need of an opening band for a show, he called up his old friend Forbes. “I just fired the singer; we have these really big shows coming up this weekend, and I want to fly you to Portland,” Forbes remembers him saying. With the Pink Martini sheet music in hand—Lauderdale had FedEx-ed all the songs to her—she boarded the plane.

Forbes soon signed on full-time, but the band did not find its niche easily. For one thing, traveling with so many musicians is expensive. Without the backing of a major label (the band’s albums are on its own label, Heinz Records, named after Lauderdale’s dog), Forbes and Lauderdale had to think unconventionally. Unable to cut expenses, they increased revenue instead by performing where they were most popular: in Europe.

The band got its first big break in 1997, when the release of its version of Edith Piaf’s “Je ne veux pas travailler” (“I don’t want to work”) serendipitously coincided with French legislation that shortened the number of hours in that country’s workweek. The selection was nominated for “Song of the Year,” and the band for “Best New Artist” in France’s version of the Grammys, the Victoires de la Musique awards. (The song is still popular there, having run in a Citröen commercial.) With its multilingual lyrics and diverse influences, Pink Martini soon attracted a following across the continent.

The band’s success in Europe prompted American symphony orchestras to extend invitations. Since its debut with the Oregon Symphony in 1998 (Lauderdale has been friends with then-music director Norman Leyden since high school), Pink Martini has performed with the Boston Pops, the Los Angeles Philharmonic, and other companies across the country. Although “It’s not really in young people’s repertoire to go see symphony orchestras,” Lauderdale says, the sophisticated fun of Pink Martini’s sets has drawn a mixed crowd of old and young, turning such collaborations into an appealing way for the orchestras to reach a new demographic.

After their Carnegie Hall performance and an appearance on The Late Show with David Letterman, Pink Martini continued its North American tour to promote Hey Eugene! with stops in Montreal, Chicago, Los Angeles, and many places in between. “There’s nothing better than a public library, a used-record store, and meeting strangers in dark alleys,” says Lauderdale of his life as bandleader. Although the stage doors of leading concert halls don’t always open onto dark alleys, Lauderdale has certainly become cruise-ship director once again.

Howard Axelrod ’95, a contributor to the New York Times Magazine, is writing a memoir.

Sophomores, Sex, Soap

Students steam up the small screen with Harvard melodramas.

by ANDREA M CARREN

isa nestles into the folds of Adam’s grey fleece jacket, her hand entwined in his. The two lovers share a park bench and an uncertain future—their budding romance, forbidden. Adam is a wide-eyed freshman from South Dakota; Lisa, a sophisticated and shapely junior from New York. But she is also his peer advising fellow, an upperclass student chosen to offer academic and social guidance to freshmen. By the rules of academia, their relationship is taboo.

Nevertheless, hormones rule on days like this. They’ve slipped away from roommates to this quiet spot overlooking the Charles River. Adam leans in toward Lisa and places a soft kiss on her forehead.
“Cut!” The mood is interrupted by Andrew Wesman ’10, an intense student from San Francisco. He paces behind a digital camera on a tripod, occasionally raking an anxious hand through his mop of hair. “All right. That’s it,” he declares.

Wesman was directing an episode of Ivory Tower, which is produced and performed by a team of 40 Harvard undergraduates, that October 2006 afternoon on the river. One of the nation’s oldest campus soap operas, the show premiered in the spring of 1994; fittingly, it has faced ups and downs since.

The structure differs in some ways from nationally broadcast soaps. “There isn’t any continuity of characters or plots across seasons,” says Stephen Black ’07, last year’s executive director, who provided guidance to the individual episode directors. “Each year has a brand new cast of characters, and usually a somewhat different feel.” The stories do continue across episodes within each season. During the 2006-07 academic year, the students made a record-setting five episodes that formed a larger whole. “It’s really up to the executive director to set the tone for the year’s show,” says Black, “and what I went for this past year was a realistic drama/comedy that would accurately reflect the Harvard experience.”

Yet, a soap opera—at Harvard?

“When Andrew and I first learned about it at the freshman activities fair, I thought it was goofy to be working on a Harvard soap opera,” says Harry Rima-

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Some Ivory Tower cast members: (left to right) Julia Gudish ’10, Jon Gentry ’07, Becky Cooper ’10, and Jack Morley ’08

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lower ’10, from Los Angeles, director of photography for the Adam/Lisa episode. “Sort of antithetical.”

But the campus is brimming with material, and Ivory Tower tackles some of its most sensitive issues: the breakup of a first relationship, dealing with a gay roommate, failing to make the Lampoon, losing one’s virginity, getting drunk for the first time, and experimenting with drugs, including the popular “study drug” Adderall. “Ivory Tower gives a glimpse into the real lives of Harvard students,” says Black. “The sex is very awkward, which we think is a true reflection of Harvard. It’s not exactly a school with a reputation for being sexual.”

Black also remembers how lonely he felt at the start of his undergraduate career, when he and a roommate sat in their dorm reassuring each other that they didn’t need to get drunk like some of their peers to have a good time. He envied minority students who had special gatherings organized for them during freshman orientation week, and recalls asking his roommate, “Don’t you wish you were black or Asian, so you had a group to fit in with?” That line was one of many freshman-year experiences to end up in Ivory Tower.

“The world’s perception of Harvard is that the students are extremely cocky and self-assured,” says Black. “I had a friend from another school who expected everyone to be wearing ascots and smoking pipes. But when it comes right down to it, a lot of kids are unsure of themselves and looking for their place to fit in.”

“We’re trying to draw the soap from the drama in kids’ lives,” says executive producer Eve Lebwohl ’08, of Long Island. “There’s no need to create any kind of external situation.” Among those dramas: an episode from last year’s Ivory Tower in which another freshman, Maddie, sleeps with an upperclassman in a steamy scene in Quincy House. Though Maddie is a virgin, she is prepared for the moment, as the viewer learns when she deftly extracts a condom from her purse on the night table.

“There are a lot of threads about relationships,” says Wesman. “In one episode, we have the juxtaposition of two lovers who are starting something very serious, very beautiful, and then, two [others] who are just hooking up, something very superficial.” Recalling the intense episode with Maddie, Rimalower adds, “It gets pretty risqué. That quasi-sex scene was an interesting task to film.”

Soap operas are emerging at schools across the country. Boston College spoofed the television series The O.C. with a drama entitled The B.C. Columbia University produces The Gates. Northwestern students created University Place. The crew of Ivory Tower uploads each episode to Google Video and YouTube, in addition to posting the shows on their own website: www.ivorytowersoap.com. The first Ivory Tower show of the 2006-07 season, released that October, racked up nearly 7,000 views on Google Video. (This season’s first episode was scheduled to be posted by mid December.) Most students watch the show on-line in their rooms, but each episode also debuts formally in Boylston Hall’s Fong Auditorium, generally attracting a full house. Although Harvard’s Office for the Arts helps fund the show, the students primarily use their personal cameras and recording equipment. Training for the crew is on-the-job, and newcomers are welcomed: Ivory Tower’s creators come from a wide variety of concentrations, hometowns, and socioeconomic backgrounds.

The show’s popularity has meant that its on-camera stars now find themselves recognized on campus—but they are most concerned with the impressions of a few key viewers. “They’ll be in a scene where they’re either cursing or making out with someone,” says Lebwohl, “and they’ll be like, ‘I can’t do that on camera. My mom’s watching at home!’” “I already told my dad he can’t watch the second episode,” says actress Julia Gudish ’10, her lip gloss catching the sunlight. “I don’t want my dad to see me kiss anyone. Ever.”

Andrea McCarren, an investigative reporter with WJLA-TV in Washington, D.C., was a 2007 Nieman Fellow at Harvard.

“The sex is very awkward, which we think is a true reflection of Harvard.”