

Unglaublich! Er ist Pop Star!

Incredible!—Chris Aguilar '10, an alumnus of the a cappella group the Midnight Ramblers, is an Austrian pop sensation.

By Karen McCally '02 (PhD)

“IT’S HARD ENOUGH TO GET A MASTER’S DEGREE, but to be a pop star on top of that? That’s even harder,” says **Chris Aguilar** '10, over Skype, from his apartment in Vienna, Austria.

And one more thing: He’s really, really glad to be doing an interview in English. “You have no idea how frustrating it is to give an interview in a language you’re not so good at,” says Aguilar, who has been in Austria for a year.

An environmental studies major and German minor at Rochester, Aguilar has been a master’s student in international relations at Webster University Vienna (his courses

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are conducted in “English, thank God”), as well as a bartender, a tutor, and an English teacher’s assistant.

Now he’s a member of the three-man band Kilmokit, hailed as Austria’s “first boy band,” whose debut CD, *Atemlos*, rose to No. 4 on iTunes Europe during the first week of its release last December.

It all started last fall, when at the suggestion of a friend, he auditioned for *Popstars Mission Austria*, an Austrian version of *American Idol* and other reality television series. “I don’t usually go to castings,” says



RAMBLE ON: Last fall, Aguilar helped keep an Austrian reality television audience riveted. With his shaky German, would he be able to rise to the top, making it into the final boy band, Kilmokit? As it turned out, “Ja” was the answer.

Aguilar. “But I missed singing so much,” he adds, alluding to his years as a member of the River Campus a cappella group the Midnight Ramblers.


Over two months, *Popstars* judges Fernanda Brandao, a Brazilian-German dancer and pop star, and Detlef D! Soost, a storied German choreographer and street dancer, went on a casting tour, holding auditions in all eight provinces of Austria. Over the course of a television season, 50 callbacks were whittled down to nine women and nine men, shown living, training, and competing against one another at a mountain resort. The object was to make—and then to stay in—either the three-member girl band, BFF, or the boy band counterpart, Kilmokit. Aguilar not only made it into the final Kilmokit, but helped the band prevail over BFF in a season finale contest decided by viewer votes. The victorious trio of “Chris, Flo, and Patrick” came away with a Sony recording contract, a series of promotional gigs on radio and television, and 100,000 Euros.

Each band member had his own challenge. For Aguilar, who was born in Mexico and raised bilingually in the United States, it was singing in his newest language. “Anything with an umlaut is really hard,” says Aguilar, who struggled through his lead vocal role in the band’s single “Keine Träne.” “I sang with a very thick accent, and there was a lot of laughter in the studio.”

Aguilar overcame that challenge in part because he can be a bit of a taskmaster. “They used to call me Mr. Perfect on the show, because I’m very—I want discipline a lot. I want to do a very good job with the choreo, with the voice, with everything.”

The camera-friendly former Rambler is enjoying overnight fame. “When I ride the metro, it’s an adventure. I’ve had people from an older couple to young children recognize me. One little girl was really cute. She didn’t think I was real,” he says, chuckling.

While Kilmokit is a pop group, with a drummer and guitarists, Aguilar says they often sing a cappella. “We’re doing photo shoots, we’re doing autograph signings,” he says. “We always want to perform at these events, so we often do a cappella. Being with the Ramblers, I learned so much about group dynamics, about leading, about a cappella blending, harmony, and melody.”

In fact, says Aguilar, “So many things from Rochester really prepared me. It’s ridiculous. It’s like the best training school for life.” 



MELIORA MOMENTS

Kate Gruschow '11S (MS)

Staff member, Simon School Advancement

HOW MANY OF US HAVE THOUGHT TWICE about getting a paper cut? Simply slap a Band-Aid on it, maybe some Neosporin, and off you go. If it were not for the care I received in the Kessler Burn & Trauma Center at Strong Memorial Hospital, a paper cut would have killed me. A paper cut.

While working for the Simon School of Business and staffing an alumni event in Charlotte, N.C., in late January 2011, I received a paper cut while setting out our nametags. A week later, it became infected. A week or so after that, I was in the Kessler Burn & Trauma Center fighting for my life.

I had developed toxic epidermal necrolysis (TENS, also known as Stevens Johnson Syndrome), an incredibly rare and potentially fatal allergic reaction to the antibiotic I was prescribed. I was given a 50 percent chance of survival, and my epidermis “burned” off over 95 percent of my body.

My *Meliora* Moment is threefold.

First, the care I received from Dr. Derek Bell and the staff at the Kessler Burn & Trauma Center literally saved my life. They healed this then 29-year-old mother of two and returned me to my family. It is truly medicine of the highest order.

Second, I am incredibly grateful to Dennis and Larry Kessler for their support of the unit at the Medical Center. I had visited another local hospital (closer to my home) three times before going to Strong with no diagnosis. At Strong, they knew immediately what it was and how to treat it.

Lastly, the outpouring of concern from the staff at the Simon School and University Advancement was overwhelming. A constant stream of cards was delivered to me at Strong (many eager visitors were declined due to my condition). Meals were arranged for my family upon my discharge. Everyone’s concern and thoughtfulness motivates me to be an “ever better” colleague.

At the time of my hospital stay, I was also a part-time student at Simon, and the faculty worked with me to get caught up. I am happy to report that a mere three months after discharge I walked across the stage at Eastman Theatre and received my master of science degree in business administration.

I am now a grateful patient, staff member, and alumna. 

For more *Meliora* Moments, and to submit your own, visit <http://meliora.rochester.edu>.