

MASON  
GROSS  
SCHOOL OF  
THE ARTS

*On the  
(Silk) Road*

Alumna Cristina Pato celebrates 10 years  
with Yo-Yo Ma's Silk Road Ensemble

# DO THE MATH

**25** percent  
of the fall 2016  
entering undergraduate  
class hails from out of  
state and abroad

We've got

**4,200**  
square feet of  
gallery space

A theater student, Gihee Hong, is shown in profile, wearing a red robe and holding a white object, possibly a prop or a piece of fabric, on a stage. The background is dark with several green spotlights. The text is overlaid on the top left and middle right of the image.

We're busy.

Mason Gross Performing  
Arts Center & Galleries  
offers more than

**550** events annually

*The Hollywood Reporter* recently

ranked us **No. 7**

among the Top

**25**

undergrad schools  
for drama

Theater student Gihee Hong in Don Nigro's short play *Lurker*.

## A MESSAGE FROM THE DEAN

In July I had the pleasure of attending the Summer Dance Showcase, which featured high-school-age dancers from the Extension Division's dance conservatory. More than 100 teenagers took part in the performance, including 28 young dancers from Riverbank Dance Company of National Chupei High School in Taiwan. The Chupei visit stemmed from a recruiting trip in the fall of 2014, when Julia Ritter, Chien-Ying Wang, and I visited schools and universities in Taiwan to begin building bridges to the East for the Mason Gross Dance Department.

In the summer showcase concert, the Chupei students (below) both joined the American students for contemporary choreographies and presented two separate, native-Taiwanese works. Our visiting dancers were so enthralled with the beauty and expanse of the Douglass Campus that they also created an improvised outdoor video piece at the Passion Puddle. One suspects that Mabel Smith Douglass would have been pleased.



The increasingly global nature of our undertakings at Mason Gross is well illustrated, too, by the accomplishments of alumna Cristina Pato, who is featured in this issue of the magazine (page 6). A graduate of the collaborative piano program, Cristina is one of the world's leading players of the *gaita*, or Galician bagpipe, which she performs in stunning international engagements with Yo-Yo Ma's Silk Road Ensemble. It was a memorable day, indeed, when I turned on the television to find Cristina playing with Mr. Ma on *The Late Show with Stephen Colbert*.

Finally, I am happy to report that a quarter of the incoming undergraduate class at Mason Gross consists of out-of-state and international students, the highest percentage of any undergraduate program at Rutgers (the rate in the Dance Department was 40 percent). This, too, underscores our growing national and international presence. With our robust recruiting efforts, which will include a trip to Singapore by dance and music faculty in October, one anticipates that Mason Gross will become more global yet.

— George B. Stauffer, Dean



# MASON GROSS

"An artist's job is to be open to experimenting and trying everything—trying new mediums, new materials. I admire artists that don't have a style."

— Visual Arts faculty member, critic, and poet John Yau, in the Los Angeles Review of Books

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ERIN BAIANO

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KEITH MUCCILLI

## 18 STUDENT VOICES

Andrew Moore, above left, says working with professional singers at the International Vocal Arts Institute pushed him to hone his craft.



JANA MARCUS

## 22 SPARKED

Head of costume design Valerie Ramshur, who often creates a soundtrack that a character might listen to, calls her approach "Method" costume design."

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Photo by Erin Baiano

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# On the Silk Road

## Alumna Cristina Pato discusses her globetrotting life as a member of Yo-Yo Ma's Silk Road Ensemble

BY LAURIE GRANIERI

Here's a twist on how to get to Carnegie Hall.

A decade ago, Cristina Pato was working toward her doctorate of musical arts in collaborative piano, assisting Argentinian composer Osvaldo Golijov with his master class on campus.

Their shared affinity for global music and the Galician language (Pato, a native of Spain, also plays *gaita*, Galician bagpipes) spurred Golijov to extend an invitation to Pato to haul her bagpipes north to Massachusetts, collaborate with cellist Yo-Yo Ma's famed Silk Road Ensemble, and, as she describes it, "make a party."

"And the party began," Pato, now 36, says in an email. "A week later I was playing Golijov's music at Carnegie Hall with the ensemble and Yo-Yo... and the rest is history."

**I**n September, Pato celebrated her 10th anniversary crisscrossing the globe as a member of the ensemble, an eclectic group of esteemed musicians from more than 20 countries. The nonprofit Silkroad organization, which Ma initially established as the Silk Road Project, in 1998, was inspired by the interchange of traditions along the ancient Silk Road trade routes, which stretched from Southern Europe to Asia. Silkroad's mission: promote

multicultural collaborations via educational, cultural, and performance programs. *The Boston Globe* describes the ensemble as a "roving musical laboratory without walls"; NPR calls it "one of the most visionary arts initiatives of our time."

Now Pato is prominently featured in a documentary from Academy Award-winning director Morgan Neville (*20 Feet from Stardom*). *The Music of Strangers* premiered at the Toronto International Film Festival in 2015 and was released in



Pato (right, with bagpipes) with Silk Road Ensemble members, including founder Yo-Yo Ma (top center).

theaters June 10. The film explores notions of culture, home, and dislocation via the Grammy-nominated ensemble, an experiment Ma describes as "a group of musicians getting together and seeing what might happen when strangers meet." No doubt, *The Music of Strangers* is especially trenchant in a year that has seen mass migrations from the Middle East into Europe. The companion album, the ensemble's sixth, released in April, is called *Sing Me Home*, and features guest performers Rhiannon Giddens, Abigail Washburn, Gregory Porter, Lisa Fischer, and jazz guitarist Bill Frisell, among others.

Pato says Neville traveled with the group for several years and that the issues he explores in *The Music of Strangers* aren't merely theoretical; she grapples with notions of culture and home herself. In fact, Pato says, traveling and collaborating with artists rooted in a wide range of cultural traditions has only nudged her toward a deeper understanding of herself.

"I'm still struggling with the idea of what or where is home for a person like me who spends eight months a year on the road," says Pato, who lives in New York City, "but this movie has helped me to understand that your roots go with you wherever you go, and that they only get richer in the process of searching for your own path. No matter where you decide to live, those roots re-root in the land you now call home, and something richer grows. It's amazing to think how connected we all are in places like New York City, where everybody comes from another place but we share a common sense of identity."



Pato (front) performs with *shakuhachi* (flute) player Kojiro Umezaki in 2011 at the Mondavi Center at the University of California, Davis, with the Silk Road Ensemble.

A woman with dark hair, wearing a vibrant red lace dress, is smiling and playing a bagpipe. She is barefoot and sitting on a wooden stool. The bagpipe is decorated with green tassels. In the background, a faded image shows her playing the bagpipe in a different setting.

Inset: A still from the recent documentary *The Music of Strangers*.

### 'CITIZEN ARTIST'

For nearly two decades, Pato has enjoyed a robust career as a recording artist, composer, and solo performer in her own right. *The New York Times* calls her "a virtuosic burst of energy," while *The Wall Street Journal* has dubbed her "one of the living masters of the gaita." But the Silk Road Ensemble isn't merely a high-profile side gig: Pato seems driven to forge and sustain meaningful exchanges between communities in concrete ways. She serves as educational advisor to Silkroad's leadership council and says the ensemble has inspired her to establish an annual multidisciplinary festival back home in Galicia, as well as a conference on arts and education.

**YO-YO MA HAS HELPED ME TO UNDERSTAND THE ROLE OF THE ARTIST IN SOCIETY, THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING A CITIZEN ARTIST, OF ASSUMING THE RESPONSIBILITY THAT COMES WITH YOUR TALENT.**

Meanwhile, Pato clearly adores her boss. She insists there are no stars in Ma's orbit. Instead, she says, he has cultivated an "incredibly democratic environment—this ensemble is like a book of values." Working alongside Ma, whom she describes as "empathetic, full of joy, and always ready to listen to everybody in the room," reminds Pato of the bigger picture: that she's not merely an entertainer but an active contributor, one with obligations to the wider world.

"Yo-Yo has helped me to understand the role of the artist in society, the importance of being a citizen artist, of assuming the responsibility that comes with your talent," she says.

"And yes, I love playing with Silk Road and with Yo-Yo," Pato adds, "but to me it is 'Yo-Yo the humanist' who has changed my life in so many different ways."



ARTWORK DOESN'T COME  
WITH A DISCLAIMER.

— Kara Walker,  
Tepper Chair in Visual Art

# Faculty & Staff NEWS

Work by faculty member **Natalie Bookchin**, including a projected video using excerpts from social media postings, is featured in the International Center of Photography's opening show in its new digs on the Bowery in Manhattan. *The New York Times* calls Bookchin's work "intimate and revealing."

Congrats to Dance Department professor and alumna **Pamela Levy**, the new director of American Repertory Ballet's Princeton Ballet School. Audrée Estey founded the school in 1954. The school serves approximately 1,200 students starting at age 3 and includes an open enrollment division for adults.

On April 16, the Rutgers Symphony Orchestra and Rutgers University Kirkpatrick Choir celebrated the university's 250th anniversary at Lincoln Center's Alice Tully Hall in New York City with *Gloria!* The musical celebration, with Riverside Choral Society, featured Music Department director **Bob Aldridge's** *Variations on a Folk Tune* for piano solo and orchestra. **Patrick Gardner**, area coordinator of choral activities, led the event, and **Min Kwon**, area coordinator of the keyboard program, guested on piano for the Aldridge piece.

Professor of painting **Stephen Westfall's** exhibition *Crispy Fugue State* was on view at Lennon Weinberg in New York City from May 12 through July 29 and included 11 works that take his studies in geometric abstraction into areas with less constraint. "This is fresh territory," says colleague and critic **John Yau**. "It doesn't look back, as some of his earlier paintings did, but forward, acknowledging that disruption and dissolution are inescapable features of daily life." Change, as they say, is good.

Rutgers Filmmaking Center director **Nicolás Pereda's** film about a Roma family in a Toronto housing block, co-directed with Andrea Bussmann, screened April 15 at the Film Society of Lincoln Center.

The Doris Duke Charitable Foundation announced that jazz program faculty member **Fred Hersch** has been named a 2016 Doris Duke Artist. Hersch is one of 20 artists who have received money to support their work.

On April 19 at Crossroads Theatre in New Brunswick, **Kara Walker**, our Tepper Chair in Visual Art, delivered the Distinguished Artist Lecture in honor of the graduating class of 2016. Among her remarks, she described taking pleasure in the range of reactions to her work and encouraged students to do the same.

In April, **Jeff Friedman**, director of the MFA in dance, was awarded the 2016 Clement A. Price Human Dignity Award for expanding the boundaries of oral history-based scholarship through choreographic and text research addressing issues of equity and inclusion; preventing the loss of alternative histories of the performing arts; and developing programs that have allowed dance to integrate a range of narratives.

Congrats to Visual Arts Department faculty member and sculptor **Patrick Strzelec**, who was awarded a President's Fellowship for Teaching Excellence during the spring semester.

Kara Walker addressing members of the graduating class of 2016.



# Student & Alumni news

As a kid in Puerto Rico, **Javier Padilla** used to dance around his driveway and quickly became fascinated by the movements of dancers in musical theater. "I knew back then I wanted to dance for the rest of my life," he says. In June, the fourth-year dance student had his original choreography, *A Conversation on Drowning*, performed at The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts at the 2016 National College Dance Festival in Washington, D.C.; in August the piece was performed at Jacob's Pillow in Becket, Massachusetts.



CHRISTOPHER DUGGAN



JODY SOMERS

*If at first you don't succeed...*

“ My parents were disappointed. Really, I was disappointed in myself. I could've changed so many things. Why didn't I do the right thing?

— Bassoonist **Jonathan LiVolsi**, considered one of the more talented undergraduates to go through the Rutgers music program, but who struggled academically. LiVolsi was kicked out of Mason Gross only to return and graduate with the class of 2016. He's now studying at DePaul Graduate School of Music, Chicago. Bravo!

”

Theater alumna **Barbara Seyda's** play, *Celia, A Slave*, about a young woman convicted for killing her master, won the 2015 Yale Drama Series Prize, given annually for a play by an emerging playwright. In August, Yale University Press published the script as part of their Yale Drama Series. In addition, Seyda received the David Charles Horn Prize of \$10,000 and a staged reading at Lincoln Center Theater's Claire Tow Theater.



Theater alumna Annapurna Sriram, center, with Katie Brayben (from left), Alfie Allen, Kunal Nayyar, and Jesse Eisenberg, her castmates in *The Spoils*, a play written by Eisenberg.

Kudos to visual arts alum **Vincent Caravano**, art director of *NJTV News with Mary Alice Williams*, on his New York Emmy Awards win for news graphics.

Bravo to music student **Kevin Madison**, who was a 2016 Concerto Competition winner and Solo Competition winner on the piano at Brevard Music Center Summer Institute & Festival in North Carolina.

Singer/songwriter and Mason Gross music student **Kathleen Lonski** wrote "Don't Let Them In" to comfort and empower victims of bullying, for which she was awarded the 2016 Elfenworks Social Justice Music Grand Prize. Lonski traveled to California in September to perform the song at the organization's annual awards ceremony.

The *London Evening Standard* said theater alumna **Annapurna Sriram** brought "sparky intelligence" to her role in *The Spoils*, a play that Oscar-nominated actor Jesse Eisenberg (*The Social Network*) wrote and starred in. The

show played in the West End from May through August. Sriram knows London well: As a BFA student, she spent her third year at Shakespeare's Globe as part of the Rutgers program and has said the training made her adept at "breaking down a character and owning it."

Congrats to theater alumnus **David Pegram**, winner of a Leonore Annenberg Arts Fellowship—\$100,000 over two years to support his professional development. Pegram spent two years as an actor-puppeteer in Lincoln Center Theater's production of the Tony Award-winning play *War Horse*.

This year marks the 20th anniversary of visual arts alumna **Cheryl Dunye's** seminal film, *The Watermelon Woman*, credited for being the first feature film directed by an African American lesbian. In an interview published online at *Lenny Letter*, Dunye encouraged a new generation of filmmakers. "I already did it. Now, who else is doing it?" she said. "Step up to the plate of your lives

and your *Watermelon Woman*, whomever that might be for you, and do it. It's a call for action in that sense and putting yourself in the picture."

Congrats to theater alumnus **Matthew DiCarlo**, production stage manager for *The Color Purple*, winner of this year's Tony Award for Best Revival of a Musical, and dance alumna **Stephanie Klemons**, associate choreographer and cast member of *Hamilton*, which took home 11 Tony Awards, including Best Musical.

Composition student **Tom Nazziola** has been selected as the winner of the 2016 Percussive Arts Society Composition Contest for Large Percussion Ensemble. His work will be offered to five percussion ensembles throughout the country for performance during the 2017–2018 concert season.

# RAISING HER VOICE

Vocal student releases album to acclaim in Bangladesh and India

BY FREDDA SACHAROW  
COURTESY OF RUTGERS TODAY



JODY SOMERS

When longtime science buff Shabnam Abedi began looking at colleges before her 2013 graduation from high school, it was with an eye toward ultimately winding up in medical school.

Having performed with various school choirs since third grade, Abedi, a child of émigrés from Bangladesh, knew there'd be an audition in her future wherever she landed. She never expected to end up at Mason Gross.

When Abedi was tapped for the exclusive Kirkpatrick Choir—a 50-member ensemble that is the school's most advanced choir—the erstwhile future doctor decided her heart and her future lay in the world of music, both sacred and secular.

"Just the fact that I made it into that choir without even being a music major at the time, or knowing anyone—I took that as a sign," says Abedi, who immediately spoke with Rutgers' choir director Patrick Gardner to begin making plans to switch her major from premed.

Abedi's recording career began in the summer of 2013, when she traveled to Kolkata (formerly Calcutta), India, to record two albums: *Amar Bijon Ghore*, which features the collective songs of Kazi Nazrul Islam, a poet-philosopher born in the late 19th century; and *Moromia*, a compilation of original songs written by Bangladeshi poets and set to melodies by the legendary Bangladeshi composer Anup Bhattacharya.

Both were originally released in Bangladesh by a company called Laser Vision, a major

record label in that South Asian nation.

The following year, a producer with the Kolkata-based entertainment conglomerate Rag Ranjani approached Abedi in hopes of offering one of her albums to audiences in India as well, under his own label.

Renamed *Jhulan Khela*, the newer offering features 10 tracks she describes as "not your

**"HER LOVE FOR CLASSICAL MUSIC STARTED LATE, BUT SHE IS ABSORBING IT VERY FAST AND WITH A VERY PASSIONATE MIND AND HEART."**

— Professor Eduardo Chama

very heavy classical music, maybe a little lighter—songs that touch people." Her latest album, *Till September . . . Intezaar*, was released on August 29.

While she has one foot in the Indian classical world, the performer is also firmly entrenched in sacred church music of a strikingly different nature.

Abedi is the soprano section leader for the choir at All Souls Church in Manhattan, and for its concert choir, called Musica Viva.

"I think I'm one of the youngest ones there," she says of her fellow choristers, a mix of some 25 professionals, semi-professionals, and volunteers.

The 2015–2016 season of the performing group featured associate music director and organist Renée Anne Louprette, a part-time lecturer at Mason Gross—and a big-time fan of Abedi.

"She passed our audition process at a level far above other competing sopranos who were graduates of the Cleveland Institute, Cincinnati Conservatory, Peabody, and the Manhattan School," Louprette recalls.

Eduardo Chama, with whom Abedi studies at Mason Gross, says he sees a bright future ahead for his student. He describes her voice as a "very versatile instrument. She naturally can move it effortlessly, and though she can sing quite high, her timbre is dark and full."

Just as important, Chama says, is her devotion to the music.

"Her love for classical music started late," he says, "but she is absorbing it very fast and with a very passionate mind and heart."

# Marco Zappala

THEATER DEPARTMENT

“

I got into acting through Harry Potter. I believed the world J.K. Rowling created so much that I asked for a wand for Christmas when I was 9. When it didn't come I was devastated. I was sad because I wanted to bring magic to people. Theater was the next logical choice.

”

— Student actor Marco Zappala, who appears in the fall 2016 Rutgers Theater Company production of Bertolt Brecht's *Fear and Misery in the Third Reich*.

STATE

CONGRATULATIONS  
MASON GROSZ  
GRADUATES





# 2016 Commencement

**EVEN IF THE THING YOU'RE DOING SEEMS LIKE A DISTRACTION, OR JUST A WAY TO PAY THE BILLS UNTIL A BIG JOB COMES ALONG—GIVE IT ALL YOUR PASSION. GIVE IT ALL YOUR INTENSITY.**

— Kevin Goetz, commencement speaker and theater alumnus



Approximately 300 students graduated in a typically boisterous ceremony on May 12 at New Brunswick's State Theatre, a celebration that featured kooky mortarboards and live jazz.

Theater alumnus Kevin Goetz (right), CEO of Screen Engine, which conducts market research for the entertainment industry, addressed the crowd, as did BFA visual arts grad Gregg Bautista. Bautista's advice: "Take some risks. Keep pushing forward. Keep making art."

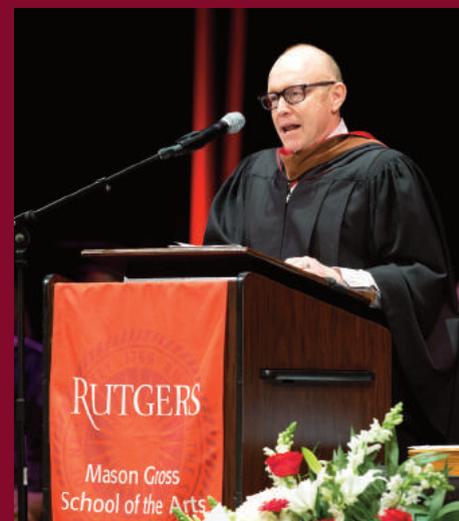
Goetz acknowledged that talent alone rarely determines success.

"Like me, your talent got you through the door," Goetz said to the grads. "But your passion, drive, and obsession got you here, to the finish line."

Goetz didn't pepper his speech with platitudes, but he did offer hope to his fellow artists.

"If I'm being totally honest, if someone told 21-year-old Kevin that this is what 53-year-old Kevin would be doing, I'd probably be disappointed—maybe even devastated—because it just doesn't jive with the very specific vision I had for my life," he said. But in the end, Goetz said he was destined to serve as both artist and businessman—and he advised grads to remain flexible as they move through their careers.

"It's easy to get stuck, guys, especially for artists," Goetz said. "I implore you to keep an open mind and heart."



# Light It Up

DANCE PRODUCTION PROFESSOR  
BRINGS CHOREOGRAPHERS' WORK  
TO LIFE WITH LIGHTING DESIGN

BY RISA BARISCH



*The LeWitt Project*, a 2012 performance installation that Mark O'Maley (left) created at West Chester University in Pennsylvania.

TODD WILLIAMS

Ask Mark O'Maley about the color blue, and you'll learn that in the world of lighting design, a color is never just a color. "What shade of blue? What angle? What intensity?" the lighting and scenic designer asks. "As an artist, I want to have that conversation with people. That's way more exciting to me than just pushing the button and turning the lights on."

O'Maley, who joined the Dance Department at Mason Gross in fall 2015, says that conversation is how he gets into the mind of a choreographer to extract ideas of what a dance piece should look like.

"I'm convinced that every single choreographer has a picture in their head, but maybe doesn't know how to communicate it," O'Maley says. "That's one of my favorite things about working with students, to start finding what I call the common language so that they can get those pictures out of their head."

Many times, the creative bridge between choreographer and lighting designer is visual art, O'Maley says. Instead of trying to describe the way light comes through a window, for example, bring O'Maley a painting by Edward Hopper, "a master painter with light," he says.

"Light is sort of theoretical—you can't see it or touch it until you're in the theater, so that's really hard to plan for unless you're having these conversations and looking at photography and paintings," explains O'Maley.

And nothing is off the table when it comes to artistic vision—a choreographer once brought O'Maley a tie-dyed T-shirt as inspiration.

"It was actually really easy to create lighting based on that,"



JACQUES-JEAN TIZIOU

Mark O'Maley.



JOHN EVANS

O'Maley's lighting design for *DancePlus Fall 2015*.

O'Maley says. "The possibilities of what we can do with light have become endless. We can get anywhere the choreographer's imagination wants to go."

O'Maley has been designing for dance and theater for 25 years, with nearly 450 works to his name, but only began teaching full-time in 2013 after returning to school to earn his MFA.

Working with students, he says, is his top reason for being in academia. He says he constantly learns from up-and-coming artists, and that Mason Gross students, in particular, are "no joke."

"They are not your average college students, in my first-year experience anyway," says O'Maley. "Dance is what they want to do, and they're very driven and devoted."

One example is Javier Padilla, a fourth-year dance student who took O'Maley's dance production class, which focuses on light design—both practical skills (operating a light board, changing gels, calibrating lights) and creative choices (analyzing a design and how to create an environment).

Padilla says that he learned "so much more than just putting in light cues" from O'Maley, whom he says is a "tremendous educator, artist, and friend."

"I learned that as a dance maker, you're essentially the main designer for your work," says Padilla, whose dance piece *A Conversation on Drowning* was selected to be performed at The Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C., in June as part of the 2016 National College Dance Festival. "Mark really expressed to us that the choreographer can enhance his or her role by using all of these tools to create a work that is tastefully crafted and well designed."

Sending students into the working world with an array of marketable

skills is important to O'Maley, who stresses the point in class at the beginning of each semester.

"If you know how to use the light board and hang a light, you can be making up to 50 dollars an hour and not waiting tables while you're still dancing," says O'Maley. "It keeps you in the community, in the theater, and in the business."

The self-described "instigator" says it's his job to push artists and audiences to look at things in a different way. He's designed site-specific work in venues including a skate park under Interstate 95 in Philadelphia as well as several abandoned churches and warehouses.

"I'm bored with the traditional ways of presenting work, and I think audiences are, too, in a way," O'Maley says, citing the rise in popularity of flash mobs performing in non-traditional venues like train stations. "As artists, our job in creating work is to keep viewers on their toes and not let them relax."

O'Maley finds this particular perspective is better executed in dance rather than theater because he's involved in a project from the

start, giving him a "greater voice at the table in the creation of the work."

"With a script, you're pretty tied to the playwright's description of time and space," O'Maley says. "In dance, we get to make that up. You can do a lot of things with lighting that you can't away with in a traditional play."

And although O'Maley has designed lighting for plenty of theatrical productions around the country and as far away as Ravenna, Italy, he's content to make his creative home in dance.

"It's been over a year since I've lit or designed a play, and I think people know now to not even ask me," O'Maley says with a laugh. "Dance is where a lighting designer gets to have all the fun."

**"AS ARTISTS, OUR JOB IS TO KEEP VIEWERS ON THEIR TOES AND NOT LET THEM RELAX."**

# ANDREW MOORE

In June, undergrad Andrew Moore was among seven Mason Gross School students at the International Vocal Arts Institute (IVAI) summer program in New York City. Students participated in master classes and received coaching in, among other areas, vocal technique, interpretation, and diction, as well as movement and acting. Here, Moore discusses how the program solidified his choice to carve out a career as a professional singer.

IVAI challenged me to learn more than just the notes on the page. Opera is so much more than that: It's about the language, the composer, the stories, the history, the emotion, as well as the camaraderie between performers.

I was fortunate to study with renowned artists, including my voice teacher, Mignon Dunn, who performed at the Metropolitan Opera over more than three decades, as well as Joan Dornemann, the Met's assistant conductor.

In the beginning I felt nervous about my lessons, because these teachers are used to working

with actual opera stars at the Met, and here I was, 20 years old, going into my senior year of college. After a while, I felt more relaxed.

The faculty was sincerely interested in helping young artists. The program offered coaching sessions, and the teachers critiqued our performances. In a master class, among other things, Christian Šebek (who recently left Broadway's *The Phantom of the Opera*) helped me not to be afraid to hit the high F-sharp at the end of an aria.

But one of my favorite moments came in a coaching session with Joan. We were talking about my struggle with diction skills in French and German, and she said, "It is not about learning how to pronounce the words correctly; it is about knowing the language. You'd be amazed at what you can accomplish. It's like learning two new words a day for 365 days: That's 730 words! You can do anything if you set your mind to it." Since that talk, I have been trying to watch one opera each week, and I've registered for language courses online. Our exchange gave me hope that if I work hard, I can really make it.

Also, I was able to connect with other singers over similar concerns. I remember thinking, "Finally, someone gets it!" I'm not alone in the whole, "What am I doing for the rest of my life?" phase. It felt nice to have my questions answered by someone who is or has experienced what I am going through.

IVAI definitely brought me closer to my dream. Being surrounded by so many opera singers with similar struggles made me realize that these people are really good, and they face the same issues as me. If they can do it, so can I.

“

**I FELT NERVOUS ABOUT MY LESSONS, BECAUSE THESE TEACHERS ARE USED TO WORKING WITH ACTUAL OPERA STARS AT THE MET, AND HERE I WAS, 20 YEARS OLD, GOING INTO MY SENIOR YEAR OF COLLEGE.**

”



Mason Gross student vocalists Shabnam Abedi, from left, Andrew Moore, Kelly Miller, Eugenia Forteza, Nick Petroski, Megan Kalberer, and Linda Garcia at the International Vocal Arts Institute in June.



Moore, left, with DMA student Alexander Lee in a production of Mozart's *Così Fan Tutte* earlier this year at Nicholas Music Center.

# TAKE 5

## 5 QUESTIONS FOR ACTING ALUMNUS MIKE COLTER

BY ALEXANDRA KLAASSEN

**SURE, MIKE COLTER BOASTS AN IMPRESSIVE RÉSUMÉ, WITH ROLES IN THE ACADEMY AWARD-WINNING FILM *MILLION DOLLAR BABY*, AS WELL AS PARTS IN TV SERIES SUCH AS *THE GOOD WIFE* AND *AMERICAN HORROR STORY*. BUT NOW HE'S ATTAINED SUPERHERO STATUS, AS LUKE CAGE IN THE NETFLIX SERIES *MARVEL'S JESSICA JONES*.**

Colter is filming his character's own spin-off show, *Luke Cage*, as well as *The Defenders*, an upcoming series that features Jessica Jones, Luke Cage, Daredevil, and Iron Fist taking on crime in the Big Apple. Colter, whom *The New York Times* named last month among the "four actors to watch this season," took some time to answer a few questions about acting, his favorite superheroes, and what it's like to be black in Hollywood.





1

### What is your fondest memory of Mason Gross?

My acting classes. And my wonderful acting teachers. They were rough on me. Bill Esper, Maggie Flanigan, and Lenard Petit—I grew in their classes. They taught me my craft. I am forever grateful. Honorable mention for Eileen Blumenthal for giving me a second chance at a wasted first year and Carol Thompson, who was the mother hen of the department. She kept my morale up on more than one occasion. Carol, if you're reading this, I'm sorry I missed your [retirement] celebration. You're the best!

2

### Did you read any comic books when you were growing up? Who is your favorite superhero?

Hulk. Because he had that Jekyll/Hyde thing going—the alter ego that he could blame for all of the destruction he caused. I loved how he would try to reason with people before they got him angry. He also felt like it was a curse. Also, Spider-man: It was easy to pretend I was [both him and the Hulk] because their powers were not unbelievable to me. I literally thought a radioactive spider could do that to me. So I hopped around the yard and trees trying to simulate his agility. I also thought if I got angry enough I could turn into a Hulk.

3

### What's the hardest thing about being an actor?

Having everyone assume you're rich and that fame makes your life easier in all ways. It's an obsession of the public to know an actor's life details but no one would want those details of their lives made public. I share what's reasonable, but I like my privacy.

4

### Do you have any rituals to get into character?

No, I don't have any set ritual because some things that work for one character may not work for another. But I do need to hear the character's voice in my head. I need to know their POV. If I can't answer a question that I'm asked as the character, then I need to know more about him. If I can't, then I will have no desire to speak as the character, and that's no good. That's when I won't know my lines. It's that simple. If I don't know why I'm saying something chances are I won't remember what to say.

5

### In a *New York Times* article you participated in earlier this year ("What It's Really Like to Work in Hollywood If You're Not a Straight White Man") you mentioned that you're often the only black man in the room. Do you think that there's an advantage to that?

I'm not sure if that's ever a real advantage, but when it's the hand you're dealt you make the best of it. I'm sure if I were in a room full of black men and there was one lone person of a different color I wouldn't spend a lot of time wondering what that person was feeling. That nonblack- to-black ratio is usually the norm in most circles in the United States. I make myself right at home. I'm probably more comfy in that setting than they are because I'm looking at the content of their character and not their skin anyway.

I honestly can say that I would say the same things in that room I'd say in a room where black people are the majority. I'm a straight shooter. We are all the same more or less. People try to focus on the differences because it makes them feel special and unique. That's great for character work in acting, but in life that just drives a wedge between us all.



JANA MARCUS

Valerie Ramshur, head of costume design, discusses the elements that fuel her work

# Sparked

**PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION** — The beauty of subways, trains, and buses is that all strata of society are jumbled together in a fixed location for a specific moment in time. People of all ages, descriptions, and economic levels are represented, and there’s a runway of fashions and character studies within reach. The choices that people make in their daily

personal styling transfix me. The narrative they tell whether consciously or not is powerful, and important to study without judgment.

**PHOTOGRAPHY** — I take pictures everywhere of everything—the toy tossed in a garbage can, the odd mix of humanity in a public space, window displays, and the fish on ice at the supermarket, ornamentation on sides of buildings. There is an endless amount of inspiration in the ordinary; it is how we train our eyes to see and acknowledge it all, how we look deeper, and open ourselves to the countless ways in which to process all the stimuli coming in.

“ RESEARCH IS MY FAVORITE PART OF THE CREATIVE PROCESS. I OFTEN FEEL I AM ON A MASSIVE TREASURE HUNT. ”

**COLOR AND TEXTURE AND PATTERNS** — I’m inspired by textiles, food, gardens, cracked pavement, rusted metals, and charred wood—anywhere the interplay of color and texture meet. These visual narratives convey a time, place, and mood.

**MUSIC** — When working on a production I try to only listen to music from the period of that specific project. I often create a soundtrack for myself of the

type of music a character might listen to, allowing me to inhabit the time and culture of the characters. Call it “Method” costume design.

**THE TIMETABLES OF HISTORY: A HORIZONTAL LINKAGE OF PEOPLE AND EVENTS BY BERNARD GRUN** —

A fantastic resource of who did what and when dating back to 4,500 B.C. When I can see the interconnect- edness of history, people, and events I can better understand the piece I am working on, as well as our contemporary culture.

**MAZES/LABYRINTHS** — These often provide multiple access points, paths, and some dead ends, but they’re always engaging and meditative. They remind me that one cannot simply go from point A to point B. Both the creative process as well as everyday life is made up of small choices: left or right, up or down, yes or no.

**RESEARCH** — This is my favorite part of the creative process, hands down. I am constantly sidetracked. If I begin by researching 19th-century corsets, I often find a detour to 19th-century cookery or toy catalogues, which can contain as much information about a culture as fashion magazines or Old Masters. I often feel I am on a massive treasure hunt.

**19TH CENTURY** — We see empires fall and new ones rise. Colonialism and independence of many nations occur simultaneously around the globe. New religions are founded, social reforms put in place while slavery, child labor, and women’s issues go unchecked for decades. Massive migrations occurred, which for many cities created an explosion in population and immigration issues never seen in previous decades. Nearly every eight to 10 years women’s fashions reflect all the socio-political and economic changes.

**MOVEMENT** — Having started my life in the theater as a dancer and an actor, my training began in the rehearsal studio. How actors and dancers move in their costumes informs their choices, how fabrics feel against the skin, or how garments move in space is exciting and essential to consider.

## THE LAST WORD

### Bryan Volta

“The community at LAB brings an intensity to art-making,” MFA sculptor Bryan Volta says of the Livingston Arts Building, which houses the sculpture program. “It’s a charged atmosphere. It’s hard to separate from others in the space. We’re not into working alone. Art is the product of culture, not the production of an object. The competition here drives me to want to push myself.”

JODY SOMERS

## 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 spring of 2016 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@winants.rutgers.edu](mailto:records@winants.rutgers.edu). Please be sure to include the full name of the deceased, name as a student, death date, class year, and major. Thank you.*

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**Richard E. Czaplinski**, Art, 2000, BA, May 6, 2016

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**Janet Robbins Dahlberg**, Music, 1949, BA, January 13, 2016

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**Edith Faste**, Art, 1938, BA, April 28, 2016

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**Steven Gaul**, Theater Arts, 1984, MTHA, March 27, 2016

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**Loris Kienzle Grunow**, Music, 1950, BA, June 27, 2016

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**Jerrold F. Held**, Music Education, 1961, BA, April 5, 2016

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**Jane Daggett Hopkins**, Music, 1938, BA, September 17, 2015

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**Vivienne Griffith Jay**, Art, 1934, BA, January 31, 2016

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**Mary E. Lynn**, Music, 1989, MM, April 15, 2016

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**Patrick G. McCreary**, Theater Arts, 1984, MFA, May 12, 2016

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**William McVicar**, Art, 1973, BA, April 23, 2016

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**Marilyn Amidon Papp**, Art, 1954, BA, March 10, 2016

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**Erma B. Striner**, Art, 1943, BA, January 12, 2016

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**Robert C. Tuschak**, Art, 1965, BA, February 8, 2013

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## The Last Look

The entrance to last semester's *Hungry Heart*, a show of artwork by 20 second-year MFA students at Brooklyn's The Invisible Dog Art Center.