When Elisa Vilbergsdottir first came to the United States to study at Westminster Choir College, most people had a similar reaction when she told them she was from Iceland.

“Oh, I know…it is actually Iceland that is green and Greenland that is icy,” she said. “This is the only fact that people know.”

But she comes from a place that is 90 percent uninhabitable because of volcanoes, lava fields and glaciers. A place where the water comes unfiltered straight from mountain springs, and geothermal power comes from the hot water underneath. When she moved here for graduate study as a lyric soprano opera singer, she faced a culture shock, even from the tapwater.

“I can’t drink it, it’s just not pure,” Vilbergsdottir said. “There are just so many people and it’s reused so many times.”

Apart from the taste of the water, 28-year-old Vilbergsdottir finds the academic program at Westminster to be more varied than the program in Lübeck, Germany.

“In Germany, it was more about tradition, about being an artist,” Vilbergsdottir said. “Here it is more literature.”

It was while she was in Lübeck in the summer of 2002 that Vilbergsdottir met Voice Professor, Laura Brooks Rice. Rice told her about Rider’s Westminster Choir College, and she decided to come here.

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Vilbergsdottir has a lead role in the Westminster Opera Theatre production of Hector Berlioz’s “Beatrice et Benedict.” She will play the role of Beatrice, a leading role, in the Shakespearean English adaptation of the French composer’s libretto in early March.

But opera singing hasn’t been the only calling in Vilbergsdottir’s life. In 1995, she played center for the Iceland women’s basketball team in the Olympics of Small Nations.

“When I first came here, I looked for the tallest guy and I was like, ‘Do you want to play basketball?’” she said.

At 6 foot 2 inches, it’s no surprise that Vilbergsdottir’s favorite composers are Wagner and Strauss, both of whom featured strong, Viking characters, such as the Valkyries, in their operas.

SAF to be raised by $50

By Stephanie Mostaccio

A proposal by members of the Student Government Association (SGA) and the Finance Board to drive up the Student Activities Fee (SAF) an extra $25 a semester ($50 a year) was presented to the Board of Trustees this past Wednesday.

The fee stands at $200 right now and will be $250 if it is approved by the Board of Trustees. Their decision has not been released yet, but according to Steven Klemchalk, the SGA treasurer, the Board of Trustees will be very understanding.

“They are looking out for the best interests of the students,” said Klemchalk.

The idea to raise the SAF was a student-based decision. Members of the SGA and the Finance Board voted to approve the increase almost unanimously.

The fee hasn’t been raised since 2000, when it was increased from $140 to $200, where it stood at the beginning of this academic year. This hasn’t kept pace with inflation.

According to Haley Baum, the SGA president, something that cost $1 in 2000 now costs $1.13, showing an inflation increase of 13 percent. The tuition, however, has risen 27 percent to $21,820 in the 2004-2005 academic year, a $4,640 increase since the $17,180 in 2000.

The rise in inflation is directly correlated with the funding of Rider’s clubs and organizations: the amount of funding needs to be increased as inflation rises, SGA believes. The proposed increase in the SAF would show an increase of 25 percent, compared with the 13 percent inflation rate. This,

Lead role of Beatrice in WCC opera filled by Icelandic vocalist

By Charlie Olsen

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