trained pianist, could often be found late at night accompanying Forbes on Puccini and Verdi arias. But he never envisioned that a band would grow out of their collaboration. “I was more concerned with throwing parties,” he says. “With being the cruise-ship director of Adams House.”

His cruise-ship-director talents—energy, organization, and a penchant for fun—have served him and Pink Martini well. Indeed, the band’s appeal is not unlike that of the cruise ship: just subtract the surfeit of dining options and the shuffleboard, and enable the ship to travel at high speed through time as well as space. Of writing lyrics in several languages and drawing on the musical styles of different eras, Lauderdale says, “It frees us from the fear of sentimentality. It’s like a kid playing the piano—he doesn’t know enough to be scared.”

Pink Martini’s success has surprised many, and that includes Lauderdale himself. “When the band first started, I was wearing cocktail dresses and we were playing ‘I Dream of Jeannie,’” he recalls. After graduation, Forbes moved to New York City to launch a career as a singer-songwriter, while Lauderdale returned to his hometown of Portland, Oregon, hoping to get involved in politics—he aspired to become mayor someday. While working on a campaign to keep homosexuality legal in the state, he booked bands for political fundraisers; one weekend, in desperate

“I just fired the singer; we have these really big shows coming up this weekend, and I want to fly you to Portland.”