



Vol. 1 Issue 3

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Barbara, our Promotional Director, is always working tirelessly to get Donald's name out to the public. As soon as an event is announced, she is the first to look for media contacts where information could be sent. In March, she succeeded in getting a blogger who was skeptical about Donald during the course of *AGT* to like Donald and even anticipate his upcoming concerts. She also constantly looks for new places where Fan Club members can leave comments about Donald and his upcoming events. Barbara is currently working to promote the two major concerts in June - the benefit for SAMMinistries on the 7th and Kerrville on the 27th.

Star Braswellians

Linda has been our Membership Director since the launch of the website in November 2008. Our membership grows steadily, especially after each event, and Linda is constantly updating the membership database, adding new members and keeping up with everyone's geographic location. Her job also involves welcoming new members and sending notices and club updates out to everyone. Without Linda's hard work, our club would never be as organized as it is today.



I would like to thank all the Braswellians who have contributed comments, photos and reviews for this edition. Thanks also to everyone for your warm and enthusiastic response to the *Braswellian Star*. To Cherie, Julia and Serena: a heartfelt thanks for your input and suggestions in making the *Braswellian Star* a success.

Doreen, Editor
 Editor@DonaldBraswellFanclub.org

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Comments for the *Braswellian Star*

Thanks for the hard work, dedication and sharing of your talents for Donald not only in what you wrote but how you showcased all of the other Braswellians and their writing talents and love and appreciation for Donald!

~Shelley (CT)

One word, only three letters, heartfelt:

WOW!

~Lois (VA)

Once again, you did a fantastic job. I just wanted to thank you for all of your hard work and your dedication to Donald and our group.

~Barbara (FL)

The Editor invites you to write to the *Braswellian Star* with your comments, questions and/or suggestions. Selected letters will be published and answered in future editions of the newsletter. Please send your comments to: Editor@DonaldBraswellFanClub.org.

Anticipating Kerrville (June 27, 2009)

The Kerrville concert with the Symphony of the Hills will be a magnificent event for two reasons. First, for Donald, it will mark a new performance style as far as live concerts are concerned. Second, it will be the biggest gathering of Braswellians to date. As of mid-May, we already have over 25 Braswellians who are planning to attend the concert, many of whom are flying in from different parts of the country. Please contact TourDirector@DonaldBraswellFanClub.org if you are interested in attending this (or any) event. The following is a memo from Cherie announcing the concert:



The Kathleen C. Cailloux theatre, where Donald will be performing

Photo from www.symphonyofthehills.org

I'm thrilled to let you know that Donald put the Kerrville people in touch with me so we could help with the concert...The benefit concert proceeds will be used for scholarships at Schreiner University in Kerrville. The Cailloux Theater, which holds 850 seats, is beautiful and has fabulous acoustics.

The concert is going to be a Pops concert and Donald will do many of the songs we've heard, showing his broad versatility. It will not just be classical music. His New Chapter Band will be performing too. Just think, we get to hear Donald with a full orchestra behind him!

The university students from the marketing, graphics, and media departments will be using the concert as a class project and will be creating all the promotional material. They intend to create 30 and 60 advertising spots for broadcast on Time Warner Cable in their viewing area!

Can't wait to see you all at this fabulous event! Shine up those yellow roses!

Love, Cherie

Songs through Silence

From Cherie: Fan Club Newsletter Editor, Doreen, in collaboration with member, Judy, created a beautiful account of this amazing singer's re-entry into the world of symphonic performance. For details regarding this concert, see "Upcoming Events", below. Their article is brilliantly written and is published here untouched. The stand-alone article is available at: www.donaldbraswellfanclub.org/files/Songs_through_Silence.pdf

When Donald Braswell takes the stage on June 27, 2009, to perform as a soloist in a concert with the Symphony of the Hills in Kerrville, Texas, he will have finally come full circle. The Juilliard graduate and protégé of Franco Corelli, the Prince of Tenors, was once known and praised for his leading tenor roles as Cavaradossi in *Tosca*, Rinuccio in *Gianni Schicchi*, and Pinkerton in *Madame Butterfly*; but in 1995 he saw his career shattered in the disastrous few seconds of the automobile accident that destroyed his voice. The journey back to his rightful place in the spotlight accompanied by a full orchestra almost took 14 years, but once again, Donald Braswell has arrived, this time exuding the depth and passion of an artist matured and tempered by the pain and suffering of his long passage.

* * * * *

As his bright vibrato trembled through the aria "Addio, fiorito asil" ("Farewell, Flowery Refuge" from Puccini's *Madame Butterfly*), Donald Braswell, though he did not know it at the time, was also bidding "addio" to his career as a premier operatic tenor. It had been over five years since he had graduated from Juilliard, and he was quickly becoming an international star whose musical brilliance would soon equal that of Pavarotti, Carreras and Domingo.

But success, however promising, can be taken away in an instant.

That moment of adversity came for Braswell in late 1995. While cycling through Britain, he was hit by a car and as a result, suffered substantial damage to his throat. Because of the type of injury that he sustained, he was told by medical professionals that speaking would be a challenge for him and that singing was virtually out of the question. He would later recall going through a long period of depression after the fateful accident put a stop on his operatic career.

And understandably so. Braswell grew up surrounded by music, and had never imagined life in silence. His parents, Don Sr. and Jane, were Broadway performers who met on the set of *L'il Abner*. The music that could always be heard in the Braswell home complemented the tranquil South Texas hills in which he has spent most his life. During school, he would participate in community theater and perform at local events, all the while playing with his high school football team in order not to flaunt his aesthetic side. Shortly after college, his wife Julie persuaded him to apply to Juilliard, a school with a roughly 6% acceptance rate. He did it to humor her, thinking that he would never get accepted. But Julie and his family weren't the only ones to recognize his talent; Juilliard not only accepted Braswell but offered him several scholarships.

Thus began the journey that would take the boy-next-door from Texas to international stardom. Braswell's versatile lyric-dramatic tenor voice made him the perfect lead for many classic works from Puccini, Verdi and Donizetti. But the higher one climbs, the longer and harder becomes the fall.

In an interview with Trinity Broadcast Network's *Praise the Lord*, Braswell stated that he had always believed that depression was something that could be overcome easily, and that it was only after his accident that he understood what it meant to go through depression. For two years, he could not speak at all. But despite this, he yearned for a way to express his pain in the most natural way he knew—through music. During this time, he composed "Look At Me", a song which he has recently performed at several concerts. The song captivates the listener precisely because of its touching and powerful simplicity: "Look at me," the poetic voice begs of the audience, "I really am somebody." He reminds us that underneath the sorrow of the silence that he was forced to bear, music was thriving and anxiously seeking a way to come out.



Photo from
www.symphonyofthehills.org



The Orchestra and the Grand Symphony Chorus

Photo from www.symphonyofthehills.org

But at that time, the music within him had no means of finding a way out. It was then that Braswell began to realize that despite the pain he was going through, he had another source of happiness – his family. His first child was born during this time of silence, and he named her Aria. Braswell told Diane Bliss of Detroit PBS: “An aria is the love song, the place of expression and emotion in an opera. I named her that because when I didn’t have a voice, Aria was going to be the voice for me. She was my song when I didn’t have one.”

Eventually, Braswell learned to take the accident that stopped his career and turn it into something positive. He took on a new attitude towards life. “God was trying to show me something,” he would later recall. “When I was a professional opera singer, I was very successful at it...after this happened, and my child

came along...I looked into the eyes of that child...I realized...it really wasn’t about *me*.” During the next few years, he and his wife had two more children, and because he was no longer touring the world, he was able to watch his three daughters grow.

When, against the odds, Braswell’s voice started to come back, he took on performance opportunities with local groups and his church in order to strengthen his singing. When the time was right, it was Julie who, like before, put him on a path that would take him back to the world of music – the world in which he rightfully belongs. In 2007, when the third season of NBC’s *America’s Got Talent* was searching for new talent, Julie sent in an audition video on her husband’s behalf. In September of that year, he was called to Dallas for a preliminary audition. In a 90-second performance, his life would be changed – again.

When he announced that he would be singing Josh Groban’s “You Raise Me Up”, laughter could be heard from the audience and booing ensued. By the end of the song, the audience was unanimously chanting their approval for him to advance to the next round. And he did, but not for long. The judges did not let him move on to Top 40, and Braswell, thrown off his musical career for the second time in his life, went back to his normal job and thought that singing was simply not his destiny.

But fate would have it otherwise. When a wild card spot opened up in the Top 40, Braswell was one of the eight contestants selected for a chance to return. The American public, perhaps impressed by his ability to turn the audience around during his first audition, perhaps awed by his powerful voice and the grace with which he handled himself on stage, voted Braswell back into the Top 40. From there, he went on to become a finalist, where, 13 years after being told that he might never speak again, he sang to a standing ovation and later won fourth place.

His experience on *America’s Got Talent* gave Braswell the opportunity to explore other genres of music. When the show’s producer, Simon Cowell, encouraged him to sing “Unchained Melody” at the finalists’ concert in Las Vegas, Braswell, still holding on to his classical roots, was at first skeptical. However, he trusted Cowell’s judgment and today “Unchained Melody” is one of his signature pieces as well as a fan favorite. He has since then performed even more soulful pieces like Sam Cooke’s “A Change Is Gonna Come” and done Elvis impressions, while still remaining loyal to the people who followed him through and before *America’s Got Talent* with covers from classical crossover artists such as Mario Frangoulis and Andrea Bocelli.

Now imagine a classically trained singer performing pop, rock or soul with a full orchestra. This is what Braswell will achieve in his participation with the Symphony of the Hills. When he launches the Symphony’s 2009-2010 season, he hopes to launch a Pops tour that will eventually give him the opportunity to perform with symphony orchestras around the nation. Through all that he has experienced, Donald Braswell is back home, both to the Hill Country that he has known since childhood and also back to his rightful place in music with a full orchestra.

Article by Doreen (TX), left, and Judy (OH), right.

Flashing Back: Las Vegas Hilton (February 15, 2009)

Donald Braswell had his own headline show at the Las Vegas Hilton on February 15, 2009. He put a whole new meaning to the saying “If you sing, they will come.” Yes, they even bought his CD. I flew to Las Vegas from Idaho for the express purpose of seeing Donald’s concert. As I sat in the second row center waiting for the concert to start, I wondered how many were in the theater. I stood up, turned around, and to my delight I realized this was a sold out show!

As the lights dimmed and Donald came to the stage it soon became apparent his abilities to entertain went far beyond anything seen on *America’s Got Talent*. He moved with great ease from songs made famous by “Old Blue Eyes”, to Elvis...complete with all the moves (now *that* was exciting), to music he wrote himself, to soul and of course let’s not forget his operatic abilities, which he showcased with a cover of “Nights in White Satin”.

The audience experienced emotion from tears to uncontrollable laughter and everything in between. Of course the standing ovations were plentiful as well. Sometimes the only thing was just to be quiet, so awed by his talent there was nothing to say. After the show, which seemed five minutes long but was in actuality almost two hours, we stood in line to meet this multitalented man and to buy his *New Chapter* CD. How long did that take? About an hour and a half. Was it worth it? An astounding YES. Will I go again? Another astounding YES. So, yes, they WILL come and they WILL buy. Those two questions are forever answered. He is good enough that I am going to fly to Texas in June to hear him again. Yes he IS that good.

Beverly (ID) [right, photo below]

For too many of Donald’s concerts I lived vicariously through the tales of my fellow Braswellians. Like most of us, I would wait at home anticipating reports from the girls lucky enough to be there in person. I’d hang on to every word, scan the pictures over and over and wonder, “When will it be my turn?” Well, that time came on February 15th at the Las Vegas Hilton.

The weekend was magic. Meeting all of the lovely women that I had been chatting with since the *AGT* board and later through our fan club was a thrill. It was like a family reunion for me! Our lunches, dinner at Benihana’s and laughter around the slot machines are happy memories. The culmination of this great time of course, was Donald’s concert. We had the best seats in the house as far as I’m concerned – second row front. But if I had known that Donald was going to bend down for kisses at one point, I probably would have leapt over Serena’s head! Donald sang a montage of music from more artists than I can remember. Every song touched us somehow. My fiancé, Greig (who questioned whether or not he would enjoy this at all), shed a few tears when Donald sang “Mack the Knife”. It had been his late father’s favorite. I found tears running down my face when he sang “Nights in White Satin” in Italian and English. Then more tears when he sang “Look at Me” and “A Change is Gonna Come”. The auditorium was full, and Donald had us all in the palm of his hand. He showed us how humorous he can be, that he has all the right moves and is completely versatile.

The first time I heard Donald sing on *AGT*, I felt that I had been touched by the hand of the Creator. Through his example of giving to others and his loving consideration of those that love him, he has made me want to be a better person.

Today I told my brother that I was flying to Texas in June for a concert. He said, “I cannot imagine who could be that good for you to shell out that much money.” He may never understand, but that doesn’t matter. I need the joy and happiness of seeing that wonderful, talented man in person again and connecting with my Braswellian sisters.



Glenda (photo credit) and Beverly at the Las Vegas concert

Glenda (ID) [left]



Donald with the Braswellians after the Las Vegas concert
Photo by Glenda

Up until now, we have seen Donald perform at church benefits, such as Spring Creek and the concert with SAMMinistries. Las Vegas was a whole different story. He performed to a sold out showroom at the Las Vegas Hilton, home of Elvis Presley, Barry Manilow and now Donald Braswell.

The excitement in the air from all the Braswellians who were there to see history in the making was electrifying. The show began with no introduction; Donald just walked onto a blackened stage and the crowd just went wild! He shook up that audience in more ways than one. He had more dance moves to shake a stick at. We Braswellian sat there in a state of shock wondering where those moves came from. His voice was

PERFECTION, his moves were SEXY, he was the whole package and the audience loved every minute of it. Listening to people waiting in line to have autographs signed, their comments were "want to see more of Donald Braswell", "what a showman", "no need for glitz, when you have Donald Braswell on stage". He was in his element on that stage and we need to see him on stages like this more often. Looking forward to more Vegas!

Serena (VA) [second from right in photo]

Founder's Focus

Doreen had a brilliant idea of having a regular column from club management. Club Founder, Julia, accepted the challenge to contribute one in each future edition of the *Star*. So below is the first installment of what will be a terrific addition to our fabulous newsletter, "Founder's Focus". Julia is the beacon of our club who drew us all together, for which we will always be grateful. Her leadership, hard work, wise counsel and friendship are invaluable to me and to the workings of the club. We couldn't get on without her. Thank you, Julia! Love, Cherie.

I cannot begin to tell you how thrilling it is to see the word "Founder" next to my name on these pages! I was one of many who fell under the spell of Donald Braswell that first time he appeared on *America's Got Talent* and sang "You Raise Me Up" with such passion and concentration, in spite of the totally inappropriate response of that bored and appallingly rude crowd. I was overwhelmed with two emotions: delight at hearing his beautiful tenor soaring above the roar of that wretched audience, and a determination to find out more about Donald Braswell. I searched the Internet and found his website, www.DonaldBraswell.com, where I was able to listen to samples of his debut album *New Chapter*, which was an independent CD that he had put together with the backing of some friends. It was a wonderful compilation of all styles and genres of music, and it showed his versatility and range to perfection. I was totally hooked.

It was wonderful to discover that I was not alone. I and many others had been instantly struck by both Donald's beautiful voice and his inspiring story. When he was unjustly voted off the show for no valid reason as far as we could tell, we all got together to commiserate by posting messages of outrage to each other on the NBC comment board, and we decided to do our part in bringing him back as the Wildcard when the opportunity arose, and encouraged each other to vote, vote, vote! The injustice this amazing singer had suffered needed to be righted, and happily America made sure that happened.



Julia (NV), Fan Club Founder and Co-Owner

Once he was restored to his rightful place in the Top 40, we kept up a constant chatter on the NBC website, comparing notes and posting tidbits of information about Donald; all contributions were gobbled up voraciously. Occasionally someone unpleasant would join our ranks and post something inflammatory, and the rest of us would immediately jump all over this intruder (in print of course) and “see him off”. It was fun, and very gratifying to know that I was not the only person afflicted with “Donalditis”, a new and very contagious disease that had spread rapidly and infected all of us who corresponded regularly on that NBC board. It was exhilarating and none of us wanted it to end, so we decided to find a way to stay in touch once the show ended, fearing that NBC would close down the forum where we all connected each day with such enthusiasm.

Before the series ended, we had established a Yahoo Group that eventually expanded into our wonderful Fan Club website, www.DonaldBraswellFanclub.org, which was developed and is maintained so devotedly by my colleague, Cherie.

Who would have guessed we would come so far in such a short time? Many of us have since met each other in person at concerts, and Donald came to learn about his “Braswellians”, and he makes a point of recognizing us at events (we aren’t hard to spot, wearing our yellow rose boutonnieres!), and he always seeks us out and poses for photographs with us whenever possible to show his appreciation for our love and support.

Donald Braswell is back to stay, and so are his Braswellians who will be with him for the long haul.

Reflecting on Donald and the Braswellians

The Braswellians were drawn together in the summer and fall of 2008 because we all saw something special in Donald. Now, almost a year later, we have come to share much more than just a mutual admiration for a musician – we share our love for each other.

Understanding what Donald has gone through encourages us to find our own inner strength; seeing his kindness and generosity continuously motivates us to set higher standards for ourselves. And each time we hear a story about how a fellow Braswellian’s life has been changed for the better by Donald, it reinforces our ever-resilient friendship. Below are two Braswellians’ reflections on what Donald and the Fan Club mean to them.



No one looks forward to having surgery. It is a necessary process that we hope will have a positive outcome. I had a total shoulder replacement a year ago and was faced with the news that the other one needed to be replaced before a more serious result would occur and that surgery would be difficult. Having the memory of the previous surgery and subsequent therapy still fresh in my mind made me even more apprehensive about a repeat performance. Since I have no family, the recovery process and a shoulder to cry on when the pain gets so bad caused periods of the proverbial “pity party”.

This time, even though the procedure was more involved, I discovered that I really did have a family to help me through. No, perhaps they weren’t blood relatives, but that made little difference. My family that I have acquired through our “Donald bonding” was there for me every step of the way. I can’t begin to put into words how much it meant to have this family, their thoughts, prayers, calls, flowers and continued postings. While I was in rehab, I had a picture of Donald taped to my closet door. Knowing what he had been through and seeing how far he has come helped me realize I can do it too.

I always feel that things happen for a reason and I couldn’t have asked for a better family if I had hand picked them. Thank you, everyone. I am so proud that I can call you my family.

Susanne (OH)

I first found Donald Braswell by flipping channels and seeing this “good looking” businessman wearing a slightly crumpled business suit saying “My name is Donald Brasswell”. I became curious to hear what a mild, meek-mannered businessman would sound like so I decided to stay on that channel and listen. To my surprise, this “Clark Kent” look alike actually had a “Superman like” voice; in fact, his entire persona seemed “superman like” while he was singing. I now have gone from mildly curious to totally mesmerized by this man’s voice and the emotion his singing was evoking from me!

And then I realized that the crowd was booing at him!

But the booing didn’t seem to hold Superman back. He kept singing with even more captivating energy pushing the booing down till the booing changed to applause, and later, cheers. He took on a crowd that was tired and in a negative, foul mood and not only got them to stop booing but actually changed their mood entirely to where they were smiling, energized and happy. I began to wonder, “Maybe this *is* superman?” When the music stopped and the song was finished, Superman seemed to have vanished and this gentle, kind, meek-mannered Clark Kent like person was back.

And now I find out that he is a devoted family man who credits God for his singing gift and thanks God on his way off the stage and calls his kids immediately to tell them what happened. I immediately felt love and respect for this human being who was a stranger to me. So now I want to know more about this man and how I can get the opportunity to hear him sing again. I was hooked. And I feel that finding Donald was not a “chance” occurrence. I believe in my heart that it was a divine intervention that guided me to watch *AGT* that night.

Through following Donald and trying to support him in any way that I could, which included voting online for the first time in my life, I got to be part of a beautiful, intelligent, loving, generous, giving, nurturing group of individuals who call themselves “Braswellians” and I feel that my life has been overwhelmingly blessed just by knowing and interacting with them which never would have happened if I didn’t see Donald sing that night.

The Braswellians became Donald’s official fan club and I believe that happened because “like goes to like”. Donald was the magnet that drew us all together. The qualities that we saw in Donald are qualities that we all value and want to preserve and protect, because we all have these qualities too but through Donald’s powerful charisma we can see those qualities shine and sparkle. So our (Braswellian) mission is to nurture, protect and promote Donald Braswell not just for his beautiful God-given voice and performance talents, and not just for his heart searing good looks, but because of the “goodness” in his core that emanates through his entire being and is palpable when he is on stage. Donald sings not just with his voice but he fuses his heart and soul into every note.

So the short answer, the Braswellians feel like my family and Donald feels like a friend and hero!

Shelley (CT)



Upcoming Events

SummerFest 2009

May 29 *** Brea, CA (Los Angeles metro area) *** 7.30pm

Donald will be performing for a school fund-raising charity event with other *America’s Got Talent* finalists. The event draws about 25,000 people each year. The concerts are free (though donations are appreciated). Stop by Donald’s booth while you are there! Terry Fator is appearing on May 31st. See www.summerfestbrea.org for more details.



**Concordia Lutheran Church
Photo by Kit (TX)**

“Look At Me” concert

June 7 *** San Antonio, TX *** 3:30pm

Held at Concordia Lutheran Theatre and Sanctuary, 16801 Huebner Road. Proceeds from Donald’s show will benefit the homeless of San Antonio. Tickets are \$20 and can be ordered at **SAMMinistries** by phone (210) 340-0302, in person at the offices at 5254 Blanco Road, or on www.SAMM.org. (Any unsold tickets will be sold at the door for \$25.)

Symphony of the Hills Pops concert

June 27 *** Kerrville, TX *** 7:30pm

Donald will be performing a Pops concert with the Symphony of the Hills, Kerrville’s 70-piece symphony orchestra, at the beautiful Cailloux Theater. Kerrville is about 60 miles northwest of San Antonio in a lovely Hill Country setting. This is a benefit concert with proceeds going to scholarships for students at Schreiner University. Ticket prices are \$35 and are now available. Contact them at info@symphonyofthehills.org or call (830) 896-9393 or (830) 792-2469. The spectacular event is expected to sell out quickly. A 2:30pm show may be held if that is the case and tickets for that show may also go fast, so interested people should get their tickets as soon as possible. See www.symphonyofthehills.org for more.



**Texas Hill Country
Photos by Doreen (TX)**

Fan Club Officers and Staff

Co-Owner, Club Founder	Julia (NV)	Co-Owner, President	Cherie (CO)
Vice President, Tour Director	Serena (VA)	Membership Director	Linda (TX)
Promotional Director	Barbara (FL)	Site Moderator	Susanne (OH)
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Comments? Questions? Is there something you’d like to see on the *Braswellian Star*?

Write to the editor at:

Editor@DonaldBraswellFanClub.org