

# FRESHMAN RAFAEL MORAS BRINGS HIS MUSICAL GIFT TO UTSA

by Lisa Chontos

**UTSA welcomed tenor Rafael Moras to its music department this semester. Moras is a young man gifted with exceptional music talent and the drive to cultivate it. As one of only 20 students in the nation to be named a Presidential Scholar in the Arts, Moras performed at a ceremony at the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington, D.C. He has won regional competitions and is a four-time Texas All-State winner. He also is the 2006 National Foundation for the Advancement of the Arts Silver-Level National Finalist in Classical Voice and has performed at gala events in Puerto Rico and New York to raise money for the foundation, also called the NFAA.**

Moras was born hydrocephalic, a condition in which cerebrospinal fluid accumulates in the brain and causes increased pressure in the skull. "One of the things that God gives all of us is dignity as a human person, but also, these gifts," he says. "And with those gifts comes a great responsibility to share them with the world. When I was born, my parents were told that I would be quadriplegic and blind. That's not the way I turned out. I just want to use what I've been given."

Moras is slender and unassuming, and he has a thoughtful face that lights up when he laughs. He has a grateful spirit and a strong love for his family.

Moras grew up in a musical family—his dad is a pianist and classical accordionist and his mom is a fine artist whose backyard studio is always filled with classical music. His brother and sister play five instruments between them. He grew up hearing his dad playing tangos, zarzuelas (Spanish operas), and especially the music of Placido Domingo. Moras' dad started teaching him to play the accordion when he was in kindergarten, but when he got to middle school, Moras decided to join the choir, his desire sparked by something unlikely: "It was the Japanese cartoon *Dragonball Z*. When I was growing up, a lot of the cartoons in Mexico came from Japan. In Mexico, the opening song was in Spanish, and the way the guy sang it really made quite an impression on me. He was able to put such heart and enthusiasm into it. Every time I watched the show, his voice would come on at the beginning sounding so joyful and full of life, and I just thought, 'Maybe if I join the choir they can show me some technique and maybe someday I'll be able to sing it like that.'"

He flourished under the vocal training of Barbara Murphy Frank at Clara Driscoll Middle School. Her infectious passion for music broke down the stereotype that choir was just for girls. In eighth grade, Moras began taking private lessons from Mark Puente. This gave Moras a male voice to model after, and he still remembers taking part in his first recital and having Puente's encouragement as he prepared to sing a difficult song. Puente moved away in Moras' sophomore year, and Moras began taking lessons from one of Puente's former voice teachers, Diana Allan of UTSA.



Allan has trained Moras for the past three years and recently helped him prepare for an NFAA competition. The audition tape requirements were strict, and Allan encouraged him to stretch himself by performing the Italian aria “Una Furtiva Lagrima.” The aria felt much higher than anything he’d ever sung and challenged him with its demanding range and need for solid breath support throughout. “Dr. Allan is amazing,” says Moras, shaking his head with visible admiration. “She took everything to the next level.” Now the aria has become one of his favorite songs to perform, along with “Sabor a Mi” and Augustín Lara’s “Granada.”

Moras feels as if he’s grown up on UTSA’s campus because he attended All-State Choir Camp here since his freshman year of high school. While pursuing a bachelor of music degree in vocal performance at UTSA, Moras plans to take part in overseas workshops and to give back by helping with the choir camps he grew up attending. “I want to take advantage of any door that might be open—any competition, any class that I might benefit from. UTSA has been so inviting, and I just want to go for it. I want to do the best that I can and make good friends along the way.”

He also would like to work on diction in other languages, especially Italian, French and German.

After graduating, Moras will likely pursue a graduate degree from a music conservatory, but his future is fluid. “I want to be the best musician that I can be, and whatever amount of fame may come with that, however God uses that, that’s great, but that’s not what I’m seeking. My training is not the means to that end.”

Last May, Moras and his father performed “No Puede Ser” at UTSA’s Fiesta Under the Stars. “One of my favorite things to do as an artist is perform with my dad,” he says. “It’s like nothing else in the world. There’s just a connection there, and my dad’s a really great musician. He’s so proud of me and I’m so proud of him.”

In July, Moras had the chance to perform with his father in Mexico. They performed to a full house at a free concert in a cathedral in Orizaba, Veracruz, an *homenaje*, or homage, to commemorate the year of Our Lady of Guadalupe.

During his busy few days in Mexico, Moras was able to take the time to encourage a 13-year-old boy with a boy’s choir voice who had seen him perform. Moras says aspiring students of voice should always be willing to forge their own paths, seek out good voice teachers and figure out their motivation and goals. “And for singing, I’d say they should take a look at UTSA. Go talk to any member of the voice faculty here and they’ll point you in the right direction. The directors and private instructors here are all wonderful.”

To those not sure if voice is their path, Moras offers, “There’s some great gift that you have. And whatever you’re successful at, don’t ever let those gifts be the totality of your self-worth, because that’s not all that you are as a human being.”

Moras says he’s excited to be part of the music department. “I’m really grateful to the faculty and staff for how they’ve supported me and the other incoming students. I just want to give back what I’ve been given, and I look forward to being inspired by all the other amazing artists and students here at UTSA.” 🎵

**“Music scholarships are a critical component in offering a music program of high quality. UTSA is growing rapidly in all program areas. The Department of Music has demonstrated outstanding quality worthy of UTSA’s rise to higher levels. Gifts for music scholarships are needed to stay competitive in attracting top music students. With this assistance, we can continue our high-quality activities and grow to new heights.”**

EUGENE DOWDY | Chair of the Department of Music and Conductor of the UTSA Orchestra

For more information, please visit the Department of Music Web site at [music.utsa.edu](http://music.utsa.edu).