CFA

Teaching Sculpture in Greece

Elevating the Arts in India's Schools

Building an Arts Nonprofit in Colombia

BOSTON UNIVERSITY

ON THE COVER: Photo by Dimitris Vlaikos

Dean
Harvey Young
Director of Communications
Laurel Homer (CAS'98)
Assistant Director of Communications
Emily Holmes
Communications Manager
Diana Hernandez Johnson
Development & Alumni Relations
Janna Schwartz,
Assistant Dean
Beth Barclay,
Senior Major Gift Officer
Denise Savino (CAS'11),
Senior Associate
Editor
Mara Sassoon (MET'22)
Art Director
Lee Caulfield
Photo Director
Janice Checchio ('07)
Contributing Writers
Joel Brown
Marc Chalufour
Steve Holt
Corinne Steinbrenner (COM'06)
Sophie Yarin
Ting Yu

Published by Boston University College of Fine Arts
Produced by Boston University Marketing & Communications

A NOTE FROM HARVEY

I was raised along a border. I tend not to use these words to describe my childhood because folks often imagine an alternate existence filled with political tension and dramatic crossings.

A fast-moving river ending in a series of spectacular waterfalls separated me from Canada. However, bridges made it easy to cross that body of water. Toronto, the nearest major city, was my Oz. It had everything. Thanks to robust immigration, it was home to people who spoke different languages, possessed every complexion, practiced varying religions, and contributed to the larger cultural diversity of the region.

Looking back, I see the privilege that I had as a kid. As an adult, I now know the history of quotas and prejudicial restrictions that selectively targeted certain groups and prevented their movements. I am cognizant of the suffering that occurs in refugee communities caught between and along borders. I am aware that not every community, including Toronto, has enthusiastically embraced immigration and evolving neighborhood demographics.

Border crossing is a fundamental part of a College of Fine Arts education. I regularly tell BU students that I try to shrink the world for them. I want them to see the interconnections. When the world seems smaller, the prospect of effecting change through one's artistry or advocacy is less daunting.

We shift students' perspectives by investing in global study. Every undergraduate theater major studies abroad as does the majority of visual arts and music majors. Our students have access to BU programs in 25 cities across 20 countries.

We affirm our confidence in the skills of our students by providing them with opportunities to perform or exhibit their work on globally recognizable stages. Last year, we curated a professional gallery exhibition in Venice that ran concurrent with the Venice Biennale. This past summer, our student musicians performed in concerts throughout China and juried competitions in the United Kingdom. As you will read in this issue, our theater students recently participated in the Prague Quadrennial, the premiere showcase for theatrical design.

We create and extend professional networks for our students by welcoming international guests. The School of Music, in association with the BU Arts Initiative, is a lead sponsor of the annual BU Global Music Festival. The School of Visual Arts convenes a Tuesday Night Lecture Series and the School of Theatre offers On Set, which brings prominent artists and scholars to campus nearly every week.

How has border crossing and, more generally, travel changed your outlook on the world? I would love to hear from you. You can reach me at **cfadean@bu.edu**.

Harvey Young, Dean of CFA

WRITE: Share your thoughts on this issue—and anything else CFA-related—at **cfaalum@bu.edu**.

ENGAGE:
facebook.com/BUArts
@BUArts
Search "Boston University College of Fine Arts"

Natasha Moustache

INSIDE

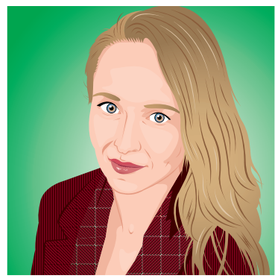
CFA Magazine
Winter
2024

THE LOUDEST VOICE IN THE ROOM

Tenor Clay Hilley ('11) is in rare company playing German opera heroes

BUILDING A GLOBAL ART COMMUNITY

Yura Sapi ('16) cofounded the nonprofit LiberArte to support artists worldwide in efforts to end racial, social, and climate injustices



INSTRUMENTAL IMPACTS

Four music educators from around the world share their teaching philosophies and insights

DRAWING IN SPACE

Artist and instructor Robert Bodem ('95,'98) teaches an innovative sculpting technique

Paula OG (Sapi); 360b/Alamy Stock Photo (Hilley); Dimitris Vlaikos (Bodem); Quick Honey (music educators)

OUR FRAGMENTED SELVES

Hoda Kashiha's paintings depict gender politics with cartoonish flair, tongue-in-cheek humor, and a relentless urge to experiment

By Sophie Yarin

In Appreciation of Blinking (2021) Acrylic, silkscreen print, and wood glue on canvas (set of eight works); each canvas 83 x 69 in.

HOW DOES artist Hoda Kashiha find humor in her work? The Iranian national lives and paints in a suburb just outside of Tehran, the capital of a country that has grappled with decades of gender inequality. Since 1983, women in Iran have been mandated to cover their hair with hijabs or face jail time, and a morality police force was established in 2005 to enforce modest dress, among other strictures. An Iranian woman's body is a highly politicized landscape, and attempts to flout convention can incur serious penalties.

Yet women's bodies are front and center in Kashiha's works—breasts, legs, buttocks, genitalia, and all. They are sometimes rendered in jagged, cartoonish strokes, often accompanied by a leering or condemnatory male presence—a garish reminder of the spaces where women's rights are restricted.

Much of the flamboyance in her work is an overture to something a little darker. *Spotlight* shows a black-and-white nightmare scene where a woman, trapped in a harsh white stagelight, attempts to shield her nakedness from a man whose shrieking face takes up most of the foreground. She's rendered like a notebook doodle; he, with his upturned nose and bulging eyes, looks a bit like a Looney Tunes character. She's vulnerable; he's outraged.

The deconstructive tangle of body parts, the gawking eyes, the boldness of depicting this in the first place—is there any levity to be found in this message, at a time like this?

"Lots of tragic things have happened in our culture, but we always joke about them because it chills the situation and relaxes you," says Kashiha ('14), a graduate of CFA's MFA program in painting. "At least you can laugh."

FROM TEHRAN TO COMM AVE AND BACK AGAIN

Kashiha's last show in Iran was in 2021, at the Dastan Gallery in Tehran.

"I didn't really have a big problem with censorship, but there were some pieces that I knew that I could not show," she says.

The fight for women's rights in Iran reached a watershed moment in 2022, as the world reeled from the death of Mahsa Amini, a 22-year-old woman arrested for allegedly violating the hijab law and who was, according to witnesses, beaten to death while in custody. Scores of Iranian women responded in protest, many by refusing to wear hijabs and others through mass demonstration, bringing new attention to a decades-old plight.

"Power can delete a body, but cannot cut it from its root," Kashiha told writer Hanno Hauenstein in a conversation for Art Basel. "Physically, that body no longer exists, but the idea and the soul remain and continue in other bodies. The Iranian protest movement has led me to articulate much better why I work with bodies and also to feel a stronger sense of connection to my homeland."

Kashiha developed a love of visual arts while attending a government-led after-school arts academy in Tehran. In 2010, a year after completing her undergraduate painting degree at the University of Tehran, she began her graduate studies at BU. Until her time at CFA, she was concerned with technical precision, with perfection.

"This is not my concern now," she says. "When I was in Iran, some of my teachers told me, 'You cannot bring these cartoonish things into your work.' But when I came to the US, I learned a lot of things that changed my work."

The tension between Kashiha's old and new styles is distinct in her paintings. Cheeky, caricature-esque squiggles mingle with glossy shapes that look like they've been rendered with a computer program. Kashiha honed her technique at several artistic residences, including the MacDowell community in New Hampshire. She headed back to Tehran in 2016.

Kashiha, who has exhibited work on three continents and in seven countries, asserts that the scope of her subject matter is global.

"Within the art history of each country, women are ignored a lot," she says. "I think there is a fight between feminine and masculine views of the world."

In her work, Kashiha rearranges and skews women's bodies with a Cubism-inflected sensibility. The human forms are typically the most representative elements on the canvas; most nonhuman objects are condensed into avant-garde shapes and swashes of color. The effect is that of a collage, a jumbled-up world that can exist in no physical location.

"One reason that I like to bring bright and sharp colors into my work is that they are so beautiful, but they can really bother you," she says. "I am always working with dual meanings: beautiful and ugly, love and hate."

Kashiha likes to play with established gender tropes—some sitcom-y and some literary, some abstract and some figurative, some concerning the male gaze and some the female—that take on a more somber context when

All images courtesy of Kashiha

Left: ***Water Like Mirror Hugged My Profile Face in the Red Hot Sky and Now My Full Portrait is Unveiled in the Soaked Chilled Sky*** **(2023) Acrylic on canvas and steel structure; 39 × 47 in.**

Above: ***Spotlight*** **(2020) Acrylic on canvas; 39 x 27 in.**

considering the country in which she's painting them. Women are shown regarding themselves, as with her *Look at the Mirror*, or are regarded via a lampooned male gaze, as with *The Eye, The Eyehole, The Hole*. Much like her personal and artistic refusal to commit to a single geopolitical characterization, Kashiha won't adhere to a single point of view or dominant narrative. In fact, there's meaning to be found in the disparity.

"I like to bring the idea to my work of being a fragmented person—which is so feminine," she says. "It's that you cannot define yourself as one person in the way I think a masculine view of the world pushes you to do."

BODIES OF WORK

While Kashiha has made a strong impression on the art world with her bold colors and wry representations of gender conflict, assigning her a signature style or subject matter would be doing her a disservice.

"I usually try to create different bodies of work and each has its own statement," she says.

Not every Kashiha painting is cartoonish or highly colorful, or features a human body. Brush techniques vary widely—from Expressionism to eerie perfectionism—oftentimes within a single canvas. What Kashiha wants her audience to take away from her eclectic catalog are musings "about power, about narcissism, about bodies that are fragmented, and that are joining together."

Another theme that unites her works is the practice of seeing. Although she's often depicted gendered ways of viewing a woman's body, her most recent narrative series tackles the notion of vision in general.

"I made a body of work that was all about blackness, and I named it *In Appreciation of Blinking*," she says. "I made eight canvases; in the first canvas, the eye is open, and then it becomes more and more closed, so that at the eighth canvas the eye is completely closed, and [the canvas] is totally black."

In Appreciation of Blinking is about a woman who is born in the first canvas—eyes open to a vivid collage of motion, figuration, and color—and dies in the last, where the subject's eyes finally close for good. Each canvas in between gets a progressively larger wash of black paint to mimic a closing eye. It's Kashiha's favorite series, she says. It was also a major change of form for Kashiha, who doesn't typically gravitate toward multi-canvas series, the concept of life and death, or painting an entire canvas black. But if there's one thing to remember about Kashiha, it's that she is constantly coming to new understandings about the world and herself. Deep down—beneath the humor, frustration, and joy—is an enduring question that keeps her returning to the easel.

"I am always asking myself if I am one person or if I am fragmented," she says. "Are we single bodies that are separated from each other or are all of us in a kind of continuity with each other?"

Left: ***Look at the Mirror*** **(2021) Acrylic on canvas; 59 x 51 in.**

Below: ***The Eye, The Eyehole, The Hole*** **(2021) Acrylic and wood glue on canvas; 47 x 39 x 1 in.**

FOR MORE NEWS AND EVENTS, VISIT BU.EDU/CFA.

CAREERS

Inside the Industry

Satabdi Jena designs whimsical housewares in her sustainable ceramics studio

By Marc Chalufour

Satabdi Jena began creating illustrations of cats and dogs a decade ago. It took a pandemic for her to begin selling them.

Prior to 2020, Jena ('11) was designing and producing corporate gifts, like mugs emblazoned with a company logo. When that work vanished, she had to reinvent her business. She decided to put her illustrations onto ceramic housewares and began selling them online and in pop-up stores and markets. With that, The Strange Co. was born.

Three years later, Jena's Delhi, India–based studio offers a variety of wares. Some feature her "Misfits," a cast of whimsical animal characters. Others depict simple scenes from monsoon season, like an umbrella blowing away. The designs are spare, but they overflow with personality.

"That leap of faith helped me," she says of launching the company. It kept her in business until her corporate clients returned—and it taught her some important lessons about embracing her own creativity.

FIND YOUR INSPIRATION.

When Jena began drawing the Misfits, she didn't think there was a market for ceramics with characters on them. She just loved animals and wanted to draw them.

She based some of her characters on animals she saw living on the streets of Delhi. Their quirky personalities, however, came from the humans around her. "I eavesdrop a lot," Jena says. She listens to people on the train and watches them in the street. Her monsoon collection is based on scenes she witnessed through her studio window. "That's my creative process," she says.

The idea of bringing joy to an individual customer motivates her. "It's very gratifying for my creative side."

Some of Jena's ceramic housewares feature her "Misfits," a cast of whimsical animal characters, such as Mr. Chonk (top left) and Ms. Meow and Bubbles (top right).

Courtesy of Jena

TELL YOUR STORY.

Jena's characters inhabit an imaginary universe. There's Ms. Meow and Mr. Chonk the cats, Jimmy the yoga-practicing dog, and Mr. Hendrix the confused rooster. To give customers a glimpse into their world, The Strange Co. packs a postcard with a character-specific poem with each order. Photos and animations on the company's Instagram page further develop their personalities.

The importance of storytelling extends to The Strange Co.'s business practices. "People don't mind paying that extra buck when they know how something's been made and who's making it," Jena says.

The Strange Co. relies primarily on the free marketing power of social media—Instagram in particular—and has also opened its studio so people can see where the products are made and take workshops.

What they'll see there is a company focused on sustainability. It uses local clay and natural dyes, and most orders are shipped in recycled materials. Communicating those practices is an important piece of convincing a customer to spend more on her products than they would elsewhere.

The idea of bringing joy to an individual customer motivates Jena. "It's very gratifying for my creative side," she says. She especially likes to imagine contributing to a customer's early-morning ritual: "You pour some coffee and when you look at that mug, it brings a smile to your face. It may be a very simple object, but it really has an impact on your day."

Studio LaLa

RISING STAR

Bold Music

By Emily Holmes

EVEN THOUGH the very first instrument in the hands of KyungSeok "Kasey" Yu ('17,'20) was a violin, once he heard the bold sounds of the brass instruments, he fell for playing the tuba.

Yu grew up in Chuncheon, South Korea, but considers the US, where he studied brass performance at CFA, his musical home. He now lives in Seoul, which he calls his "emotional home," with his wife Younggyo Lee ('19), a pianist, and their twins. He is the principal tuba in the Incheon Philharmonic Orchestra and part of the quintet Brass Arts Seoul, and he's performed at Seoul Art Center, Jordan Hall, Boston Symphony Hall, Weill Recital Hall at Carnegie Hall, and Musikverein in Vienna.

What draws you to the tuba?

There are other low-pitched instruments in the orchestra, but the tuba is the only instrument with such a loud volume. It is easy to interfere with the ensemble performance if the tuba player lacks fundamental technique and musicianship. It's a burdensome place to be alone as a principal player, with the entire ensemble depending on my performance, but I cannot forget the moments of harmony when I play flawlessly after thorough preparation.

Favorite piece of music?

Like a balanced diet, I avoid being picky in listening to music. As much as I can, I appreciate the works of multiple composers, genres, and music from various eras.

What's inspiring you right now?

Last year, I started as a lecturer and adjunct professor at three universities in Seoul. Life as an educator inspires me greatly. [I enjoy] guiding students of various ages, with different backgrounds in music, suggesting sound directions, challenging them, and helping them find individual meaning and value as musicians.

How many hours per week do you practice?

At least 10 hours per week. I do basic and advanced rehearsal sessions for various Incheon Philharmonic Orchestra performances. And, for the past two years, I have been playing almost every weekend in large cities across the country as a guest principal tuba.

Most memorable performance?

December 13, 2019. I rushed to prepare for a Boston Pops performance after a phone call from my mentor and teacher, Mike Roylance [a CFA lecturer in tuba and euphonium and principal tuba of the Boston Symphony Orchestra]. I listened to music and practiced and practiced [in the] less than 48 hours [before the performance]. My wife, who watched my successful Boston Pops debut performance from a balcony seat, often brings up memories of the day, and we still shed tears of emotion.

CONVERSATION

PLAYWRIGHTS MARTIN SHERMAN AND KIRSTEN GREENIDGE ON TEACHING, REHEARSALS, AND SUSTAINING A CAREER IN THEATER

Edited by Mara Sassoon

Alun Callender

Philip Keith

IN MARTIN SHERMAN'S one-woman play *Rose*, the titular protagonist is a Jewish refugee who recounts the trajectory of her life, from surviving the Warsaw Ghetto to becoming a hotelier in Miami Beach. "It looks at Jewish life in the 20th century, but what is strange and scary is that it's more relevant now than it was when it premiered about 24 years ago," Sherman says of the show, which wrapped up a run in London's West End in mid-June 2023. "It's become eerily contemporary. Also, as it happens, the character was born in the Ukraine. So, it's taken on all of that too."

Sherman ('60) is best known for his play *Bent*, about the persecution of gay men during the Holocaust, which premiered in 1979 and starred Sir Ian McKellen. A 1980 Tony nominee for Best Play, Sherman adapted it into a film in 1997 starring Clive Owen.

In early June 2023, *CFA*'s editor sat down with Sherman, along with Kirsten Greenidge, a playwright and a CFA associate professor of theater, to discuss their careers and how they approach their craft. Greenidge's notable works include *Baltimore*, about race relations on a college campus, and *Milk Like Sugar*, winner of the 2012 Obie Award for playwriting, about a teen who makes a pregnancy pact with her friends. In the following conversation, which has been edited for length and clarity, Sherman and Greenidge talk about how their passion for playwriting developed, the challenges of teaching the craft, and sustaining a career in the theater industry.

CFA: Martin, a production of your play *Rose* recently opened on the West End.
Martin Sherman: This is the first big revival in England, and it's with the most magnificent actress named Maureen Lipman, who I actually wrote it for. She had been in an earlier play of mine, but she was [originally] too young to do it because the character is 80.
Kirsten Greenidge: After 24 years, did you rewrite any of it?
MS: No, but I cut some stuff. You can always do that.
KG: [Laughs.] That's true.
MS: You can always cut, but I think it's very, very dangerous to rewrite an older play because you're a different person [than when you wrote it]. Even if there are things that you're not that comfortable with now, that's who you were. And I think you have to leave it. Tennessee Williams kept rewriting his plays. I think it was dangerous.

> **"I love rehearsals. I think that's part of the deal of being a playwright. Half of your artistic life is solitary, but the other half is communal, and I can't imagine a life without both halves."**
>
> MARTIN SHERMAN

Now, I'm wondering—how do you teach, Kirsten? I think playwriting is the most difficult thing in the world to teach.
KG: I think so, too, and I've been teaching for a long time. I can teach how to navigate through things like writer's block, researching, representation, and the basics—structure, what elements "should" be in a play. I think most of us tend to teach the way we were taught, and I was taught very much on a workshop model. So, some of my more effective playwriting classes are just hearing the work out loud and giving feedback.
MS: That's fascinating. When I was at BU, there was no such thing as a playwriting course. It didn't exist. Nor did it exist anywhere. How does teaching affect your writing?
KG: In a good semester, I'm able to get into a really great work-life balance. In a not great semester, sometimes I am pushing the work toward my breaks. The great thing about teaching is your breaks are predictable. One of the great things that Susan Mickey, [director of the School of Theatre], and [CFA Dean] Harvey Young are doing is making sure that all the faculty are having more time and more opportunities to do their professional work, to maintain that side of their lives while also teaching.
MS: That's magnificent. By the way, I just read *Milk Like Sugar*. It is the most wonderful play.
KG: Oh, thank you. Thank you.
MS: It completely takes you into a world that I wouldn't have been in and makes it so alive—and so funny. It's beautifully constructed. It's an absolutely gorgeous play.
KG: Thank you. *Milk Like Sugar* grew out of a commission from Theater Masters and The La Jolla Playhouse. They sent me to the Aspen Ideas Festival to get a bunch of ideas and then make one of them into a play. At the festival, there was a discussion about how to help young girls in at-risk communities, and a statistic was being floated around that the older a person is when they have their first child, often the more stable they are healthwise and economically. It made me think about what opportunities are open to some young women when they do get pregnant at a very young age in our country. That idea stuck with me. At the time, there was also this story circulating on the news where it was rumored that a group of girls at a high school in Massachusetts had made a pact to all get pregnant at the same time. It's since been debunked, but these ideas and themes began to take root in my mind.

Did you get to attend rehearsals for *Rose*? Are you a playwright who loves rehearsals?
MS: Yes, and I love rehearsals. I think that's part of the deal of being a playwright. Half of your artistic life is solitary, but the other half is communal, and I can't imagine a life without both halves. I write for it to be acted. It's not literature; it's something that has to come alive with the actors and the director. I have to be part of that.
KG: I focus a lot on impressing upon students to be present in the rehearsal room because the play is basically only half done when you step into that first rehearsal.
MS: There's a protocol and a technique to being a playwright in a rehearsal. I feel very strongly that playwrights should not only study playwriting but should also study acting—not to be an actor, but to understand what an actor's process is. I think that's crucial.
KG: I agree.
CFA: Martin and Kirsten, I'm wondering about the moment that you both realized you wanted to become playwrights.
MS: I wrote my first play when I was 12. I started going to the theater when I was probably about seven. We lived across the river from Philadelphia. Plays would come to Philadelphia on the way to New York or on the way back from New York. I guess my mother couldn't afford a babysitter, so she would take me with her to the theater. She took me with her for about two years before she became ill, and then I kept going by myself. I loved it. Here I was, a child sitting in the theater watching a Tennessee Williams play, surrounded by adults. [Laughs.]
KG: The age of 12 was a big year for me in terms of playwriting as well. We took a trip in seventh grade to see *Joe Turner's Come and Gone* at the Huntington Theatre here in Boston. After seeing that play, I was like, "I want to do that." I just didn't know how to be a playwright because I'm not a man and I'm not white. So, when I was young, I came up with a pen name, an alter ego that didn't sound like that person was Black or ethnic in any way. I will never tell anybody that pen name. I told my parents once and let's just say they're New Englanders—they're very honest. They were just like, "Really? Why that?"

One of the pieces that made me fall in love with American literature was *A Streetcar Named Desire*. My two best friends and I would read that play over and over. It wasn't until I was older that I realized we had no idea what that play is really about. I watched the film version last week with my husband and I was thinking about how I was 12 and saying these words, and I had no idea what was happening.
MS: When we are that age, dealing with plays by people like Tennessee Williams, I think there's something very strange in that. We didn't understand the plays, but part of us...
KG: Part of us definitely did. On a core level.
MS: Yeah, it's an interesting dynamic.
CFA: I'd like to talk about some of the topics and themes you both explore in your works and why you gravitated toward them.
KG: My work deals with the intersection of race, gender, and class in some way, and I think it is inspired by some of the writers that I came up admiring, such as Suzan-Lori Parks. In one of her essays, she talks about how just having a group of Black people onstage is a revolutionary act. Another seminal playwright and work for me was Lorraine Hansberry and her *A Raisin in the Sun*.
MS: I just write what I think I need to write. It's whatever makes me want to write—and most things don't. It's such a joy when suddenly there is something I want to write a play about. When that moment occurs, it's from heaven.

One of the most seminal plays that formed me as a writer was also by Lorraine Hansberry. It was *The Sign in Sidney Brustein's Window*. It taught me that you can write about anything you feel you need to write about, and that you mustn't be afraid of what anybody will think. It was a radically brave play. She is the greatest example of what a playwright should be.
KG: I'm just wondering, how do you keep writing plays? I'm compelled to write them, but I'm at a point now where theaters are going through the backlog of things they didn't produce during the pandemic and new voices are coming into the field. As a mid-career playwright, I wonder if anyone even wants my plays anymore.
MS: That's a real problem. What I face now is incredible ageism. I can't get a new play read. I remember when I was much younger, hearing about writers who were my age now—famous writers who couldn't get their work read. That's always been the case. What does a young playwright have to look forward to if they can't think that they have an entire life in the theater? It's so essential to have voices from all generations. Something that I found that has helped me a lot is that I also write films. It's not quite the same as writing a play. It's very different technically, but in terms of passion, it means I can exercise my craft if I'm not writing a play. Also, the ageism is not as intense in that world as it is in the theater.
KG: Thank you for sharing. That's been on my mind a lot, especially as I look ahead at a summer of not teaching.
MS: But it's so wonderful that you still do it.
KG: When I'm writing or in rehearsal, there's really nowhere else I'd rather be. Do you feel like you use different parts of your brain for writing for film versus theater?
MS: The big difference is that when you write a play, it's very much about talking and dialogue. If you've just written a film, and then you go back to writing a play, the joy of being able to articulate is so fantastic. But then, when you go back to writing for film, the joy in *not* having to do that is enormous. We know how to write films because we have in our heads the structures of writing for actors and writing dramatically.
KG: I will take that with me in the summer.
MS: You should. I think *Milk Like Sugar* would be a wonderful film.
KG: Wow, thank you. I will put that on my summer to-do list. ●

> **"I just didn't know how to be a playwright because I'm not a man and I'm not white."**
>
> KIRSTEN GREENIDGE

BUILDING A GLOBAL ART COMMUNITY

Yura Sapi cofounded the nonprofit LiberArte to support artists worldwide in efforts to end racial, social, and climate injustices

By Ting Yu

Photos by Paula OG

Yura Sapi was 24 when they received a new name.

Born Viviana Vargas Salvatierra to an Ecuadorian mother and a Colombian father, Sapi spent their childhood in Queens, New York, and the suburbs of Long Island. A creative child who fell in love with acting during public school and summer theater programs in New York, Sapi recognized from a young age that "the arts really were my home."

However, after studying theater at BU and earning an MFA in performing arts management from CUNY Brooklyn College, Sapi ('16) was confronted with the limited opportunities available to actors of color and those with a fluid gender identity. "I started seeing the American dream in a different way—almost as a lie, a story being told," Sapi says. "The roles I loved the most were the ones I was a part of creating, writing, and producing. I wanted to be part of dismantling oppressive structures and making a change."

They made a bold decision. In 2018, Sapi left New York for Ecuador. Three years later, they moved to Nuquí in Chocó, Colombia, to immerse themselves in a way of life that was both new and ancient—"rediscovering ancestral practices, a river you can swim in, and a more sustainable type of living," they say. They visited Indigenous and Black communities and came to understand antiracism beyond a US perspective. Sapi also began learning Kichwa, their Indigenous language of Ecuador. During a ritual exercise with an elder, they received a new name: Yura Sapi.

"In Kichwa, *yura* means tree or plant, and *sapi* means roots," they explain. "It's definitely an important part of who I am. I'm here on this earth to reconnect with and grow my roots and help others do the same."

To that end, Sapi cofounded a nonprofit that seeks to empower artists and "creative activists" around the world to help end racial, social, and climate injustice. The organization, LiberArte, supports primarily BIPOC, migrant, and LGBTQIA+ artists in the US and abroad through grants and an eclectic range of educational programming and arts initiatives.

"I've always felt that art was activism," says Sapi. "Artists are able to envision worlds that don't exist. We see things and manifest them into existence. Whether it's a play presenting another reality or a mural with a specific message, artists can change minds and change worlds. That's what LiberArte is all about: liberation through the arts."

THE POWER OF THE ARTS

With book bans and censorship on the rise in the US, Sapi believes LiberArte's work is more meaningful than ever. "People have always known the power of the arts, so there will always be resistance and fear of it," they say. "We have to remember that they're fearful of what we're bringing to light—of showing a mirror—because it means that we're doing something about it."

From a sound studio in Nuquí, they host *Building Our Own Tables*, a podcast that amplifies the experiences and voices of global theater leaders of color. LiberArte's Strategic Planning Institute offers in-person and virtual courses on equity, inclusion, and justice and is preparing to launch a yearlong fellowship to help artist-activists bring their community-driven endeavors to fruition. "It could be a theater collective, an art installation, a performance, or a community garden," Sapi says. "We want to help them visualize and realize an idea that gives back to the community."

LiberArte's community-driven, nature-inspired approach to nurturing artistic expression stems from Sapi's personal journey. They've made a home in Nuquí, a remote municipality in the Chocó region of Colombia, nestled among pristine rivers, thermal springs, and waterfalls. "I love being able to connect with nature in such a deep way, where humanity isn't dominating everything," says Sapi, now a multimedia artist working in theater, film, photography, painting, and digital media. "Chocó is also predominantly Black and Indigenous, so I feel a common understanding with the people here in terms of my racial justice work and its intersection with social and climate justice."

LiberArte launched Protectores de la Tierra [Earth Protectors], a food sovereignty project that engages local farmers and volunteers in cultivating more than 100 acres of Black-owned land to feed the residents of Nuquí and surrounding communities and to reduce reliance on imported processed foods. "We're bringing back ancestral farming practices from a generation ago, when Nuquí exported things like rice, plantains, pineapple, and corn," Sapi says. "It's one of the rainiest places on Earth, so it's incredible what can be grown here. In a place you can only reach by plane or boat, having our own food is so important."

Clockwise, from top left: Sapi (left) and Yowar Mosquera started Protectores de la Tierra, which cultivates more than 100 acres of Black-owned land to feed the residents of Nuquí, in Colombia; Sapi hosts *Building Our Own Tables*, a podcast that amplifies the voices of theater leaders of color; a July 2023 rehearsal for members of LiberArte's music ensemble artist-in-residence Tambacum, including Julián "Tatico" Mosquera (center).

The project links organically with LiberArte's Nuquí Artist Residency, which invites artist-activists abroad to work on the land while finding creative inspiration in the region's striking natural beauty and community culture. The first artist-in-residence was Marcos Lopez Castro, a beats music producer from Queens, New York. LiberArte's current artist-in-residence is Nuquí-based Tambacum, a traditional music ensemble featuring singers, drummers, and percussionists who came together in 2020 during the pandemic. Tambacum released their first record in 2021, and LiberArte is working on bringing the group to the US for an East Coast tour in 2024.

"Artists can change minds and change worlds. That's what LiberArte is all about: liberation through the arts."

"Their music is ancestral and intergenerational," Sapi says. "They're teaching the young kids and learning from local elders. In this way, we are decolonizing how art is taught. It's not only in academic institutions. There is so much wisdom and expertise that comes from these *sabedoras y sabedores* [wise bards] who learned through their ancestors."

LiberArte and Tambacum have joined with community arts groups and businesses to revive the annual Festival del Tamborito, which is held in Nuquí, and celebrates Chocó's vibrant cultural heritage through music, dance, storytelling, and artisan crafts. Sapi says international interest in the festival and other cultural events has boosted support and funding for education, food access, and local environmental issues.

Sapi envisions LiberArte's work activating artists in other countries across the Andean region, Central America, Africa, Asia, and the Middle East. "It's so important for us to have this global community," they say. "That's where our power is. We're able to see ourselves in each other, multiply everything we're doing, and get inspired and empowered by our collective hope. Ultimately, we're all together. Our water is all connected. We're all artists, really, creating our lives." ●

THE PROOF IS IN THE MUSIC

Ethnomusicologist Grace Koch has spent her career studying the connection between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander music and land rights

By Marc Chalufour

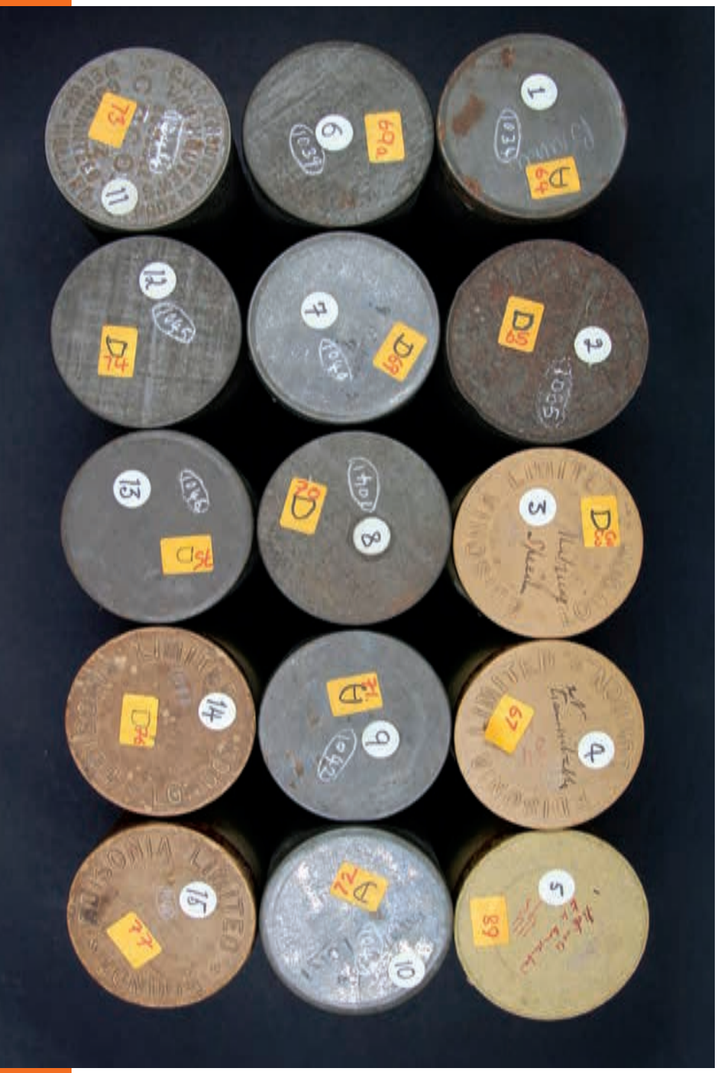
In this 1898 image, researcher Charles Myers uses a phonograph to record ceremonial music of the people of the Torres Strait island Mer.

IN MARCH 1898, researchers from Cambridge University set sail from London for the Torres Strait Islands, an archipelago between Papua New Guinea and the northeast tip of Australia. The leader, anthropologist Alfred Cort Haddon, had visited the area a decade earlier and wanted to learn more about the islanders before exposure to white civilization altered their culture forever.

The expedition, like many of its era, left a complicated legacy. Journals from the trip include racist language. Cultural artifacts taken by the researchers remain in British museums. And yet, their musical recordings (on wax cylinders), photographs, and films have provided a way for today's Torres Strait Islanders to reconnect with their ancestors—and to help them reassert rights to their land.

"It was probably one of the first expeditions to use multimedia," says Grace Koch ('73), an ethnomusicologist at Australian National University and a researcher at the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS)—and a leading figure in establishing the significance of music in the Aboriginal and islander land rights movement.

Koch has studied musical traditions across Australia. One of the consistent themes is a connection to the land. The recordings from Haddon's expedition, some of the first ever made by anthropologists, provide a unique look at music that has continued to be passed down to younger generations and which, over the past half century, has



The Alfred Cort Haddon 1898 Expedition (Torres Strait and British New Guinea) Cylinder Collection. Koch interviewed the descendants of the people featured in these wax cylinder recordings.

helped to establish Torres Strait Islanders' rights to land that had been taken by the British Crown. Those traditions live on in music across the continent. In parts of central Australia, for example, knowledge of *kujika*—songs about creator spirits moving across the land—was the Aboriginal way of proving title to a piece of land.

"The people who own the songs own the land," Koch says.

TO THE OUTBACK

The course of Koch's life changed soon after graduating from BU with a master's in music education. Her husband, Harold, had received a PhD in linguistics from Harvard and accepted a job at the Australian National University. The couple moved to Canberra in 1974 and Koch briefly taught music. In 1975, she joined the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies (now AIATSIS). She worked with Alice Moyle, a pioneer in ethnomusicology, the study of a culture's music.

At the same time, an Aboriginal rights movement had sparked dramatic legislation. In 1976, the country passed the Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act (ALRA), covering an area of more than half a million square miles. The new law allowed Indigenous people to obtain a freehold title to their land after centuries of displacement by settlers—but first they had to prove ownership. That left the challenging question of how a document-based legal system would handle claims from societies that rely on oral traditions. One solution was to study their music.

Koch, new to the country and even newer to ethnomusicology, was poised to play a role in a pivotal moment in Australian history.

MAPPING NATIVE MUSIC

Many Aboriginal songs depict the creation of land, including identifiable features like mountains and water sources. Songs also helped generations pass down information critical to survival, such as the locations of certain plants. In Torres Strait, songs helped sailors navigate around islands and reefs. "Because you can map these songs, it's hard evidence," Koch says.

Establishing that evidence was a lengthy process, with anthropologists, linguists, and ethnomusicologists providing a bridge between native and European cultures. Koch would travel to the Northern Territory—often remote areas, some without roads—for weeks at a time. Sometimes that meant picking up people at settlements where they'd been forced to relocate and taking them to their ancestral land. She recorded their songs, listened to their stories, and created genealogies. "It was very exciting—we were out there where hardly any white people had been," Koch says.

As she traveled around Australia, Koch gained an appreciation for how native music varied between regions. She describes the single melodic lines sung by people in Central Australia—though she also recalls listening to a

Previous spread: Photo by Anthony Wilkin, courtesy of the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Cambridge (N.23209.AC142). This page: © British Library Board

"Everybody who listened to it was so moved—a lot of people cried. This was very important to their own identity. It gives them a link to their past."

GRACE KOCH

group of women singing a polyphonic song. Each voice began at a different time and created a cluster of sound. "That was one of the most beautiful things I've ever heard," Koch says. "Especially because they were so involved with the story and the site they were looking at."

The evidence that Koch and her colleagues gathered was provided to the Aboriginal land commissioner who would rule on the claim. The commissioners would often hear songs and ceremonies performed by the people making the claim. Many of those claims were successful, but the Land Rights Act only applied to the Northern Territory in north-central Australia.

In 1992, *Mabo v. Queensland (No. 2)* brought the issue of native title—a legal recognition that Indigenous people have rights to their land based on their own traditions and customs—national. Eddie Mabo, a native of the Torres Strait island of Mer, had become a prominent advocate for Indigenous land rights and, in his lengthy legal battle, he frequently cited the importance of songs.

The ruling on the case came from the High Court of Australia, which rejected the idea that there were no legal claims to Australian land before the arrival of British settlers. The Native Title Act was passed in 1993, allowing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders to claim title to their lands.

In 2013, Koch published the results of a study of the prevalence of music as evidence in land rights and title claims. She found that 64 of 67 land claims made under the ALRA through 2010 cited music, ceremony, or dance. Songs or ceremonies were performed for the land commissioners in more than half of those hearings. A majority of the 108 title claims made between 1993 and 2010 also included references to song and ceremony. Repeatedly, the commissioners and justices ruling on the claims cited the importance of music in determining ownership of the land.

A RETURN TO TORRES STRAIT

In 2019, after decades of helping Australia's Indigenous people communicate the importance of their music to Western society, Koch received a unique invitation. Researchers at the British Library, with funding from the Leverhulme Trust, a UK grant-making organization, and the UK government's Department for Business, Energy, and Industrial Strategy, had launched the True Echoes project, an effort to make portions of its sound archive

Courtesy of Grace Koch

Koch works with claimants for the McLaren Creek land claim in the Northern Territory in 1986.

more accessible, and to reconnect with the Oceania communities where the recordings were made. They wanted to interview descendants of the people recorded by Haddon's 1898 expedition.

Years earlier, Koch's mentor, Alice Moyle, had worked with the British Library to identify and sort the Haddon recordings. To assist with the delicate process of bringing those recordings back to the Torres Strait Islands, they enlisted Koch. Once again, she was mediating between cultures. She found local scholars, familiar with Torres Strait history and customs, to conduct the interviews.

Participants found the music of their ancestors was still familiar—after all, land remains the theme in their music today. One man sang along to a recording.

"Everybody who listened to it was so moved—a lot of people cried," Koch says. "This was very important to their own identity. It gives them a link to their past."

That musical legacy is so powerful, it has reshaped a nation. After nearly 50 years of the Land Rights Act and 30 years of the Native Title Act, First Nations people have rights to approximately half of Australia's Northern Territory and 85 percent of the coastline.

Those who own the music, own the land.

THE LOUDEST VOICE IN THE ROOM

Tenor Clay Hilley is in rare company playing German opera heroes

By Steve Holt

Clay Hilley is one of fewer than 10 professional heldentenors—a subgroup of tenors who embody the heroic protagonists in operas by German composers—in the world.

360b/Alamy Stock Photo

RICHARD WAGNER'S EPIC, FOUR-PART OPERA *DER RING DES NIBELUNGEN* follows the struggle of gods, mortals, and mythical creatures over a ring that gives its holder dominion over the world. The superhero of the Ring cycle, as the renowned opera series is known colloquially, is Siegfried, a larger-than-life mortal who exists to recover the object from a giant, forging a sword no other human has the strength to forge before killing a dragon and eventually his own grandfather, the god Wotan. An actor singing Siegfried must possess a tenor voice that not only embodies the innate power entrusted to Wagner's hero, but one resilient enough to endure a show run time that exceeds five hours. Only a handful of heldentenors, which translates to "hero tenor," on Earth has the vocal range, stamina, and experience to play the part at the world's leading opera houses. So, when veteran tenor Stephen Gould pulled out of *Götterdämmerung*, the fourth opera in Wagner's Ring cycle, the day before its opening show at Germany's 2022 Bayreuth Festival, opera management scrambled.

"I GET THE TOP C, WHICH REALLY PAYS OFF IN *GÖTTERDÄMMERUNG*, WHERE YOU HAVE THIS BIG, A CAPPELLA HIGH C THAT YOU'VE GOT TO PUMP OUT THERE AT THE VERY END OF A VERY LONG WEEK."

Clay Hilley ('11) and his wife, soprano Sara Duchovnay, were on vacation with friends in Puglia, Italy, when he noticed a call coming in on his cell phone from Bayreuth. "We were sitting there with Aperol spritzes in hand, eating some pasta," Hilley recalls. "I said, 'Sara, I think vacation might be coming to an abrupt end.'"

On the phone, Hilley, a tenor and graduate of BU's Opera Institute, was only told he was needed as a backup for Gould in case he couldn't go on as Siegfried the following day. The couple rushed back to their Airbnb, packed quickly, and called a cab to the airport for the two-hour flight to Munich. A driver met them there with the *Götterdämmerung* score for Hilley to study on the two-hour drive north to Bayreuth, near the composer's birthplace.

Arriving at his hotel at 11 pm, Hilley tried to get some sleep before reporting to the theater at 10 the next morning to prepare for the 4 pm curtain time. That's when he learned that Gould was apparently downed by a cold and that he would sing Siegfried on the famed Bayreuth Festival Theatre stage—the same stage where Wagner debuted the beloved opera nearly 150 years earlier. Costuming, makeup, final notes on the script, staging, and music took up every minute of the next six hours. Hilley took it all in stride and with good humor. After all, this was the break the 41-year-old had sought for more than half his life. He was about to become a hero tenor.

THE MAKING OF A HELDENTENOR

Within the tenor voice type exist six, sometimes seven, subgroups. Heldentenors are defined by their ability to embody the heroic protagonist in operas by German composers like Wagner, Strauss, and Beethoven and the extraordinarily high notes they can hit. That said, the hero has to hit those high notes. Where many heldentenors range up from the lower baritone parts, Hilley comes from the high side—which can give him an upper hand when performing Wagner.

"My low C is pretty weak," Hilley admits. "But I get the top C, which really pays off in *Götterdämmerung*, where you have this big, a cappella high C that you've got to pump out there at the very end of a very long week."

Suzanne Vinnik

Hilley is one of fewer than 10 professional heldentenors in the world singing classic German hero parts. He owes some of this to supply and demand: fewer opera houses are performing Wagner than works by the great Italian composers, like Puccini. Hilley, who stands 5 feet, 10 inches, can also thank biology for his position in the opera world: a fleshier throat and larger head allow him to "resonate all that big sound that you need to cut through a giant orchestra of over 100...to the people who paid for the tickets."

Since making Berlin his home base in 2021, Hilley has parlayed his powerful, resilient voice and knowledge of Wagner into a packed performance schedule. In the fall of 2021 and spring of 2022, he played Siegfried in marathon performances of *Götterdämmerung* six times with the Deutsche Oper Berlin. He says this is where he first appeared on the radar of Katharina Wagner, the famed composer's great-granddaughter, who remembered his name when Gould pulled out of the 2022 Bayreuth Festival.

Hilley followed the Berlin shows with three performances singing Tristan in Wagner's *Tristan and Isolde* in November 2022, four performances as Der Kaiser in Strauss' three-hour *The Woman Without a Shadow* in Baden-Baden in April 2023, and a five-performance run as the drum major in Alban Berg's *Wozzeck* at London's Royal Opera House in May and June 2023. According to the great American heldentenor Jon Fredric West, who has taught or coached Hilley since 2015, heldentenors must work for years to master the German "diction, style, and drama" and wait until their voices have matured enough to sing the repertoire. This means a heldentenor may not sing his first Siegfried or Tristan until he is in his late 30s, West says.

Bernd Uhlig

Hilley's performances as Siegfried in *Götterdämmerung* at the Deutsche Oper Berlin put him on the radar of Katharina Wagner, great-granddaughter of the opera's famed composer, Richard Wagner.

"Clay stands at the top of the [heldentenor] breed because his tone is so beautiful in-house—not too dark and not too light," West says.

Few in Statham, Ga., would have predicted Hilley's voice would take him around the world. Like many others in town, Hilley grew up singing in his family's Baptist church. He showed an early proclivity for the piano and trumpet—both of which he would keep up through high school. The first time Hilley's mom and dad heard him sing by himself on a stage, he was a 10th grader making his dramatic debut in a school production of Gilbert and Sullivan's comedic opera *H.M.S. Pinafore*. "I never sang around the house," Hilley recalls, "so when I opened my mouth... they were like, 'Is that our son? Is he lip-syncing?'"

Pinafore, it turns out, provided Hilley an operatic taste of something he loved. He devoured every opera he could after that, volunteering as an usher with his mom at Athens' Classic Center so he could see operas and attending group classes with a vocal teacher in town. Hilley figured he would eventually teach rather than perform, until he was well into his music education studies at the University of Georgia. He joined the chorus of the local Athena Grand Opera Company, composed of a combination of university and community performers, and was enamored with the professional singers the company would pay to fill the lead roles.

"My focus became figuring out how to become one of those people up there singing for a living," says Hilley, who added voice and piano as majors and packed in as many credit and rehearsal hours as he could. He earned a master's in vocal performance from Georgia State University before moving to New York City to study at the Manhattan School of Music and BU's Opera Institute. The only "book learning" Hilley did at BU were his Italian classes. The rest of his certificate program was "almost exclusively performing, which was wonderful."

SIEGFRIED IN A PINCH

Backstage at the Bayreuth Festival Theatre in 2022, costume tailors and makeup artists buzzed around Hilley as he prepared to stand in as Siegfried on opening night of *Götterdämmerung*. Director Valentin Schwarz walked him through the show's staging, which struck a notably contemporary feel. When conductor Cornelius Meister came by to meet with Hilley, the two barely had an hour to rehearse the score before festival director Katharina Wagner sent a messenger to the makeup room to have Hilley report for a quick walk-through of several scenes. Before the curtain opened, Hilley made sure his dressing room was stocked with the essentials he'd need to get through the vocal marathon ahead: granola bars and sandwiches for calories and protein, fresh pineapple or apple cider vinegar to protect against dreaded inflamed vocal cords, and sparkling apple juice with a hint of sweetness—apfelschorle, a German staple—to stay hydrated. If he strains his vocal cords during a performance, Hilley will take a few deep breaths of hot steam from a nebulizer he always keeps nearby. On that opening day, Hilley felt fine, if a little fatigued following the previous day's travel, as he took the stage at Bayreuth.

Reviews of Schwarz's modern twist on *Götterdämmerung* were mixed; the production team even received a smattering of boos and jeers after the show ended. But Hilley's performance received widespread praise, with *New York Times* opera critic Zachary Woolfe writing that the heldentenor "would have been impressive even under less dramatic circumstances."

Hilley is not slowing down. By the end of 2024, he will have taught or performed in Italy, Scotland, Canada, Hong Kong, Spain, and all over Germany. The only downside to his newfound opera stardom is a lack of vacation time. Even if he had the free time, his holiday is liable to be interrupted.

"These are great problems to have," he says with a laugh. "I don't want to offend [aspiring singers] by talking about this major first-world problem. People would kill to be in my shoes. I would have killed to be in my shoes."

ART MATTERS

Abhishek Panchal works to elevate the arts in India's school curricula

By Corinne Steinbrenner

Photo of Panchal by Nirav Karelia

FROM BOSTON TO BANGALORE, school art teachers share many of the same frustrations: class times are too short, budgets are too low, their work is seen as extracurricular rather than core. What these art educators need, says Abhishek Panchal, are school leaders who understand their challenges—and value the arts enough to address them.

Panchal ('21) is on his way to becoming such a leader.

He joined the Gateway School of Mumbai as a visual arts teacher in 2016. Three years later, after enrolling in CFA's Online Master of Arts in Art Education Program, he was promoted to arts program coordinator, overseeing Gateway's programs in visual art, music, and drama. Earlier this year, Panchal became Gateway's vice principal.

"I see myself leading a school in the near future," he says. "I think that's next in my trajectory."

Founded in 2012, Gateway is a nonprofit school for children with disabilities. It offers lower, middle, and high school programs and serves about 120 students with a range of disabilities, from attention deficit disorder and dyslexia to cerebral palsy and autism. When Panchal became Gateway's arts program coordinator, he aimed to elevate the arts at the school.

"One of my goals was to bring the arts from extracurricular to cocurricular," he says. "Now, if you see the vocabulary we use in our communication—maybe on the website, maybe while talking to our external stakeholders—the arts and physical education are 'cocurricular.' They support the main curriculum."

As vice principal, Panchal has a higher platform from which to advocate for the arts at Gateway.

"If you come in with research, if you come in with the right amount of data," he says, "you're able to convince stakeholders—may it be donors, may it be parents—of the reasons why a child should participate in an art education program."

Panchal has power beyond the walls of his own school. Gateway is an education leader in India and considers itself a "lab school"—it develops best practices and then shares them with other educators through publishing and professional development programs. When he speaks at conferences and forums, Panchal can promote Gateway's view that art is critical to the holistic development of a child.

"One of my goals was to bring the arts from extra-curricular to cocurricular."

Panchal gave up some teaching responsibilities when he became vice principal, but he continues to teach art and design to Gateway's high schoolers. He also maintains a personal artistic practice in a small home studio.

"I hold a very strong opinion that art teachers should continue making their own art," he says. "Whenever I'm introducing my students to a new form or new media, I often experiment with that in my own practice. It helps me understand the potential breakdowns my students might have in access, and it helps me to think about scaffolds or modifications that they might require to access that particular media."

Panchal wrote his CFA master's thesis on integrating Indigenous Indian art forms into middle school curricula. He and his students have explored art traditions such as Warli painting, an ancient form of mural painting using white pigment made from rice flour and basic geometric shapes to symbolize elements of nature.

Panchal hopes to earn a doctoral degree one day and pursue a role in education policy and administration. Would that mean leaving his art behind?

"There's a common misconception that being an artist is about what you do in the studio," says Panchal. But artists aren't defined by what they create, he says, so much as by how they see the world.

"I always tell my students, you're not artists because you come here and sit in the art studio and make art. You're artists because you're thinking, you're observing, you're making connections."

PROCESS

THE ACCIDENTAL FILMMAKER

Cécile Fontaine deconstructs and manipulates found footage, bringing collage to life

By Marc Chalufour Photos by Augusta Sagnelli

Cécile Fontaine manipulates found film footage to create new works of art. She deconstructs developed images with liquid baths or metal implements. Then she builds a new film from the pieces.

Cécile Fontaine has made more than 50 films over four decades, but she rejects the label of filmmaker. "It's just collage; it's not real filmmaking," she says. "It's working *on* film."

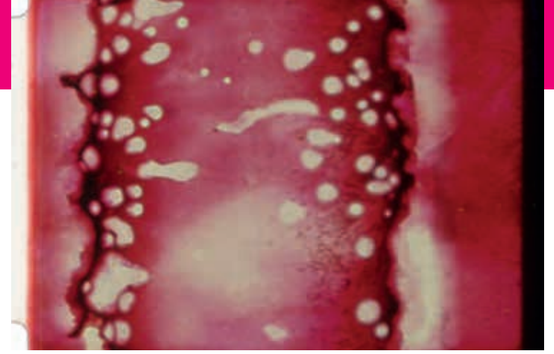
Fontaine ('83) says this on Zoom from the Paris apartment where she has lived and made art for 30 years. It's one of many self-deprecating comments that she makes.

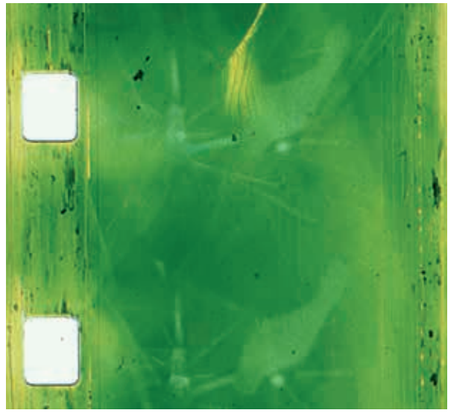
A reel of film and a light box sit on a table behind her. The other tools she uses are within reach. Fontaine occasionally grabs one of them and holds it up to the camera. They're all household products, like liquid cleaners and Scotch tape. She uses scissors, knives, and a splicer. Boxes of found film—strips and spools of footage given to her over the years, rescued from the trash, or purchased at flea markets—provide her raw material.

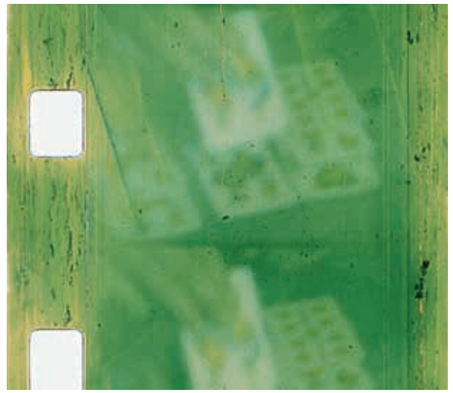
She cites collage artists Jacques Villeglé and Mimmo Rotella as influences rather than French cinema luminaries like François Truffaut or Jean-Luc Godard. But her finished products *are* films, intended for projection. They just happen to defy every moviemaking tradition and norm imaginable. She seems as amazed by her success as she is by the unpredictable outcomes of her artistic experiments.

Rather than make an image in camera, Fontaine deconstructs developed images with liquid baths or metal implements. Then she builds a new film from the pieces. Her works lack a narrative arc and rarely include sound. They might best be described as moving collage. The effect can be like riding a merry-go-round with a kaleidoscope pressed to one eye.

Artist yann beauvais, cofounder of the experimental film nonprofit Light Cone, has written about the first time he saw one of Fontaine's films: "There was something deeply moving in the discovery of a new use of the film, or more precisely in the way of making cinema."







Film images courtesy of Fontaine and Light Cone

THE PRACTICAL ARTIST

Fontaine studied art education at CFA, but she also wanted to create her own art. She carried a Super 8 camera around Boston and began experimenting with her footage. One of her first films, *Irène* (1982), shows a friend riding a unicycle in her apartment. Fontaine soaked the film in bleach, which removed a

Left: Images from the film strip for *The Last Lost Shot* (1999), which Fontaine made in response to the 1999 shooting at Columbine High School in Colorado.

Right: *Irène* (1982), one of Fontaine's first films, in which a friend rides a unicycle in her apartment.

layer of emulsion and gave the images a green tint. Manipulating emulsion (film's light-sensitive chemical coating)—just as a sculptor might work with clay—has been a hallmark of her work ever since.

Fontaine enrolled at the School of the Museum of Fine Arts at Tufts University after BU. Her formative creative decisions were exceedingly practical. Film, she figured, would be easier to transport back to Paris than bulky paintings. And to manipulate her films, she used cheap household products like Fantastik and Clorox bleach. "I thought that if I could use it to clean my clothes, it was OK for film and for my health."

From there, Fontaine's style began to take shape. "It was always through a mistake," she says. One day, she peeled a piece of tape off a section of film and noticed that some emulsion came with it. That became her dry technique.

For *Golf-Entretien* (1984), Fontaine soaked a film strip in Fantastik. To her surprise, the emulsion expanded. She removed the excess with a painter's palette knife and reapplied it elsewhere on the film strip. The result was a dual image. An instructional golf video plays in the background while the distorted images from the reapplied emulsion, punctuated with swaths of green and magenta, flash by. This became her wet technique.

Fontaine recalls her classmates "looking at me with big eyes. They didn't understand what I was doing." While many of her peers focused on animation—the act of creating images to transfer to film—Fontaine was, in essence, doing the opposite by removing images from filmstrips.

"I did everything you weren't supposed to do. I just explored the material," she says. She experimented with scratching and puncturing film with steel wool, scissors, and razors. She soaked it in ammonia, bleach, soapy water, and vinegar. She wrote on the film and pasted acetate to it, then ditched those methods when she saw other filmmakers using them.

"I wasn't good at techniques, and I just disliked techniques," she says. Rather than learn them, she created her own.

EXPECTING THE UNEXPECTED

Fontaine moved to Paris in 1986 and contacted Light Cone for the first time. That's when

Above: Fontaine soaked film for a golf video in Fantastik and manipulated it to create a dual image for *Golf-Entretien* (1984).

Opposite: *Spaced Oddities* (2004) used footage of plankton discarded by a natural history museum.

beauvais watched her early work, launching a decades-long relationship. Their ability to promote her art helped Fontaine reach a broader audience while balancing new projects and a full-time job as a teacher.

To start a project, Fontaine looks through her film collection. She holds strips up to the light to examine the images—never projecting them until she's done manipulating them—and searches for colors, textures, and movement that please her.

Fontaine typically isn't concerned with the subject matter of the images, though she has created films in response to the AIDS epidemic and the 1999 shooting at Columbine High School in Colorado. In *The Last Lost Shot* (1999), she juxtaposed children's illustrations with a Winchester rifle commercial—a mash-up of youthful innocence and gun culture. She soaked the film in water and powdered laundry detergent, which created a red tint. The damaged layer of film moves like an organic animated blob threatening to consume the rifle-wielding men.

Despite the basic methods Fontaine uses, she never knows what a film will look like when it's done. "I'm always surprised," she says. "Sometimes I don't understand what has happened, and it's difficult to do the same thing [again]."

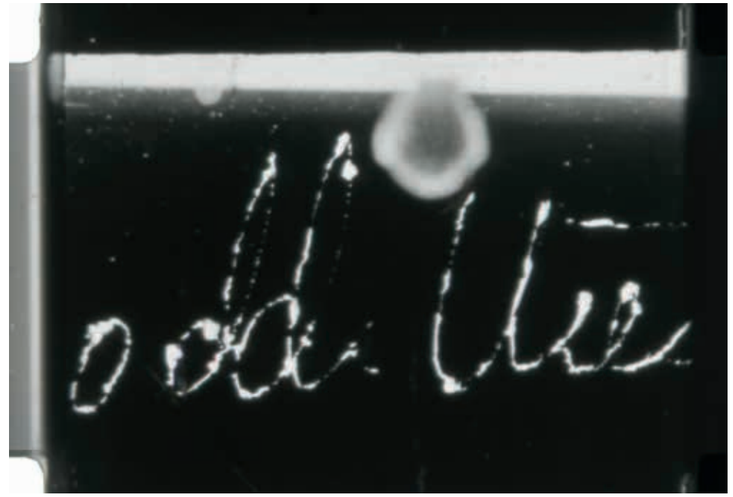
When she soaked film in soapy water for *Parallel Stories* (1990), sections of emulsion unexpectedly burst. Water bubbles worked their way between the remaining emulsion and the film and left residue behind. The image looks as though it's been eaten away by a splash of acid.

Using black-and-white footage of plankton, discarded by a natural history museum, Fontaine created *Spaced Oddities* (2004) by editing each individual cell of 16 mm film—approximately 1,500 frames. She executed her dry technique by laying double-sided tape on her desk and pressing the film onto it, then peeling it off. She trimmed the perforations with scissors, then taped each cell at a 90-degree angle onto another strip of film. What would have been organic movements of the plankton turn frenetic with her editing.

"Fontaine constructs an imaginary world, a phantasmagoria of colors and shapes that transports the spectator to a parallel visual universe," Lucia Tralli wrote in a 2016 essay for the journal *Feminist Media Histories*. "Hers is a cinema that rigorously refuses the movie camera."

In 2009, Fontaine went digital, experimenting with video. She would manipulate film then scan it for additional editing on her computer. She also began filming some of her own footage again. The computer allowed her to make dramatic edits with the click of a button—generating kaleidoscopic sequences impossible to create with scissors and tape. "But I don't really like my work in video," she says. "I missed the materiality of the film, transforming it by direct action on its surface."

"IT WAS ALWAYS THROUGH A MISTAKE," SHE SAYS. ONE DAY, SHE PEELED A PIECE OF TAPE OFF A SECTION OF FILM AND NOTICED THAT SOME EMULSION CAME WITH IT. THAT BECAME HER DRY TECHNIQUE.



Fontaine retired from teaching in 2021. The same year, a retrospective exhibit in Paris celebrated her career and was accompanied by a book she'd created in collaboration with yann beauvais, *L'émulsion fantastique* (Light Cone, 2021). The name pays homage to her use of Fantastik.

Fontaine is modest about her success. "Some people say that I've influenced them," she says. "That's always a surprise. I never think about the people who are going to see the film." ●

WATCH SOME OF FONTAINE'S FILMS AT LIGHTCONE.ORG/EN/FILMMAKER-117-CECILE-FONTAINE.

Artist and instructor Robert Bodem teaches an innovative sculpting technique

BEING SPACE

By Corinne Steinbrenner

Photos by Dimitris Vlaikos

IN A LIGHT-FILLED STUDIO IN ATHENS, GREECE,

Robert Bodem presses layers of clay around spare metal armatures, creating realistic sculptures of the human body in motion and in repose. The clay figures—some life-sized, some smaller and more intimate—are later cast in bronze, becoming sculptures that will be displayed in elegant homes and sun-filled gardens of art collectors around the world.

Bodem's studio is also a classroom, where he teaches a sculpting technique he has refined over more than two decades—a methodology he calls "drawing in space." The technique breaks down figurative sculpting into such a systematic process that he could teach it to anyone, he says.

"When you do high-quality figurative work, and people recognize that quality, almost the first thing out of their mouth is, 'I could never do that.' And that's not the truth," says Bodem ('95,'98). "With this curriculum and a good student with the right attitude and the right amount of effort, so much is possible."

Bodem has taught workshops and a multimonth sculpture program at his Athens Sculpture Atelier since 2018. Before moving to Athens to be near his wife's family, Bodem spent 20 years in Italy, directing the sculpture program he'd founded at the Florence Academy of Art. His classes draw students from across the globe. Some have become celebrated sculptors, with works on display in cathedrals, museums, public parks, and private collections. Others have become teachers themselves, opening their own ateliers in Spain, the Netherlands, and Israel, to name a few.

While teaching in Florence, Bodem distilled his sculpting methods into a studio manual for his students, which he titled *Drawing in Space*. He is working with a former student, British sculptor Poppy Field, to rewrite *Drawing in Space* and expects to self-publish the new volume as a full-color, hardcover book later this year.

THE BOX AND THE EGG

Bodem was a teenager in upstate New York when, following in the footsteps of his beloved high school art teacher, he enrolled in an art education program at Nazareth University in Rochester. An instructor there recognized his talent and encouraged him to set aside his teaching aspirations and pursue a studio career. Bodem transferred to BU, where he fell in love with sculpture.

"I was a 20-year-old kid carving trees with chainsaws and banging on wood and welding metal," he says. "I enjoyed doing it every day."

Bodem's early sculptures were abstracts, but his ideas were often based on the human figure. After earning a BFA, he explored the figure further through drawing classes at the Florence Academy of Art, a school established in 1991 by Daniel Graves, an artist from Bodem's hometown of Pittsford, N.Y. After months of drawing from life models at the very traditional academy, Bodem was finished with abstraction. He called Isabel McIlvain, a renowned figurative sculptor who was a CFA associate professor at the time, from a café in Milan and asked if he could return to Boston for graduate studies with her.

McIlvain taught Bodem a concept called "the box and the egg," which has become the basis of his teaching curriculum. When blocking in a sculpture, Bodem always begins with the pelvis (the box) and moves on to the ribcage (the egg). Perfecting the placement of these underlying structures is vital, McIlvain taught him, because a figurative sculpture isn't just about the surface that viewers can see; a great figurative sculpture has a sense of "internal-ness."

"Whether it's Greek figurative sculpture, Renaissance, the French Academic period, or the Baroque period—there's an *inside* there," Bodem says. "That was Isabel's big teaching principle. I've altered it in ways, but that principle has been the basis for everything I've been doing for 25 years."

At the end of his graduate studies, Bodem applied for and won CFA's Esther B. and Albert S. Kahn Career Entry Award, which came with a $15,000 prize. He moved back to Italy, where the funds covered his living expenses as he attempted to launch a figurative sculpture program at the Florence Academy of Art to complement the drawing and painting programs Graves offered.

"In the beginning, he had just a couple of students, and we had to fill up space with drawing students so we could pay the rent," says Graves. "In a couple of years, he took over the whole building, and it just kept growing and growing. His best students became teachers, and the program—there's nothing I know of on this planet that comes close to it."

One of those students was aspiring Dutch artist Sanne van Tongeren, who searched for years for a sculpture program that would help her master the human figure. She was thrilled to discover the Florence Academy of Art, where she studied with Bodem and later joined the faculty. In 2018, she returned to Amsterdam and opened Figura, the Dutch Academy of Figurative Sculpture, where she teaches her students to construct a box and an egg and connect them with contours. When she opened Figura, she says, her dream was to revive a form of classical art education that once thrived in the Netherlands.

"In the 17th century, we had great Dutch sculptors who were even teaching Italian sculptors," she says, adding that the Rijksmuseum, the national art and history museum of the Netherlands, is filled with "beautiful three-dimensional artwork."

Bodem says it's gratifying to see his students spreading his methods in their corners of the world. And he's proud of the dual career he's built as a teacher and an artist. The two roles have always gone hand in hand. Experimenting with techniques in his studio teaches him lessons he can share with students, he says. Likewise, students come to him with difficulties he's never encountered, and problem-solving with them teaches him lessons that elevate his own work.

As a sculptor, Bodem says, he strives to be inventive within a traditional art form. As a teacher, he continuously reevaluates his methods. In Florence, the sculpting program he taught was three years; now, he's perfecting a program that offers the essential components of his training in just six months.

"I'm still innovating with this process that I've been developing for 25 years," he says. "It's never static."

At CFA, Bodem learned a concept called "the box and the egg." When blocking in a sculpture, he always begins with the pelvis (the box) and moves on to the ribcage (the egg).

INSTRU-MENTAL IMPACTS

Creating culturally relevant curricula. Building students' confidence. Four music educators from around the world share their teaching philosophies and insights with *CFA* magazine

By Mara Sassoon

Illustrations by Quick Honey

ROGER N. WILLIAMS

JAMAICA

For more than 15 years, Roger N. Williams has been dean of the School of Music at Edna Manley College of the Visual and Performing Arts in Kingston, Jamaica, which includes undergraduate programs in music performance and music education. Williams ('22) comes from a family of musicians and educators: his mother is an elementary school teacher, and, as a child, he started taking piano lessons after watching his father at the keyboard. He earned bachelor's and master's degrees in music performance before enrolling in CFA's Doctor of Musical Arts (DMA) in music education program. "I am a performer, but education was always there," he says. "Everything I do would lead back to: how am I going to teach? The two things for me work hand in hand."

Williams was instrumental in developing the curriculum and building the faculty at Edna Manley College's School of Music. The performance curriculum is about more than mastering an instrument. "It's important to gain the necessary techniques to manipulate your instrument, but ultimately, you're expressing music," he says. "Technique in and of itself means absolutely nothing if it doesn't support musical expression."

Williams turned to BU's DMA program because he is interested in building out the research program at Edna Manley College's School of Music and one day expanding its programs to offer graduate degrees. His dissertation was about the disconnect between the established music curriculum

AMIRA EHRLICH

ISRAEL

Like Roger Williams, Amira Ehrlich considered culturally relevant teaching practices in her BU DMA dissertation, "Pray. Play. Teach: Conversations with Three Jewish Israeli Music Educators"—and she brought what she learned to schools in her home country, Israel. Ehrlich ('18), dean of music education at Levinsky-Wingate Academic College in Tel Aviv and a member of the Board of Music Education in Israel's Ministry of Education, examined the music curricula at three high schools serving Hebrew-speaking Jewish populations.

"In Israel, schools are socioreligiously separated," she says. "Secular Israeli Jews have their own school system, as do modern Orthodox Jews, ultra-Orthodox Jews, Muslims, Druze, and Christians."

"You might think, well, if the school systems are different, and the curricula are different, they're culturally grounded," Ehrlich says. "But with music education in Israel at the high school level, there's only one curriculum for all of the schools. I wanted to know why this is, and how it plays out."

She recalls interviewing a senior member of Israel's Ministry of Education about the origins of the standardized music education curriculum for her dissertation. "The education system became socioreligiously segregated in 1954," Ehrlich says. "When it happened, they made the decision about which school subjects will have specialized culturally adaptive curricula, and which subjects are so-called neutral. I asked why civics education, history, and literature have different curricula for each school system, but music doesn't. He said, 'Music is so neutral, there's no need for culturally specific education.' Music education can never be neutral, and we cannot pretend that it is."

Ehrlich also observed three music teachers at high schools serving modern Orthodox, ultra-Orthodox, and secular Jewish populations. She brought the teachers together in focus groups: "I asked them, 'Are we really teaching the same thing?' What is the significance of teaching Haydn's symphonies in the context of a modern Orthodox Jewish school, in an ultra-Orthodox Jewish school, and a secular Israeli Jewish school? We were all trying to uncover the hidden meanings of teaching this same Western classical curriculum for these different communities."

Ehrlich says that her dissertation work helped the teachers become more aware of how their lessons are culturally situated, and each of them changed their teaching practice as a result of her study. "One of them even went so far as to be leading part of a group of modern Orthodox Jewish Israeli music teachers who came together and offered the Ministry of Education a new curriculum, specialized for their communities," Ehrlich says. "Prior to this, there was this ignoring of the fact that music education is culturally grounded."

Ehrlich is proud of the work she is doing at Levinsky-Wingate Academic College. "I feel that I have a great opportunity to impact Israeli music education, through the students that are enrolled in our program and through our alumni," she says. "Israel is a multicultural country, and we work with students who are Jewish, Christian, Muslim, Druze, Bedouin.... We get students from all over the country, and we send our alumni back out all over the country."

She says she owes her philosophy, in part, from lessons learned from her dissertation supervisor, André de Quadros, a professor of music education; the late Susan Conkling, then a CFA professor of music education; and Lee Higgins, a former associate professor of music education who specializes in community music and is director of the International Centre of Community Music at York St. John University in England.

"They helped me understand that music is for everyone, and that what music educators are doing is helping people fill their musical needs," Ehrlich says. "Every person has musical needs, and music educators are the people who are going to help you and facilitate your musical experience. This plays out in my hopes for my impact on Israeli music education."

in Jamaican classrooms and students' culture systems. "I'm very interested in culture and education, and how the two things interact within a specific area or region," he says. Williams focused on three public secondary school music classrooms in Kingston, observing the impact of a culturally responsive teaching framework developed by noted scholar Geneva Gay, which involves incorporating students' lived experiences and customs into the lessons.

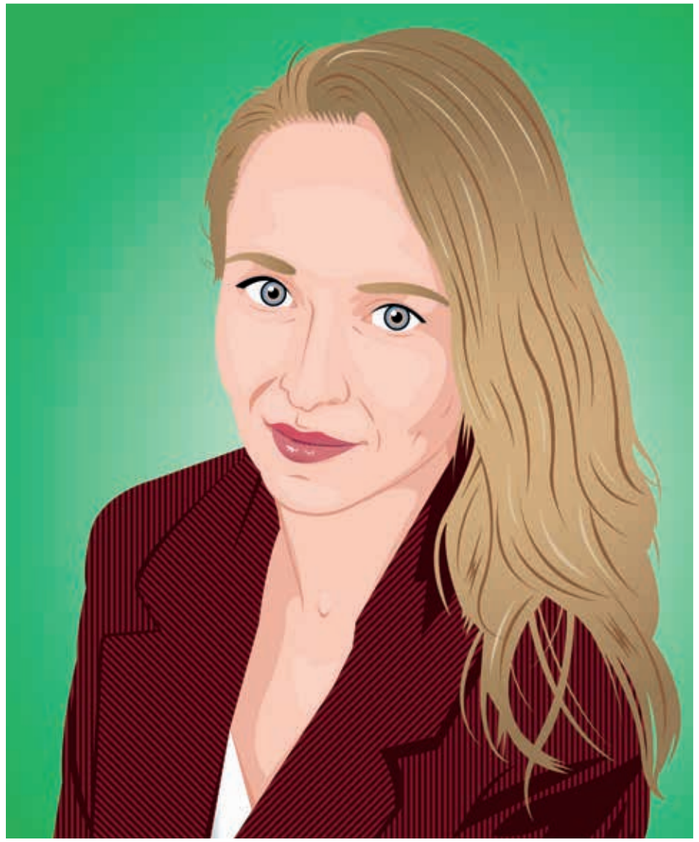
"I was seeing how teachers operate within the school system while ensuring they use culture as a part of their dissemination of information and, at the same time, looking at what culture means," Williams says. He found that teachers and students had different ideas of what is culturally relevant. "Teachers are insisting on using reggae and folk music to give students that grounding, but students are

"It's important that we understand where students are coming from."

looking at things in a very different way," he says. "For them, rock and rap are big parts of their culture now. Not to mention Jamaican dancehall music and K-pop."

But Williams notes that the three schools are in a major urban center; what constitutes culturally relevant curriculum depends on where a school is. "It's the teacher's responsibility to say, 'This is what I think they should be learning because this is traditional Jamaican culture, but this is what they understand. How do the two things merge?' It's important that we understand where students are coming from."

Williams is bringing what he learned through his dissertation into the curriculum for music education students at Edna Manley College, emphasizing fairness, equity, and culturally responsive teaching in the classroom. "Coming out of a postcolonial society where, in the early days, it was a privilege to even get an education—it just means a lot to me to see that students have access to music education within their schools," he says.



YVANNA MYCYK
CANADA

After earning a bachelor's degree in string performance at CFA, violinist Yvanna Mycyk went on to get a law degree from the University of Toronto. Practicing law was great, she says, but before long she felt the pull of a different field: music education. She'd been thinking about a string pedagogy course she had taken at CFA, which involved young students from Boston schools coming to BU for lessons. "I enjoyed that constructive feeling that you're really helping build something when you're involved in educating people," she says. "I think it's important for people to never feel like they have to limit themselves. One day, I announced I was going to go back to school for education."

Today, Mycyk ('03) is director of operations, VSO Education & VSO School of Music, a music school that serves students of all ages. "The VSO School of Music is not just about symphonic music," she says. "It has a great jazz and a great voice program, an incredible traditional Chinese music ensemble, and so much more."

Until she assumed the director role in May 2022, Mycyk had also taught violin at the VSO School of Music.

As a violin instructor, she would think back to the CFA string pedagogy class. "One of the things I remember learning is being deliberate in how you describe techniques, like a bow hold, because we are doing these sculptural kinds of shapes that you need to do in a very specific way. My philosophy is that education is transformational, and we as educators need to find a way to help make that transformation happen," she says. "I think it's very important to meet every student where they are at right now and also understand that the sky's the limit of what their potential is."

Mycyk works with the VSO on educational programming for the community, including open rehearsals, during which people of all ages can watch the orchestra practice. "A polished product can be kind of hard to penetrate, but if people get to go and see it taken apart, see those inner workings, they get so deep into it," she says.

She also oversees the teams making study guides for the music classes and designing other educational opportunities for area schools. For example, the VSO performs concerts especially for audiences of elementary school students, and orchestra members will go into the schools and speak to students after they've attended a concert. "I always talk about making that connection with the awesomeness happen."

LENNOX VANTERPOOL
ANGUILLA

"Even the slightest exposure to music, and the chance to become proficient in an instrument, will help build character and give lifelong opportunity."

Lennox Vanterpool founded the Morlens School of Music in 1989 to serve the youth of the Caribbean island Anguilla. Vanterpool, who named the after-school music program after his late parents—Morris, who had been a choir director and fife player, and Lenore—says it came out of a desire to give back to the community. "Even the slightest exposure to music, and the chance to become proficient in an instrument, will help build character and give lifelong opportunity," he says.

Morlens offers instruction in an array of instruments, music theory, and composition. "Our motto is 'playing is work,'" says Vanterpool ('11), who specializes in piano.

Each year, he offers a Music Matters recital series that allows his students to show off the fruits of their hard work and helps him give back on a deeper level by donating proceeds from the performances to community organizations in need.

"This island is naturally musical," says Vanterpool, who was born and raised in Anguilla. "But sometimes I feel that not enough is really being done to advantage children who are naturally inclined to sing and play an instrument." That's where Morlens comes in, he says.

At CFA, where he earned a master's in music education, "I was able to think about what it means to advocate for music education and the attending issues of justice and what it means to teach the whole child—all of these issues I was looking to explore." In his book, *Broken Chords: Education and Social Justice in Post-1986 Anguilla* (2016), he examines his country's educational system, including how music education is mostly found in after-school programs. "In my opinion, the arts, especially music, aren't seriously addressed," he says, "and that is unfortunate when we have such a rich musical culture."

Vanterpool says that he uses music education to encourage his students to become well-rounded citizens. "We want to be able to bring out the best in every young musician," he says. "We want to build their confidence. It's wonderful to see their development through music education, to see that music is something that can inspire them to create, to reflect, to speak up."

Roberts starred as the title character in this 2019 performance of *Richard III*, with his wife, Jessica Boone, as Lady Anne.

GUY ROBERTS FOUNDED A THRIVING SHAKESPEARE COMPANY IN THE CZECH CAPITAL

OUR MAN IN PRAGUE

By Joel Brown

Photos by Kaja Curtis

Right: Roberts (sitting) as the titular character in a 2017 production of *Macbeth*, with Jessica Boone as Lady Macbeth and Jeff Smith as Banquo.

Opposite: Roberts as Lucio in a 2018 production of *Measure for Measure*.

Growing up in Texas, Guy Roberts thought he would be a painter like his grandfather, but Shakespeare got in the way.

"When I was 15, I had heard there was this film called *Hamlet* by this guy named Laurence Olivier, and it won a bunch of Oscars and was supposed to be really amazing, so I watched it," he says. "It's a bit strange to talk about, but I had what I would probably describe as a near religious experience.

"Here was this man speaking the most beautiful words that my conflicted teenage soul seemed to connect with," recalls Roberts ('94). "He lived in a castle. He had a sword fight, which he won even after he was poisoned. I just thought, wow, what more do you want out of life? And so, from that moment, it was Shakespeare for me."

He started a Shakespeare club at his Houston high school; the Bard's words carried him to a BFA in acting from the College of Fine Arts, and a professional career as an actor and a director. He had his own small company in New York and was artistic director of the Austin Shakespeare Festival for several years. In 2007, he got a grant from the city of Austin to travel to the Czech Republic to direct a production of *Macbeth* in Prague. There, he found a new artistic home.

"The decision to go into a life in the theater is ridiculously hard in America. Doing it in a foreign country, in a language that's not the native language of the country, is probably the definition of insanity."

A RICH THEATER TRADITION

Roberts is founder and artistic director of the 16-year-old Prague Shakespeare Company (PSC), a professional, English-language theater company with a full-time staff of about 10—including his wife, producer and actor Jessica Boone—and a roster of multinational artists. He manages the company, directs and acts in its plays, acts in Hollywood productions filming in the Czech Republic (including Amazon Prime Video's *The Wheel of Time*), and performs internationally.

On his second day in Prague in 2007, he was walking across the 14th-century Charles Bridge over the Vltava River and realized that he wanted to live in Europe. At that time, Prague was perhaps the only major European city that didn't have a professional English-language company, he says.

"I thought, I'll move to Prague. I'll start the English-language theater. But I'll make Shakespeare and classical theater the core aesthetic of our work," he says over Zoom from his office in the capital city. "The decision to go into a life in the theater is ridiculously hard in America. Doing it in a foreign country, in a language that's not the native language of the country, is probably the definition of madness and insanity."

But he and PSC have thrived. At their 140-seat home theater, they present dramas, comedies, and musicals, and commission new plays. Many of their productions also tour the US and other locations around the globe. This fall's shows include *Romeo and Juliet*, *The 39 Steps*, and *The Book of Will*.

The PSC has also succeeded in part thanks to a decade-long partnership with the Czech National Theatre; it has presented 23 productions at the Estates Theatre, which is part of the National Theatre and the stage where Mozart premiered *Don Giovanni* in 1787. "It's sort of the jewel of the country," Roberts says. They've also been part of the Summer Shakespeare Festival at Prague Castle, started by former president Václav Havel, himself a playwright and poet.

There's a special fondness for Shakespeare in the Czech Republic, Roberts says. Under communism, a Shakespeare play was safe to produce but could also carry coded or hidden messages about society—a vital outlet for expression.

Another big part of the PSC's work is education. Summer and winter intensive Shakespeare programs bring students of all ages from around the world into their productions alongside the pros. "What I was trying to do was capture in a bottle, in a small intensive experience, my four years at BU," he says.

At the time, BU had a relationship with the Huntington Theatre Company, and Roberts wrangled a meeting with Peter Altman, then the producing-director. "The upshot was, I did six shows at the Huntington by the time I graduated and I had my Equity card."

Theater works differently in Prague than the United States. Instead of striving for corporate and foundation sponsorship, companies are often subsidized by the government, and ticket prices are low. Instead of scheduling one play for weeks or months, companies will have several at a time in repertory, playing once or twice a month; PSC has been doing its *Macbeth* for a decade.

But some things are the same everywhere. COVID made for a brutal couple of years, and at one point the company raised $40,000 to help keep food on the table for its artists. Audiences are returning, but as in America, they tend to buy tickets at the last minute now, and outdoor shows are an easier sell.

Theater is "extremely revered" as an art form in the Czech Republic, Roberts says, with a rich tradition and a vibrant community of artists. "It's so respected that, from my understanding with my Czech friends, when you tell your parents you want to be an actor or go into the theater, they don't say you should be a doctor or lawyer instead," he says with a smile. "What's nice is to live in a country where even young people dress up to go to the theater."

CFA Goes to Prague

This summer, Jon Savage, a CFA assistant professor of scene design, visited Prague with a group of students, several on grants from the Undergraduate Research Opportunities Program (UROP). Savage, who won an Elliot Norton Award from the Boston Theater Critics Association this year for outstanding scenic design, led about a dozen students to the Prague Quadrennial of Performance Design and Space. Students researched various aspects of contemporary world theater and made contacts from numerous countries.

Grant Powicki ('25) studied the systems of funding for theater production in countries with different political stances and will present his findings at the UROP fair this fall. The group also met with actor and director Guy Roberts (see main story), among others, in an effort to help expand overseas opportunities for School of Theatre students.

Along with the exhibits, "theater groups from around the world performed, so every night you could see an opera or a play or puppets," Savage says. "Expectations of theater in the US are narrower than they are internationally, especially in Eastern Europe. It's much more important there, rather than only entertainment. Being exposed to that as a student was world-changing for me, so I'm hoping that that will be the same for our students."

Pictured above, from left: Zachary Connell ('25), Powicki ('25), Rebecca Kleeman ('25), Gabby Cadden-James ('25), Emily Cady ('25), and Rowen Bailey ('25) at the State Opera House.

Claudine Hennessey traded her acting dreams for a life working to improve healthcare in South Africa

By Steve Holt Photo by Paul Samuels

DRAMATIC SHIFT

CLAUDINE HENNESSEY IS SITTING IN THE DARK. Again. For the umpteenth time this week, the electricity has been turned off in her section of Cape Town, South Africa, because demand has overwhelmed the energy grid. The regular blackouts, called "load shedding," are sometimes announced ahead of time, but they can happen with little notice. The government is telling residents to prepare for as many as 12 hours of load shedding a day in the near future. A portable battery pack powers a small lamp and keeps Hennessey's laptop running so she can do most of her work (and answer Zoom calls from BU reporters).

Low-income South Africans are not as fortunate. For them, the consequences of load shedding can be dire. Hennessey ('96) says it prevents access to quality healthcare—a sector she's served for nearly two decades, mostly in information technology. South Africa is near the top of the list globally for cases of tuberculosis and HIV, as well as sexual and domestic violence. A rolling electrical blackout is one more barrier to receiving care. If a patient makes it to a clinic and the power's out, their vitals, symptoms, and care plan might need to be recorded manually rather than in the nationwide information system. They may get to the hospital only to find the equipment needed to save their life is down.

"It's got catastrophic implications in the health sector," says Hennessey, who spends her days providing technical support to the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) in her position as senior clinical cascade and strategic information lead at the consulting firm Panagora Group. "[Load shedding] has kicked up a whole host of things for a country that was doing really well, but this is definitely going to impact it negatively."

Make no mistake, Hennessey loves living in her adopted South Africa, where she's been for 14 years, and believes deeply in the work she does helping improve the healthcare system. But it's a vastly different life than she imagined for herself as an undergraduate studying theater at BU, dreaming of one day making it big on the stage or screen.

BIG DREAMS, HARD TRUTHS

"[It was] a bit naïve or dramatic, but I always said I wanted to become rich and famous so I could use my fame for good," Hennessey says. Well-trained at one of Minnesota's top arts academies, Hennessey was accepted into BU's theater program. The first-generation student set out to perform in the classics, especially Shakespeare, and frequently was cast in the role of the mother or grandmother because she looked older than her age. Her senior year, she and fellow students went on auditions in New York City, but Hennessey didn't get any parts. "Being plus-sized [and young] at the time, I was never going to get hired in New York to play the mother in *The Glass Menagerie*," she recalls.

She moved to Chicago and began taking improvisational comedy classes at The Second City. To make ends meet, she sold programs and T-shirts in the theater. She met current and future *Saturday Night Live* cast members, like Rachel Dratch and Chris Farley. Her acting teacher was Tina Fey, who suggested that Hennessey's classical training was getting in the way of her sketch comedy. Hennessey loved rehearsing too much to feel at home in improv. Fey, who would go on to become a *Saturday Night Live* "Weekend Update" host and an Emmy-winning comic actress, dealt Hennessey's young acting career its death blow with six words: "You're not cut out for improv."

Hennessey was crushed. Acting had been her first love since she was a child. Still, she knew that between the difficulty she had getting parts and Fey's brutal advice, she would need to pivot to something more sustainable—at least in the near term. A job search in Chicago brought her to the Leukemia & Lymphoma Society, accompanying charity runners to marathons around the world. She ran the Vancouver Marathon in honor of a friend's son who'd died from leukemia. But with her acting dreams shattered and boredom taking root, Hennessey opted to take another risk: on a whim, she applied for the Peace Corps, requesting a volunteer post somewhere in Africa. It would be a homecoming of sorts, as Hennessey was born in England to parents who were in the Royal Air Force. Hennessey's father had moved the family to Zambia for a job when she was a toddler, and the family lived in southern Africa for eight years. The Peace Corps sent her to Cameroon, in West Africa, where she learned French and eventually settled in a Muslim village in the middle of the country. Living on a lake, she taught sex education and HIV prevention, paddling on boats from village to village to demonstrate male contraception using wooden penises. She ended up seeing many types of health challenges. "People kept bringing their sick kids to me, and I couldn't really do anything about it," she recalls.

When Hennessey's service ended, she returned to the US and began a two-year nursing program at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, with the goal of returning to Africa. A year into her degree, in 2007, Hennessey had an opportunity through Johns Hopkins to study forensic nursing in South Africa for 12 weeks. She worked in a mortuary, reviewing the autopsy files of women who'd been raped and killed.

Despite the grim work she was doing, the country captured Hennessey's heart. "I realized this is the place I really wanted to be when I finished my nursing degree," she says. "There is something about the people, environment, and spirit of Africa that makes you come alive, that challenges you in ways you never thought possible while at the same time showing incredible beauty, love, and compassion."

Hennessey returned to South Africa in 2008, but couldn't practice as a nurse. The South African Nursing Council didn't recognize her degree because it was a two-year degree. After a year of calls and letters to the nursing council, Hennessey, running out of money, gave up on working directly with patients as a nurse in South Africa. She instead went to work for a succession of government agencies and nonprofit organizations, joining a national effort to digitize patient records—which were still being recorded and maintained manually in hospitals and clinics—in order to report HIV and tuberculosis data to international databases. She helped design the curriculum South Africa uses to train healthcare workers on how to use the registry, and oversaw its implementation in more than 4,500 healthcare facilities and prisons. In February 2022, she joined Panagora, supporting strategic information activities across South Africa, as well as in Eswatini (formerly Swaziland), Botswana, Angola, Lesotho, and Namibia. She says the impact of poor infrastructure, including rolling blackouts, "negatively impacts years of progress and gains made in the digital health and informatics space."

"[It was] a bit naïve or dramatic, but I always said I wanted to become rich and famous so I could use my fame for good."

Hennessey, who turns 50 next year, says her job is 100 percent remote; she'd eventually like to get back to working directly with healthcare providers in the clinics. Whenever she's hamming it up while training nurses and doctors on "something as boring as an information system," she's applying her acting training. She also dreams of one day launching a radio program about her adventures as a single expat dating in South Africa. Perhaps she'll join a community theater production.

"I do have this secret desire in my head to be onstage some day and to use my fame for good," she says. "[But] I'm happy with what I'm doing, and I have loved every opportunity."

CLASS NOTES

SHARE YOUR STORY!
We want to hear what you've been up to. Send us your news and photos at **bu.edu/cfa/shareyourstory**, and we'll share the highlights here.

1960s

Susan Surman ('60), an award-winning playwright and actress, published the romance novel *Trade Off* (Indigo Sea Press, 2022).

Barbara Owen ('62) had a 40-year tenure as director of music at the First Religious Society of Newburyport, Mass. In January 2023, the First Religious Society, with the support of the Methuen Memorial Music Hall, celebrated her 90th birthday with ten distinguished speakers and seven well-known organists. She was honored for her accomplishments in organ building, preservation, scholarship, history, and music. Owen is curator and founder of the Organ Library of the Boston American Guild of Organists located at Boston University.

Micaela Amateau Amato ('68) had her work featured in exhibitions in 2022 and 2023, including *Silver Stories*, *SOONOQO*, *Mi Korazon Sospira*, and *Neti Neti*. She also created the illustrations for the book *Zazu Dreams: Between the Scarab and the Dung Beetle, A Cautionary Fable for the Anthropocene Era* (Eifrig Publishing, 2017) by Cara Judea Alhadeff.

Carolyn Michel ('68) portrayed all five family members in the play *Family Secrets*, which explores the joys and tribulations of parenting, childbirth, and octogenarian romance. Michel's husband, Howard Millman, directed the play, which ran in March 2023 at the Sarasota Jewish Theatre.

Vernon Miller ('69) is a composer, arranger, songwriter, producer, teacher, and performing musician whose work has been released on Warner Brothers, Epic/Sony, and various independent US and European record labels. Miller, along with writing/recording collaborator Jeiris Cook, released a five-song EP, *The Jeiris Cook/Vern Miller Project*. In 2023, Miller also published an academic paper, "'The Sound Of Silence': A Comparative Analysis of the Recordings by Simon and Garfunkel and Disturbed."

Sophie Yarin

KAMAL AHMAD ('16) curated *Intersections* at Boston's Piano Craft Gallery in June 2023, a first-of-its-kind group exhibition of recent painting graduates. The show brought together works by graduate students from MFA programs around Boston, including from BU. Ahmad relished the challenge of curating works across 4 schools, 7 programs, and by 43 graduate students—24 of which were from BU.

1970s

Stewart F. Lane ('73) and his wife Bonnie Comley received the Ambassadors for the Arts Award as founders of BroadwayHD at the 2023 Chita Rivera Awards, presented at NYU Skirball Center for the Performing Arts in May 2023.

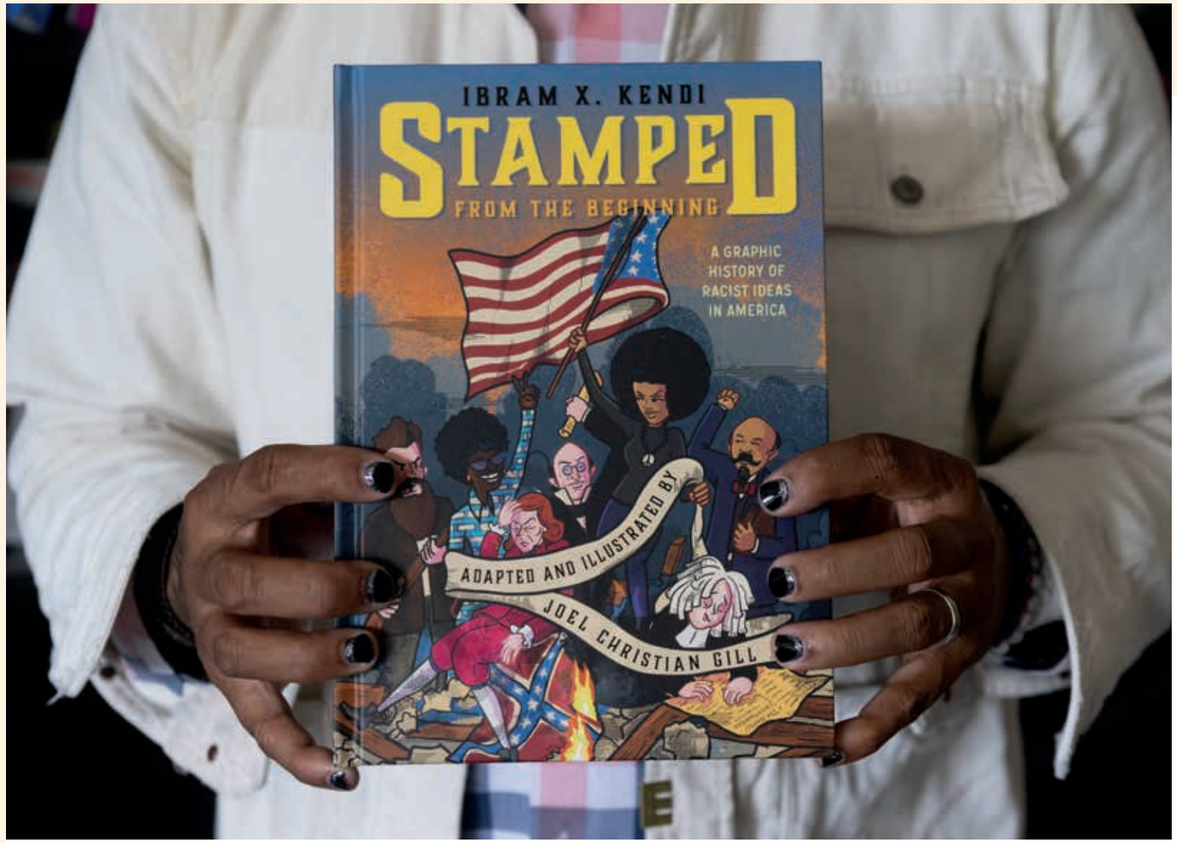
Phil Brown ('74) directed the postpandemic revival of the Swinging Epiphany Celebration with the Swing North Big Band in St. Johnsbury, Vt., in January 2023. Brown originally conceived Swinging Epiphany in 2012. The "lessons and carols" celebration features the traditional Christmas and Epiphany scriptures interspersed with jazz carols and swing standards performed by an 18-piece big band. Swinging Epiphany was offered annually in communities across northern Vermont and New Hampshire through January 2020.

Lesley Cohen ('74) had her new work featured in a solo exhibit, *Light Matters*, at Bromfield Gallery in Boston, Mass., in April 2023. The series of drawings serves as a metaphor for the possibilities of joy that can be received as people reenter and reengage with the world outside following pandemic-era lockdowns.

Boaz Sharon ('76), a professor of piano at CFA, performed a concert in March 2023 in Brasilia, Brazil, for Casa Thomas Jefferson, a nonprofit organization dedicated to promoting understanding between Brazilians and Americans.

Robert Stuart ('77) had a solo exhibit, his tenth, which opened in November 2023 at the Reynolds Gallery in Richmond, Va.

Julie Ridge ('78) is featured in Zac Norrington's documentary *Breathe*, about her double swim around Manhattan and life navigation of bipolar disorder. The film has been presented at the Annual ReelAbilities Film Festival. In addition, her one-woman show, *Bipolar & the English Channel*, was produced multiple times off-Broadway and was presented at Temple Israel in Sharon, Mass., and at the Mary D. Fisher Theatre in Sedona, Ariz., in May 2023.



Cydney Scott

JOEL CHRISTIAN GILL ('04) is chair of CFA's visual narrative graduate program. He collaborated with Ibram X. Kendi, the founding director of BU's Center for Antiracist Research, on the new graphic version of Kendi's book *Stamped from the Beginning*, a nonfiction story of the origins of systemic racism in America.

William Spencer ('78,'85), a published composer, plays bassoon in the Hopkins Symphony Orchestra in Baltimore, Md. Spencer is a business analyst working on a large-scale system modernization project for the Maryland State Department of Education.

Marsha Goldberg ('79) exhibited her work in a solo show, *Authentic Reminiscence of Light*, at Adah Rose Gallery in Kensington, Md., in summer 2023. Goldberg also showed her work in the small group show, *Abstract Configurations*, at West Strand Art Gallery in Kingston, N.Y., in summer 2023.

Patricia Randell ('79) played the female lead in the sold-out reading of Paula Pizzi-Black's play *The Spaces in Between* in February 2023, as part of the LAByrinth Theater Company's Barn Series at 59E59 Theaters in New York City.

1980s

Jason Alexander ('81, Hon.'95) directed *The Cottage* on Broadway, featuring a cast including Eric McCormick, Laura Bell Bundy, and Lilly Cooper, which ran July through October 2023. The comedy tells a tale of sex, betrayal, and love in 1920s London after the revelation of an extramarital affair. Alexander was also featured in Hulu's *History of the World: Part II*, which premiered in March 2023.

Ronna Kress ('81,'84) was the casting director for the Netflix romantic comedy *Your Place or Mine* featuring Reese Witherspoon and Ashton Kutcher.

Margo (Fisher) Lemieux ('81) is a professor emerita at Lasell University. She coordinated an exhibit at the Bảo tàng Mỹ thuật Đà Nẵng –Danang Fine Arts Museum in Vietnam in April 2023 featuring 38 artworks by members of the Boston Printmakers artists

Eight Boston University alums worked on the new Broadway play *Good Night, Oscar*, starring Sean Hayes, which opened at the Belasco Theater on April 24, 2023. The Terriers involved in the production include, from left: **JILLIAN OLIVER ('06)** (stage manager), **DAVID LURIE-PERRET ('01)** (production stage manager), **JOHN ZDROJESKI ('12)** (cast, playing the role of George Gershwin), **GREG BIRD ('14)** (deck automation), and **ALEX WYSE ('09)** (cast, playing the role of Max Weinbaum). Not pictured: **KEN ELLIOT ('00)** (associate lighting designer), **ALEX BRANDWINE ('09)** (advance carpenter), and **ANA ROSE GREENE ('04)** (production manager).

Greg Mills

association, around the theme of "peace, love, and understanding." The exhibit also featured a show of works by artist and Vietnam War veteran David Thomas called "Finding Parkinson's," in which he grapples with his experience with the disease. Thomas is the founder of the nonprofit Indochina Arts Partnership, which promotes cultural exchange between Vietnam and the US.

Roman Alis ('83) was a company actor with the Virginia Shakespeare Festival and helped found the York County School of the Arts in Williamsburg, Va. He has recently retired as a theater arts educator with the York County Public Schools and The College of William & Mary. He actively devotes his time to playing piano for children's hospitals.

Paul Carlson ('85,'98), a pianist, was the visiting artist at the Thurston Consort's concert in April 2023. The concert, held at the Rollstone Congregational Church in Fitchburg, Mass., celebrated the music of New England composers Amy Beach, Margaret Ruthven Lang, and Jennifer L. Jones. Carlson is music director of the Peregrine Consort, an ensemble that presents the Bach Cantatas on period instruments, along with other works, and teaches at the Lexington Music School in Lexington, Mass.

Brett Johnson (BUTI'79, CFA'85) joined the Emmanuel Episcopal Church of Wakefield, Mass., as its 21st rector. Johnson leads the church's weekly in-person and virtual worship as well as weekly evening prayer.

Mark Ortwein ('89) has been assistant principal bassoon in the Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra for 20 years and has done solo appearances and recordings with many different groups, including playing John Williams' *Escapades for Alto Saxophone and Orchestra* with Williams conducting the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra. Ortwein has a newly released jazz album, *It Was Time*, which can be heard on all streaming platforms.

1990s

Peter Paige ('91) is the coshowrunner of the seventh season of ABC's *Station 19* after being the executive producer for the sixth season of the *Grey's Anatomy* spin-off.

Lauren Ambrose (BUTI'94,'95) portrays Adult Van in season two of Showtime's *Yellowjackets*. The series follows a team of high school girls' soccer players who survive a plane crash deep in the remote Canadian wilderness. Ambrose also played Dorothy Turner in Apple TV+'s M. Night Shyamalan series *Servant*, which concluded in March 2023.

Sedrick Huckaby (BUTI'95, CFA'97) and Letitia Huckaby, artists and cofounders of Kinfolk House, a collaborative project space that inhabits a 100-year-old historic home where community and art converge, participated in a June 2023 virtual event hosted by the BU Office of the Senior Diversity Officer and CFA, which was moderated by Dean Harvey Young. The Huckabys discussed the legacy, mission, and current projects at Kinfolk House and how the values and vision of the nonprofit align with the commemoration of Juneteenth.

Sue Wagner ('97) was nominated for two 2023 Tony Awards for her work as producer of both *Ain't No Mo'* and *The Sign in Sidney Brustein's Window*. *Ain't No Mo'* was nominated for Best Play and *The Sign in Sidney Brustein's Window* was nominated for Best Revival of a Play.

Nicole Pond ('99) is a lecturer in art and art education at CFA's School of Visual Arts. She was recognized as one of the recipients of the Belmont Public Schools 2023 Outstanding Teacher Awards. Outstanding Teachers are recognized for their excellence in the classroom and for consistently making a difference in the lives of Belmont's students. Pond has been an elementary art teacher in Belmont, Mass., for more than 20 years and is a practicing visual artist.

2000s

Moritz von Stuelpnagel ('00) directed Danny DeVito and his daughter Lucy in a premiere production of Theresa Rebeck's *I Need That* at the Roundabout Theatre Company on Broadway in fall 2023.

Chris Chou ('01), **Sachiko Akiyama ('02)**, and **Kayla Mohammadi ('02)** had work featured in their group exhibition *From the Heart*, which ran in February and March 2023 at AVA Gallery and Art Center in Lebanon, N.H.

Philippe Treuille (BUTI'01) presented the world premiere of his composition, *Live Forever*, in May 2023 at the DiMenna Center for Classical Music in New York City. *Live Forever*, a concerto for flute and orchestra, celebrates the resilience of diverse people confronting challenges together. The concert also featured *Rejuvenation in Red* and *Tessellations*, two other compositions by Treuille.

Missy Mazzoli (BUTI'98, CFA'02) is the Mead Composer-in-Residence at the Chicago Symphony Orchestra and one of the first two women to be commissioned by The Metropolitan Opera. Mazzoli returned to Boston University Center for New Music in March 2023 for a three-day residency to engage with students.

Ryan Guzzo Purcell ('04) is founding artistic director of The Williams Project, a national professional theatre ensemble. Purcell directed Intiman Theatre and The Williams Project's coproduction of *The Sign in Sidney Brustein's Window* in February 2023 at Erickson Theatre in Seattle, Wash. This was the first professional production of the show in Seattle.

Teresa Wakim ('05), Grammy-winning soprano, was the featured guest vocalist in the Musicians of The Old Post Road's two productions of *Baroque Diva: A Tribute to Faustina Bordoni* in Wayland, Mass., and at Boston's Old South Church in March 2023.

Yevgeny Kutik (BUTI'00, CFA'07) was a guest soloist at Mozart at McClaren, formerly known as Festival Amadeus. The annual classical music festival was presented

BECCA JEWETT ('15), **JON VELLANTE ('16)**, **AJA M. JACKSON ('18)**, and **VICTORIA OMOREGIE ('22)** worked on Boston's SpeakEasy Stage Company's production of Jackie Sibblies Drury's acclaimed comedy *Fairview* in February and March 2023. Vellante played the character Jimbo, Omoregie (right) portrayed the character Keisha, while Jewett was the production's costume designer and Jackson was the lighting designer.

Nile Scott Studios

by Glacier Symphony at Flathead Valley Community College in Montana in June 2023.

Rachel Lambert ('08) directed the film *Sometimes I Think About Dying*, which screened at the Sundance Film Festival in January 2023. The film tells a story of love for the socially awkward and emotionally challenged.

Clare Maloney (BUTI'03, CFA'08) released her debut album in December 2022 with her rock band, Clare Maloney & The Great Adventure. The debut LP *Daybreaker* was hailed as "stunning" by *Relix* magazine, praising its "brilliant vocals, rocking band, and polished songwriting." Maloney got her start on the opera stage at CFA and went on to perform at Carnegie Hall, Lincoln Center, National Sawdust, and at concert halls throughout Europe and Asia. She eventually found her way back to her roots as a rock musician, sharing the stage as a first call vocalist with members of The Grateful Dead, Jefferson Starship, Allman Brothers Band, Hall & Oates, and the E Street Band along the way. Her new original band can be seen and heard in music clubs and at festivals across the country. Find the tour schedule and album at claremaloney.com.

EGLE JARKOVA ('16) founded the international summer music festival Vivace Vilnius in Vilnius, Lithuania, in 2012. The event brings musicians from all over Europe and the United States to Vilnius for master classes and concerts, all free of charge. In 2022, the festival's 10th anniversary, the event brought many sponsored students fleeing war-torn Ukraine to Lithuania. The festival provided scholarships and an additional stipend for transportation, lodging, and food for those Ukrainian students whose lives had been interrupted. Jarkova's goal is to provide opportunities for young musicians to advance their studies and their musical growth while making new connections and creating lasting memories.

2010s

Shannon Chrisco ('12) has been teaching elementary visual art in Kentucky for 18 years, and was awarded the Kentucky Art Education Association Elementary Art Teacher of the Year award for the 2022–2023 school year.

Alex Neumann ('09), the lead sound designer for *Into the Woods*, was nominated for the 2023 Best Sound Design of a Musical Tony Award. Neumann won the 2023 Outstanding Sound Design of a Musical Drama Desk Award for the production.

Jonny Watkins ('09) cofounded and is a director of the National Youth and National Children's Concert Bands, leading youth wind bands in the UK. In addition to a busy freelance performing and teaching career, he also runs two nonprofit children's bands in his hometown of Harpenden, Hertfordshire.

Alex Wyse ('09) directed the LGBTQIA+-themed horror-comedy *Summoning Sylvia*. It tells the story of a gay bachelor party that takes an eerie turn when sinister spirits are summoned. He also helped create the Emmy-nominated digital series *Indoor Boys*.

2020s

Kevin Dunn ('23), Alyssa Jewell ('23), Sasha Marlene Nemi Lato ('23), Nia Safarr Banks ('23), and **Steven Velasquez ('23)** are five CFA School of Theatre MFA design & production alums who presented at the 2023 National Design Portfolio Review, an introduction of talented emerging designers to the industry.

Ami Okazaki ('23) was selected by the United States Institute for Theatre Technology (USITT) Prague Quadrennial 2023 jury and curators to be featured in the June 2023 USITT PQ 2023 Emerging Exhibit in Prague, Czech Republic.

Rachel Juszczak ('12,'14), Aija Rēķe ('15), Jennifer Wang ('19,'25), Caroline Samuels ('22), Milos Bjelica ('23), Valentina Pulido Pardo ('24), and **Dan Casso ('26)** performed in "Fanfare for Composing Women," a concert that celebrated the great contributions of women composers throughout history, which took place in June 2023 at Congregation Kehillath Israel in Brookline, Mass.

Alicia Link ('12) showed her multimedia art installation, *when it starts, we will let the host know you are waiting*, at The Penn State Berks Freyberger Gallery in spring 2023. The installation addresses inequity through the visual language of the gynecologist's office and waiting room.

Gail Shalan ('12) and **Erin Ruth Walker ('13)** narrated the audiobook version of *House Party*, edited by Justin A. Reynolds (Penguin Random House Audio, 2023).

Brittany Lasch ('16) was appointed assistant professor of music in trombone at Indiana University Jacobs School of Music in August 2023. Lasch has appeared as a soloist with ensembles such as the US Army Band "Pershing's Own" and the Rodney Marsalis Philadelphia Big Brass. She also performs as principal trombone of the Detroit Opera Orchestra.

D. Matvejev

Caroline Campeau

THROUGH THE LAPTOP ORCHESTRA HE CREATED, ELDAD TSABARY HAS FOUND A HOME IN ELECTRO-ACOUSTIC MUSIC

By Steve Holt

SOUND DESIGNERS and creators of electroacoustic music—which requires the aid of electronic technology, such as a computer—"are masters of solitary studio work," according to Eldad Tsabary, chair and associate professor of music at Concordia University in Montreal. The Concordia Laptop Orchestra (known as CLOrk) brings those musicians "out of their dungeons" and into a world of improvisation and collaboration with each other and audiences that is redefining the boundaries of electroacoustic music, says Tsabary, who founded the group in 2010.

After serving in the Israeli Defense Force—he grew up in Petah Tikva—and taking three months to backpack in the Canadian Yukon, Tsabary ('13) embarked on a journey of musical discovery: he'd started playing the organ at six and later switched to the flute, concentrating on flute performance at the Rimon School of Jazz and Contemporary Music; he moved to New York City to study composition under renowned music theorist Carl Schachter at The New School's Mannes School of Music; and he started a PhD in composition at City University of New York. Over time, his interests shifted, from composing music for and playing traditional instruments to more electronic forms of sound. He earned a continuing education degree in computer-assisted sound design from Montreal-based Musitechnic Formation in 2004 and started teaching courses on sound and electroacoustics at Concordia University in 2005.

Tsabary has found a home in the musical subgenre of electroacoustics. On his way to earning a doctorate in music education at CFA, he wrote his dissertation on ear training for electroacoustics. "BU was much more in line with my interest in music as a channel for community, for people, for collaboration," Tsabary reflects.

CLOrk, which Concordia students take as a course and follows in the footsteps of the pioneering laptop orchestra at Princeton University, allows Tsabary to bring together all his musical interests. The orchestra has performed at festivals around eastern Canada, the Hong Kong Freespace Jazz Fest, Cambridge Festival, and many others. With their laptops open in front of them and speakers surrounding the audience, musicians create sounds and beats in audio softwares of their choosing. Sometimes a musical set will have a predefined structure to prevent it from becoming a "ball of sound," and sometimes Tsabary conducts. But frequently, he prefers to see what the musicians come up with on their own.

"What I find most driving is getting a platform for cooperation," he says. "I have my ideas, but I don't want to force them on others in this setting. I'm much more interested in the ground-up process of how people find ways to cooperate...and make sound together, or new ways to interact. Sound exploration is fun, but the human part to me is kind of like the glue."

Boston University College of Fine Arts

855 Commonwealth Avenue
Boston, Massachusetts 02215
bu.edu/cfa

Nonprofit
US Postage
PAID
Boston MA
Permit No. 1839