



Wisconsin Singers Alumni Spotlight Chris Lange



"I've never been satisfied just with 'good enough.' I want to take something as far as I can, as long as I can." These words couldn't describe their speaker better—Chris Lange, our featured alum for the month—who has worked up an impressive and varied

resume as a performer and a professional. Currently, he plays in a band and a request-based duet group in Florida, but his love of performing goes back years to his upbringing in Wisconsin.

Originally from Niagara, WI, Chris started piano lessons in second grade. He also performed in his school and church choirs, and as a keyboard percussionist in his school band. However, Chris says what really made him fall in love with performing was when he got to perform in his community's first musical in seventh grade. To him, musical theater was the perfect blend of challenge: singing, dancing, and acting. From that point forward, he said, he knew he had to keep performing in his life.

Chris graduated high school and came to UW-Madison in 1992, and during his freshman year, he had a couple friends in Singers. He saw how often his friends were away from home because of Singers and didn't get what it was all about—that was, until he finally saw a Singers show, in January of his sophomore year. Chris was enraptured by the performance and knew he had to get involved, but thought he missed his chance with it being the middle of the season. As chance would have it, one of the singer/dancers had to leave the troupe around that time, and Chris leapt at the opportunity

to join. Impressively, Chris learned the entire show in only two days before January reboot camp started, and immediately started touring the show. He was exhausted, but loved every minute of it. And despite joining halfway through the season, he felt welcomed immediately: "As soon as you open yourself up," he described, "you're instant family. I never felt like an outsider."

Over the next 2 (and a half) seasons, Chris stayed with the troupe, performing as a singer/dancer, and functioning as the group's head of PR and Marketing—at the time, there was no dedicated business team! Because he was an advertising and marketing major, this was the perfect field experience to hone his craft. He thanks Singers for developing his professionalism and work ethic, echoing the sentiments of alum Josh Gohlke, featured this past fall in the newsletter. Chris said he learned to make calls, be firm, and actually talk to others in a way that stood up for his artistic intent and value. For Chris, who has always and continues to act as the promoter and manager for any group he plays in, these skills have proven to be indispensable. Within the realm of performing, he credits Singers for teaching him actual vocal technique and discipline, and the ability to navigate adversity on stage, like having to cover a missing part on short notice—something the 54th season troupe is getting extra practice with!

Soon after graduating from UW in 1996, Chris took a job doing IT work for the UW-Madison medical school, where he felt valuable contributing to important medical and research work. At the same time, he began touring with BC³, an a cappella group he formed with other singer/dancers. He toured nearly full-time across the country for 7 years after graduating, alongside working full-time for the University. Some days, he would leave work in the afternoon, drive to another state for a show, then

return at 4 AM before going to work again the next day and doing it all over again. Otherwise, he'd use PTO and sick days to cover working days he had to miss for performances.

After stepping away from BC³ in 2003, he continued to perform in community theater, eventually meeting a fellow pianist with whom he entertained the idea of starting a dueling pianos group. Before they knew it, they were playing 4-5 gigs a night, as the dueling piano trend caught on nationwide. Seeing the potential in this opportunity, Chris left his job at the University in 2005 and committed full time to developing a dueling pianos company, Piano Fondue. Over the years, he worked to provide the highest caliber performances possible, eventually building it up to have 16 performers and 16 technicians, setting them apart from other groups by having quality sound and lighting design.

Chris ran the group from 2005 to 2015, when he sold the company to his original business partner. At the time, he said all the performing and company operations started to lose its joy and creativity, so he knew it was time to move on. For a couple years thereafter, Chris said he thought he was done performing, and didn't even touch his piano. He was dedicated to running a coffee shop, and his husband Brandon ran a hair salon. As time went on, though, Chris missed performing more and more—it was like a part of him that just needed to get out. He couldn't live without it. So, he started playing in a band again, making more valuable musical connections around the Madison area.

Just a few years later, in 2019, Chris, Brandon, and Chris' family decided to make the move to Florida. Though they had traveled there regularly for years prior, they thought it was time to make the move permanent, and live and work in that new environment. So, in July 2019, they packed everything up and moved to where they now reside, close to The Villages in central Florida.

"It was the best decision we've ever made," remarked Chris. The area has constant demand for performers and gives great business for Brandon as a hairstylist. The weather, unlike Wisconsin, also affords nearly year-round playing, far more conducive to a professional musician like Chris.

Though he initially planned to take the first six months off in Florida, to get situated and also get a feel for the music scene, Chris joined a band after three days, which developed into the two acts he plays today—a duet piano-vocal request group with singer Corrin Farroh, and a fully instrumented band—also featuring Corrin on vocals.



Though the pandemic initially hindered their plans in 2020, Chris quickly adapted to playing live-streamed shows, as well as outdoor venues capable of adhering to distancing requirements. His band grew, adding two new members, and they also gained popularity—just last year, Chris played a staggering 237 shows—and he lamented the 10 that were cancelled due to weather! As with his past groups, Chris also functions as the group's promoter/manager. Going forward, Chris will continue to do what he does best: push the group to the best that it can be, for as long as it can. For current Singers, Chris had one piece of advice from his own experience: just keep performing. Find the balance that works for you between other commitments and performing, but never stop—because you never know what exciting opportunity just one performance might lead to.

