needs of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Rochester.

In addition, this concert will be dedicated to Sister Florian Reichert, SSJ. Sister Reichert joined the order in 1919 and served as the sisters' supervisor of music from 1933-68, teaching Gregorian chant and other musical techniques to novices.

In 1954, Sister Reichert wrote a Mass in honor of St. Joseph for the order's tercentenary celebration. She also held the position of director of liturgy for the Sisters of St. Joseph Motherhouse from 1955 until her retirement in 1978.

**Our kids need
the experience
of a lifetime.
Yours.**

Covenant House Faith Community

There's no substitute for experience, and we need yours. Whether your children are grown and raised or you've completed your business career, here's an exciting opportunity. A chance to put your faith and experience to work by putting the Gospel into action.

Covenant House Faith Community is Christian men and women of all ages, all denominations, helping the truly forgotten—homeless kids. Members commit themselves to 13 months of service helping young people while living in a lay Christian community dedicated to a prayerful lifestyle.

Faith Community is a vibrant, action-oriented and deeply spiritual challenge. No special talents or religious knowledge are required. What it takes is a commitment to God, fellow community members and the homeless kids of our city streets.

Find out more about this richly rewarding challenge of a lifetime. Then put your lifetime of experience—and your faith—to work.

Write or call: Orientation Director, Covenant House Faith Community
346 W. 17th Street, New York, NY 10011 (212) 727-4971



New York • Fort Lauderdale • New Orleans • Houston • Los Angeles • Anchorage • Toronto