

MASON
GROSS

SCHOOL OF
THE ARTS



THE GO-GETTER

ANDREW BAMBRIDGE REFUSES
TO BE DEFINED BY DWARFISM

Dance alum **Carlo Antonio Villanueva's** work in Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Company's *A Letter to My Nephew* at BAM's Next Wave Festival is cited as one of the best dance performances of 2017 by *Dance Magazine's* editor-at-large, Wendy Perron. "Small and springy, ready for anything; juicy voguing and runway moves," Perron says of Villanueva's performance.

“ **A TOUR DE FORCE** in every section of this dance. ”

DRUMROLL,

Lucas Hnath, one of last year's playwrights-in-residence, not only was nominated for a Tony Award for his play *A Doll's House, Part 2*, but Ben Brantley of *The New York Times* called it a "stunning comic drama" and a

“ **LANDMARK STUDY,** ” naming it among The Best Theater of 2017.

The New York Times' classical music critic, Anthony Tommasini, named *The Lou Harrison Centennial Celebration* concert at Trinity Wall Street—featuring **Rutgers Kirkpatrick Choir** and **Rutgers Percussion Ensemble**—one of the best classical music performances of the year.

“THE EXHILARATING CONCERT...WAS A RALLYING CRY FOR PEACE AND TOLERANCE,”

Tommasini writes.

Catch Rutgers Kirkpatrick Choir's *Lou Harrison 101* concert 7:30 p.m. April 21 at Kirkpatrick Chapel.

PLEASE

The work of dance faculty member **Pam Tanowitz**, as well as alumnus **Nick Sciscione** of the Stephen Petronio Company, was singled out for The Best of Dance 2017 list in *The New York Times*. Sciscione's solo at The Joyce Theater is called

“A KNOCKOUT, VIRTUOSICALLY MUSICAL,”

while the *Times* notes that “Ms. Tanowitz met Bach's daunting invention with her own” in her piece *New Work for Goldberg Variations* with pianist Simone Dinnerstein.

Students are set to perform work by Tanowitz and others May 2–5 at DancePlus Spring in Mastrobuono Theater.

A MESSAGE FROM THE DEAN



ANDREA KANE

I am delighted to announce that in June we will host a live, onstage interview with the distinguished American composer and lyricist Stephen Sondheim. He will appear at Nicholas Music Center on Friday, June 1, at 7 p.m. Winner of an Academy Award, eight Tony Awards, eight Grammy Awards, a Pulitzer Prize, and a 2015 Presidential Medal of Freedom, Sondheim is arguably the greatest and best-known figure in American musical theater. His credits include *A Little Night Music*, *Sweeney Todd*, *Sunday in the Park with George*, and *Into the Woods*. We are honored to bring him to Mason Gross for this event, which is co-sponsored by the Rutgers–New Brunswick Office of Summer and Winter Sessions. Tickets are available at 848-932-7511, or at the Mason Gross Performing Arts Center Ticket Office.

In addition, I am pleased to report that plans for the renovation of Nicholas Music Center's auditorium are under way. The project is made possible by a gift of \$1 million from Bruce Nicholas, son of the original donors of the facility. The renovation will involve replacing the seats and carpeting and enlarging the stage. The renovation follows the refurbishment of the Nicholas Music Center lobby, carried out last summer with the support of a gift from the Rutgers Class of 1957. The work will take place this summer, allowing us to enter the fall semester with a fully refurbished hall.

Finally, we've compiled a list of major awards won by our faculty. Our faculty have won 109 major awards, including 10 Grammy Awards, two Tony Awards, three Bessie Awards, 13 Guggenheim Fellowships, 10 Fulbright Fellowships, six NEA Fellowships, five American Academy of Arts and Letters Awards, one MacArthur Fellowship (also known as the "Genius Grant"), and many others. What an impressive list! We are fortunate to have such distinguished faculty, artists who are also deeply dedicated to passing their talents on to the next generation of artists, the students of Mason Gross.

George B. Stauffer

— George B. Stauffer, Dean



Rutgers Conservatory at Shakespeare's Globe students on the steps of the venerable theater, London, England, February 2017. They're back on campus here in New Brunswick for a production of the Bard's *Henry IV*, running April 20–28.

MASON GROSS

"Theater gives you the best tools to be seen by so many people, to talk to them, to touch them, and to say what you really want to say. It has this power. People say theater is dead, but I think now it's even more important to do it."

— Berlin-based scenographer Shahrzad Rahmani, speaking to students in the "Global Theater" class, November 16, 2017.

8 Faculty & Staff News

10 Student & Alumni News

12 Giving Back

20 Alum Profile

23 In Memoriam



6

JODY SOMERS

THE GO-GETTER

Multi-talented music student Andrew Bambridge, who's also appeared in films with Adam Sandler and Peter Dinklage, refuses to be defined by dwarfism.



14

GLOBETROTTING

Performing in China convinced student Isabella Vergara (second from right) that dance speaks a universal language.



16

ENRIQUE FIGUEROA

WINDOWS ON THE WORLD

A public art project in local storefronts promotes compassion and connection in turbulent times.

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ON THE COVER

Marimba player Andrew Bambridge in the practice room. Photo by Jody Somers.

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THE GO-GETTER

MULTI-TALENTED MUSIC STUDENT
REFUSES TO BE DEFINED BY DWARFISM

BY CARLA CANTOR
COURTESY OF RUTGERS TODAY

WHEN ANDREW BAMBRIDGE RECEIVED ACCEPTANCES FROM BOTH THE ACTING AND MUSIC PROGRAMS AT MASON GROSS SCHOOL OF THE ARTS LAST YEAR, A RARITY FOR THE SCHOOL, HE FACED A TOUGH DECISION.

Bambridge, who was born with achondroplastic dwarfism, felt lucky to have had some acting breaks. In 2015, he played the younger self of *Game of Thrones*' star Peter Dinklage in the movie *Pixels*, also starring Adam Sandler, and later that year appeared in a minor role on the TV sitcom *Happyish*.

Nevertheless, he knew from experience people with dwarfism have a hard time getting auditions in the professional acting world.

So he chose music. Now a sophomore at Mason Gross, Bambridge studies music composition and percussion performance, playing everything from the marimba, xylophone, and other keyboard mallet instruments to the snare and bass drums in university bands and orchestras.

"The great thing about music is that it's not about how you look but how the music sounds. Is the melody emotional? Does the piece have meaning?" said Bambridge, who last fall won the school's concerto competition, an unusual feat for a first-year student.

“

I'M NOT AFRAID
TO PUT MYSELF
OUT THERE.

”

Bambridge devised a platform from a Gold's Gym step that allows him to play the marimba.



PHOTOS BY JODY SOMERS

Though he is adept at many instruments, Bambridge's go-to is the marimba, a percussion instrument with wooden bars—laid out in the same array as a piano keyboard—that are struck with mallets to produce musical tones.

"The instrument is as big as my car," said Joseph Tompkins, head of the percussion program at Mason Gross, "and Andrew has figured out how to negotiate the spatial issues, using a platform he designed to reach the keyboard. Not only does he have enormous talent, he is a go-getter. Andrew can do anything he puts his mind to."

DOING IT HIS WAY

Growing up in Morris County and, later, Hunterdon County, New Jersey, Bambridge displayed his determination early. Emulating his older

brother, he begged to take piano lessons, but his fingers were too small to reach the octaves. He tried violin, but realized his undersized instrument would never produce high-quality sound. In sixth grade, he discovered percussion—instruments easier for him to navigate—and joined the school band.

BAMBRIDGE SHARED THE SPOTLIGHT WITH PETER DINKLAGE AND ADAM SANDLER BEFORE EXCELLING IN PERCUSSION AT MASON GROSS

"I had my first MRI when I was 4 days old and more than a dozen operations by the age of 14," Bambridge said.

He is grateful to his parents for the way they handled his physical challenges—"searching out the right specialists, not jumping into surgery"—and for supporting his artistic ambitions. "They never said you can't do this," he said.

In fact, they encouraged him during high school to apply to Juilliard's pre-college division for percussion, and after he got in, his mother drove him in and out of Manhattan every Saturday for three years.

So how did he end up sharing screen time with Sandler and Dinklage? "For me, acting has been a whole separate journey," Bambridge said. In tandem with the music, his parents encouraged him to act in church plays—his first, at age 6—leading to roles in community-theater

productions. When he was 13, he entered an acting competition in Orlando, Florida, sponsored by Actors, Models and Talent for Christ. "Surprisingly, and thankfully, I won best male actor out of 600 contestants," he said.

The experience led to a flurry of interest from agents and producers, but during the next four years, he didn't get called for one audition. There were two problems. "Casting directors don't like to hire actors under 18 because they are considered children, which comes with a lot of restrictions," Bambridge said. "But the main issue is that parts for little people are few and far between."

Then came the call for *Pixels*, a sci-fi comedy that centers on video gamers. One video audition and in-person callback later, he was in, filming in Toronto the summer before his senior year. The film opened July 2015 and *Happyish* followed, but the dry spell resumed, allowing him to rediscover his musical side.

"My music is very much influenced by my condition. It's very personal," said Bambridge, whose performance of his original song *Not the Same* at a talent show in Boston is posted on his website.

As for acting, he's not ruling it out. Peter Dinklage, who also grew up in New Jersey and has a similar form of dwarfism, gave him some wise advice. "He told me, 'Write for yourself or work with talented writers who can create great roles in which a little person is at the center of the story,'" said Bambridge.

"In music and in acting, I'm not afraid to put myself out there," he said. "I'm willing to make a fool of myself—and if something doesn't work, I'll try something new."

Watch a video about Bambridge—and hear him play marimba—on the Rutgers Today YouTube page.



Bambridge with actor (and New Jersey-native) Peter Dinklage.

brother, he begged to take piano lessons, but his fingers were too small to reach the octaves. He tried violin, but realized his undersized instrument would never produce high-quality sound. In sixth grade, he discovered percussion—instruments easier for him to navigate—and joined the school band.

Classical Music Magazine gave musicology faculty and interim associate director of the Music Department **Rebecca Cypess** and The Raritan Players a stellar review of their newest recording, *In Sara Levy's Salon*. The magazine calls the recording "a fascinating concept, brilliantly realised."

Visual Arts Department associate chair and media faculty **Natalie Bookchin** had several solo exhibitions up earlier this year: *Natalie Bookchin: Network Effects* at Cummings Art Galleries at Connecticut College, from January 22 to March 2; and *Natalie Bookchin: Testament* at Queensland Art Gallery & Gallery of Modern Art, Brisbane, Australia, from January 5 through February 24. In addition, Bookchin had a solo screening at Cinema Vérité Iran International Documentary Film Festival in Tehran from December 10 to 17.

FACULTY & STAFF NEWS

The New York State Dance Education Association recognized faculty **Kimani Fowlin** with an Outstanding Dance Educator (Teaching Artist) Award. The award recognized a "stellar dance educator" from the teaching artist sector of the organization's membership.

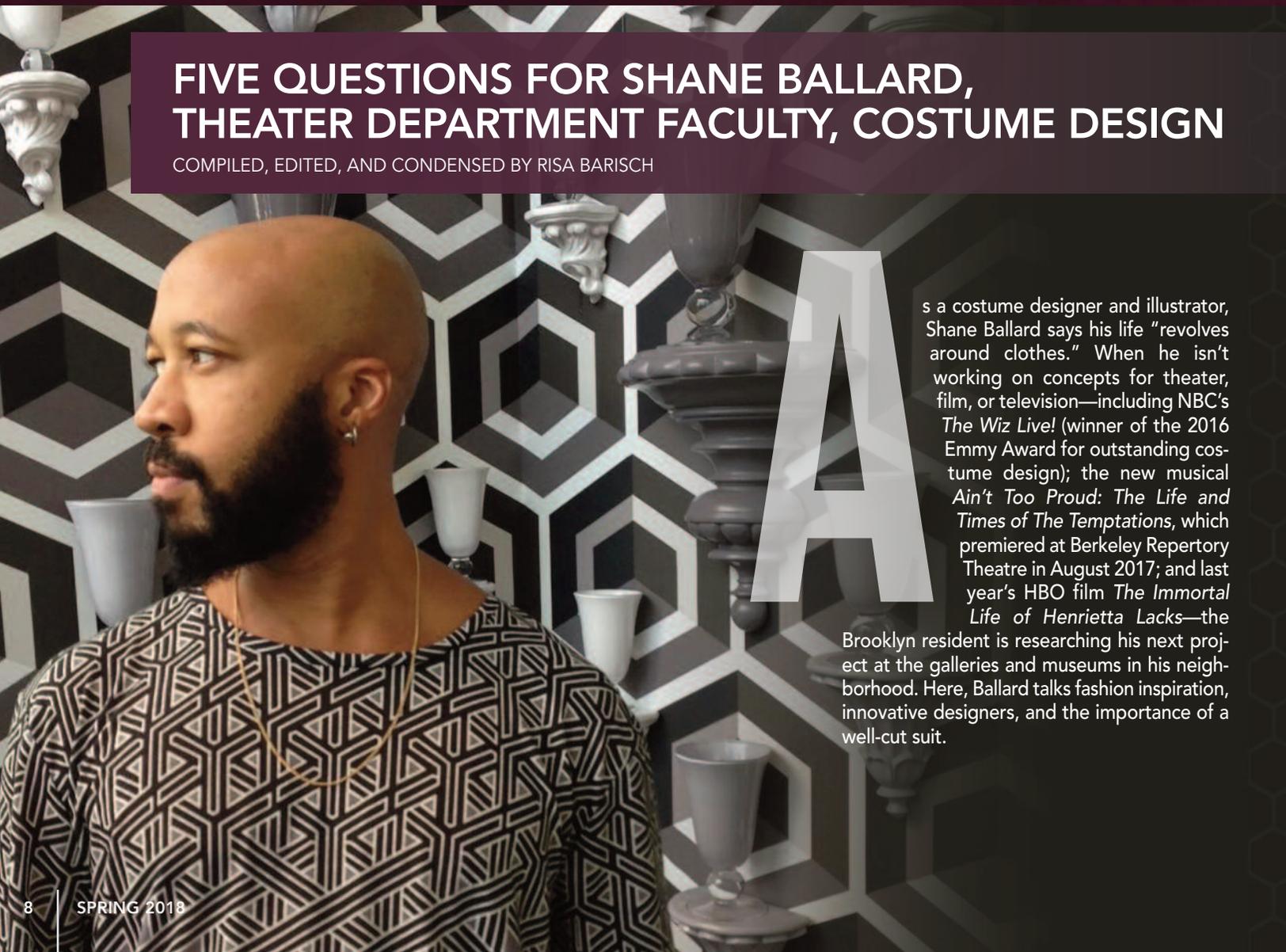
Jazz piano faculty member **Fred Hersch** received two Grammy nominations, for Best Jazz Instrumental Album, and Best Improvised Jazz Solo.

In February, music faculty and double bassist **Louis Levitt's** recording *Outliers* with his group Sybarite5 debuted at No. 1 on Billboard's Traditional Classical Albums chart.

Rogelio Martinez of the Theater Department received a world premiere of his play, *Blind Date*, at the Goodman Theatre in Chicago. The play, a fictionalized account of the first meeting between Soviet general secretary Mikhail Gorbachev and U.S. President Ronald Reagan, opened on January 20 and ran through February 25.

FIVE QUESTIONS FOR SHANE BALLARD, THEATER DEPARTMENT FACULTY, COSTUME DESIGN

COMPILED, EDITED, AND CONDENSED BY RISA BARISCH



A

s a costume designer and illustrator, Shane Ballard says his life "revolves around clothes." When he isn't working on concepts for theater, film, or television—including NBC's *The Wiz Live!* (winner of the 2016 Emmy Award for outstanding costume design); the new musical *Ain't Too Proud: The Life and Times of The Temptations*, which premiered at Berkeley Repertory Theatre in August 2017; and last year's HBO film *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks*—the

Brooklyn resident is researching his next project at the galleries and museums in his neighborhood. Here, Ballard talks fashion inspiration, innovative designers, and the importance of a well-cut suit.

Head of Percussion **Joe Tompkins** toured Austria, Germany, France, and Luxembourg with the Cleveland Orchestra in October, performing Mahler's Symphony No. 6 and Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring*. In January, he performed with the New York Philharmonic.

Dance's **Chien-Ying Wang** was invited to present and perform *Equanimity* with Riverbank Dance Company at Xinzhuang Culture and Arts Center in Taipei, Taiwan, on October 14 and at the Performance Hall of Hsinchu County Cultural Affairs Bureau in Hsinchu, Taiwan, on November 4.

Faculty member Hanneline Røgeberg's *Rebound Extrovert*, oil on canvas, 80 inches-by-80 inches, 2014. The painting was part of her solo show, *Hard Sauce*, on view September 14 through November 4 at Thomas Erben Gallery in New York City.



WHAT PIECE OF CLOTHING IS PARTICULARLY MEANINGFUL TO YOU?

A jacket I owned that I customized to use as a costume for an off-Broadway rock musical called *One Day*. The character it was made for was a rebellious risk taker with a slightly punk-rock aesthetic. I took inspiration from some favorite punk fashion designers, Vivienne Westwood and Stephen Sprouse, to create it. It's a simple oversized black blazer with strong shoulders. I attached a black vest to the outside of the jacket, as well as some custom-made patches, safety pins, and metal studs. It's a very strong look and sometimes I actually wear it to events. It always draws a lot of attention.

WHAT CURRENT FASHION TREND DO YOU HATE?

Men wearing tailored suit pants that are very tight and very short. It's so strange to see a well-dressed man in a great suit who looks chic from the waist up, but from the waist down looks like he's wearing a child's pants. If I were them I'd be afraid to make any sudden moves and tear a seam open.

IF YOU HAD UNLIMITED FUNDS, WHICH DESIGNERS' CLOTHING WOULD YOU BUY?

Haider Ackermann, Dries Van Noten, and Yohji Yamamoto. They aren't popular, mainstream designers here in America and may not be familiar to many people, but they make interesting, timeless clothing with an edge for men.

WHERE DO YOU LOOK FOR FASHION INSPIRATION?

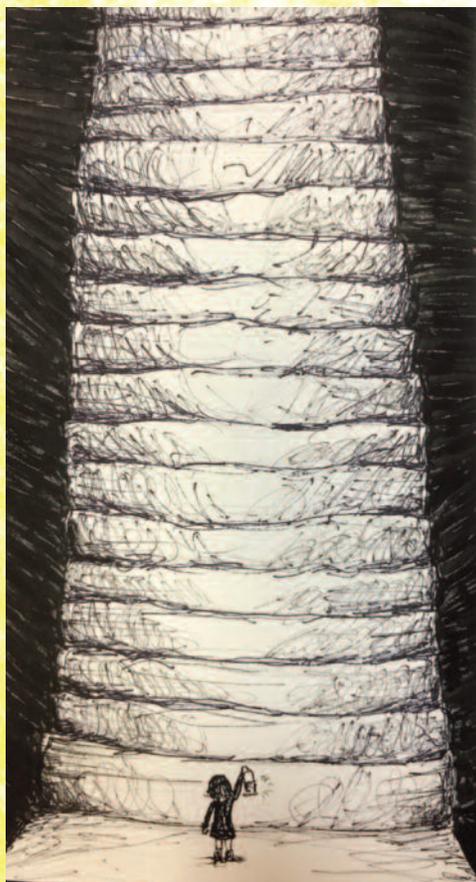
I find inspiration from *life*. I've heard debates about the differences between costume design and fashion design. For me, one informs the other and vice-versa. The main difference is the end use—but the creative processes for both can often be quite similar in terms of research and searching for inspiration. For me, inspiration comes from being fascinated by people, their stories, and how they choose to express themselves through clothing. The streets of New York are a theatrical stage of sorts, an everyday fashion runway where I find inspiration simply from being engaged with the world around me.

DESCRIBE YOUR FASHION STYLE IN THREE WORDS.

Eclectic, unconventional, and edgy. Sometimes I'm influenced by trends, but I tend to mix things up and not stick to one particular style. As an African-American designer, my culture has greatly informed my style. The men in my family put great importance on style and grooming. For them, dressing was an art form, and I continue in that tradition. Accessories, hats, and jewelry aren't things I shy away from. I believe in putting together a complete look, from head to toe.

STUDENT & ALUMNI NEWS

Dance alumna **Stephanie Klemons** was the choreographer behind that *Dirty Dancing*-inspired National Football League ad that went viral after it first aired during Super Bowl LI. Klemons, an original cast member and associate choreographer of the Broadway musical *Hamilton*, managed to turn New York Giants players Eli Manning and Odell Beckham Jr. into dancers in just two days. "They are so coachable and have so much physical acuity," Klemons told *The New York Times*. "Their ability to go on the field and memorize plays is totally akin to the way a Broadway performer's brain works."



On September 15, BFA visual arts student **Zahra Bukhari** became the boss of our Instagram, as she illustrated a day in the life of a Mason Gross student. Here's her drawing of the massive Civic Square Building staircase, which perhaps felt especially daunting that day because of a broken elevator.

Visual Arts alumna **Raque Ford** has been awarded a Louis Comfort Tiffany Foundation grant.

Music undergrad **Marissa Hickman's** composition "Anatomy of the Infinite Machine" was performed at the BEAMS (Brandeis Electro-Acoustic Music Studio) Marathon Weekend Festival in March at Brandeis University.

Theater students **Tasha Milkman**, **Sydney Mitchell**, and **Sarah Zinn** spent Thanksgiving at the Studio Festival 2017 in Târgu Mures, Romania, making a presentation about their "Global Theater" class with faculty member Christopher Cartmill, a whirlwind few days of workshops and performances.

Dance alumni **Kyle Marshall** and **Oluwadamilare Ayorinde** performed with the Trisha Brown Dance Company at The Joyce Theater from December 12 to 16.

On November 4, music student **David Ashton Kjar** performed in Trinidad as saxophone soloist with First Citizens Supernovas Steel Orchestra, a mass steel drum band, at the National Academy for the Performing Arts. He continues to perform regularly for the Broadway production of *Aladdin*.

During the fall semester, a group of **graphic design students** crafted posters in response to poetry collected by Mary Shaw's literature students in the Department of French. More than 100 posters mixing verse with design were displayed at the Rutgers Academic Building, from early November through December 1. The exhibit was part of the first-ever *Poetries-Politics* colloquium at the university's School of Arts and Sciences, presented by the Department of French. The colloquium also featured readings, lectures, and performances that celebrated the power of political poems across several languages and cultures.

Visual Arts alumna **Alice Aycock** is a recipient of the International Sculpture Center 2018 Lifetime Achievement Award, along with Betye Saar.

The **Rutgers Scarlet Knights Jazz Trombones** won the 2018 Kai Winding Jazz Trombone Ensemble Competition. They are set to perform in July at the 2018 International Trombone Festival taking place at the University of Iowa in Iowa City.

Camila Canó-Flaviá was a theater alumna for all of two months before landing a job performing in the world premiere of Obie Award-winner



GINNY DAVIS

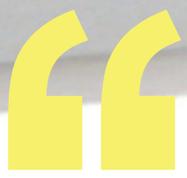
Music students gathered for a Q&A on September 25 with vocal alumna **Kaitlyn Nicole Davis**. Davis performed "Wishing You Were Somehow Here Again" from Broadway's *The Phantom of the Opera*. Davis, who has played the role of Christine in the show's national tour, shared advice on a variety of subjects, including standing out in an audition. "Casting directors are going to ask when you walk into the audition, 'What have you been up to?' " she said. "Instead of just a 'Nothing much, how about you?' the last time I auditioned for *Phantom*, I answered: 'Well, I've been dog-sitting my brother's dog, and blah-blah-blah.' That was the first time I was really a person to them, and they thought: 'OK, we want to work with this person.' It's a balance—you don't want to walk in and tell them some big, dramatic story, but just show that you're a human being—you've been working on things and growing. They like to work with [relatable] people because they have to see them all the time." Vocal student Vincent Giampino says he enjoyed the conversation. "Kate tried out for Christine a plethora of times," he says. "She was persistent and didn't give up, which I think is especially important in a musical theater career."

Clare Barron's *Dance Nation*. The production is scheduled to run through May 27 at Playwrights Horizons' Peter Jay Sharp Theater.

Theater alumnus **Sebastian Stan** starred alongside Margot Robbie and Allison Janney in the acclaimed film *I, Tonya*. Janney took home an Academy Award for Best Supporting Actress.



FULL CIRCLE



The spirit of being an artist is to keep moving forward, with or without a studio.”—Sonic and visual artist **Jennie C. Jones**, who paid a visit to Rutgers on November 10 for the annual Distinguished Alumni Lecture. Jones’s work delves into minimalism and experimental jazz, partially, she says, because she was spending a lot of time figuring out her in-studio playlist. “I have a big note on my studio wall: ‘Don’t overthink. Do,’ ” Jones, recipient of the 2017 Ruth Ann and Nathan Perlmutter Artist-in-Residence Award from the Rose Art Museum at Brandeis University, has said. Soon after her visit, Jones posted about the Rutgers event on Instagram, commenting, “Full circle O Rutgers tonight.”





GIVING BACK: HELP KEEP THE MUSIC PLAYING

When the Rutgers Marching Scarlet Knights wind their way into High Point Solutions Stadium, they ignite a burst of high-energy applause from the audience. The band's noble 100-year tradition, marked three years ago, was celebrated with the purchase of new uniforms, which helped the Marching Scarlet Knights stand out in their nearly weekly national fall television appearances. While new uniforms have the band looking its best, creating the sound that defines a Big Ten marching band is not possible without your help. After years of use, the band's aged instruments are either in woeful disrepair or in the twilight years of their lifespan, and in need of replacement. To remedy this situation, Mason Gross and Rutgers Athletics are launching a \$500,000 campaign to purchase new instruments. With your help, we can raise the money needed to replace the band's instruments with new ones that better fit the proud tradition of the Marching Scarlet Knights.

As we look toward the 2018–2019 season, it's important that our band has a greater presence, one that rivals that of our new Big Ten peers. Your contribution toward outfitting the band with new instruments will ensure that the Marching Scarlet Knights provide the ultimate sound and spirit for all RU Athletic fans. Join us, and let's keep the music playing!

RUTGERS

Mason Gross School
of the Arts

Give to the Mason Gross Annual Fund

To make a gift to the Mason Gross School of the Arts, please contact the Development Office at 848-932-5197, or mail your donation to the Office of Development, Mason Gross School of the Arts, 33 Livingston Avenue, New Brunswick, NJ 08901. Please make checks payable to the **Rutgers University Foundation**.

NOTE TO SELF

Have faith. Stay late. Break old habits.

Brandon Rubin
MFA Acting, 2014

WE ASKED ALUMNI TO DO SOME TIME-TRAVELING AND OFFER ADVICE TO THEMSELVES AT THE BEGINNING OF THEIR ADVENTURE AT MASON GROSS. HERE'S WHAT THEY HAD TO SAY.



Being an artist is an exercise in perseverance and faith.

You have to always keep going even when you feel like you want to quit. Even when you feel like you are fighting a million battles on a million fronts, persevere, don't quit on yourself, and always have faith that you will arrive in the place you see yourself, no matter what. A friend of mine shared these words, and I pass them on to you: "You might sleep on an air mattress, a sofa, your friend's apartment floor, but never, never, never, sleep on yourself."



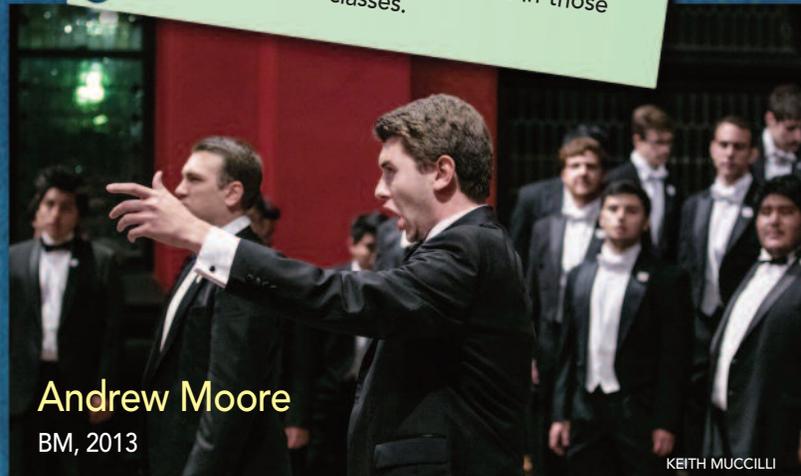
Katie Hector
BFA Visual Arts, 2014

DO NOT REMAIN STUCK IN YOUR HABITS AND THOUGHT PROCESSES FROM HIGH SCHOOL.

Slowly, you'll begin to realize that what your professors are teaching you and the way they are instructing you to sing is actually better, and your voice will improve by leaps and bounds. Next, look for the good in everything. There will be times when you'll say, "Why do I have to take this class?" or "What does this have to do with my major?" After graduating, you'll see that you'll use those very tools that you learned in those "why-am-I-here" classes.

Your professors' lessons and assignments are not designed to punish you, but instead promise to push you to critically think and develop your own questions, theories, and philosophies.

So, take advantage of your time with them. Fully engage with them by asking questions, sending emails, and staying late after class to talk. Sure, it can be a little awkward at times, but jump in anyway. By engaging with your professors in meaningful dialogue you will put yourself in a position to learn what cannot be taught in a textbook.



Andrew Moore
BM, 2013

KEITH MUCCILLI

STUDENT VOICES: ISABELLA VERGARA

In September, I had the opportunity to travel for 10 days to Beijing, China, to attend the International Creative Dance Seminar at Beijing Normal University. I was part of a group that included Mason Gross dancers Margaret Shue, Aanyse Pettiford-Chandler, Charlotte Stout, and Francisca Quintanilla, as well as faculty members Chien-Ying Wang and Paul C. Ocampo, and their adorable daughter, Louisa.

Traveling to a foreign country was humbling because it made me feel so small, but it did so in the best way: By traveling to China, I felt as if I had taken a camera that was zoomed all the way in on my life in New Jersey, and then zoomed all the way out and saw myself as just a tiny speck on this planet.

We spent our time taking classical Chinese dance classes, sight-seeing, and eating. Not only did we meet Chinese students, but the event brought together students from all over the world. Being around dancers from different backgrounds made the rest of the world feel less far away. I didn't expect to connect with the people I met as much as I actually did, but our shared passion made cultural differences less of an obstacle.

With only two people in our group able to speak Chinese, verbal communication among the student dancers wasn't always possible. However, one of the most beautiful things I got to experience was the power of dance as a language. Directions, tasks, and qualities were translated through movement, and dance became all the more beautiful because I could feel the connection it brought to everyone in the room. Dance was the common ground that allowed us to understand each other.

“

ONE OF THE MOST BEAUTIFUL THINGS I GOT TO EXPERIENCE IN CHINA WAS THE POWER OF DANCE AS A LANGUAGE. DANCE WAS THE COMMON GROUND THAT ALLOWED US TO UNDERSTAND EACH OTHER.

”

JOHN EVANS

OBJECT LESSON

“After an installation, I usually give the objects away or return them to the people I borrowed them from. Sometimes I keep them when they are rare or supercharged with meaning,” says MFA student artist Catalina Tuca, whose found objects were on view as part of the MFA exhibit *Mercury St.*, along with the work of six other student artists, earlier this semester at the Mason Gross Galleries. “For example, I have an abalone, a big shell from Chile. When I was a kid, everyone had an abalone shell in their house as an ashtray. Then they disappeared—they weren't in fashion anymore. For me, that is super interesting. I showed my nephews the shell, and they have no idea what it is. The shells represent a place and time.”

KEITH MUCCILLI

MUSLIM FEMINISTS USE ART TO TELL THEIR STORY

STUDENTS AIM TO DISPEL PRECONCEPTIONS ABOUT ISLAMIC RELIGION AND CULTURE THROUGH FIRST EXHIBIT

BY LISA INTRABARTOLA
COURTESY OF RUTGERS TODAY

Islamic feminism may sound like an oxymoron to some.

But anyone who understands Islam knows those terms are in concert—not conflict—with one another, said Zahra Bukhari.

“The concept of giving women equal rights and a voice has been part of Islam since its inception,” said Bukhari, a senior at Mason Gross who co-founded the Muslim Feminists for the Arts collective last fall with twin sisters Usra and Sarah Attalla. “This group is being unapologetic about those two words. We are about proving they are synonymous with each other.”

The six-member collective approached its first exhibition, *Hello My Name Is*, with the goal of introducing the Rutgers community and broader audiences to the concept of Muslim feminism while representing Muslims in the arts.

“We are using art as a universal language and tool to reach people from diverse backgrounds,” said Bukhari of the exhibition, which was on view last semester in the Civic Square Building and showcased print, painting, and design works. “Each member’s piece is meant to communicate our narrative and dispel myths in the media about what Muslim women are supposed to be.”

That includes myths linking head coverings to oppression and honor killings to Islam, said Bukhari, and upending the notion that a Eurocentric brand of feminism is the only brand of feminism available to women around the world.

“The idea of the white savior—women and men injecting themselves into a culture and religion and imposing on it their own ideals of what feminism is—is a way to justify labeling those who don’t look like you as ‘other,’” the visual arts major said.

Because Bukhari chooses not to wear hijab, she said she

“EACH MEMBER’S ARTWORK IS MEANT TO DISPEL MYTHS IN THE MEDIA ABOUT WHAT MUSLIM WOMEN ARE SUPPOSED TO BE.”

—Zahra Bukhari, co-founder of Muslim Feminists for the Arts

felt more of a responsibility to represent the women of her faith who do. Though she has not personally experienced discrimination because of her religion or gender, she said watching anti-Muslim and anti-feminism sentiment gain traction in America solidified her decision to make use of the resources she has access to as an art student and build this platform.

“My image speaks louder because it already defies the stereotypes of what a Muslim woman looks and acts like,” said Bukhari. “We have a responsibility to do something.”

Muslim Feminists for the Arts co-founder Sarah Attalla, who does wear traditional Muslim head coverings, said she, too, feels a sense of obligation

to share her story. Taking advantage of this outlet makes up for a missed opportunity to start a dialogue in her small Central Jersey hometown, where she and her sister were the only Muslim students in their high school who wore hijab.

“I was afraid to speak up for myself, but people knew that I was Muslim because of the way that I dress,” said the Mason Gross junior. “I graduated and realized that nobody was left to give the town that diversity that I had given. I should have used my voice, because I did not break many stereotypes by being silent.”

When the group approached Barbara Madsen, associate professor of visual arts, last year for help organizing, she agreed to become their adviser.

“They came with a sense of urgency and the need to respond during these tumultuous political times,” said Madsen. “Their fundamental need to have their message heard is a democratic right that co-aligns with the history of activist print media and social justice.”

The collective also hopes its existence will spark conversations within the local Muslim community and help legitimize the arts as a viable professional pursuit. Many Muslim families in Central Jersey value careers in health, science, and law over the arts, said Bukhari, because those fields ensured stability in their countries of origin.

“I want them to know we’re lucky enough to live in America,” she said. “And we can succeed in this field.”

Visual arts undergrads Zahra Bukhari, left, and Usra Attalla, co-founders of Muslim Feminists for the Arts, showcased their work *Beyond East and West* and *Where the Lines Shift*, respectively, in the group’s first exhibit, last semester’s *Hello My Name Is*.



**PUBLIC ART PROJECT
PROMOTES COMPASSION AND CONNECTION
IN TURBULENT TIMES**

Art with Heart

BY RISA BARISCH

AFTER THE VIOLENT AND DEADLY WHITE NATIONALIST RALLY IN CHARLOTTESVILLE, VIRGINIA, LAST AUGUST, RUTGERS ALUMNA CASSANDRA OLIVERAS-MORENO WAS, LIKE MANY PEOPLE, LEFT FEELING HELPLESS AND OVERWHELMED BY THE HATE AND NEGATIVITY STREAMING AT HER FROM THE NEWS MEDIA.

At the same time, Oliveras-Moreno says she was bolstered by the “incredible work and strides being made” by organizations focused on social and environmental justice in Highland Park, New Jersey, where she lives, and its neighbor New Brunswick, where she works as the communications and collaboration administrator in the Visual Arts Department at Mason Gross.

“While there are no easy answers to be found,” she wrote to her colleagues on the New Brunswick Community Arts Council a few days after the rally, “I would like to ask that we consider the potential for an artful response.”

Just a few months later, that response came in the form of the Windows of Understanding project, a public art installation across New Brunswick and Highland Park that Oliveras-Moreno developed with arts council members and Rutgers alumnae Jennifer Sevilla and Tracey O’Reggio Clark. With the tagline “We See Through Hate,” it launched on January 15, Martin Luther King Jr. Day, as an homage to Dr. King’s legacy.

The month-long installation, co-presented by the New Brunswick Community Arts Council, the Mason Gross School, and the Highland Park Arts Commission, paired nearly 20 local artists—many of whom are Mason Gross students—with community organizations to promote compassion

Background and inset: Food Is Love Harvest Moon Brewery & Café storefront installation by student Enrique Figueredo. Oil pastel, pencil, charcoal on fabric.

“

I'M FROM VENEZUELA—
THAT'S FOOD INSECURITY.PEOPLE ARE STARVING TO DEATH. I LEARNED THAT IT'S
HAPPENING HERE TOO. YOU GET SCHOOLED ONCE YOU
LEAVE THE BUBBLE OF CAMPUS.”

—MFA student artist Enrique Figueredo

”

and awareness around social justice issues. The installations appeared in storefronts on Church, George, and French streets in New Brunswick, as well as along Raritan Avenue in Highland Park, and presented themes including cultural identity, faith-based initiatives, environmental conservation, homelessness, and youth mentoring.

LEAVING THE 'BUBBLE'

Visual arts graduate student Enrique Figueredo, always on the lookout for learning experiences outside of his MFA program, responded to Oliveras-Moreno's open call immediately.

"I kind of say yes to a lot of things because I see it as I'm here for two years and then I'm gone, so I might as well meet and work with as many people as I can," says Figueredo. "I don't want to come to this school and shut myself off and then leave."

Figueredo was paired with Elijah's Promise, a community kitchen and culinary school in New Brunswick, which led to a reality check about food insecurity.

"Of course you hear about it, but in America it just doesn't sound real," says Figueredo. "I'm from Venezuela—that's food insecurity. People are starving to death. I learned that it's happening here too. You get schooled once you leave the bubble of campus."

For his installation at Harvest Moon Brewery & Café on George Street, Figueredo created a large-scale fabric canvas and used oil pastel, pencil, and charcoal to depict the busy Elijah's Promise kitchen and all of the people who may come there for food and company—children, the elderly, young professionals, homeless people, construction workers.

"Windows can be mirrors too, and I want people to see themselves when they look at this," says Figueredo, who was deeply moved by his visits to the largely volunteer-run organization. "I want everyone who walks by to say, 'Oh, that's a familiar sight. That could be me.'"

Figueredo says he was given "100% freedom" with his artistic vision. However, he admits that it was difficult working for a client, which required a balancing act of his self-expression and the role of public art creator.

"When I'm working in my studio, it's just me and my imagination, and whatever I say goes," says Figueredo, who works in woodcuts, mixed-media prints, and paintings. "There may be no goal or message. But when you're doing public artwork, you want it to be super clear and you want people to stop and engage with it. I had to rewire myself and put my ideas in the backseat so that I could communicate better."

That challenge was part of the plan, says Oliveras-Moreno.

"The opportunity to step outside of the solitude of your studio to be trusted and charged with transmuting the mission and the passion of another entity is a responsibility that I don't think these students have taken lightly," Oliveras-Moreno says. "We hope students in our visual arts program emerge as incredible artists but also responsible citizens, and that these skills of collaboration and communicating stay with them."

PICTURING HOPE

Mahsa Biglow, also a graduate student, was paired with the Esperanza Neighborhood Project, a revitalization initiative focused on a 57-block area of New Brunswick. Her installation was inspired by the residents who guide the neighborhood improvement effort, many of whom are mothers who emigrated from Mexico.

Biglow's installation, titled *The Sun Will Shine Brighter Tomorrow*, was on display at Las Cazuelas Mexican restaurant on French Street in New Brunswick, a city that has welcomed several generations of immigrants from countries including Hungary, Italy, Poland, and Peru. Biglow asked several children of



Portrait 1 of 7 from the installation *The Sun Will Shine Brighter Tomorrow* by student Mahsa Biglow.

Esperanza Project families to draw flowers native to those countries and then created portraits of each young artist holding their work.

In the photos, the kids radiate happiness ("The smiles are real," says Biglow, who asked her subjects to tell her jokes or the funniest thing that happened to them that week while she snapped away with her camera).

"Esperanza means hope, which for me is the other side of hatred," Biglow says.

The portraits capture "the essence of both the immigrant story and the American Dream: that work and sacrifice can yield a better life for the next generation," says Charles Bergman, director of the Esperanza Neighborhood Project. "We hope that people will see the installations, both ours and all the others, and feel good about the positive work being done in New Brunswick to build justice and understanding in the face of so much divisiveness and hatred."

Biglow then had each child plant the seeds of their flowers—lilies, corn poppies, dahlias, tulips, orchids, and marigolds—symbols, she says, of the desires of the Esperanza mothers for their children to have strong educations and successful careers.

"Planting is an act of hope for me," Biglow says. "You plant a seed, you wait for it and take care of it, hoping that it turns into something beautiful."

[Learn more about the initiative at windowsofunderstanding.org.](http://windowsofunderstanding.org)

ART IS THE ONLY WAY TO RUN AWAY WITHOUT LEAVING HOME. -TWYLA THARP

O

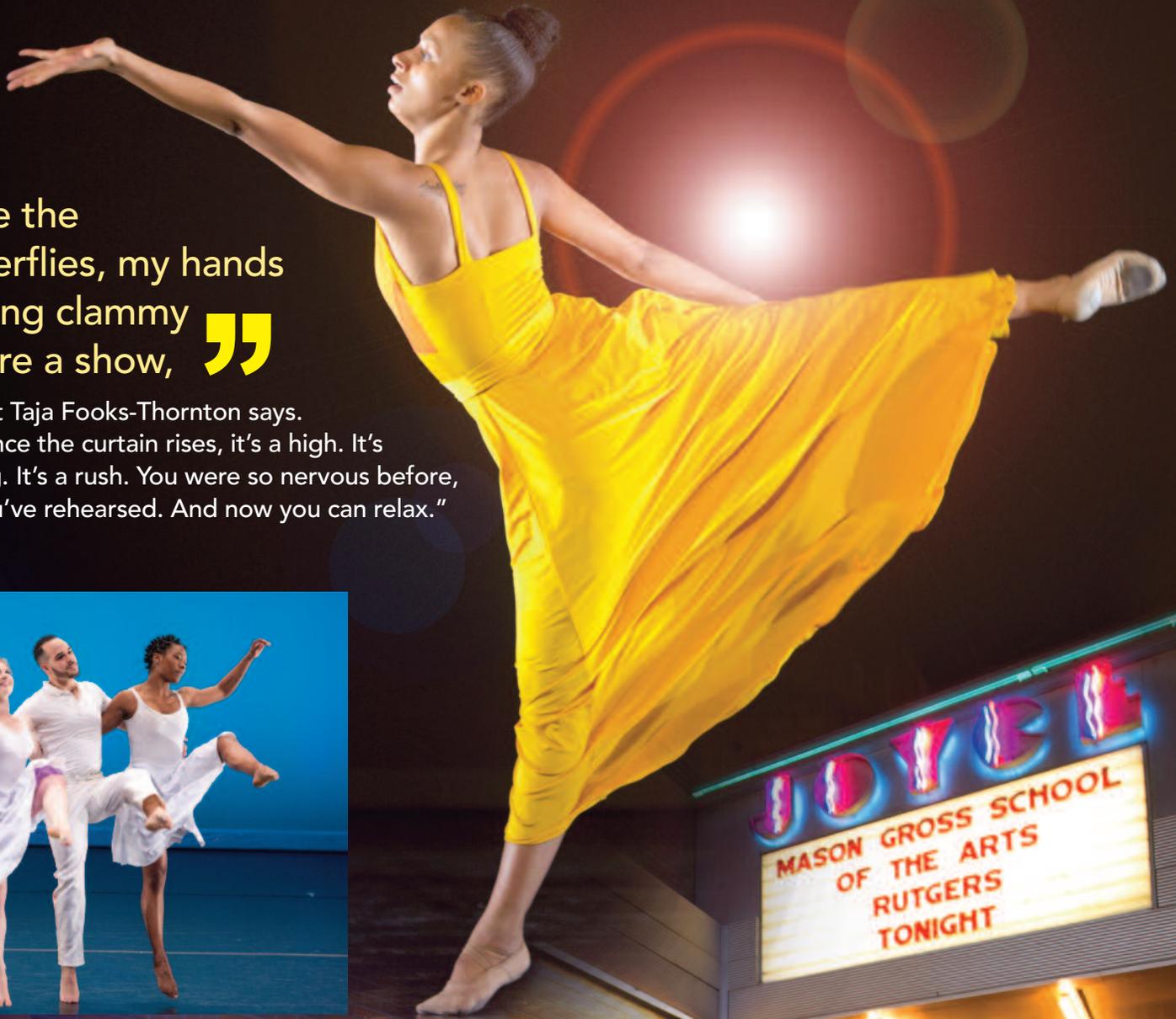
ON DECEMBER 4, MASON GROSS DANCE STUDENTS PERFORMED WORKS BY ESTEEMED CHOREGRAPHERS LAR LUBOVITCH, DARRELL GRAND MOULTRIE, MARK MORRIS, AND REGGIE WILSON (AT RIGHT, TAKING A SELFIE WITH OUR STUDENTS) AT MANHATTAN'S LEGENDARY JOYCE THEATER. BRAVI TO ALL!



“

I love the butterflies, my hands getting clammy before a show, ”

student Taja Fooks-Thornton says. “But once the curtain rises, it’s a high. It’s thrilling. It’s a rush. You were so nervous before, but you’ve rehearsed. And now you can relax.”



JOYCE
MASON GROSS SCHOOL
OF THE ARTS
RUTGERS
TONIGHT



A

n explosion of sound reverberates in Newmark School's K-8 art classroom, but it's not coming from the students—their teacher is making all the racket.

Being loud is Mason Gross alum and art teacher Jonathan Sykes's method for steering his pupils' wandering focus: His voice booms, and his gestures are even bigger.

"Listening position!" he reminds them. "Eyes up here!"

This is the Newmark School in Scotch Plains, New Jersey, whose mission, according to its website, is to serve "students ages 5-21 who are strong academically, but live with autism spectrum disorders, mood disorders, anxiety disorders, attention issues, and other developmental disabilities." Sykes, the art and drama teacher for grades K through 8, teaches eight art classes, leads an afterschool advanced art club, and oversees the production of two plays a year.

"It's a lot of work, but it's so worth it," he says. "I've had a lot of students who blossomed on stage and have taken that back to their lives. It has helped them grow as people."

Sykes graduated with a BFA from Mason Gross in 2009 with a dual concentration in painting and design; three weeks later he accepted the position at Newmark.

"At Mason Gross my plan was to paint on the side and do graphic design to make a living," he remembers. "The night of my senior thesis show was a pivotal moment: I made the biggest thing I ever made, and I was so proud of it. All of my friends and professors came to see my piece... They were asking me questions and giving me feedback, and I just loved all the conversations we were having about art. Seeing everyone's reactions, I realized I did not want to go into the business world; I wanted to stay in academia."

So, as Sykes tells it, he applied to "every art school position out there."

"I wrote a heartfelt cover letter about how my high school teacher inspired me and how I wanted to pay it forward," he says. "Lo and behold, one school called me: this one."

"I remember him telling me that he wanted to help children see their potential and that they could be whatever they chose to be if they worked hard and had someone that could understand their struggles," Principal Gina Borea recalls. "Jonathan has had a tremendous impact on our students."

It seems as if Sykes will do just about anything to make this impact: During lessons on horizon lines and picture perspective, he takes the figurative stage at the front of the room, cracking jokes, keeping the energy flowing.

"We focus on what our students can do, not what they can't," he says later. "Their lives are filled with a bunch of can'ts."

CAN-DO ATTITUDE

Inside those "cans," Sykes nudges students to grow, something he says he learned from his professors at Mason Gross.

"They pushed me a lot," he remembers. "They were so inspiring in that they had a lot to say and they pushed you—they wanted you to make the best work you can."

Sykes is determined to bring the same encouragement to his classroom.

"I don't have my kids using crayons and pencils all day," he says. "For every project I focus on a skill, a medium, and a part of art history. I do a Picasso self-portrait where we learn about Cubism and we use a Batik [a wax-resistant dyeing technique on cloth] with paint."

The same goes for the stage.

"I've had lots of students who suffer from anxiety, depression, and self-esteem issues, and I put them on stage and push them," he says. "I had one student who couldn't even try out, but I knew she would be perfect. I gave her a small part in the show in eighth grade; by senior year she was doing stand-up improv. Seeing her go from not being able to read a script in front of me and one other person to going up on stage and doing improv in front of a crowd..."

He shakes his head.

"I've seen art change a lot of students' lives."

And it seems teaching has changed Sykes's life as well.

"They have taught me to never give up, as cheesy as it sounds," he says with a smile. "They've taught me determination and strength but also to just have fun. Working with kids, whether they have special needs or not, reminds you that art is supposed to be fun. It reminds me of why art is important to me."

“

I'VE HAD A LOT OF STUDENTS WHO BLOSSOMED ON STAGE AND HAVE TAKEN THAT BACK TO THEIR LIVES.

”



While the majority of his artistic work now goes into lesson plans, colorful classroom murals, and intricate set designs, Sykes has earned a reputation for his over-the-top Halloween costumes.

"Each year it has gotten bigger and better," he says of the intricate costumes he wears to school. He's scaled up from a man-sized Lego pirate to a 13-foot Kermit the Frog.

"Everyone asks me: why do you go all-out every year? It's insane! I tell them it's for the kids, to inspire and show them you can do it."

He pauses.

"We also have a staff contest. If they heard this, my co-workers would be like: 'Oh, sure, it's for the kids.'"

He laughs.

"But the kids really do love it."



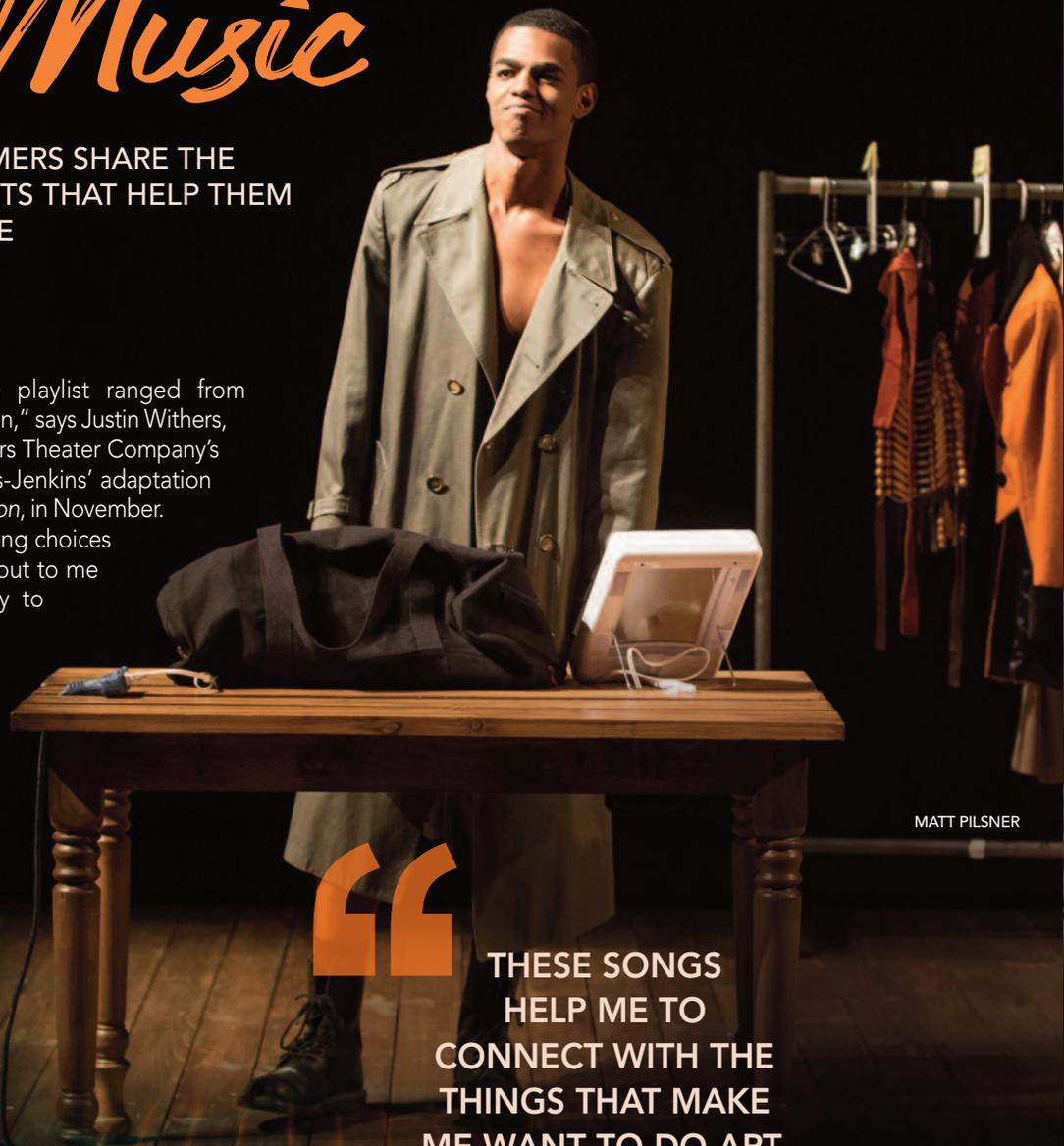
Soul Music

STUDENT PERFORMERS SHARE THE PRE-SHOW PLAYLISTS THAT HELP THEM SUCCEED ONSTAGE

“T

he music on my *Octoroon* playlist ranged from Kanye West to George Gershwin,” says Justin Withers, right, who performed in Rutgers Theater Company’s production of Branden Jacobs-Jenkins’ adaptation of Dion Boucicault’s *An Octoroon*, in November.

“I guess I could explain the song choices as different pieces that have stood out to me throughout my life for their ability to articulate the struggles and/or joys of being African-American. People like Kendrick Lamar, Jay-Z, Chance The Rapper, and Eminem all create a lot of songs that are politically charged. Some of these songs get me angry, while others feel more uplifting. Singers like Audra McDonald and Norm Lewis are also on my playlist, as they do the same thing for me but with completely different styles of music. These choices are meant to help me to connect with myself and the things that make me want to do art, like this play. It sort of reminds me why I do what I do. I hope that the work I do can move an audience the way these songs move me.”



MATT PILSNER

“

THESE SONGS HELP ME TO CONNECT WITH THE THINGS THAT MAKE ME WANT TO DO ART, LIKE THIS PLAY.

—Justin Withers

”



KEITH MUCCILLI

“W

hen I arrive at the theater, I find a quiet place to get mentally ready, put on some loud German pop music—I have a pretty embarrassing ‘secret’ playlist that has a lot of disco—Marianne Rosenberg is a frequent choice—cross my fingers, and off I go,” says Colin Levin, left, who sang the part of Count Almaviva in the Opera at Rutgers production of Mozart’s *Le Nozze di Figaro* earlier this semester.

“

BE THE STUDENT
WHO GOES CURIOUSLY
LOOKING FOR THE
THING THAT IS
NOT SHOWN.

—Jason Moran

”



THE LAST WORD

Several esteemed musicians led master classes last semester, including the renowned Norwegian pianist and New York Philharmonic 2017–2018 artist-in-residence Leif Ove Andsnes, and composer/jazz pianist Jason Moran. Moran contributed the score to Ava DuVernay’s 2014 Oscar-nominated film *Selma*, and to her Oscar-nominated 2016 documentary *The 13th*. He’s also a MacArthur Fellow.



PHOTOS BY KEITH MUCCILLI

YOU HAVE TO HAVE
AN ATTITUDE!

—Leif Ove Andsnes

”

In Memoriam

The Mason Gross School of the Arts community reports with great sadness the loss of alumni and friends of the school. We extend our condolences to each of their families and classmates.

All death notifications included in this issue of our magazine were submitted to the university after our last issue in the fall of 2017 and before going to press on this issue. We apologize for any omissions and ask that loved ones of deceased alumni, friends, donors to the school, faculty, and staff notify us by emailing records@ruf.rutgers.edu. Please be sure to include the full name of the deceased (and name as a student), death date, class year, and major. Thank you.

Dorothy Heilman Budd, Music, 1948, BA, December 8, 2017

Vilma Csipo Calhoun, Music, 1950, BA, December 20, 2017

Douglas J. Ferrari, Art, 1992, BA, August 7, 2017

Pauline Galea Finocchio, Music Education, 1975, BA, December 23, 2017

Frieda Obermaier Howling, Art, 1942, BA, October 8, 2017

Joseph Kovacs, Professor of Music, April 27, 2017

Lisa A. Matters, Art, 1981, BA, May 7, 2017

Julius A. Miller, Music, 1970, MA, November 11, 2017

Velma Dunbar Samson, Music, 1947, BA, November 1, 2017

Cathy Schaeffer, Theater Arts, 1981, MFA, November 15, 2017

Michael P. Sturm, Music Education, 1970, BA, December 17, 2017

Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey
33 Livingston Avenue
New Brunswick, NJ 08901



The Last Look

Detail, Kirkpatrick Chapel, November 2017. In the fall, the chapel will celebrate the installation of an 1840 Thomas Appleton organ.

Fun fact: Poet Robert Frost gave a reading at the chapel in 1957. But non-poets can use the chapel too. If you're hosting a wedding, baptism, concert, memorial, or other event, explore rental options on the new Kirkpatrick Chapel website: kirkpatrickchapel.rutgers.edu.