Boston University College of Fine Arts Magazine

Summer 2024

CFA

A Painting's Long Journey Home

The Art of Audiobook Narration

CFA Alum Runs Puzzles for the *New York Times*

BOSTON UNIVERSITY

ON THE COVER: Photo of Robert T. Freeman by Cydney Scott

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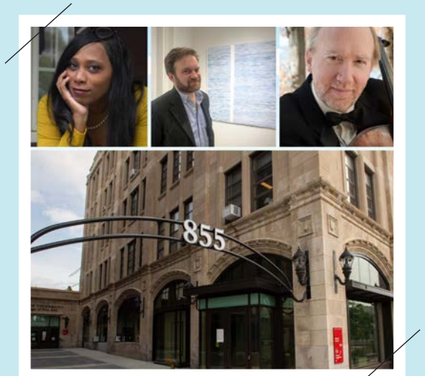

What do a playwright, a painter, and a cellist all have in common? They're the new leaders of CFA's three schools! Award-winning playwright Kirsten Greenidge will be director of the School of Theatre, artist Marc Schepens ('12) will lead the School of Visual Arts, and cellist Michael Reynolds will lead the School of Music. All will begin their roles on July 1.

@buarts

Natasha Moustache

A NOTE FROM HARVEY

The professor's lessons inspired a lifetime of artistry. Last year, a group of visual arts alumni who graduated in the 1970s emailed me. Looking back on their 50-year careers as professional artists, they found themselves returning again and again to the words of a former mentor, Reed Kay, a professor emeritus of painting. Professor Kay was stern but supportive. He was generous with his time. He cared about his students. He was a talented artist who led by example. He was a master teacher.

The alumni wanted to celebrate Professor Kay, whose teachings they continued to hold dear. After a series of conversations, they decided that they would chip in, along with Kay's family, and create an endowed prize fund in honor of their favorite teacher. The Reed Kay Prize would be a merit-based award given annually to a continuing undergraduate student and provide financial assistance with materials costs.

Not long before his 99th birthday, I invited Professor Kay to a reception where I honored him with the CFA Dean's Distinguished Service Award and surprised him by announcing the creation of the Kay Prize.

Energetic, thoughtful, and critical of universities that champion STEM disciplines over pursuits of artistic inquiry, Professor Kay captivated the room. The alumni in attendance became college students again for an evening. Everyone else (myself included) was gifted an audience with a legend. The room was electric.

Every day, inspiration happens in CFA classrooms. I am in awe of the many ways our faculty seek to nurture the potential in their students. André de Quadros, a professor of music and music education, helps incarcerated students regain their voices through our Prison Arts Program. Karin Hendricks, chair of music education, and Michelle LaCourse, chair of the string department, are winners of the University's highest teaching awards and model excellence in every class session.

We have all been profoundly impacted for the better by a teacher or mentor. I would love to hear about a lesson you learned from a BU faculty or staff member that continues to resonate. Please email me at **cfadean@bu.edu**.

If you would like to contribute to the Reed Kay Prize (or contribute to another fund supporting student scholarships or urgent needs), I hope you will consider making an online donation today by visiting **bu.edu/cfa/give**.

Harvey Young, Dean of CFA

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

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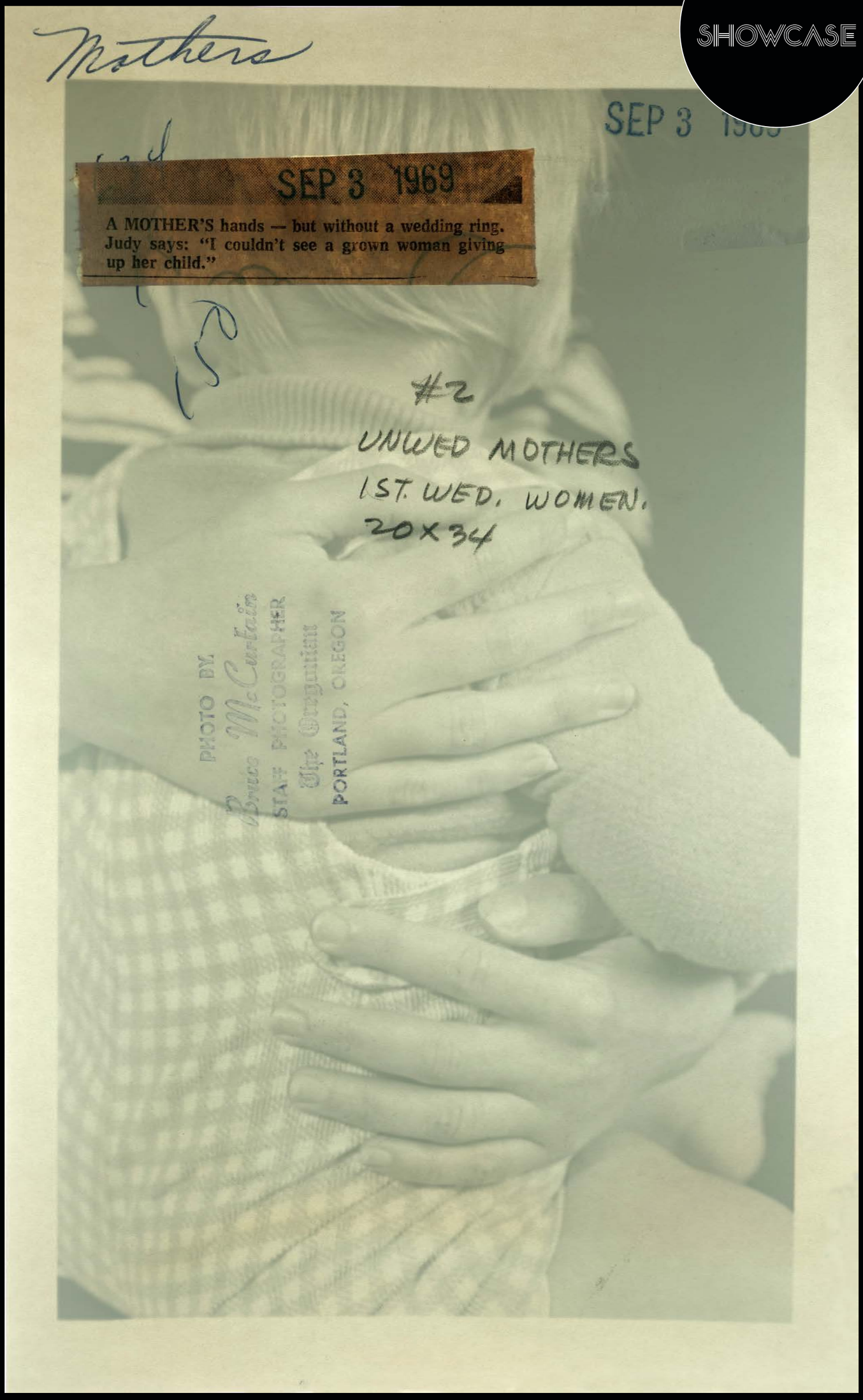
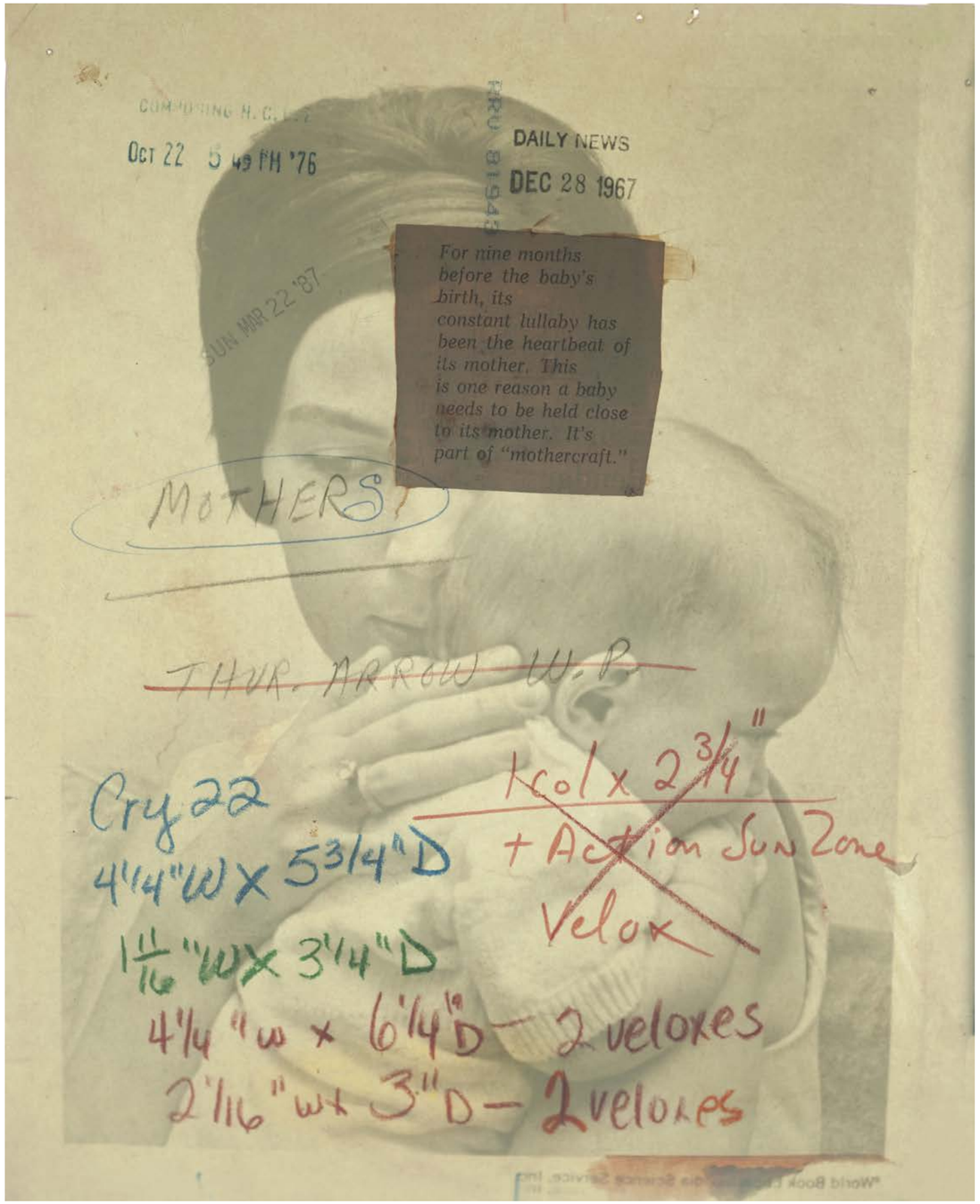
Painter Robert T. Freeman ('71,'81) has his 1981 piece *Black Tie* installed inside the Massachusetts governor's office



IMAGES OF MOTHERHOOD

Toni Pepe finds inspiration and meaning in 20th-century newspaper photography

By Marc Chalufour



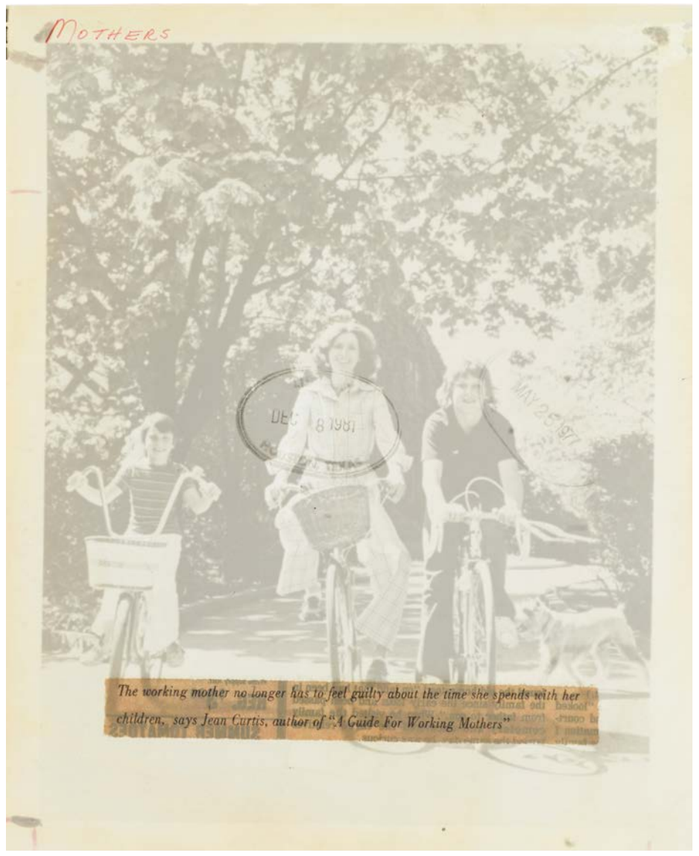
Previous spread:
Unwed Mothers **(2020) Archival Inkjet; 13 x 16 in.**
Left: ***Mothercraft*** **(2020) Archival Inkjet; 28 x 35 in.**
Below: ***Teenagers*** **(2023) Archival Inkjet; 35 x 28 in.**

Toni Pepe's studio is packed with boxes of vintage photographs. She's collected entire albums from her family. Photos of total strangers come from flea markets, thrift stores, and online purchases. More arrive in the mail every week. Pepe's photography is often inspired by these old images. She references them when staging self-portraits and incorporates them into mixed-media works of art. "My work has always been loosely related to the family album," she says.

Becoming a mother in 2012 sharpened her focus. "It just felt natural to explore this new identity that comes with a lot of baggage. It was this marvelous, crazy, magical experience that I felt compelled to somehow unpack," says Pepe (MET'11), an assistant professor and chair of photography. She began by including her children in her photographs—and she contemplated new projects. One night in 2016, Pepe typed "mother and child" into an eBay search and discovered some old press photos. The images, abandoned when newspapers transitioned to digital archives or went bankrupt, provide glimpses of how mothers were viewed across the 20th century. Pepe began buying photos and thinking of ways to use them. In 2019, she launched an ongoing series: *Mothercraft*.

The press photos are distinct because the backs of each print bear the marks of a bygone era of journalism. Cursive pencil script communicates instructions to printers, rubber stamped dates create a timeline of usage, and typed captions explain the subject of each

All images courtesy of Toni Pepe



Left to right:
The Time She Spends (2022) Archival Inkjet; 28 x 35 in.

Off Playing Bridge (2020) Archival Inkjet; 28 x 35 in.

Mothers (2020) Archival Inkjet; 28 x 35 in.

image. "It was really the text that drew me in," she says. "They are like these little time capsules." Pepe makes her own photographs of the press photos by hanging them from a wire in her studio, backlit with strobes. The blast of light provides the contrast she needs to capture the image from one side and the text from the other in a single frame.

The name of the project comes from one of the first press photos that Pepe acquired. It's a yellowed print of a mother comforting her infant. A piece of newsprint, pasted to the back, reveals the text that accompanied the picture in the paper: "For nine months before the baby's birth, its constant lullaby has been the heartbeat of its mother. This is one reason a baby needs to be held close to its mother. It's part of 'mothercraft.'"

Another image in the series shows a bawling baby clutching the side of its crib. The caption reads, "Dennis O'Neal, 6 months, screaming for his mother who is off playing bridge." Pepe often uses the copywriters' words to title her pieces, including *Mothercraft*, *Off Playing Bridge*, *Test Tube Baby*, and *Illegitimate*.

"Sometimes they're hilarious, and other times they're incredibly upsetting," Pepe says of the captions. "I like when the text points toward a time period and the kind of belief and value system of that time." A 1941 photograph of a baby with its diaper around its feet illustrated a story about the childcare needs of women working during World War II. The child is identified as "A tiny inmate" at an emergency hostel. The caption for a 1969 photo reads, "A mother's hand—but without a wedding ring."

"I'm really interested in how photography has shaped what our idea is of a mother and what a mother should look like and how she should behave," Pepe says. The series now includes more than 100 images, and they reveal many historical stereotypes and tropes. Captions focus on marital status, career decisions, birth control, and gendered parenting roles. "These identities maybe aren't created by the press photos, but it's one way in which they were disseminated," she says.

Pepe was also drawn to the physical nature of press photos. They've been handled and scribbled upon, stained and creased. "They're not precious," she says. "They start as objects in the world, and I want them to end as objects in the world." To accomplish that, she prints them on thin kozo paper, made from the paper mulberry plant, then pins each print in a frame so it can hang loosely and bend and curl naturally. She prints some in a large format, 35 or even 50 inches wide, and groups others in grids of smaller prints.

More than 30 images from the series are on display at the Blue Sky Gallery in Portland, Ore., this year. One piece, *Mothers*, is part of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, exhibition *Tender Loving Care*, which runs through July 2025. Pepe has also begun thinking about designing a book.

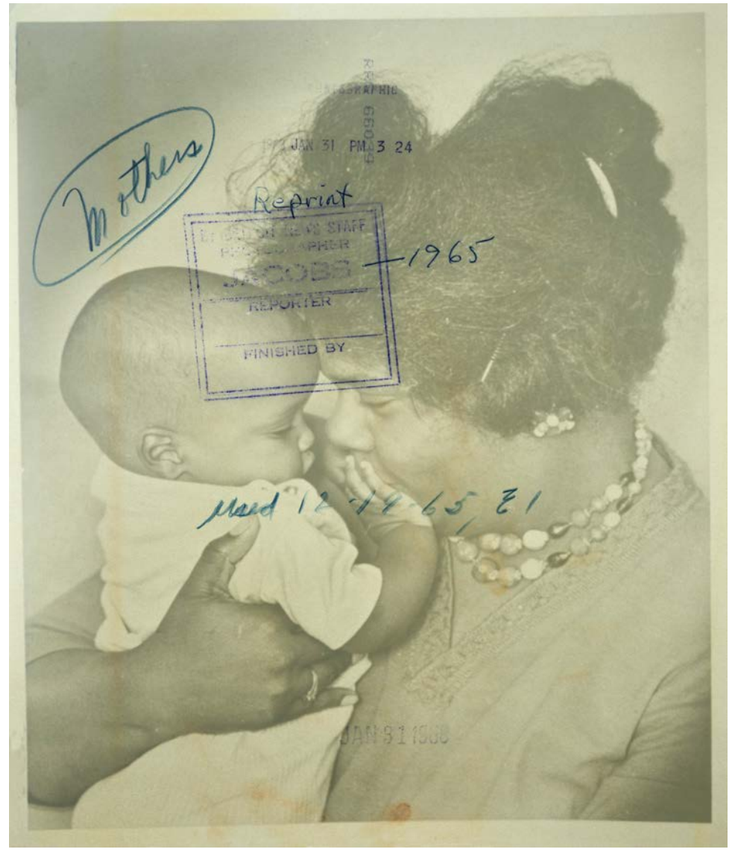
As *Mothercraft* has expanded, Pepe's changing experiences as a mother have shaped the project. "I'm starting to turn toward other kinds of imagery, and thinking more broadly about time and our experience of it," she says. "That's one of the reasons I wanted to explore motherhood—because my own experience of time was totally disrupted." Press photos of the cosmos, calendars, and timepieces have joined the images of moms and babies.

Assembling *Mothercraft* altered Pepe's understanding of time in another way.

A recurring theme across the series is abortion. "I would read these stories and I felt kind of distant. I was looking to the past and thinking, 'These poor women—what a terrible time,'" Pepe says. There's coded language used to describe one woman's death "under strange circumstances." Another image, depicting a happy young woman playing on a beach, accompanies a story about the arrest of her doctors on charges of homicide "as a result of an abortion."

When the US Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade* in 2022, ruling that abortion is not a constitutional right, Pepe began looking at her project in a very different light. "My relationship to time is different. Time doesn't necessarily mean moving forward, doesn't necessarily mean progress."

"I'm really interested in how photography has shaped what our idea is of a mother and what a mother should look like and how she should behave."



"I love coming-of-age stories—how we're all healing that inner child," says stage director Rosalind Bevan.

RISING STAR

A Directing Hit

By Steve Holt

ROSALIND BEVAN SMILES widely, her eyes glimmering with joy. She's talking about theater. The independent director, producer, and casting director of stage productions started acting while in high school, but soon imagined herself giving other cast members performance notes. Her theater teacher complimented her eye for direction, and eventually Bevan ('19) tried her hand at it, codirecting her senior musical. She fell in love with it. At CFA, she directed productions as an undergraduate. But she didn't *entirely* give up acting; she registered for physical acting courses—where movement is the primary mode of storytelling—that would help her connect with actors. "I needed a language, a way for myself physically," she says.

Right out of college, Bevan joined Boston's Huntington Theatre as a casting and producing apprentice while also working on side projects. In October 2023, she directed the CFA Fringe Festival production of Tarell Alvin McCraney's *Marcus; or the Secret of Sweet*, about a young gay man coming of age in Louisiana. That same month, feeling the urge to branch out as an artist and pursue her directing dream, Bevan moved to Los Angeles. Projects are already rolling in. Early in 2024, Bevan was associate director of IAMA Theatre Company's production of Catya McMullen's *Arrowhead*. This summer, she is associate directing Mike Lew's *tiny father* at the Geffen Playhouse, working with director Moritz von Stuelpnagel ('00).

"I am so, so honored and grateful to be part of the Boston theater community," she says. "It's so rich, but I was just ready to be flung out to see who I am as an artist in the world."

What does your typical day look like as an independent director?

I read a lot of plays. I'm trying to figure out what works speak to me and what I want to pitch to other theaters, making connections with playwrights, going to readings. What are my friends doing next? What do we want to produce? How can we raise money? How can I make a connection with another theater out here? Do they need assistance? [I'm] really just working my artistic community, which is a hard but exciting thing.

Favorite stories to direct?

I am super drawn to the messy and the complicated—and finding the beauty in the messy and complicated. I keep thinking about what is igniting the lover and the fighter in me. I think love is really at the core of any story, if you look hard enough. I'm also drawn to resilience and legacy and building something, so I love coming-of-age stories—how we're all healing that inner child, that part of us that we tend to shove away without even knowing.

What do you love about the stage?

It's literally different every single night, even if it's happened for a long run. There's something about that collective experience, that sharing of energy, that saves us a little bit.

Ken Yotsukura

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

SOUND BITES

"I'm proud of the actors. Every time I walked on the line in New York or LA, I was always amazingly inspired and grateful, just blown away by the solidarity and strength of our artists. I think one thing [the Alliance of Motion Picture and Television Producers] didn't realize is that actors have always hustled.... This wasn't new."

MICHELLE HURD ('88), a member of the SAG/AFTRA (Screen Actors Guild–American Federation of Television and Radio Artists) negotiating committee, spoke with *Bostonia* in November 2023 about the strike settlement.

PERFORMANCE

Back to the Big Apple

School of Music students, including violinist **An-Chi Lin ('27)**, above, returned to New York City in January 2024 for a special annual performance at Carnegie Hall's Weill Recital Hall.

Courtesy of Michelle Hurd; Craig Williston / QoolFoto (performance); Cydney Scott (Gill)

AWARDS

AN NAACP IMAGE AWARD NOMINATION

Stamped from the Beginning: A Graphic History of Racist Ideas in America, a graphic novel by Ibram X. Kendi, founder and director of BU's Center for Antiracist Research, the University's Andrew W. Mellon Professor in the Humanities, and a College of Arts & Sciences professor of history, and **Joel Christian Gill ('04)**, chair of CFA's visual narrative program, pictured left, was nominated for an NAACP Image Award. The awards honor the year's best in Black excellence in the fields of motion pictures, television, music, books, and podcasts.

Erin Ruth Walker

Patrick Stratner

Chris Sorensen

VOICE ACTORS GAIL SHALAN AND ERIN RUTH WALKER DISCUSS THE ART OF AUDIOBOOK NARRATION

Edited by Mara Sassoon

Gail Shalan

IN EARLY MARCH 2024, Gail Shalan walked the red carpet outside the Avalon, a historic Los Angeles nightclub and theater, among stars such as Sir Patrick Stewart and Nia Vardalos. They were making their way into the Audies, one of the premier awards for audiobook narration, where Shalan ('12) would go on to win Best Middle Grade Audiobook for the multicast recording of Claire Swinarski's *What Happened to Rachel Riley?* and Best Young Adult Audiobook for her solo narration of Jenny Laden's *This Terrible True Thing*. (Stewart won Best Autobiography/Memoir for his *Making It So* and Vardalos hosted the event.)

"It's really exciting," says Shalan, who recorded her first book in 2013. "This has been a big leveling up kind of year for me. I knew several books I did were in consideration for Audies, but I was pretty sure nothing was going to come through. It came as a huge surprise."

Shalan has become a prolific narrator since earning a graduate degree in acting from the Bristol Old Vic Theatre School in the UK. She draws from the training she received at the school and at CFA. "The tools I learned—commedia dell'arte, mask work, clown work, dialect training—have all helped me," she says. "For my master's degree, we worked a lot on dialects. As an audiobook narrator, I use them more often than not."

Erin Ruth Walker began narrating audiobooks in 2021, at one point turning to Shalan for advice about breaking into the industry. Now, she's narrated more than 40 books while acting for film and TV—recent credits include the TV series *Daisy Jones & the Six* and *The Consultant* on Amazon Prime and the romantic comedy *Which Brings Me to You*.

Walker ('13) especially enjoys narrating books for younger audiences. "Some of the prettiest books I've narrated have been children's books," she says. "I think there's also something about telling stories to younger audiences that allows me to tap into the childlike wonder. It makes me feel happy and alive and motivated in the [recording] booth when I'm telling those stories."

In 2023, Shalan and Walker teamed up as part of an ensemble cast of narrators for the audiobook version of the young adult novel *House Party*, edited by justin a. reynolds. They came together again in February 2024 to discuss their experiences in the audiobook industry, how their acting education helps, and key things they consider when it comes to effective narration.

Erin Ruth Walker: Gail, was voiceover always where you knew you wanted to go? How did you find your way to audiobooks?

Gail Shalan: I moved to New York right after graduation. I was really floundering when it came to how to get a foot in the door. But then I got an email inviting New York City–based alumni of the London Academy of Music & Dramatic Arts program I did for study abroad to Audible Studios to learn from the legendary narrators Scott Brick and the late Katy Kellgren about the Audiobook Creation Exchange (ACX), where indie rights holders and authors can find narrators and hire them directly.

I was mesmerized by Katy. She invited me to sit with her on the train back to Penn Station. She spoke about how she loves her job as a narrator because it allows her to have a family, a reliable income, and flexibility in her own schedule. She was like, "I get to play all the parts, do all the voices." And I thought, this is exactly what I've been looking for.

I went through ACX, and I booked my first project there pretty quickly. But I did maybe only six projects over the next four years. And then I went to grad school in the UK, where I narrated a little bit. I got my first Audible UK project because they needed an American voice.

ERW: I felt similarly when I graduated. All I wanted to do is tell stories, and I'd do it however anyone would let me. But I didn't know how to open doors in any part of this industry.

GS: Coming back to the States, I thought, okay, this is something I want to fully pursue. In 2019, I built a home studio in my closet.

ERW: At the height of the pandemic, there was no acting work, and I thought maybe this is the time to start investigating voiceover, and specifically audiobooks. I started seeking out people for advice. I looked for coaches to get some training, because it is very different than on-camera work or theater, which is what I'd been doing. I also built a studio in a closet. I think it's time to upgrade that.

GS: It'll change your life. Do it.

ERW: Yeah, it's kind of a cave right now. [Laughs.] I booked my first audiobook with Audible Studios. It's still part time for me, because I do pursue an on-camera career. But it's really changed things for me. Audiobook narration has allowed me to have a creative and artistic life. I'm very grateful to the audiobook community. They are some of the most lovely, kindest people I've ever met.

GS: Isn't that true?

ERW: Everyone is just so warm and open, and there's no gatekeeping.

GS: Would you agree that this is quite a self-selecting avenue of creative performance?

ERW: One hundred percent. I think this is a part of the industry that weeds people out pretty quickly. It's hard—not just physically hard, but it's a mentally hard job because you have to be by yourself in a small space for hours. A lot of the work is self-directed. You have to just be like, okay, we're going to keep going, and you don't get a break.

GS: I think you hit on a lot of what I've also experienced. The solitude thing—you have to learn how to create in a vacuum and not feel alone. I think that the generosity of our community actually may come from that.

ERW: I have a technical question. It's something I think about a lot. What are things that you do to keep your voice healthy? It's just that I had no vocal stamina. When you're in [theater] school, you're doing it every day. I think it's like when you work out every day, you take it for granted. Then, when you stop, you're like, whoa, I can't do a push-up anymore. I would say three sentences and be running out of breath. It really is a muscle in training.

GS: We as narrators are talking for, like, six hours a day, four to five days a week, and it's quite different than what you'd use onstage. I think it has shifted my lifestyle. I drink so much water. I make a lot of choices about what I'm going to do or consume in my free time based on how it might affect my vocal quality. Sleep makes a huge difference. I schedule around hormonal cycles because those affect the voice.

ERW: I get really bad allergies, so if I notice that my voice is starting to sound really different, I'll stop if I have the space. I do that, because sometimes when you listen to audiobooks, you can detect, oh, that was a pickup.

GS: You really learn your instrument when you play it that often. I think it's a sign of somebody who's very seasoned when they can make a pickup seamless. It's actually a musical thing. It's not an acting choice.

I had this really challenging project earlier on, a 500-page middle grade novel in verse. I knew how to do hours of verse on a Shakespearean stage, but I was like, how do I do this as a 12-year-old character, in my closet, and how do I not breathe? I coached with the amazing [narrator] Gabra Zackman. She told me to use everything I know about breath and allow it to be part of the performance. It sounds so obvious. And when you think about narrations that you love, it's like, of course, they're human.

ERW: I think the difference between really good narration and serviceable narration is using breath and actually talking to a specific single human being. I literally put up a picture of someone I know. I tell a story to that person because it changes my voice. All of a sudden, it's intimate and personal.

GS: Absolutely. It's using the power of your imagination to create these acting dynamics that we've been trained with.

ERW: More than any other part of the industry, I get the most questions about audiobooks. I think it feels the most mysterious for people.

GS: One of the questions I'll ask people who are interested in exploring it is, what draws you to this? If it's about wanting an easier way to make more money as an actor, it's very easy to explain that this is not what this will be. If it's about a love for this form of storytelling, then we have somewhere to start.

The task I give those folks—something somebody advised me at some point—is to put yourself in a very small, dark space and take a nice long book, 300 to 600 pages, and read it out loud, from start to finish, or for as long as you can. Every time you mess up, go back to the beginning of that sentence, and start again. If you've done this now for several hours back-to-back and you still like it, then keep doing it. If not, this is probably not going to be for you.

ERW: You're right. What's your favorite part about being an audiobook narrator?

GS: I found a lot of freedom with folks taking me for my word when I articulate who I am and what I have to offer. Rather than judging me by my book cover, they read a little deeper. It's not just how I see you based on your headshot and your name and where I think in the world your ancestors might be from.

Instead, there was real honor for my passions and skills. I didn't have a lot of ease in that during my [acting] training. I didn't fit in a lot of places. But in audiobooks, it felt like there was permission to fit in a lot of places that feel true. Have you had that experience?

ERW: I think you kind of hit the nail on the head. There is something really freeing about voiceover. It gets to be a true expression of your voice, your self, your soul; it's just you, without any of the trappings of your physical body. When I was starting out [in acting], I was told a lot, "Well, you don't look like what you are; what you look like is this." There is something about audiobooks that feels really special because that's all gone.

GS: I feel there's a larger pool of voices that we're hearing from in publishing.

ERW: I think the industry did something really great in that they realized, okay, we are telling these diverse stories, but our narrators are mostly still coming from a certain perspective. Maybe we should open that up to find narrators who can authentically portray these stories.

GS: And I think that in recent years there's also been a lot of agency and control given back to the authors in regard to this as audiobooks have risen in profile. What we really need is the level that decides what books are being published to actually be more diverse itself, but it has made a lot of progress. ●

> **"The tools I learned—commedia dell'arte, mask work, clown work, dialect training—have all helped me. As an audiobook narrator, I use them more often than not."**
>
> GAIL SHALAN

> **"There is something really freeing about voiceover. It gets to be a true expression of your voice, your self, your soul; it's just you, without any of the trappings of your physical body."**
>
> ERIN RUTH WALKER

Video game veteran Jonathan Knight wants to make the *New York Times* the premier destination for digital puzzles. Acquiring Wordle was just the start.

By Marc Chalufour

Photos by Gabriela Hasbun

word-guessing puzzle seems like an unlikely viral sensation, but Wordle was the right game (simple, satisfying, shareable) at the right time (late pandemic doldrums). Players get six attempts to guess a five-letter word. Color-coded tiles reveal which letters they've guessed correctly and which they haven't. Within a few minutes a player can solve the puzzle and share the now-iconic gray, yellow, and green results grid. For many fans, it's become a daily ritual.

Josh Wardle, the software engineer who designed the game for his partner, released it to the public in October 2021. Within three months, 300,000 people were playing each day. Within four months, Wardle was a millionaire.

Following a January 3, 2022, *New York Times* story about the phenomenon—"Wordle is a Love Story"—the number of players shot up to 2 million a day. One of the new converts was Jonathan Knight, senior vice president and head of games for the *Times*. "I woke up the next day, and the first thing I wanted to do was solve the new Wordle," he says. "It really sticks with you."

Knight ('94) had joined the *Times* in 2020 with a mandate to grow the company's games division. The simplicity of Wordle evoked games the *Times* was known for, like the classic crossword puzzles and Spelling Bee, which challenges players to form words from a cluster of letters. Knight reached out to Wardle and, on January 31, 2022, the *Times* announced its acquisition of his game. According to the paper's own reporting, the price was "in the low seven figures."

Games have been an important feature of the *Times* since 1942, when the paper began including a crossword puzzle for entertainment during wartime blackouts. The recent explosion in gaming on smartphones has opened the door for innovations—from improving on old classics to finding the next big thing. The *Times* launched a crossword app in 2014 (saving puzzlers from the eternal question of pen versus pencil) and has slowly introduced new games since then. Globally, video games now out-earn the film and music industries combined, pulling in almost $250 billion last year. For the *Times*, games are a revenue source and a gateway for players to find its other products. And to maximize that potential, the company turned to Knight. A veteran of the video game industry, he had worked on titles that helped revolutionize console, mobile, and social gaming. More important, he's an evangelist for all kinds of games.

Games have been an important feature of the *Times* since 1942, when the paper began including a crossword puzzle for entertainment during wartime blackouts.

Jonathan Knight is senior vice president and head of games at the *New York Times*, where he's met his mandate to grow the company's games division.

"I really believe that everybody is a gamer," Knight says. "It's fundamental to human nature—we have a deep need for play."

GAMER BECOMES GAME-MAKER

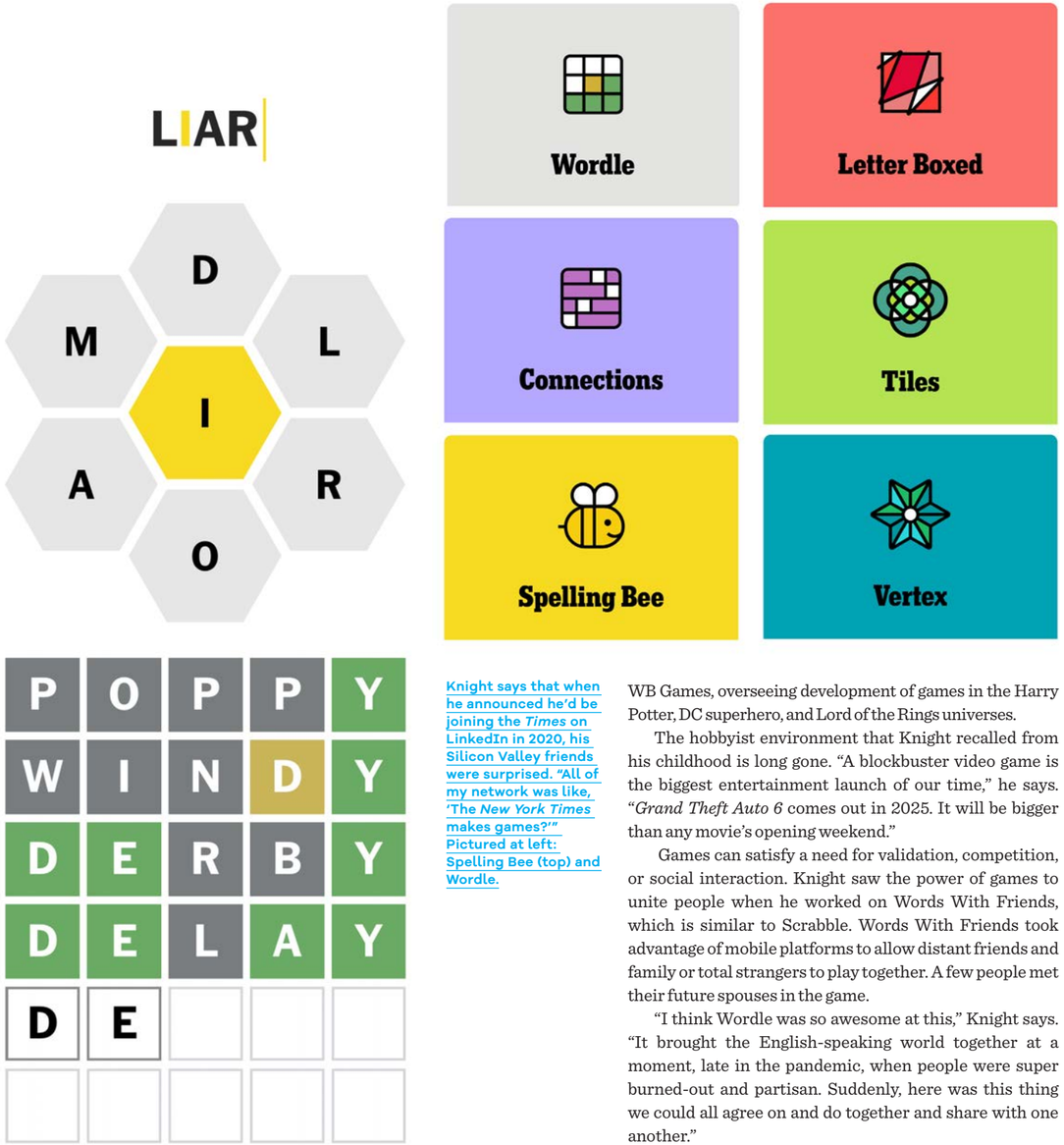
Knight had an unorthodox background when he hit the job market in 1994. He had majored in drama and minored in math at Colorado College, where he'd taken the few computer science courses he could find. Then he earned a master's in directing at the CFA School of Theatre.

Knight also had a lifelong passion for games. He and his brothers had played hours of Risk, Monopoly, and Civilization when they weren't at the arcade. Their father was such a board game fanatic, he special-ordered games from England before their US release. They moved to video games and learned to write code after the family bought an Apple II computer. Knight even designed a text-based Star Trek game. But, he says, "it was such a hobbyist kind of environment."

That changed by the time he graduated from BU. The video game industry was maturing, and his combination of skills was appealing. "That was a time when technology and entertainment hadn't fully intersected, so I had a pretty unusual résumé." Interplay Productions, a video game company in Irvine, Calif., hired him as a line producer, which involved scheduling, tracking, and some design work.

A video game, it turns out, has a lot in common with a play. "Figuring out how all the different pieces of the video game team need to be motivated and taken care of was, in retrospect, kind of similar to actors and set designers," Knight says. "The people who make these things need to be organized and directed to get a final product."

After a year at Interplay, Knight began ascending the ranks at some of the biggest companies in gaming. At Electronic Arts, he directed and executive produced *Dante's Inferno*, a game that debuted with a splashy Super Bowl ad, and oversaw its *The Sims* franchise, then among the best-selling games of all time. As a senior vice president at Zynga, he worked on *FarmVille* and Words With Friends, games that revolutionized mobile and social media gaming. When the *New York Times* hired him, Knight was a studio head for



Knight says that when he announced he'd be joining the *Times* on LinkedIn in 2020, his Silicon Valley friends were surprised. "All of my network was like, 'The *New York Times* makes games?'" Pictured at left: Spelling Bee (top) and Wordle.

WB Games, overseeing development of games in the Harry Potter, DC superhero, and Lord of the Rings universes.

The hobbyist environment that Knight recalled from his childhood is long gone. "A blockbuster video game is the biggest entertainment launch of our time," he says. "*Grand Theft Auto 6* comes out in 2025. It will be bigger than any movie's opening weekend."

Games can satisfy a need for validation, competition, or social interaction. Knight saw the power of games to unite people when he worked on Words With Friends, which is similar to Scrabble. Words With Friends took advantage of mobile platforms to allow distant friends and family or total strangers to play together. A few people met their future spouses in the game.

"I think Wordle was so awesome at this," Knight says. "It brought the English-speaking world together at a moment, late in the pandemic, when people were super burned-out and partisan. Suddenly, here was this thing we could all agree on and do together and share with one another."

Games have even become a form of communication. Just look at the 2022 story of Denyse Holt, Knight says. An avid Wordle player, Holt religiously shared her results with her daughters. Then, one day, she didn't. Alarmed, they reached out to neighbors and notified the police, who found Holt trapped in a bathroom where an armed intruder had locked her 20 hours earlier.

THE NEXT BIG THING

Games were expanding at the *Times* before Knight's arrival. The crossword app had a devoted following. In 2018, they moved another print game, Spelling Bee, online. According to *Vanity Fair*, there were 850,000 subscribers paying for full access to the games library by 2020. Still, Knight's Silicon Valley friends were surprised when he announced his career move on LinkedIn. "All of my network was like, 'The *New York Times* makes games?'" he says.

Knight, however, saw great potential: a prestigious brand, dedicated to crafting classic games. Three years into his tenure, the games team has grown to about 100 people. They include puzzle editors, software engineers, designers, product managers, producers, data analysts, and marketers. They're responsible for a range of daily games, including the Crossword, Mini crossword, Spelling Bee, Wordle, Connections, Sudoku, Letter Boxed, Tiles, and Vertex. Most can be played for free, once a day, but $6 per month unlocks the iconic Crossword and other features, including a 10,000-puzzle archive. Knight's pitch for upgrading? "It's the cost of a Starbucks!"

Since buying Wordle, NYT Games traffic has increased by 10 times, Knight says. According to *Axios*, that translates into 8 billion games played in 2023. Converting even a fraction of those players to subscribers to one of the *Times*' products—such as stand-alone subscriptions for news, sports, recipes, and product reviews, in addition to games—is a lucrative prospect at a time when many newspapers are going bankrupt. For Knight, there's another indication of success: these days, he's attending *Times*' board of directors meetings. "The spotlight is definitely on us," he says.

Behind the scenes, his team is trying to design the next big thing. They hold an annual hackathon where anyone in the company can pitch ideas. The best ones go through a development and review process and, if they survive that, get beta tested. Then the team uses analytics to see which games are drawing players back again and again. Two 2023 beta tests led to opposite fates. Digits, which challenged players to combine numbers in a series of mathematical equations, was released in April but was discontinued four months later. Connections, which requires players to identify themes in a set of words, was released in June and took off, quickly becoming the *Times'* second most played game behind Wordle.

"We're doing something unique," Knight says. "We offer elegantly designed, clean puzzle games. It's one a day—you put it down and come back tomorrow. It fits into your life." There's no attempt to encourage binge playing. You can subscribe or play for free, but you won't be bombarded by in-app purchases or unskippable ads, the bane of many free-to-play mobile games. And, in this age of artificial intelligence, Knight is proud that *Times* games still have a personal touch: "We're offering a handcrafted experience. We're humans making these puzzles every day."

What's next for NYT Games? They began a beta test of Strands, a modern take on the word search and launched a redesigned Games app in March. What, exactly, the Games team will unveil next is a closely guarded secret—but Knight trusts their process and promises it will be exciting. "It's working," he says. "And I think we're winning."

"We're doing something unique. We offer elegantly designed, clean puzzle games. It's one a day—you put it down and come back tomorrow. It fits into your life."

That's not hyperbole. The booming popularity of *Times* games prompted a 10-page feature on Knight and his team in the February 2024 *Vanity Fair*. The video game industry has taken notice as well. *Polygon*, a Vox Media site that covers gaming, named Connections one of the best games of 2023, on a list dominated by massive, world-building adventure games filled with photo-realistic graphics.

And when Knight goes to the annual Game Developers Conference, he no longer gets blank stares. "Now, everyone's like, 'Oh, it's the Wordle guy! Can I get a selfie?'" ●

By Sophie Yarin

Photos by Cydney Scott

A LONG JOURNEY HOME

Acclaimed painter Robert T. Freeman's 1981 painting *Black Tie* hangs inside the Massachusetts governor's office

IN WINTER 2023,

Robert T. Freeman, a Boston figurative oil painter for more than 40 years, got a call from Massachusetts Governor Maura Healey's office.

"The caller ID said 'Maura Healey,' and I thought, I gave them money last month, so I didn't answer," Freeman ('71,'81) recalls with a laugh. "But it just kept ringing and ringing and ringing."

It turns out, Healey herself was on the other end. When Freeman finally picked up, she informed him that his 1981 oil painting *Black Tie* was one of two works by local artists of color selected to hang in her office.

"I thought, well, that's wonderful," he says. "I told her how flabbergasted I was that she would do that."

Black Tie is displayed alongside Allan Rohan Crite's *At the Tremont Street Car Barns*, as part of Healey and Lieutenant Governor Kimberley Driscoll's initiative to bring "more inclusive faces and voices to the State House," according to their December announcement.

"When people walk into the governor's office, I want them to feel seen, represented and empowered," Healey said in the announcement. "An important way to do this is by hanging artwork that is representative of the diverse Massachusetts experience."

Freeman's 4-by-6-foot painting depicts an in medias res scene at an upscale social event in the mid-20th century: a roomful of well-dressed Black guests sit around a table, their heads turned toward the viewer—an interloper—gazing with rarefied remove. Behind them, an orchestra plays and red boutonnieres bloom on the lapels of black tuxedos. According to Freeman, the scene was inspired by a party he and his wife arrived at late—a social faux pas the other partygoers did not appreciate.

In 1981, *Black Tie* was one of relatively few works that highlighted middle-class Black society, something Freeman became well known for. His *Social Season* series, with *Black Tie* the centerpiece, was his own debut to Boston's arts society. Works in the series are lavished with gold-leaf jewelry, long black dresses, cocktails and cigarettes, mischievous smiles, merriment, hauteur.

"We're a really separate culture here, as middle-class Blacks," Freeman says.

Beyond his subjects, Freeman's use of figuration lent him even greater distinction, according to Dana Clancy ('99), director of CFA's School of Visual Arts and an associate professor of painting.

"Even though [CFA was] teaching figuration, the art world was not doing any—there was a real marginalization for anyone working figuratively in the '70s," Clancy says. "Bob Freeman's work is part of a very important tradition that carries forward into what's most important right now in contemporary painting, and I think it's really exciting to have the art world catch up to those same concerns."

"I never explored my personal subject matter until I started graduate school with Philip Guston."

At CFA, Freeman studied under legendary figurative painter Philip Guston (Hon.'70), who taught a graduate seminar from 1973 to 1978. Like Guston's, Freeman's paintings prioritize shape, color, and movement over technical precision to achieve a sense of wholeness, reveling in thick, heavy brushstrokes that do more to evoke shared understanding than render reality.

"I never explored my personal subject matter until I started graduate school with Philip Guston," Freeman says. "He gave me the opportunity to explore what was in my heart and my mind in ways that I had never done before, and it just opened up a world."

After earning bachelor's and master's of fine arts degrees in art education, Freeman took a position as artist in residence at the Noble and Greenough School in Dedham, Mass., where he stayed for 27 years. In 1981, he was itching to show his work in local galleries, but struggled to get his foot in the door.

"I went down to the galleries on Newbury Street first, and...they said, 'Thank you, but we're just not interested in that kind of work,'" he remembers. Eventually, he learned that the galleries conducted open calls for art once a month. "So, every month, Bettye [my wife] (CAS'70) would drive a U-Haul and double-park in front of each gallery, and I would slip the paintings out. We did this for over a year. And every gallery said no."

His fortunes changed in September 1982, when Chapel Gallery in Newton, Mass., exhibited four of his works. A favorable review by Christine Temin, a former staff arts writer for the *Boston Globe*, and a blown-up image of *Black Tie* appeared on the front page of the newspaper's arts section. Temin praised Freeman's confident handling of the figures and his strong message. That same year, *Black Tie* was purchased by local philanthropists Newell and Kate Flather (Wheelock'76); in 2010 the Flathers gave the painting to the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

Black Tie (1981) Oil on canvas; 48 x 72 in.

On loan to the State House, the painting has been in the Art of the Americas permanent collection at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, since 2010.

Comfortably ensconced in the art world, Freeman was free to explore bolder figuration and more complex subjects. Later series, such as *American Regatta*, inspired by his love of sailing, display more of the gestural sense of movement and more abstract geometry. *America's Past-Times*, a violent jumble of Black and Caucasian limbs engaged in ironic games of tug-of-war, capture the flag, and Marco Polo, moved him away from celebrating Black leisure and toward documenting a more harrowing experience of race in America.

Since the January 6, 2021, insurrection at the US Capitol, Freeman has devoted his artistic attention to the long shadow of slavery and its connection to American white supremacy. During a 2021 trip to Ghana, where he had spent part of his childhood, Freeman visited the country's notorious slave castles, where, from the 16th through 19th centuries, captives were held before deportation.

"When I returned to the studio, it took the better part of six months to begin figuring out what I was going to do with the pain," he says. "The narrative was the haunting, empty rooms of the slave castles.... It's a hard subject matter, but it is something that I think I need to do."

Freeman had been working on his slave castle series for months when he received Healey's phone call. After a long journey, *Black Tie* now hangs in the State House as a vital representation of Black American life.

"The painting has taken off, from me taking it into every gallery on Newbury Street and getting rejected," he says. "Finally, after 41 years, it's celebrated—and I couldn't be happier."

FEATURE

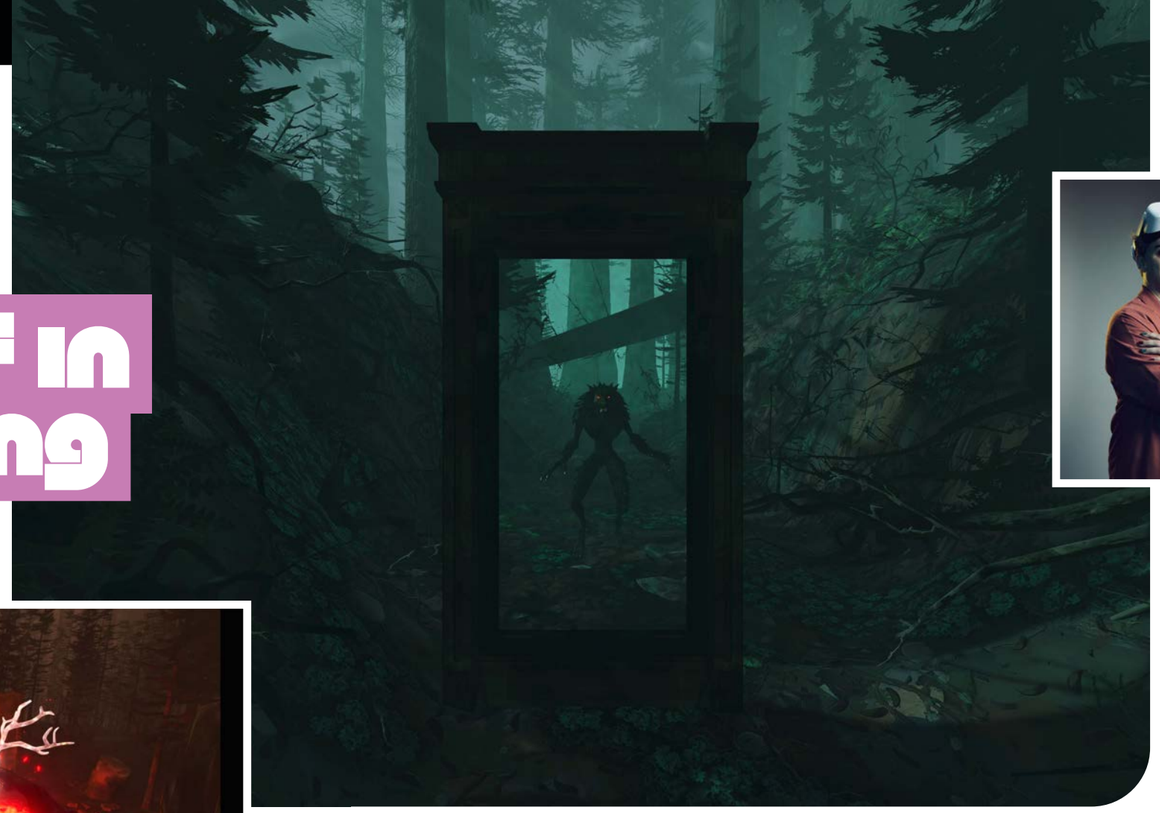
By Mara Sassoon

Illustration by Ryan Snook

ALUMS CHRISTOPHER MORRISON AND JULIE GRATZ ARE USING TECHNOLOGY TO PUSH ARTISTIC BOUNDARIES

Art Reimagined

You find yourself in a California mining town in 1851.



Christopher Morrison created the short, interactive VR game *The Werewolf Experience*. In the game, you're a werewolf being chased by townspeople in the failed Gold Rush town Fool's Errand, Calif.

A full moon shines brightly. Suddenly, your limbs are extending, fur starts growing all over your body, and sharp claws emerge from your fingers and toes. You let out a guttural howl.

You are in *The Werewolf Experience*, a short, interactive virtual reality (VR) game created by Christopher Morrison, a writer and director based in London and Brussels. Through his company Reality+, Morrison ('96) has developed and produced his own plays, shorts, and feature films. He's also contributed storylines, dialogue, and character development for video games, including 2024's *Outcast: A New Beginning*.

"I'm a narrative guy," he says. "I'm drawn to character-based stuff that's a little bit weird." In 2016, he was inspired by his wife, who at the time was the head of emerging technologies for Procter & Gamble and working on VR projects for the company, to try a new format and begin an offbeat VR project of his own. "I started to consider VR as an artistic enterprise," he says, "and the very first thing I thought of was: everybody wants to be a werewolf." In his game, you're being chased by townspeople in the failed Gold Rush town Fool's Errand, Calif. "You've heard a rumor that there is a white stag in the forest outside the town and that it can cure all disease," explains Morrison. "So, your goal is to hunt the stag to cure yourself of lycanthropy."

Morrison is just one alum turning to tech to enhance an artistic vision. Julie Gratz, an artist and animator based in Austin, Tex., helped develop an augmented reality (AR) app that makes static prints come to life. When a viewer holds up a phone or tablet to a print on the wall, the app shows an animated version that has depth, movement, and sound.

In a piece Gratz created, *Above/Below* (2018), a print of trees above a rocky stream in daylight gets turned on its head in a trippy animation when activated with the app. The image rotates 180 degrees, and in the process the scene turns from daytime to night.

Gratz ('11) runs the video and animation production company Kaleida Studio. In addition to creating her own AR work, she represents other AR artists, but her primary focus with Kaleida is creating nonfiction animation for documentary films and series. She keeps her finger on the pulse of the latest tech: she's begun exploring how to use artificial intelligence as a tool in her work.

Morrison and Gratz started out on more traditional paths at CFA, but both have always harbored a spirit of innovation. Morrison was an acting student but later chose to pursue an independent theater studies track to explore all of his interests. Coming from a martial arts background, he was especially interested in physical work and stage combat. "I was able to cobble together this weird sort of movement for the stage BFA program," he says. "I was able to pursue all the movement, acting, directing, and fight stuff that I wanted to. It definitely set me on a path of learning everything."

Gratz was a graphic design major but was drawn to animation through a multimedia class she took. "We did one or two little animation projects in Adobe Flash," she recalls. "My brain clicked a lot better with designing with motion and time than it did with static graphic design pieces. I think where that comes from is, I have a whole background with dance and performances and musicals. So, to me, animation was like, 'Oh my God, I'm choreographing my artwork. It can be to music. It can have rhythm.' I was immediately like, 'Oh, wow, this is what I need to do.'"

In the spirit of their boundary-pushing ethos, both have embraced new formats and technologies to express their creativity throughout their careers. They are now doing so at a time of rapid advancements and when more questions around ethical issues of technology, especially AI, are arising. Some question whether purely AI-generated imagery is art, and many artists are concerned that generative AI art programs could be drawing from copyrighted content.

Morrison and Gratz are aware of these issues but are also intrigued by the constant developments in the technology.

"I just consider myself as someone with some experience in the [VR] industry as it sits right now," says Morrison. "These days, everything's in flux. The tech seems to change almost weekly. And that's also one of the reasons it's very exciting."

"I started to consider VR as an artistic enterprise, and the very first thing I thought of was: everybody wants to be a werewolf."

CHRISTOPHER MORRISON

WHY VR?

If it seems unusual that more artists are integrating technologies like virtual reality into their work, consider the words of Jaron Lanier, a pioneer in the field. "VR can be a way of exploring the nature of consciousness, relationships, bodies, and perception. In other words, it can be art. VR is most fun when approached that way," Lanier writes in the *New Yorker* article "Where Will Virtual Reality Take Us?" He later adds, "I've always thought that VR sessions make the most sense either when they accomplish something specific and practical that doesn't take very long, or when they are as weird as possible."

Morrison seems to have taken Lanier's view to heart. All of his creative pursuits—including his foray into VR—stem from his love of role-playing games like *Dungeons & Dragons*, which he enjoyed for allowing him to develop characters and explore their relationships to each other. "Sitting around a table, improvising a story with a group of people, is still at the core of what I do," Morrison says.

As for Lanier's point about doing something specific and practical, and embracing the weird? Morrison did just that in *The Werewolf Experience*, which he worked on mostly over the course of COVID lockdowns. He came up with the script for the story and then partnered with The Pack Studio, a Belgium-based visual effects company, to produce the animated VR short. Since its completion in 2022, *The Werewolf Experience* has been in festivals around the world—it was one of three VR pieces to be featured at the 2023 Cannes Film Festival—and Morrison is also working to release it for download on the gaming platform Steam.

With *The Werewolf Experience*, Morrison was trying to address something he'd long thought about when it came to traditional video games. "One of the things that always bothered me was that we would have the same controller for every game," he says. "I know a lot of people would say, of course, it's the only way to do it. But I've thought about

Previous spread: Photos by Alun Callender (Morrison) and Jeff Wilson (Gratz)

This spread: Courtesy of Christopher Morrison; Inset photo far right: Alun Callender

"I have business cards that are AR, if you activate them. The animation side still blows everyone's minds and gives people a lot of joy."

JULIE GRATZ

what if there were a different controller for every game we made. It would give you a different interaction. I think the controller becomes a trap; narratively and mechanic-wise, you're stuck in this 'box.' With VR, it's worse because the controllers are even more simplified."

Then Morrison started thinking: What if he eliminated the need for controllers entirely? "You have a new body and you're in a new world, but if you're needing to use the thumbsticks on controllers you're holding, you're in two places at once. So, the mechanic that I wanted to deal with was that you control everything with your voice."

And since you are a werewolf, that means you howl. At key moments throughout the story, whether you choose to howl or stay silent affects what happens next. There are three different endings depending on the decisions you make throughout the game.

While variations of VR have been around for many decades, the technology has quickly advanced in recent years. It started to become mainstream in the mid-2010s, when companies like Meta, HTC, and Sony began selling headsets with high-quality graphics to use at home, mainly for gaming. In February 2024, Apple got into the VR mix with its Apple Vision Pro headset. Today, VR is being used in a multitude of ways in many fields, including education, retail, and healthcare.

The technology may be more widely accessible, Morrison says, but people are still figuring out its best applications. It requires careful thought about what content is best served by the technology. "If you're doing a VR thing," he says, "it has to have some kind of mechanic at its core that takes advantage of virtual reality. Otherwise, why do it in VR? People just throw stories at it that don't make any sense for the technology."

While companies like Apple and Meta continue to invest in VR, all is not well in the industry. CNBC reported last December that sales of VR headsets in 2023 decreased by nearly 40 percent.

Morrison acknowledges the volatility of the industry, but he is hopeful about its future. "VR has been declared dead maybe six different times ever since it was introduced in the '90s—really, in the 1960s if you want to get specific, but I'm talking since the '90s, when the potential really arrived," he says. "Most people consider 2016 as year zero [of VR as it is today], when the first generation of the Oculus Rift dropped. Even from then, it's been declared dead twice. We're in a weird valley right now, but I personally think it will come back, and I'm excited."

Julie Gratz's AR art appears animated when viewed through an app like Artivive. The technology can be used on business cards and fine art prints alike.

Courtesy of Julie Gratz

ANIMATION OF THE FUTURE

Like Morrison, Gratz is attuned to the constant flux of technology. Back in 2018, she was living in Brooklyn and sharing a studio building with a tech production company. They encouraged her to try working with AR.

"At the time, I was like, 'I don't understand AR, that sounds crazy,'" she says. "But I realized that, with AR, the hardest part is what happens when it is activated—the animation itself. And I already had experience with that."

She made some new animations and created prints from them—"It's basically printing out one frame of the animation," she says—then connected the prints to an AR app called Artivive. She hosted an open studio event to show off the interactive work and was thrilled with the reaction: "It blew everyone's minds. It was really satisfying and fun."

From there, Gratz showed other animator friends how to make AR prints and began representing them. She had group shows around the country. For an Art Basel Miami exhibit in 2019, she partnered with two friends to create their own Kaleida Studio AR app. They incorporated a feature that makes a paired image appear three-dimensional inside its frame; when a viewer moves their device around, the image's depth changes.

Gratz had plans for many more shows, but those tapered off during the pandemic. She's still selling the AR prints and hopes to resume creating more AR art soon. "I have been making some animations that I haven't released in a while," she says. "My goal is to continue the AR artwork with things that are not only these gallery-quality prints that people can buy, but also much more affordable options. For example, I have business cards that are AR, if you activate them. The animation side—even though people are more used to the technology now—still blows everyone's minds and gives people a lot of joy. I would rather be able to make that accessible than making it this fine art, out-of-your-price-range sort of thing."

Gratz has relocated to Austin, Tex., and recently partnered with the creative studio Mighty Oak to focus on animation and motion graphics for nonfiction television and film. She created the title sequences and many full animations for the 2022 Netflix documentary series about the use of psychedelics, *How to Change Your Mind*, based on Michael Pollan's book of the same name.

"I animated a mushroom journey of this woman who has cancer and a mushroom journey Michael Pollan did, and the team just let me do whatever I wanted," she says. "They recognized that my personal style worked perfectly for this." The series received an Emmy nomination for Outstanding Graphic Design and Art Direction.

And just as she has embraced experimenting with AR art, she is open-minded about new technology when it comes to her work with animation and motion graphics, even exploring the use of AI.

Generative AI art apps like DALL-E and Midjourney have come under scrutiny in recent years for potentially violating artists' intellectual property. Some artists view AI as an attack on their profession. But not Gratz. She acknowledges the need for better protections for artists but sees AI as another tool, one that still relies on human touch to manipulate it to serve the work at hand. "I've used AI for a few projects already in ways that you wouldn't be able to tell," she says.

One example is in a documentary she worked on, *In Restless Dreams: The Music of Paul Simon*. Gratz created graphics for the 2023 MGM+ miniseries. "I used it for one shot, just in a simple way, where we had two frames of Paul singing from a contact sheet. Rather than just fading from one frame to the other, I did a morph," she says.

The AI program she used was able to track the differences in distance of the facial features in each image to assist with creating that morph. "It was great, but it wasn't perfect," she says. She still had to make some adjustments by hand.

"Some people are doomsday about it, but I don't believe that," Gratz says. "I'm keeping an eye on it, but it's been more of a tool for me and, if anything, has made my job faster, which has actually been helpful. I would encourage artists to not be afraid of technology and also to not think that it's out of their realm of expertise. There are so many ways an artist can use technology to augment their inherent skills and talents." ●

Cydney Scott

A 2022 CFA production of *Exit the King* was the first to use Random Actor.

Random Actor's Second Act

Software created at BU could change the look of stages everywhere

Random Actor is almost ready for its closeup. The software tool for creating live, interactive stage projections has been in development at BU for more than five years; the first steps culminated with its use in the School of Theatre production of *Exit the King* in 2022.

Having passed that test, Random Actor is being further developed by its creators Clay Hopper ('05), a senior lecturer in directing, and James Grady, an assistant professor of art and graphic design and creative director of BU Spark!, an on-campus tech innovation lab. They developed Random Actor with a grant from the BU Shipley Center for Digital Learning & Innovation and the help of visiting artist Paolo Scoppola and many BU students.

Random Actor's algorithm creates and projects graphics onstage that move and change in real time based on the creative team's input and in response to data flowing from motion detectors and microphones onstage.

Say the program is projecting a moving cloud of sparkly stars onto the lead performer onstage and the surfaces around them. A stage designer can control and change the quality and behavior of the projections during the performance, or the changes can be driven by the performer's movements or voice. It's a continuous feedback loop between performer, algorithm, and designer, a collaboration producing a visual extension of the artists' intentions.

Exit the King, which Hopper directed, provided proof of concept. Since then, the team has been building out a more robust version of the software with additional computing power purchased with a second Shipley grant. It's working well enough that they are talking with venture capitalists about investing in Random Actor's future.

Uppermost in their minds is a planned fall theatrical production that will show off the software's full potential, at a Boston cultural venue to be named later. As a next step, Hopper and Grady are proposing BU build a creative data science studio. "That is, a funded laboratory whose explicit mission is to explore the intersections of these types of emerging technologies with narrative, design, exhibition, and art," Hopper says. "That's our lodestar for the future."—*Joel Brown*

By Mara Sassoon Photos by Michael D. Spencer

SUNDAY IN THE BOOTH WITH GEORGE

CFA reimagines a hit musical

The musical *Sunday in the Park with George* is inspired by the famous 19th-century pointillist painting *A Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte* by Georges Seurat. The work, which depicts people at a park near Paris, is rendered entirely in hundreds of thousands of tiny technicolor dots and brushstrokes. Productions of the Pulitzer Prize– and Tony Award–winning show by James Lapine and Stephen Sondheim typically have sets that mimic Seurat's colorful painting.

But for the CFA performances of *Sunday in the Park* at the Joan & Edgar Booth Theatre this past spring, director Clay Hopper ('05) and scenic designer Cristina Todesco ('94,'05,'09) took a very different approach—one specifically adapted to the Booth's black box theater.

"We have a pretty unique space at the Booth," says Todesco. "It's very flexible in terms of how the audience can be arranged and how the audience experiences the story."

Most productions of the musical have been performed in end stage or proscenium theaters, where an audience faces the stage in one direction. "That's because this is a play that is [referencing] a painting, which is a flat, 2-D form of art," Todesco adds. "But theater itself is not that. It's alive. It breathes. It moves. It's fluid. So, it was really important for us to embrace what this three-dimensional box could give us for this production."

That meant eschewing the convention of recreating Seurat's painting as a backdrop for part of the show. "It seems like a convention that people accept very readily because it's such a gorgeous painting," Todesco says. "We wanted to free ourselves of that."

Instead, she presented a recreation of the painting in the theater's lobby. "People could get their dose of it. And then, during intermission, they could come back and look at it again, with what they acquired after having watched act one."

The musical follows fictionalized versions of Seurat in act one and of his great-grandson in act two. Todesco was intrigued by Seurat's process of creating the painting and wanted to portray that in a unique way in the CFA production.

"I've always found his sketches to be very evocative and to have a tremendous amount of depth, air, and weight," she says. "His drawings don't have color, so there's a certain simplicity, a clarity, that speaks to me. There's a looseness to the sketches that I really appreciate."

For the set, Todesco and Hopper used white walls and dramatically colored lighting to bring characters to life. Todesco says her goal was to capture the feeling of "stepping inside the canvas before the paint happens."

To show Seurat's process, Todesco reproduced the artist's sketches on large panels set on tracks. "These panels moved as the subject comes into more clarity for George as he's working through all the elements of design—harmony, balance, line, color, light, all of that stuff," Todesco says. "So, we shifted these panels, and at the end of act one we revealed the sketch of the painting. That was our approach—to see this play in a new way." ●

Top: Coming up with the scene design for the show was a long process. "It starts well before a hammer hits a nail," says scenic designer Cristina Todesco ('94,'05,'09). "We had conversations starting in October about how we do this in the space that we have—and do we need the painting in the show? A lot of our conversations were about how we can do this without that." Todesco always begins planning by making a small-scale model of her vision. "We built a model where a quarter inch equals a foot, so everyone could see where the decisions we were making on paper were coming from and what the results of those would be."

Above: Technical production and scenic art students used more than 1,400 feet of plywood, 1,500 pounds of steel, and 25 gallons of white paint to create the set, according to Jacob DeSousa ('20), CFA's scene shop manager, and Diane Fargo, a senior lecturer in scene painting.

Inset photo far right: Katie Nelson

Left: It took two scenic artists 160 hours to recreate Seurat's painting, which was displayed in the lobby.

Below left: To create the panels with Seurat's sketches, scenic art students painted the images on plastic screens to mimic the effects of his drawings. "His drawings have the texture of the watercolor paper he used, which usually has a raised grain pattern," says Todesco. "The screens let us achieve that kind of softness. Then, we had a layer of muslin, a kind of lighter-weight canvas, on top of that, and then we had blackout fabric on the back of the plastic screen."

Left: Technical production students engineered a 16-by-16-foot turntable that actors stood on throughout the show. "We could decide how fast we wanted it to rotate, how many rotations were needed during a song, and when it needed to stop for a moment of stillness," says Todesco. "It was a tool in choreographing many scenes and many moments."

PROFILE

Jonny Watkins cofounded two national concert bands in the UK in the face of declining support for youth music instruction

By Steve Holt

Photo by Karen Payne

WINDS OF HOPE

LAYING A MUSICAL INSTRUMENT changes a person. It lowers anxiety and makes the player feel happier. Researchers have shown that playing music—especially in groups—rewires the mind. The combination of sensory and fine motor skills required to oompah on the tuba or tap out a beat on the timpani generates neurons and fires up synapses, strengthening communication between cells. The positive effects of music on children, whose brains are more elastic than those in adults, can be especially pronounced.

So, when London-based trombonist Jonny Watkins ('09) began hearing about the demise of youth bands and orchestras in the United Kingdom, he was worried about young musicians having fewer outlets to showcase their talents. In particular, youth concert bands featuring brass, percussion, and woodwind instruments—sometimes called wind bands—had all but vanished on the national level, beginning with the shutdown of the National Children's Wind and Chamber Orchestras in 2018. And with a youth mental health crisis raging, he knew his country needed *more* opportunities for kids to practice and perform together. "There needed to be a national representation for a wind band in orchestra music," Watkins says. "Almost every school [in the UK] has a wind band. Every town has a community band. It just seemed like a massive, gaping hole in the landscape that there wasn't going to be a national wind band. So, we thought we'd jump in."

In 2018, Watkins cofounded the only wind bands that draw students from across the UK. They feature audition-based bands for two age groups: the National Children's Concert Band (NCCB) is open to musicians ages 10 to 14, and the National Youth Concert Band (NYCB) welcomes players 12 to 18. Each April, dozens of young musicians move into boarding school dorms in the Midlands region of the country for a week of individual lessons and group rehearsals (with plenty of camp-like fun mixed in). The course culminates in a performance at the end of the week. The bands have grown from 42 musicians in 2019 to as many as 90 today.

But after surviving the fallout from a global pandemic, will the bands be able to keep playing, on their shoestring budgets and amid a political climate that values (and funds) youth arts instruction less each year?

FILLING A GAP

The last national youth wind band in the UK shut down in 2018, when the nonprofit that backed the National Children's Wind and Chamber Orchestras announced suddenly it was closing its doors. Three of the orchestras' main volunteer musicians—Watkins, conductor Jonathan Parkes, and orchestra manager Kathryn Wood—jumped in to fill that void. Balancing their day jobs (Parkes and Watkins are professional musicians and educators, and Wood is a legal clerk), they formed the company that would become the NCCB and NYCB in November 2018 and held their first residential course in April 2019. The following year, as they were preparing to welcome the second cohort of students to the course, the COVID-19 pandemic forced them to hit pause. When many other youth arts organizations lost thousands of pounds canceling courses and performances or closed their doors for good, the NCCB and NYCB were able to wait it out.

"We live in different parts of the country, and everything's done online," Watkins says. "We didn't have any overhead, so we could just close the lids on the laptops and step away from it while the pandemic was going on."

They were next able to offer the program in the summer of 2021, testing every participant for COVID at the door. Once the initial nerves had calmed, Watkins says, the students enjoyed the much-needed connection and joy the course provided. "It was quite an emotional week," he says. "You've got all these kids who have had no contact with anyone for a year and a half."

Watkins established the concert bands while witnessing arts funding across the UK plummet, leaving many organizations in peril. Arts Council England (the national government's grant-making arm for the arts) in 2022 removed a number of organizations from its grants portfolio following cuts to its budget—including the English National Opera, the acclaimed Britten Sinfonia chamber orchestra, and many smaller outfits—leading to what one *Guardian* newspaper columnist called a "doom loop" for the arts in England.

Watkins says the concert bands he cofounded have never received national grants, however, and operate exclusively on student tuitions for the April course. But they still face another headwind: given inflation and the socioeconomic realities of many of the families who wish to participate in the program, he says, the bands are "just about maxing out what we can ask people to pay." And that's just to continue doing what they've been doing; there's little left over to increase the size of the bands or commission new music for the program.

Watkins, who came up through elite youth bands and orchestras in England, studied at London's Guildhall School of Music & Drama before pursuing a master's degree in brass performance at CFA. After BU, he played with orchestras in Hong Kong and China before returning to the UK in 2018. Today, he is a regular with symphony orchestras in Bournemouth and Birmingham and teaches trombone to a few dozen students each week. Cofounding a youth wind band (for which he serves as course director and senior tutor in brass) wasn't in the plan.

"I think everyone who sets foot in a music school has this dream of being a principal *whatever* of the Boston Symphony or Chicago or London," Watkins says. "For some people, that works out. I quite like the variety I've got."

A PLACE TO BE THEMSELVES

Each April, young woodwind, percussion, and brass players from across the UK descend on the country's Midlands—usually somewhere near Birmingham—to participate in what is the centerpiece of the concert band programs: a week of individual instruction and group rehearsals leading to a performance for family, friends, and the public. After students arrive at their dorm rooms, settle in, and begin to make new friends, they see their music for the first time—usually in an hourlong program for the older youth, and a half-hour session for the younger children. Tutors, who are experts in their instruments, work with each band during the day to refine the pieces. Students may also choose to join and rehearse with a saxophone quartet, wind or brass quintet, or another chamber ensemble to perform that week at community locations, such as nursing homes. In the evenings, staff and students gather for movie and game nights, karaoke, and special performances.

Jonny Watkins says the two national youth concert bands he cofounded in the UK have provided students a sense of belonging.

"It's been life-changing for some of these kids from backgrounds where they never thought they'd be able to do anything like the national group...because they're from a place where that doesn't happen."

Jonathan Parkes

The result is music magic. In 2023, under the direction of Parkes, the concert bands played to a packed Bradshaw Hall at Royal Birmingham Conservatoire. The bulk of the youth band's set was a five-part, nearly 45-minute Johan de Meij symphony inspired by *The Lord of the Rings*. Many of the musicians are from parts of the country where funding for instruction in schools has been slashed and few opportunities exist for talented players to perform in public.

"It's been life-changing for some of these kids from backgrounds where they never thought they'd be able to do anything like the national group, that they weren't good enough to do that, because they're from a place where that doesn't happen," Watkins says. "A few of those kids have gone on to our conservatoires, and they've written to us and say they wouldn't have been able to do that without our confidence in them—that's an amazing feeling."

The youth band programs do more than provide performance experiences and a boost in confidence: they also give the children a sense of belonging. A few years ago, a returning young musician notified leaders with the bands that they were exploring their gender identity and would like to be called by a different name during the weeklong residential course, "almost as a trial, to see how it was," Watkins recalls. Every band member and staff honored the student's wishes that week. Watkins says the student went home and came out to their friends. That student has since gone on to study music in college and helped organize a queer orchestra in the city where they study, he says.

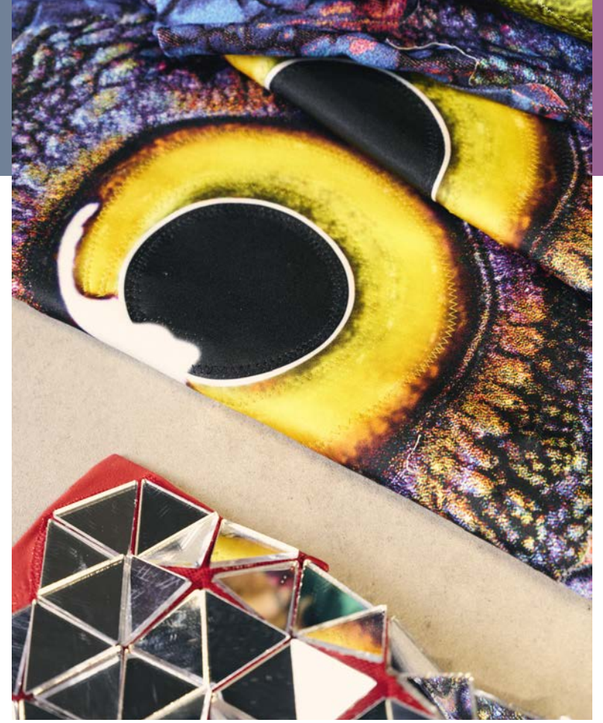
"One of the things we've always tried to do with the course is to make a space that's safe, nurturing, and where we encourage people to be themselves," Watkins says. "We want it to be somewhere they don't have to worry. Just come in, enjoy themselves, and do something that they love to do."

THE COSTUME ENGINEER

Collette Livingston ensures Cirque du Soleil's costumes withstand the performers' complex acrobatics

By Molly Callahan

Photos by Peter Tarasiuk



Anne Collard

Livingston says she has "a love-hate relationship" with the scaly, reptilian-looking costumes worn by *LUZIA* performers who specialize in "acro-pole," a kind of high-flying acrobatic dance performed entirely on rubber-coated poles (see left). The costumes—and the performers themselves—take a beating. "There's not a day they don't need repair," she says.

There are 1,115 different costume elements in Cirque du Soleil's *LUZIA*, a fantastical tour through a make-believe version of Mexico. Every night, performers morph into butterflies, snakes, birds, insects; the stage becomes a veritable Noah's Ark—rain and all—of flamboyant creatures, large and small. And, thus transformed, the performers fly through the air, dance across the stage, and contort their bodies in unimaginable ways in a show of the company's signature, mind-bending feats of athletic grace.

This is all to say: There's a lot riding on those 1,115 pieces of costuming. Each one must be flexible enough to accommodate the performers' superhuman gymnastics; durable enough to withstand repeated friction, soaking, twisting, and stretching throughout thousands of shows; and eye-popping enough to make even those in the nosebleeds sit back in awe.

Invariably, something will rip. Or pop. Or chafe. And when it does, more often than not, the performers turn to Collette Livingston, assistant head of wardrobe, for an answer.

"When it's a two-show day, or a three-show day, you really have to prioritize what you can get done," says Livingston ('08), who joined Cirque du Soleil shortly after graduating from BU. "We'll organize all the costumes on the rack of repairs [backstage] by which act they appear in. And sometimes you are finishing a costume during act one for someone to wear in act two. You just need to know your timeline and how fast you think you can achieve it."

EYE-CATCHING—AND SUSTAINABLE

One costume in particular ends up on those repair racks more than any other. It may not be the flashiest—that would be the dress in *LUZIA* that turns from white to red as if by magic (but actually by way of 61 motorized white flowers whose red petals open up). Rather, it's a piece with which Livingston says she has "a love-hate relationship."

The costume shows up during a portion of the show that takes place in the jungle at night. It's a scaly, reptilian-looking set worn by performers who climb tall, thin poles onstage. Highly decorated, the costumes feature vibrant blues, oranges, and reds, but the main event is a series of crafty yellow eyes that look like they might blink at any moment. Like the spiny skin they emulate, these costumes have to be tough and protective. The performers who wear them specialize in a kind of high-flying acrobatic dance performed entirely on rubber-coated poles—a technique known as "acro-pole." They can grip the pole not just with their hands but in the crease of their hip, or the hinges of their knees, to create gravity-defying postures.

For Livingston, all this means that the costumes—and the performers themselves—take a beating. "There's not a day they don't need repair," she says. A performer might slide partway down the pole, controlling the fall with the tension in their arms, legs, or hips. Or, they'll catch themselves by pinching the pole between their arm and waist before springing off into another pose.

"The acro-poles, in particular, are these two really tall poles right in the middle of the stage," Livingston says. "They're covered with a thin rubber, which is great for having to stop and grip. But you can imagine what that may do to your skin. This is one where we do see a lot of burns and skin injuries. And if it's going to burn the skin, it will burn the costume."

The costume is made of stretch denim: a pair of straight-leg pants and a jacket with a high collar that ends just below the

Since she was hired by Cirque du Soleil in 2008, Livingston has held every job in the wardrobe department. The experience has given her a deep understanding of the rigors of the job. Her speciality is extending the longevity of the costumes, which is especially important for a show that can run 10 years or more.

performer's chin. Underneath, the performers wear a unitard that's customized for each individual. Livingston and her team sew in thin layers of neoprene in places where performers need a little extra protection—for some, it's a patch on their waists, for others, the calves—depending on the stunts they do.

Given the inevitability of tears and burns, it's hugely helpful to Livingston and her team that these costumes are printed with a scaly pattern, she says. It means that when one area gets worn out or damaged, they can cut around the pattern and replace just that area instead of scrapping an otherwise perfectly good costume. The busy pattern hides the patch far better than a single color ever could.

"I don't want to replace those costumes all the time for a few reasons: We don't have an infinite supply, and it's more sustainable this way. I'm so thankful that the creation team chose this pattern—though I'm not 100 percent sure that this was the top of their priorities when they were designing it," Livingston says with a laugh. "But what helps is, once you've been on a wardrobe team for a while, you take these aspects into account."

SMART DESIGNS

Livingston was hired by Cirque, in 2008, to adapt and maintain acrobatic footwear for the performers in the show *KOOZA*. She stayed on with *KOOZA* for five and a half years, then worked on the company's show *Varekai*. *LUZIA* opened in 2016; it's Cirque du Soleil's 38th production since the company was founded in 1984, and Livingston joined the production in 2017. The show is touring Australia through January 2025.

At this point, Livingston has held every job in the wardrobe department. The experience has given her a deep understanding of the rigors of the job and the particulars of solving problems on the fly, often as a show goes on just feet away. "You understand what every person on the team needs, and you can back that person up if they need it," she says.

At BU, Livingston excelled in her costume production studies, says Nancy Leary, an associate professor of costume design and one of Livingston's mentors.

"She's just super, super smart in terms of engineering things, understanding how to make things work," Leary ('03) says. It's a skill that comes in handy at Cirque, where costumes disappear into the stage floor or change color in real time.

"YOU REALLY HAVE TO LISTEN TO THE PERFORMERS. THEY'LL BE ABLE TO IDENTIFY A PROBLEM IN THEIR OWN COSTUME—THEY JUST WON'T ALWAYS KNOW HOW TO FIX IT, AND NOR SHOULD THEY."

The difference between costume design and costume production can best be understood as a difference between theory and execution. Costume designers are responsible for creating the designs that will help tell the story, transforming words on a page into theoretical visual concepts. It's the job of the production team to interpret all that and wrangle those designs into tangible pieces worn by performers.

The latter is "like engineering, in a way," Leary says. "You have to know a lot about the time period, or how to support a costume that might weigh 20 pounds."

"I LOVE THIS WORK"

The costumes that appear onstage at any Cirque du Soleil show are the result of a long design and production process involving hundreds of people. To start, a team of designers dreams up the costumes for the show. In the case of *LUZIA*, that team was spearheaded by Giovanna Buzzi, an Italian costume designer and daughter of the internationally renowned architect Gae Aulenti.

Buzzi's background was mainly in opera costumes, Livingston says, so the designer worked closely with a team of artists and craftspeople at the Cirque du Soleil international headquarters in Montreal to advise her on the specific needs of acrobatic performers. Every decision—from the best fabric choice to the most secure (or flexible) stitches and closures—comes from years of experience. There's no detail too small, either. Even the pit musicians for *LUZIA* wear costumes. They wear headpieces that look convincingly like crocodile heads bobbing on the water.

From there, the costumes are hand-printed, cut, and sewn in Montreal, then shipped to the show, wherever it may be.

Livingston comes into the process a year or so after a show has opened, she says. At that point, she can take stock of what's working and what's not. Her speciality is extending the longevity of these costumes, which is especially important for a show that can run 10 years or more.

"You'll notice these problem points pretty quickly, but it's harder to figure out how to fix them over time," she says. "You really have to listen to the performers. They'll be able to identify a problem in their own costume—they just won't always know how to fix it, and nor should they. They will say something like, 'I keep getting skin burns *here*,' or, 'My jacket always busts open during *this trick*.' And then it's up to us to use our expertise, diagnose the problem, and find a sustainable solution."

And so far, it's working. The pandemic, and its related shutdown of parts of the Cirque headquarters, meant that Livingston and her team couldn't rely on getting new costumes if older ones wore out; they had to patch and repair, and make them work longer. They apply those lessons today.

The acro-pole costumes, for example, have a high turnover rate. In the past, the *LUZIA* performers would have worn through three pairs per year. Now, they're down to two a year.

"There are always going to be repairs," Livingston says. "You can't make a perfect costume, especially with performers like ours, who are constantly pushing the envelope and trying new stunts. But my brain loves fixing problems, and there's no shortage of those. I just love making things work better, and more sustainably. It's a lot of work, but I love this work." ●

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/share-your-story**, and we'll share the highlights here.

1960s

Charles W. Palmer ('65) had 14 oil paintings, all completed in 2023, featured in the exhibition *Recent Works* at the Fire on Main Gallery in Soap Lake, Wash., from August through November 2023.

Cynthia Close ('67,'69) is a contributing editor for *Documentary Magazine* and writes regularly about art, cinema, and culture for *Artists Magazine*, *Art & Object*, *Pastel Journal*, *Watercolor Artist*, *Art New England*, and *The Observer*. Her creative nonfiction and essays have been published in anthologies and various literary journals.

Karen Roop ('69,'75) exhibited her paintings in fall 2023 as part of a group show celebrating the 40th anniversary of the Francesca Anderson Fine Art Gallery in Lexington, Mass.

Philip G. Simon ('69) is an associate professor of music emeritus and has continued to teach part time at the Wilkes University Division of Performing Arts music program following his May 2019 retirement. He transcribed and arranged Lili Boulanger's *D'un matin de printemps* for woodwind trio and string quartet, which was performed by members of the New Jersey Chamber Orchestra in August 2022. Simon also published a book, *A History of American Popular Music* (Cognella, 2024). He currently teaches a course in American popular music for the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute at Temple University, and he continues to teach, guest conduct, present clinics, and perform on tuba and bass throughout northeastern Pennsylvania. Simon serves as an alumni ambassador for the Boston Youth Symphony and would enjoy hearing from his friends and classmates. You can email him at philip.simon@wilkes.edu.

ANABEL GRAETZ ('66) played the role of Ruth in *Good Burger 2*, which was released in 2023. Graetz continues to teach voice out of her Lexington, Mass., studio.

1970s

Marguerite V. Ogden ('70) exhibited a monotype in The Boston Printmakers 2023 North American Print Biennial, at BU's 808 Gallery. The exhibit ran from October through December 2023.

Will Lyman ('71), **Talia Sulla ('23)**, and **Jesse Kodama ('25)** performed in the Huntington Theatre Company's *Prayer for the French Republic*, which ran in fall 2023. **Christopher Akerlind ('85)** was lighting designer for the production and **Zach Kelley ('22)** and **Fady Demian ('23)** were understudies.

Judith Dickson ('75) published a book, *A Successful and Proven Guide to the First Time Homebuyer, Putting It All Together* (Page Publishing, 2016), inspired by her homebuying experience.

Sandi Gold ('75) released her book *I Chose Love: How to Thrive After a Life-Threatening Illness Using Love to Guide You* on January 16, 2024. The book, which has been 30 years in the making, is part memoir and part self-help, chronicling her transformative journey.

David Krafchick ('75) wrote the play *The Fawn and the Black Oak, A Sword Play*. It has had two professional readings at the Tacoma Little Theatre in Tacoma, Wash.

Grant Drumheller ('76,'78) participated in the exhibition *Horizons* at the Museum of New Art in Portsmouth, N.H., in summer 2023. He writes that the exhibit offered a fresh perspective on the horizon, an essential way of understanding the space around us and our relationship to the world.

Susan Kerner ('77) is a professor emerita at Montclair State University and is coproducer of the nationally and internationally recognized documentary *Eva's Promise*. The film tells the story of Holocaust survivor Eva Schloss, who had promised her brother, Heinz Geiringer, that she would retrieve his paintings and poetry, hidden under the floorboards of the attic where Heinz and his father were hiding, if he should die in the concentration camps.

Robert Stuart ('77) had his 10th solo exhibit, *Light Gets In,* at the Reynolds Gallery in Richmond, Va., in November and December 2023.

Tracy Burtz ('78) showcased her work in the solo exhibition *Voices* at The Painting Center in New York City in January 2024 and in the show *Solitude* at Edgewater Gallery in Middlebury, Vt., in spring 2024. Edgewater Gallery, Thomas Deans Fine Art in Atlanta, Ga., and East End Gallery and Nantucket Looms, both in Nantucket, Mass., represent Burtz's work.

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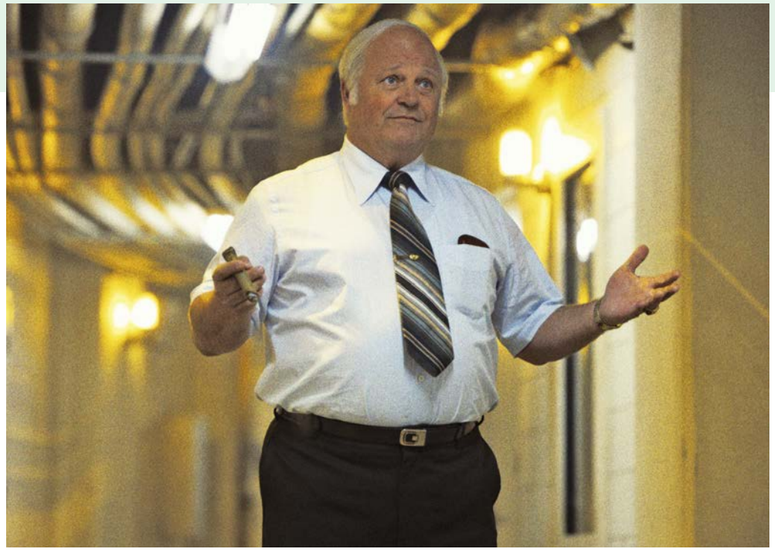


Warrick Page/HBO

MICHAEL CHIKLIS ('85) starred as Celtics general manager Red Auerbach (Hon.'84) in the second season of HBO's *Winning Time: The Rise of the Lakers Dynasty,* which premiered in August 2023.

Jody Gelb's ('78) micro-memoir, *She May Be Lying Down but She May Be Very Happy*, was published by Kelson Books in 2023. The book explores terror, hope, joy, disability, acceptance, death, and awe through Gelb's writing about life with her late daughter who survived a catastrophic birth during Gelb's pregnancy leave from *The Who's Tommy* on Broadway.

Deborah Kamy Hull ('78) had her new collection of work, *Cross-Pollination*, exhibited at HallSpace in Dorchester, Mass., last winter.

Marsha Goldberg ('79) exhibited her work in *Marsha Goldberg & Andrew Zimmerman: Taking Shape* at the Hunterdon Art Museum in Clinton, N.J., from September 2023 to January 2024. Goldberg also had work included in Adah Rose Gallery's booth, B-2, at ArtFair 14C at the Central Railroad of New Jersey Terminal building at Liberty State Park in Jersey City, N.J., in October 2023.

Nina Tassler ('79, Hon.'16) produced the Chicago Shakespeare Theater's *Judgment Day*, which was directed by **Moritz von Stuelpnagel ('00)** and starred **Jason Alexander ('81, Hon.'95)**. The comedy ran from April 23 through May 26, 2024.

Ed Wierzbicki ('79, COM'90) has been leading a team of actors, therapists, and Emmy-winning filmmakers in producing more than 80 films that delve into adolescent trauma and therapy. They now have two ongoing series: *Critical Moments*, which takes audiences inside therapy sessions by way of a devised theater approach, using improv actors and trauma therapists; and the *Trauma Avengers*, where actors portray six young characters, based on actual clients.

1980s

Julia Shepley ('80) was the 2023 environmental/installation artist for the Goetemann Artist Residency in collaboration with the Ocean Alliance. Her prints were on exhibit in *Somerville Prints!* at the Brickbottom Gallery in Somerville, Mass., in November and December 2023. Other new works were included in the exhibition *Object Lesson* in February and March 2024 at the South Shore Art Center in Cohasset, Mass. Her solo exhibition, *Carry*, at Boston Sculptors Gallery was reviewed in *Sculpture Magazine*, and her participation in the *Material Drawing-Drawn to Touch* exhibit at Catamount Arts in Saint Johnsbury, Vt., in discussion with curator Katherine French, is recorded on the Catamount Arts website.

Jason Alexander ('81, Hon.'95) was the director of the Broadway comedy *The Cottage*, which had performances at the Hayes Theater in summer and fall 2023. **Paul Tate DePoo ('10)** was the show's scenic designer. Alexander was also honored at the Creative Coalition Humanitarian Awards, which recognizes those who donate their time, resources, and celebrity to promote worthy social causes. Additionally, Alexander lent his voice to the Netflix animated film *Leo*.

Karen Carpenter ('81) is the director of the musical *Ballad of Dreams*. She is also associate artistic director of The Old Globe, where she has produced over 40 plays and musicals, revived their annual Shakespeare Festival, and directed many award-winning plays, among them, *As You Like It*, named Best of the Year by *San Diego Magazine*. She is also the producing director of her company, The Figment Factory, LLC, which puts on corporate and nonprofit events.

Jacob Litoff ('81) performed the Joseph Bologne Chevalier de Saint Georges Violin Concerto #9 and the Concertino in G, Opus 42 by Mieczyslaw Weinberg with the Charles River Sinfonietta in their June and July 2023 music festivals. He also played the first cello in the Elegie for 4 Cellos by Josef Werner. Litoff is still freelancing and teaching violin, viola, and cello.

Stephanie Reiter ('81) showcased her work in exhibitions at George Billis Gallery in Fairfield, Conn., and New York City in summer 2023.

Wynn Harmon ('82) played Doc in *West Side Story* at Teatro Lirico di Cagliari, Sardinia; Francis Fuller in the 2023 *Law & Order SVU* episode "Bend the Law"; and multiple roles in the world premiere of Anna Deavere Smith's *Love All*, the story of Billie Jean King (Hon.'08), at La Jolla Playhouse.

Kathleen Mulligan ('82) completed her project "Preserving the Vanishing Stories of Partition," which was awarded a Fulbright-Nehru grant. Mulligan created original monologues with students at Khalsa College in Amritsar, India, based on interviews with survivors of the partition of India and Pakistan in 1947. While in India, Mulligan also gave a performance of William Luce's one-woman play, *The Belle of Amherst*, at seven different venues throughout northern India and Nepal.

Andrew Nixon ('82) writes that he presented a new body of work that merged the spheres of old-world etching, contemporary digital image-making, and traditional printmaking technology in the Art at Watson exhibition, *Andrew Nixon: Inventions and Discoveries*, which ran at Brown University from September 4, 2023, through January 12, 2024.

KATHY MCCAFFERTY ('96), left, and TATIANA CHAVEZ ('20) starred in Wellfleet Harbor Actors Theater's world premiere of *The Pickleball Wars* by KEVIN RICE (CAS'74, GRS'99) in August 2023. Other alums involved in the production include producing artistic director CHRISTOPHER OSTROM ('98), company manager GEOFF BORMAN ('08), and technical director DANIELLE IBRAHIM ('21).

Nancy Goldstein ('83) is designing architectural and landscape lighting for a large residential renovation project in Brookline, Mass. She writes that BU once owned the house and John Silber (Hon.'95) lived in it during his presidency.

Julianne Moore ('83) starred as Gracie Atherton-Yoo in the film *May December*, a drama about a notorious tabloid couple whose lives are upended when an actress arrives to do research about their past for a movie. Moore's performance earned her nominations for the 2024 Golden Globe Award for Best Performance by a Female Actor in a Supporting Role and the 2024 Critics' Choice Award for Best Supporting Actress.

John Near ('85) edited and translated *Autobiographical Recollections of Charles-Marie Widor* (University of Rochester Press, 2024).

Steven Sussman ('87) plays piano in the acclaimed trio Ensemble Aubade, which made its debut in the Music at Christ Church Concert Series in Andover, Mass., on November 19, 2023.

Ellen Harvey ('88) acted in the Off-Broadway play *Dracula: A Comedy of Terrors*, a reimagining of the classic, which ran at New World Stages from September 2023 through January 2024. **Tijana Bjelajac ('07)** was the production's scenic/puppetry designer and **Tristan Raines ('12)** was the costume designer.

Sonya White Hope (BUTI'83,'84, CFA'88,'90,'16) is founding executive director of Sankofa Songs, which, she writes, cultivates exceptional Africentric arts education practice by nurturing community among aspiring and experienced Africentric arts educators, providing professional development, producing events, spearheading research, and developing pedagogical tools that support K–12 arts educators and their instruction. For more information, visit sankofasongs.org.

Laura Reeder ('89) is a curriculum coordinator for a US Department of Education "PEACE" Project with Patchogue Arts Council, addressing issues of segregation in New York's Suffolk County, which, she writes, is one of the most segregated counties in the US. Reeder was invited to be a part of a panel on ecofeminism and land art at the 2023 International Sculpture conference.

Cathy Sheridan ('89) was named president of New York City's Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) Bridges and Tunnels in August 2023 after serving as the interim president since March 2023.

1990s

Ken Schaphorst ('90) had his compositions played by the New England Conservatory Jazz Orchestra on December 7, 2023.

Christopher Shelley ('92) earned his certified professional wedding officiant distinction from the International Association of Professional Wedding Officiants and is a member of The Knot Hall of Fame for wedding officiating. Shelley's passion project is developing a keynote speech and program called People Skills Live for colleges, high schools, and companies around the country. It's designed to help people conquer social anxiety, present themselves with confidence, and position themselves for success.

David Coleman (BUTI'86, CFA'93) is a composer and theater music director. He has been the director of choral music at the Dana Hall School in Wellesley, Mass., for 23 years and the director of the 220-voice Tufts Third Day Gospel Choir for 16 years. He recently celebrated 26 years of marriage to Fadie Thomas Coleman (CAMED'16), who won a BU Metcalf Award for Excellence in Teaching in 2022 while teaching at BU's medical school. Their daughter, **Aimée (BUTI'21)**, is in her second year of college, majoring in musical theater. Coleman also won the 2023 Elliot Norton Award for Outstanding Music Direction.

Cristina Todesco ('94,'05,'09) was the scenic designer for SpeakEasy Stage Company's production of Samuel D. Hunter's *A Case For the Existence of God*, directed by Melinda Lopez (GRS'00), which ran from January 26 through February 17, 2024. **Aubrey Dube ('18)** was the production's sound designer and **Jolie Frazer-Madge ('20)** was the assistant stage manager.

Rick Plaugher ('97) opened Take Choice Acting, a conservatory-level training studio in New York City for young talent that offers a variety of classes, such as small group training sessions, one-on-one coaching, and college audition preparation sessions.

Michele Caniato ('98) composed *Ao Viandante (To the Wayfarer)* while at Obras Foundation for the Arts in Portugal. The choral work will be recorded by Coro Volante for Ablaze Records. Caniato's piece *Half-Time (A Basketball Intermezzo)* for saxophonist Andy Wen premiered in November 2023 at Muskingum University in New Concord, Ohio. It was included in Wen's recital tour of numerous universities and at the 44th International Saxophone Symposium at George Mason University. In April 2024, Caniato was a resident composer at the Visby International Center for Composers in Sweden, where he worked on an opera.

2000s

Fay Wolf ('00) had two original songs and a commissioned cover of "The Water Is Wide" featured in the Netflix limited series *Devil in Ohio*, which was created and executive produced by **Daria Polatin ('00)** and starred **Emily Deschanel ('98)**. Her songs are featured on the show's official soundtrack, which was released on vinyl in fall 2023.

Ginnifer Goodwin ('01) starred in *Buddy Games: Spring Awakening* and voiced Judy Hopps in *Once Upon a Studio,* a short film marking Disney's 100th anniversary that featured an ensemble of beloved characters.

Justin Nurin ('01), a trumpet performer, shares that he played the national anthem prior to game 7 of the MLB National League Championship Series in Philadelphia in October 2023.

Steven Behnke (BUTI'02) is the large ensembles manager for the Mannes School of Music at The New School in New York City. Behnke manages all aspects of the orchestra program as the orchestra, library, and stage manager.

Ilah Cibis ('02) won the 2023 Distinguished Alumni Award from the North Bennet Street School in Boston. She attended their jewelry making and repair program after completing her BFA at BU. Cibis also opened the flagship store for her jewelry brand in Worcester, Mass., in summer 2023.

Michael & Suz Karchmer

Sarah Davis ('02) performed at the Logan County Historical Society and Overland Trail Museum in Sterling, Colo., honoring veterans with a special concert, "Wartime Songs Through the Years." She also works for the state of Colorado and serves as a board member on the Logan County Arts League and the Ivan E. Rundus Foundation.

Kayla Mohammadi ('02), an assistant professor at Massachusetts College of Art and Design and an abstract artist, was the juror for an abstract art show at River Arts in Damariscotta, Maine, in fall 2023. Mohammadi also had her work on display in *Seeing Through* at Cove Street Arts in Portland, Maine, from July to September 2023.

Jason Borbet ('03) opened Borbay Studios & Gallery in Victor, Idaho.

Arturo Chacón-Cruz ('03) sang the title role in Verdi's *Il trovatore* at the San Francisco Opera in fall 2023. Other roles of his include Des Grieux in Massenet's opera *Manon* in Tenerife; King Gustavo III in *Un Ballo in Maschera* at Barcelona's Gran Teatre del Liceu; Rodolfo in Puccini's *La bohème* in Las Palmas, Spain, and Bordeaux, France; and Don José in Bizet's *Carmen* in Belgium. He also sang the closing concert of the Cervantino Festival in Mexico.

Clare Maloney (BUTI'03, CFA'08) has been recording original music and performing with her band, Clare Maloney & The Great Adventure. Their 2023 summer tour included stops across the northeast United States. They opened for Bailen as well as Pat Benatar and Neil Giraldo and played a preshow for Robert Plant and Alison Krauss. Maloney and the band returned to Boston for a show at the Rockwood Music Hall in the Fenway in October 2023.

Coleen Scott ('04) signed a second book contract to document Hollywood costume history, focusing on The Collection of Motion Picture Costume Design in Los Angeles. Scott is also a member of the costume technology and makeup faculty at Santa Rosa Junior College in Santa Rosa, Calif.

Nathan Zullinger ('04,'12) is an assistant professor and director of the choral and vocal program at Haverford College. He previously served on the faculties of the University of North Carolina School of the Arts and the University of Rhode Island.

Resa Blatman's ('06) paintings were included in the fall 2023 exhibition *Bats!* at the Peabody Essex Museum in Salem, Mass. She was also a 2023 recipient of the Mass Cultural Council grant and the city of Somerville recovery grant. Blatman is the 2023–2024 artist-in-residence at Mount Auburn Cemetery in Cambridge, Mass., where she is making a series of paintings and terrariums inspired by the cemetery decorations and the landscape. She is also hosting intimate and informal chats about death with anyone interested and curious.

Katy Rubin ('07) is working to implement Legislative Theatre (LT), a participatory policy-making strategy, in cities in the UK and internationally. She collaborated with the Greater Manchester Combined Authority on an LT initiative to create a five-year Homelessness Prevention Strategy. The project was awarded the International Observatory of Participatory Democracy's 2022 Award for Best Practice in Citizen Participation. Rubin also was named a 2023–24 Atlantic Fellow for Social and Economic Equity at the London School of Economics. The mission of the Atlantic Fellows for Social and Economic Equity program is to create and support a community of changemakers from around the globe who are working to address social and economic inequalities. To find out more about Legislative Theatre and Rubin's work, visit katyrubin.com.

Nicholas Zegel ('07) has been building his own design studio, NICK, in Long Beach, Calif. One of his major clients is New Balance. Zegel has also worked with Arts Council Long Beach on a large-scale community project set to debut in 2024 and has been hosting a local Taco Bell Drawing Club, where artists gather at a Long Beach location of the fast food chain to work on drawings. This community building effort was inspired by the late artist Jason Polan and continues to attract new members and the attention of press and Taco Bell corporate.

Vasiliy Medved ('08,'09) composed his "Three Pieces for Choir Acapella" score during his graduate studies at BU. It won the Ablaze Records Call for Scores and was included in the National Union of Composers of Moldova collection of choral pieces that are waiting for government grant approval for publishing in Eastern Europe. Medved's music was published by Lumina Publishing House, Republic of Moldova (2021 and 2022), and by Lantro Music Publishing House, Brussels, Belgium (2023).

Jenny Rachel Weiner ('09) wrote *The Chameleon*, a satire that explores the complexities of assimilation and Jewish identity. Directed by **Ellie Heyman ('12)**, the play had its world premiere in fall 2023 at Theater J in Washington, D.C.

2010s

Katie Fortunato ('10) produced Nicole Travolta's autobiographical one-woman comedic play, *Nicole Travolta Is Doing Alright*.

Andrew Mayer ('11), Jesse Garlick ('14), and **Fady Demian ('23)** acted in SpeakEasy Stage and the Huntington Theatre's coproduction of *The Band's Visit* by Itamar Moses and David Yazbek, directed by Paul Daigneault, which ran November 10–December 17, 2023. **Aja M. Jackson ('18)** was the production's lighting designer.

Jason Powell ('11) wrote and published an autobiography, *Red-Headed Stepchild* (2023), about the horrors of child abuse. He writes that he is hoping educators will use his book to help teach students that they must have a voice when it comes to their safety. Powell received his doctorate in leadership for educational justice with an emphasis in child abuse from the University of Redlands. His dissertation was an autoethnography designed to explore how and why some students are able to emerge victoriously from horrific and traumatic upbringings, while others are unable to find their own equal liberation.

Sydney Lemmon ('12) starred in the world premiere of the play *Job* in fall 2023, which marked her Off-Broadway debut. *Job* is a thriller with a twist that upends all expectations. The play won the inaugural SoHo Playhouse Lighthouse Series in 2021 and received an extended run at the Connelly Theater through March 23, 2024.

Katrina Galka ('13) and **Jose Martínez ('20)** performed in *Peter Grimes* at the historic Teatro alla Scala in Milan, Italy, in fall 2023.

Kristin Renee Young ('13), a soprano, joined the music ensemble Celtic to Classical for performances at venues in southern Delaware in August 2023.

Leonard Augustine Choo ('14), a costume designer, fashion consultant, and educator, was named to *Prestige Online*'s Class of 2023 40 Under 40 list. Choo is the director of industry development at Singapore Fashion Council.

Benjamin Taylor ('14,'16) played Marcello in a new adaptation of *La bohème* in August and September 2023 at the Colonial Theatre in Pittsfield, Mass.

Naomi J. Brigell (BUTI'11, CFA'15) performed in a Fran Randall classical concert in the Maple Room in Evanston, Ill. Brigell has appeared as a soloist with the Dayton Philharmonic, Palm Beach Symphony, Bach Collegium Fort Wayne, and Salt Creek Song Festival. She is based in Chicago.

Ben Ducoff ('15) recently released an independent feature film, *Yaniv*,

which he cowrote, produced, and starred in alongside fellow CFA grads, including producer/actor **Nik Sadhnani ('15)**, and actors **Annabel Steven ('15)**, **Ben Salus ('16)**, and **Ian Geers ('14)**.

Katie Velasquez (BUTI'10, CFA'15) is the principal flutist of the Missouri Symphony and the artistic director of the Virtual Flute Music Festival.

Kathryn D. Brownlee ('16) was awarded the 2023 American Prize in Conducting–Community Orchestra Division. Brownlee is the founder, artistic director, and conductor of New Texas Symphony Orchestra.

Brad Foust ('17) was appointed to the board of directors for Arts Ed Tennessee, a nonprofit agency that advances, promotes, and supports music, theater, dance, and visual art education through a robust statewide coalition of arts education advocates.

Rachel Orth ('17,'28) performed the violin in the Center for Beethoven Research at Boston University's event *Creation and Temporality: Beethoven's Piano Trio in Bb, Op.97 and Schubert's Piano Trio in Eb, Op. 100–A Symposium and Performance* in November 2023.

Kendra Jain ('19) and **Sarah Shin ('19)** coproduced *The Sitayana (or "How to Make an Exit")*, presented by The Tank, in association with Waves of Love, which had performances in New York City in August 2023 and in Boston in 2024. Jain starred in and Shin directed the one-woman, contemporary retelling of the Ramayana, a classic Hindu epic. **Kyra Tantao ('18)** (graphic designer), **Elizabeth Baker ('20)** (social media manager), **Bea Perez-Arche ('20)** (production stage manager and assistant director), **Danielle DeLaFuente ('22)** (scenic designer), and **McKenna Ebert ('22, CAS'22)** (lighting designer) were also involved in the production.

Michael Pfitzer ('19) is choral director at Deerfield Academy and interim conductor of the Mystic Chorale. Pfitzer lives in Greenfield, Mass., with his two children, wife, Caitlin, and new dog, Rosie.

Jim Barcus

KATHY LIAO ('11) was a 2023 recipient of the Joan Mitchell Fellowship, awarded to 15 artists from across the US. The Joan Mitchell Fellows each receive $60,000, distributed over five years, and the chance to participate in professional development opportunities, convenings that facilitate community building and peer learning, and programs that focus on personal finance, legacy planning, and thought leadership.

2020s

Gina Fonseca ('20) starred in Martyna Majok's *Cost of Living* at SpeakEasy Stage Company in March 2024. Alex Lonati (MET'21) directed the play and **Amanda Fallon ('21)** was the production's lighting designer.

Jose Martínez ('20) was recently granted the International Tuba and Euphonium Association Jim & Jamie Self Creative Award and was named ambassador of the Luminarts Cultural Foundation at the Union League Club of Chicago in 2023. Martínez is currently on a one-year leave from the National Orchestra of Spain in order to perform internationally in countries including Belgium, Switzerland, United States, the Netherlands, and Italy.

Alyssa Primeau ('20) joined the US Navy Band flute section based in Washington, D.C.

Maurya Dickerson ('21) plays with the Ocala, Fla., and Venice, Fla., Symphonies and with the Gainesville Chamber Orchestra. She has also performed at the Zodiac Chamber Music Festival in France and at the Virtuoso & Belcanto Music Festival in Italy.

Ashby Gentry ('21) starred as Alex in the Netflix original series *My Life with the Walter Boys*. The coming-of-age drama premiered in December 2023 and was in Netflix's Top 10 in 88 countries the week of its release. The series has already been renewed for a second season, in which Gentry will reprise his role.

Victoria Paspalas ('21,'23) is the assistant band director at the University of Notre Dame, where she works with the marching band, varsity band, and concert bands as well as teaches several classes in instrumental techniques and music technology. Paspalas also accompanied the band on a trip to Dublin, Ireland, for their first football game as part of the Aer Lingus College Football Classic in August 2023.

Bobby Rogers ('21) is a professor of music at Woodland Community College in Woodland, Calif. Rogers, who is also maestro of the Santa Rosa Youth Symphony and Santa Rosa Symphony Professional Orchestra Family Concert Series, also completed an 11-day tour of Spain conducting the Santa Rosa Youth Symphony.

mica rose ('21) is the codirector of emergence at Arts Connect International, a nonprofit dedicated to building equity in and through the arts.

Saejin Yoo ('21) is program coordinator, regional initiatives, at the New England Foundation for the Arts, where she helps manage new programs that will support nonprofit organizations engaged in arts programming that uplifts underserved communities, especially communities of color, and will feature cohort building and learning.

Danielle DeLaFuente ('22) was the associate scenic designer for *Covenant* at the Roundabout Theatre Company, which ran October 5–December 17, 2023.

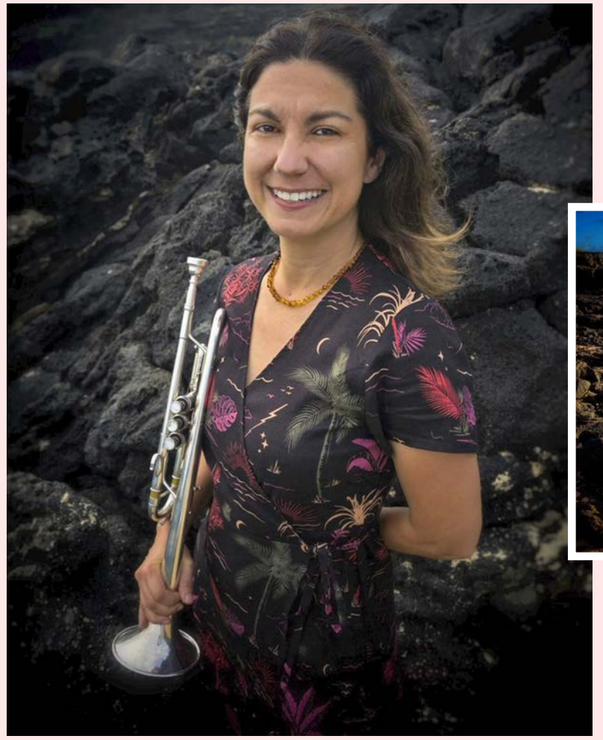
Victoria Omoregie ('22) and **Isabel Van Natta ('22)** acted in the Huntington Theatre's production of Kimberly Belflower's *John Proctor is the Villain*, which ran February 8–March 10, 2024. **Valyn Lyric Turner ('23, CAS'23)** and **Jack Greenberg ('24)** were understudies in the production, while **Jessica Scout Malone ('17)** was a fight and intimacy consultant and **Kevin Schlagle ('12)** was line producer. **Aja M. Jackson ('18)** was the lighting designer.

Anthony Cosio-Marron ('23) will join the Nashville Symphony Orchestra as second/assistant principal trombone (tenure track) in September 2024.

Yaming Jiang ('23) won a Juror's Choice Award at the Cambridge Art Association's 2023 National Prize Show. She is working part time at a gallery and continues to make paintings.

Mary Pyrdol ('23) began a part-time lecturer position teaching web programming at Lesley University College of Art & Design in fall 2023. She writes that she is extending her education by completing the Google UX certification course on Coursera.

MUSE



Courtesy of JoAnn Lamolino

MINDFUL MUSIC

By Steve Holt

TRUMPETER JOANN LAMOLINO says her performance anxiety felt like she was operating a train, and suddenly she realized she didn't know how to drive it. "Everything's going way too fast," she says. "Your mind is racing. You frequently can't focus on the task at hand. You start second-guessing every little thing you've ever known about playing the trumpet or how to play in an orchestra or play an audition."

Lamolino (BUTI'96,'97, CFA'00) started doing yoga as an undergraduate at BU, but she didn't begin practicing mindfulness and yoga to ease her nerves onstage until after about 15 "crash-and-burn" orchestral auditions around the country a few years later. Integrating a daily mindfulness practice improved her focus and interactions with others. Before auditioning or performing, Lamolino would practice positive self-talk, center her mind and body as she sat down to play, and visualize herself playing beautifully.

"The improvement to my trumpet playing was actually quite significant," says Lamolino, who lives in New Jersey but is associate principal trumpet in the Hawaii Symphony Orchestra and teaches at the University of Hawaii. "I started to advance in auditions. It got more and more fun, and then eventually I had my first [audition] win."

When live performances ended at the start of the pandemic in 2020, Lamolino became certified in kundalini yoga—a process that took seven months and 220 hours of coursework—and in early 2021 began teaching mindfulness and yoga online. Many of her early students were fellow musicians, and she recognized that the inner work she had done could benefit other performers. Today, musicians from across the country can log on to Lamolino's classes, seminars, and one-on-one sessions through her virtual Mind.Music. Sanctuary studio to learn exercises and techniques to reduce anxiety and increase the quality of their play. Lamolino also integrates mindfulness into her trumpet courses at the University of Hawaii and master classes she teaches around the country.

"Back when I was going to college in the 1990s and early 2000s, this stuff was still kind of taboo," Lamolino says. "But I do think that being more open-minded to having a regular mindfulness practice really helps your day-to-day life, let alone operating a piece of metal on the stage."

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