



2010 TOP SINGLES: **FLYING SOLO**

Choosing this year's group of 16 from a pool of more than 350 nominations—to say nothing of pinning down the superbusy finalists long enough to be interviewed—was a journey in itself. But we're pleased to introduce you to a diverse group, including a Cirque du Soleil alum, a bow tie-wearing pastry chef, and four doctors we found simply irresistible.

Selections by the SLM Staff

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Photographs by Kevin A. Roberts



MATHEW RICE | 31

Pastry chef | South City

It takes chops—literally—to date Mathew Rice. “My best friend and I have a test we do if we date somebody,” explains the North Carolina native. “They have to be able to eat with chopsticks. If you know about food, you’re not going to go to an Asian place and ask for a fork.”

The deal breaker makes sense, given Rice’s culinary career. The renowned pastry chef moved here from Salt Lake City in 2005, around the same time as Gerard Craft, to help launch a little venture known as Niche. He’s since helped reinvent the dessert menu at Pi, making milkshakes that rival Chris Sommers’ deep-dish decadence. And his work hasn’t gone unnoticed outside St. Louis: His pastries have garnered national attention in the pages of *Food & Wine* and *Martha Stewart Weddings*.

Rice was even *thisclose* to being a contestant on Bravo’s *Top Chef Just Desserts*. “I guess they only had room for one flamboyant boy with a bow tie,” says the South City resident, whose left arm is covered in a sleeve of floral tattoos.

As for dating in St. Louis: It isn’t always a cakewalk, Rice admits. “I haven’t gone on many dates since I’ve been here,” he says. “I did Match.com for a while, and that didn’t work out well—the worst was the guy who forgot his wallet.” For someone who as a kid would “sit in front of an oven and watch it like TV,” it seems only natural that Rice’s ideal date would involve food: “Just staying in and creating a meal tailored just for you.” Sounds like a sweet deal to us.

JOANNA JIPKEMBOI KENDAGOR | 22

Car sales consultant/student | Des Peres

Most of Joanna Jipkemboi Kendagor’s friends aren’t from here. They’re from Ethiopia. Her mom is from Trinidad, her dad is from Kenya, and she has triple citizenship in the U.S., Kenya, and Canada, which opens her up to multiple cultures—and their problems. Currently, Kendagor is an Audi specialist and business student, but her goals extend far beyond that.

“I’m not really a science person, so I’m not trying to find a cure for AIDS or anything, but I want to help with whatever opportunities come my way for people in Africa,” she explains. “Luckily, AIDS has not touched my extended family in Kenya, but there are a lot of other issues they need help with, like getting used to a new democracy.”

On the home front, one of her main goals is to help young women with their self-esteem. She’s a mentor for Big Brothers Big Sisters, and hopes she can teach young women to have a better outlook on life.

“If women don’t understand their worth, the odds are really stacked against them, especially in the dating world,” she says.

Kendagor’s dream date is someone who has a sense of humor, but who is also driven to better himself and values family. One last, critical characteristic: It has to be someone who wants to give as much as she does.

“My parents have really instilled the passion in me to give back,” she says. “All my life they’ve been helping overseas students who come to St. Louis acclimate to the area, helping them find homes and friends. I can’t think of anything more important to me.”

Though she does have one other life goal—to start her own business. In what industry? That’s a secret.

ASHLEY KRUPINSKI | 24

Choreographer/dance instructor/stylist | Wildwood

For someone so elegant, dancer Ashley Krupinski lives by an unexpected motto: *Genius lies in the awkward*.

“A choreographer said that once in a class, and it’s so true,” explains Krupinski, adding that she gives the same advice to her junior-high dance students. “In middle school, they’re so concerned with what people think. In the real world, it doesn’t matter—go past the expected, do something out of your comfort zone.”

She’s applied the same advice to her own life, traveling around the world with the renowned Young Americans group and teaching dance in multiple cultures. For three months, she lived out of a suitcase while in Europe and the American South.

“I taught everyone from a 7-year-old girl in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina to 200 German [juvenile delinquents],” says Krupinski.

After stints in L.A. and New York, she returned to St. Louis to learn the family business at Krupinski Academy of Dance, her parents’ dance studio. (Her father, Mark, is a choreographer for Muny Kids and Muny Teens, which she participated in; Krupinski continues to perform at The Muny, most recently in *Footloose*.) She and her mother, Caren, have also started an accessories line, k.dotties.

So does a potential mate need to be as sure on his feet as she is? “No,” she says with a laugh. “Sometimes it’s better if they’re completely out of the world of dance.”

DR. SANJIV BAJAJ | 30

Radiology resident | Central West End

Ladies, when you’re out at night, Dr. Sanjiv Bajaj is the guy you want to be walking with. You see, this doctor’s also an actor—and before anyone gets hurt, he’ll probably have talked his way out of any encounter.

On the train to Verona, Italy, for instance, he once successfully foiled six Italian guys brandishing knives—although the tactic he used there might not work on your typical mugger. Bajaj correctly deduced that they were trolling for U.S. passports, so he spoke nothing but Hindi and broken English to them. “Eventually,” he says, “they put away their knives and started giving me travel advice!”

That’s not the only time Bajaj has cheated death. When the Birmingham, Ala., native started at Princeton University, he signed up for a camping trip called Outdoor Action that lived up to the name. He and his partner were just beaching their canoe on an island when Bajaj was pulled off his feet by a tornado. When it was over, he recalls, “I get up and look around, and it’s the scariest sight I’ve ever seen: Aside from a 10-foot radius of trees right around us, the entire island is completely level.” (Ask him about the twist ending to this twister story.)

None of that’s tempered his love of travel—next year, the vegetarian will perform ultrasounds in Bhutan, and he’d eventually like to open a charity hospital in India—but after visiting more than 35 countries and attending 70-plus weddings, Bajaj is ready to settle down.

“I’m looking for someone to adventure with,” he says, “but I’m also looking for something serious at this point.” Dates can impress him with Punjabi home cooking...or tracking down a tea he hasn’t tried.



JENNIFER GARTLEY | 30

Flutist | Tower Grove South

Music professor and professional flute player Jennifer Gartley has seen *Anchorman: The Legend of Ron Burgundy*—and she was duly impressed with Will Ferrell's wild "performance" in the flute scene.

"I'm pretty jealous," she admits with a laugh. "I'm not that cool."

Gartley may not leap onto tables to play scorching flute solos, but in the words of Ron Burgundy, she's kind of a big deal. She's one of the founders of the all-woman Chamber Project St. Louis.

"They're not just amazing ladies," she says of her band, which plays classics from all eras. "They're my family in St. Louis."

When the South Carolina native isn't performing, she's toiling for the Department of Music at Washington University and giving lessons to about a dozen eager kids at McKendree University in Lebanon, Ill.

What toots her flute? "I like...nice guys," she says. "People that are smart and can hold a good conversation" are welcome to apply, but she won't date other classical musicians. "The music world is so small, that's like dating someone you work with," she says.

Another caveat: "Even though I am 5-foot-10, I still wear high heels whenever possible," she says. "And there's a cutoff point—I'd rather not date a guy shorter than, say, 5-foot-9."

If Gartley *does* take a guy home to meet her parents, he'd better be ready for a formidable reception: Her father was a prisoner of war for five years in Vietnam—in the Hanoi Hilton, in fact, at the same time as Sen. John McCain. "My dad always jokes that he's going to say to a guy I bring home 'You know I was in prison, right?'" says Gartley. "But he never does; he's always on good behavior."

GREG LUKEMAN | 50

Nonprofit executive director | Downtown West

If you've ever attended a local gala or gallery opening, there's a good chance you've bumped into Greg Lukeman, executive director of Food Outreach. "Let's be honest, I will go to a garage door opening," quips Lukeman, whose nonprofit work and packed social calendar keep him continually on the move.

It's that whirlwind lifestyle that serves as both a blessing and a curse when it comes to dating, says Lukeman, whose dream date is Colin Firth. "When you get to be my age, the kind of people that are chronologically my age tend to be set in their ways," he says, adding that a significant other needs to be able to mix and mingle without too much hand-holding. "It's a big bill to fill."

Lukeman's already filled quite a bill himself, having worked at Monsanto, the former Ralston Purina, and Maritz before taking over at Food Outreach in 2001. Today, he leads the area's only organization dedicated to providing nutritional support for people living with HIV/AIDS or cancer. "In my vision, it shouldn't matter what disease someone has," notes Lukeman, who expanded the client base to cancer survivors in 2006.

Such work reminds him of the importance of perspective—both for himself and a prospective partner. "Don't harp on those things you don't have," he says. "Concentrate on what you do have."

Oh, and enjoy the small things in the meantime—like food. A major dating pet peeve for Lukeman: "When the meal is served at a restaurant and someone peppers it right away. It's odd that they would assume it's bland."

JEFF MCHUGH | 46

Radio program director | Central West End

As program director for Clear Channel's Z107.7 and 100.3 The Sound, Jeff McHugh has some pretty good stories. Next time you see him, ask him to tell you the one about The Cure's Robert Smith peeing into a flowerpot on the roof—he likes that one.

"Being the director of a radio station is a lot like being the director of a movie," he explains. "If the people around you are smart, like a Leo DiCaprio or a Kate Winslet, you just let them do their creative thing."

McHugh has gone from being a kid just a wee bit obsessed with his record player to doing broadcast work in multiple major cities, most recently Portland, Ore. He thinks musical tastes in St. Louis are a bit different from some other places he's landed.

"Here, anyone past the age of 30 really loves rock-based, singer-songwriter music, and twentysomethings will listen to pretty much anything," he explains. "Try to play Mariah Carey for twentysomethings in Portland, and they won't put up with it—at all."

Another difference between St. Louis and other cities he's lived in? The dating scene.

"I think most transplants would agree that if you haven't lived here all your life, people tend to treat you a little bit like an alien," the Los Angeles native says. "That being said, there's an interesting mix of really cool, diverse women here."

So if you're intrigued, ladies, here's another story to ask him about: the bit where he gets a gold record from Paula Abdul. It's about making connections and appreciating random things—both things he knows a lot about.

DR. MARTY FERNANDEZ | 45

Anesthesiologist | Ballwin

Dr. Marty Fernandez may look serious and buttoned-down in her lab coat, but beneath her professional exterior beats the heart of a wild child.

"I really had wanderlust for years," she says. "I backpacked across Mexico and Central America by myself, from Mexico City to Panama. It's when you travel alone that you're more open to conversations, to hearing people's stories—and it taught me to be comfortable in sub-optimal conditions. There were times when I found myself on a bus holding someone's chicken, or sleeping in a train station."

Fernandez has already lived in Spain, the Dominican Republic, and several American cities. In college, she even followed the Grateful Dead. So how did she go from vagabond to anesthesiologist? "I got a degree in international relations," she explains, "but then I decided to help people by becoming a doctor. I went to medical school later in life, in my thirties."

Her globe-trotting didn't stop, though—Fernandez connected with Doctors Without Borders to care for people injured by civil war in Sri Lanka. "Our windows were rattling from the shelling every day, and we could hear artillery," she recounts. "We were frightened, but our security told us that the bullets were going in the other direction."

At home, when Fernandez isn't delivering surgery patients to the Land of Nod, she enjoys playing pinball and whipping up sangria. "I lived in Spain for years, so you know I have a good sangria recipe," she says.

And maybe her next adventure won't be a solo flight: "I'm ready to be with someone genuine, open-minded, and who has a valid passport," she says.



CHRIS CHUNG | 34

Nonprofit executive | Clayton/Richmond Heights

Most people who decide to sky-dive find themselves strapped onto a more experienced person, an instructor who soothes the nerves, then falls with them and pulls the rip cord.

Chung did the “tandem jump,” but wanted more. So he took extra instruction in sky diving, then did a solo jump (albeit with a pair of more experienced jumpers flanking him). “It helped that it was a cloudy day, so it looked like you were jumping into a soft bank of clouds,” he says.

Why take the risk?

“It was one of those things I wanted to cross off the list,” he says. “I’ve done hang gliding and paragliding, too.”

So what’s left? When Chung isn’t encouraging companies to do business in our state, per his job with the Missouri Partnership, he’s fantasizing about consuming gigantic meals like Adam Richman, host of the TV show *Man v. Food*.

“I can put food away like nobody’s business,” says Chung. In fact, he admits one of his secret vices is “crunchy peanut butter eaten straight from the jar.” Between the sky diving and the bearlike appetite, this guy has certainly earned his “man card.”

Should you choose to take a dive with him, he says, you should be a woman who’s “intelligent, adventurous, into travel, willing to try new cuisine, maybe even speak other languages, into current events, and interested in the whole world, not just what Hollywood stars are doing right now.”

LEA MCROBERTS | 29

Architectural designer | Central West End

Lea McRoberts has only trod the red mud of our burg for two years, but already, the Des Moines native has made it her stomping ground.

McRoberts digs the concrete walls of the Pulitzer Foundation for the Arts and the adjacent Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis, going to ethnic festivals and farmer’s markets, hiking the Lewis and Clark Trail, and eating “No. 128, *Dau Hu Xao Lan*, at Mai Lee. It’s crispy tofu in a lemongrass and curry sauce.”

“But,” she adds, “if I’m in an especially romantic mood, it’s South Broadway Athletic Club wrestling night all the way.”

McRoberts might just be this year’s wittiest Top Single. A conversation with the 6-foot blond force of nature is always memorable. Asked what she imagines herself doing in 10 years, McRoberts boasts, “I’ll definitely be the hottest MILF the PTA’s ever seen.”

Ah, but she wasn’t born this brash: “In high school, I played the oboe and pretty much tried to do my best to blend into the walls,” she says. “One day, I decided to start faking self-confidence, and I figured it would just come naturally someday. I figure I’m 85 percent there.”

Let’s call it 99 percent.

“I was a bit nervous moving here, knowing only one friend from junior high in St. Louis,” she admits. But she got involved with the Young Architects Forum St. Louis, met some cool people, and “after about a year, I felt like I had an amazing group of friends and that I was in the right city after all,” she says. “Now, after being here for a little more than two years, I feel like I have arrived.”

DR. UMANG SOOD | 26

Pediatrics resident | Central West End

Dr. Umang Sood can do just about anything. She saves kids’ lives as a pediatric resident at St. Louis Children’s Hospital, but she’s also a dancer, culinary enthusiast, philanthropist, crafter, therapist, trained bartender—we could go on.

“Medicine challenges one side of my brain, so I’m always trying to do things that challenge the other, more creative side,” she explains.

Sood grew up in Oklahoma, but, she clarifies, “I didn’t ride a horse to work or anything.” A self-professed goofy “big kid at heart,” she’s been passionate about helping kids from an early age. Now that she’s in her dream job, her goals range from educating kids and their parents about nutrition to working with children who have alcoholic parents.

Ask her what accomplishment she takes the most pride in, and you won’t hear anything about the lives she’s saved or the degrees she’s earned.

“Helping raise my brother and shape him into the man he is now is more gratifying than anything,” she says. “My family is the most important thing to me in the world. My dad says that the family is like the four wheels on a car—it only works well if all four wheels support each other and work together.”

One last important thing that Sood *really* cares about: thunderstorms. “Thunderstorms make me incredibly happy,” she explains. “I don’t completely know what it is... I think it’s just the awesome power of nature that really affects me.”

RONALD GADDIS | 60

Neuropharmacologist | Manchester

Ronald Gaddis is one of those rare individuals who signs off his emails with suggestions such as “Have a phenomenal day”—and means it. His outlook on life is simply a positive one. At 60, he says, he’s still “fortysomething in mind, spirit, and body.”

Says this divorcé, “We’re only here one time”—so we might as well make this life a good one. So it was that the father of two found himself getting a black belt in tae kwon do with his son, Mason, at age 54. “Most of the people were in their twenties, and they weren’t cutting me any slack,” he recalls. “The headmaster said I was the oldest individual to achieve a black belt in the history of his dojo.”

By day, Gaddis is a full-time associate professor of biological sciences at Webster University, with a Ph.D. in neuropharmacology. By night, he’s a serial entrepreneur—previous ventures include a chain of music stores in Kansas City—whose latest gambit is a landscape-design company.

There’s a side of Gaddis that’s rock ‘n’ roll (he’s played guitar since age 10, and loves Pink) and a side that’s a bit more clockwork (note the precision-etched goatee and practically military-grade watch). He’s a son of Detroit who owns a black Mercedes roadster—but who spent enough time in Kansas City and Columbia to develop a definite country twang.

Growing up, he says, “My mother was very good about teaching me the finer things a man should know about how to treat a woman.” Dates should expect dancing, shopping, and possibly even a taste of coconut cream pie—made from his mother’s recipe.



DR. KEVIN WILLIAMS | 29

Emergency-medicine resident | Cheltenham

When we spoke with Dr. Kevin Williams in September, he was surprised he'd been chosen. "I don't think I'm that exciting," he told us.

While it's true that he does eat a lot of frozen food (Stouffer's and Lean Cuisine are staples, though he dreams of one day opening an Italian *tapas*-style restaurant), sleeps through most weekends, and hasn't had time to sing or play piano in a while, well, an ER doc's schedule will do that. As far as we're concerned, his career alone is pretty exciting.

Growing up outside of Washington, D.C., Williams saw "all kinds of different traumas, like gunshots or stabbings or victims of violence." As a kid, he was always analytical—when he got his first computer at age 12, he disassembled and reassembled it the same night—and he realized he could use his scientific bent to help people.

What he likes most is the puzzle of diagnosis, "the ones that come in where they don't know what's going on, and you actually figure it out," he says. "There's few victories you get, and that's one of them."

After shifts end, Williams often meets up with other Barnes-Jewish Hospital residents at Pepper Lounge, Mandarin Lounge, or Exo. At Duke University, he says, "I was voted most likely to be at the party. So I'll always go out...but when I get there, I just walk around and mostly observe."

Talking to Williams, you get a sense that he's thinking about—and amused by—a lot more than he necessarily cares to share. How can a gal tell if he's into her? Well, he probably *won't* call. But that doesn't mean he doesn't care.

"I'm more of a texter," he says. "I don't call people anymore—but I will send them a text or an email." Welcome to dating in 2010.

ANDY HILL | 25

Process engineer/student | Downtown

Like that of many engineers, Andy Hill's day-to-day schedule at Wood River Refinery involves things like "optimizing process yields" and "interfacing with different departments." It's all a little...abstract, perhaps part of why he began working on an MBA this fall at Wash. U.

Get Hill talking about some of the Catholic mission trips he's gone on, bringing supplies to places like Guatemala, New Orleans, and Mexico, however, and the native Oklahoman's hidden depths become apparent. In 10 years, he says, he'd like to be directing international relief efforts. As he relates a tale about blurting out the Spanish word for team, *equipo*, at just the right moment in Mexico, his boyish enthusiasm for service—and sense of humor—comes to light.

Hill takes an open-minded, do-it-yourself approach to a lot of things. This is a guy who built his own kitchen island and is currently teaching himself how to play violin with a \$40 fiddle purchased on eBay. "My goal is to play Pachelbel's Canon in D at some point in my life," he says.

And he didn't hesitate to join friends in learning broomball, hurling, and Gaelic football. In fact, if this clean-living guy has any sort of vice, it's probably team sports. He manages a league of volleyball teams under the name "Jukebox Heroes," and also plays softball and basketball.

Potential dates should be in touch with their faith, and outgoing enough to join him in his commitment to service. Oh, and University of Texas fans...let's just say you might require a trial period. "I would just feel wrong kissing a girl wearing burnt orange," jokes the University of Oklahoma alum. "It would take some getting used to."

ASHLEY NARSUTIS | 31

Lawyer | Central West End

Ashley Narsutis has a charming Texas accent that occasionally makes an appearance. "I'm originally from Denton, Texas," she explains, "and the accent seems to come and go depending on who I'm around. I was at a family wedding recently, and it came back real thick. It's funny, though, because my family tells me I talk like a Yankee now."

If you want to get close enough to enjoy her Southern drawl, you'd better have an agenda. "When a guy asks me out, I would very much like him to call me with a plan—a date, a time, and a place," she says. "Don't call me and ask for ideas about what we should do. Give me something I can put on my calendar and look forward to."

Fellas, you gotta keep up with this one—literally. Narsutis finished her first marathon last year, and she loves to run. "Running is such a stress reliever for me," she says. "It's almost meditative."

Narsutis also enjoys running off to other countries. She hit Thailand earlier this year. How did the recent divorcee pay for her trip?

"I absolutely love to travel, and this year I was itching to go somewhere," she explains. "Coming up with the money was a bit of a struggle, but then I realized—who wears old wedding rings? In the building where I work, there's a jeweler who bought my old engagement ring. I bought my ticket to Thailand and left a week later."

There's a poetry in that—a trading of bondage for freedom, tangible for intangible. And to hear this transplanted Texan tell the tale, it sounds *reeal niice*.

AARYA SARA LOCKER | 38

Nonprofit associate director | Benton Park

"I have been known on more than one occasion to throw water balloons at people coming to my house to hang out with me," admits Aarya Sara Locker. "I find it's best to drop them out the second story."

Locker is a joker—a former circus clown, in fact, who's adapted her flair for physical comedy into social work. She's now associate director of the DisAbility Project, a theater company for the differently abled.

Her résumé is about as wild as they come. After working for Circus Smirkus in Vermont, she went to a Cirque du Soleil audition in Montreal, and "eight days later was clowning on a cruise ship. It was like touring with a circus, except we took the audience with us."

Locker subsequently lived in a yoga ashram in upstate New York, where she got a yoga-teaching certificate (and a new first name, meaning "bringer of light and truth"). She then taught stage combat for plays and films, and even wound up teaching stage combat to a blind student. She currently teaches physical comedy at a juvenile detention center.

Don't forget her stint as a minor-league baseball mascot. "For a little over a year, I was the Indianapolis Indians' team mascot, Rowdie," she explains. "He's a big, red 7-foot bear with a baseball for a nose."

"A career in the arts is a patchwork of things," she summarizes. "I've had a lot of wonderful and bizarre jobs." The next person to enter Locker's world should share her "joy at the absurdity of life," she says.

"Somebody once said 'God is an author, and he's waiting for an audience that's forgotten how to laugh,'" she says. "You can have a hilarious adventure just going to the post office if it's with the right person." 🐻