

BRIGHTLIGHTS

[Reshma Shetty ('99)]

Music major plays *Royal Pains* doctor

BY CAITLIN HARRISON ('10)

Students arriving at JMU with a preconceived idea about a major field of study sometimes change their minds after discovering firsthand all that the Madison Experience has to offer. Reshma Shetty ('99) not only changed her major, she also changed academic disciplines.

"My freshman year I came to JMU to study biology," says Shetty, who grew up in England and Richmond, Va. "After a few months, the creative side of me started to rebel and counter the very stark science classes I was enrolled in."

Shetty left the biology lab for music recital halls and earned an undergrad degree in music performance *magna cum laude*.

Her cross-disciplinary experiences are coming in handy, though. She's not a doctor, but she plays one on TV as Divya Katdare on USA Network's hit show *Royal Pains*. Well, more specifically, she plays a physician's assistant to the lead character Dr. Hank Lawson. Shetty also earned a graduate degree from the University of Kentucky Opera Theatre and studied at the Cincinnati Conservatory of Music.

While *Royal Pains* is Shetty's first major television role, she did make an appearance on NBC's *30 Rock* in 2007. She also portrayed Priya in the 2006 Broadway play *Bombay Dreams* and starred in the off-Broadway play *Rafta Rafta*, both of which were well-received by reviewers and theater critics.

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— RESHMA SHETTY ('99)

Shetty has many fond memories of her Madison Experience. "I remember D-Hall on a Sunday and the open buffet, which made me fat! I also remember finals week when I would live in the library and try to sneak in food from Dukes. And I remember how beautiful the Quad is during the fall semester."

The university community has fond memories of Shetty as well. "She was one student that impressed me from the start with her potential to succeed as a performer," says John Little, JMU professor of voice (tenor). "Reshma was always completely self-possessed and very forthright. Combined with her good looks and beautiful singing voice, I always figured that she couldn't miss as a performer."

Brenda Witmer, professor of voice (soprano), agrees. "We quickly discovered that Reshma had quite a beautiful voice and a real passion for acting. By her senior year, she was one of the top operatic voices on campus, performing a very difficult repertoire," recalls Witmer.

Although Shetty began her career at Madison studying biology, she always knew she wanted to become a performer and go into acting. "I actually wanted to be a drama student," she says. "But it was not the most accepted choice for an Indian girl to try to become an actress. Finding color-blind casting was a definite problem at the time, as well, so I never thought I could do it. ..."

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Shetty lives in New York City and still has close ties to Madison. "When I was a student, JMU's arts community was fairly small, and we are all united, so I studied and performed with my friends," says Shetty. "It was a safe environment. We felt free to try new things. My closest friends in New York City today are the people I met at Madison."

Witmer says, "I am thrilled for Reshma's success in such varied artistic endeavors. Her elegance, comedic timing and generous spirit are the genuine article. I do hope that she continues to sing — perhaps the writers of *Royal Pains* could develop that into her role?"



(Above): Reshma Shetty ('99) walks a runway in New York City. Shetty's cross-disciplinary academic experiences at JMU help her adeptly play a doctor on USA Network. (Far right): Shetty with her fellow *Royal Pains* cast members.

The viewers and JMU arts fans can only hope.

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* Learn more about Reshma Shetty and her role on *Royal Pains* at www.usanetwork.com/series/royalpains/.