

MASON GROSS

SCHOOL OF THE ARTS



*Forward,
March!*

TODD NICHOLS IS DETERMINED TO TAKE THE MARCHING SCARLET KNIGHTS TO THE NEXT LEVEL

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Do

Mason Gross faculty and affiliated faculty received **2 Tony nominations** last spring: Faculty member Don Holder was nominated for best lighting design of a play for *Oslo*, while *A Doll's House, Part 2*, penned by one of last year's playwrights-in-residence, Lucas Hnath, was up for Best Play.

Our tribute concert to radical postwar composer Lou Harrison, which took place at Trinity Church Wall Street on April 23, was named among **This Week's 8 Best Classical Music Moments** in *The New York Times*.

8



the Math

25

In May, *Backstage* named us among the **Best 25 MFA & MA Acting Programs in the U.S. and U.K.:**

"Built on the foundations of a true theater company, this theater program inducts actors (both undergrad and grad), playwrights, directors, set designers, and more to learn and work alongside each other."

Rutgers Theater Company's *The Cider House Rules*, February 2017.



MATT PILSNER

A MESSAGE FROM THE DEAN


Over the past 10 years or so we have been fortunate at Mason Gross to be involved in many special events and projects: Rutgers in New York productions at Alice Tully Hall, The Joyce Theater, Blue Note Jazz Club, WhiteBox, and other venerable Big Apple venues; the dedication of Mortensen Hall; the 250th anniversary celebration of Rutgers; and participation in the Sam Wanamaker Festival at Shakespeare's Globe in London, to name a few.

But all this may have been a prelude to the extraordinary undertaking that is about to be launched in downtown New Brunswick: a new \$65 million performing arts center that will be shared by three regional companies—George Street Playhouse, American Repertory Ballet, and Crossroads Theatre Company—and the Mason Gross School (see rendering below).

This new "arts co-op," of which Rutgers will become a 28 percent owner with an investment of \$17 million, will contain two new performance spaces: a 485-seat theater with orchestra pit, fly tower, and wing space for music and dance events, and a 250-seat proscenium theater for drama productions and film screenings. The larger theater has been designed to specifications proposed by our faculty, who intend to use the space for opera and dance performances, especially, but also for musical theater, a program we hope to launch over the next few years. The highly respected firm of Elkus Manfredi is serving as architect for the project; Auerbach Pollock Friedlander, advisor for Carnegie Hall's Zankel Hall, The Santa Fe Opera's Crosby Theatre, and other major performance spaces, serve as theater consultants.

New Brunswick PAC, as the space is being called, is path-breaking in terms of its town-gown collaboration. Built by DEVCO, the New Brunswick Development Corporation, and supported by the State of New Jersey, Middlesex County, the City of New Brunswick, and Rutgers, the center will inject energy into the downtown area and Livingston Avenue, in particular. It will allow Mason Gross students to rub elbows with the professional artists of the resident theater and dance companies and broaden our outreach to the Central Jersey community. The center will be constructed on the site of George Street Playhouse and Crossroads Theatre, which are being razed as I write. Official ground-breaking took place on October 4, with a target completion date of August 2019.

We will add a construction-site report to our website, so that you can follow the progress of the project as it unfolds. Stay tuned!



George B. Stauffer

— George B. Stauffer, Dean



MASON GROSS

"Every now and then you feel frustrated because it's not going your way, or you're tired and you feel like you're hitting your head against a brick wall and nothing's happening. But there's nothing else that would really fulfill me as much as doing music."

— Violinist and music education major Nathan Bishop, in our new admissions video, *The Idea of Imagination*. View the video on our YouTube page.

8 Faculty & Staff News 10 Student & Alumni News 14 Student Voices 20 Commencement 23 In Memoriam



6 FORWARD, MARCH!

New Marching Band director Todd Nichols confesses he's a "band nerd at heart."



13 TRUE GRIT

Dance student Bria Bacon landed her dream job just two weeks after graduation.



16 DISHING ON DESIGN

Theater alumnus James Pearse Connelly sets the stage for VH1's cooking show featuring Martha Stewart and Snoop Dogg (yes, you read that right).

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ON THE COVER

Todd Nichols on the field of High Point Solutions Stadium with members of the Marching Scarlet Knights. Photo by Keith Muccilli.

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Forward, March!

NEW MARCHING BAND DIRECTOR IS DETERMINED TO TAKE RUTGERS TO THE NEXT LEVEL

BY LISA INTRABARTOLA
COURTESY OF RUTGERS TODAY

WHEN THE MARCHING SCARLET KNIGHTS WOUND THEIR WAY INTO HIGH POINT SOLUTIONS STADIUM FOR THE FIRST TIME THIS FALL, A NEW DIRECTOR LED THE REVELRY.

Todd Nichols—a New Jersey native with 25 years of experience as a music educator, band leader, and professional percussionist—joined the university July 1 as full-time associate director of university bands and director of athletic bands. Nichols takes the baton from Timothy Smith, who is retiring after directing the university's athletic bands for 17 years.

"It's been a longtime goal of mine to be part of a university band program, and I always have been a fan of Rutgers," said Nichols, who's led marching bands from Edison and Roxbury high schools to state championships. "I consider Rutgers to be the pinnacle for our area and really believe the marching band can be one of the best—if not the best—in the country."

A self-described "band nerd at heart," Nichols picked up the trombone in fourth grade, but was wooed away from the wind instrument by the drum line his first year with the Morris Hills High School Marching Band—where he played snare for three years and spent his senior year as drum major.

"There was something about the rhythm, drive, and force of the drums that was way more appealing to me," he said. "I used to practice in the basement for hours and my parents' cue for me to stop when I was too loud or too annoying was flicking the lights on and off."

Nichols earned a bachelor's degree in music education from The College of New Jersey and a master's in conducting from Messiah College. During that time, he prepped for a music career by playing professionally in clubs, Broadway shows, and at celebrity fêtes while working with many New Jersey high school drum lines and percussion sections. In 1999, he became full-time director of Edison High School's band program, which he led to multiple N.J. State Marching Band Championship victories. He's spent the last 13 years as director of bands at Roxbury High School, a nationally recognized marching band program. Under Nichols's direction, the marching band performed alongside Bruno Mars and the Red Hot Chili Peppers in Super Bowl XLVIII's halftime show.

That deep connection to New Jersey's high school marching band leaders will be an asset to Nichols as he embarks on his first order of business at Rutgers:

bulking up the band. During his predecessor's tenure, the Marching Scarlet Knights grew from 134 to 255 members before dipping back down below 200 for the 2016 season. Nichols's goal is 300.

"The kids are wonderful and their drive is very inspiring. They have a great work ethic, and they want to improve," he said of the current band. "We are working as hard as we can to recruit because there is strength in numbers. We have so much unreached potential."

Putting on halftime shows is nothing new for Nichols, but this will be his first season leading a band through more than one routine. His tentative plans for those shows include staying true to the band's—and the region's—drum corps slide step style.

"We only have three days of rehearsal, two hours at a clip," Nichols said. "When 95 percent of the students coming in are used to that style, there's no need to reinvent the wheel."

But that doesn't mean the Marching Scarlet Knights can't spice up their drill formations and incorporate more fun upper-body choreography and energizing musical arrangements into their repertoire, he said.

"We have everyone in the stands from students in their 20s to grandparents in their 80s, so we need to be wide reaching," said Nichols. "We will have different programs to hit different demographics so everyone has something they can latch onto throughout the course of the season."

Darryl Bott, director of university bands at Mason Gross, headed up the search committee to replace Smith. Bott said he has long been impressed with Nichols's successes as a high school band director and is confident he can reinvigorate the relationship between the marching band and Rutgers fans.

"He is just a dynamo. He's exactly the kind of energy we need right now to get to the next level," said Bott. "Our vision is to make that band as strong as anything else in the Midwest in terms of performance level. But we want to do it in a way that's New Jersey driven and has its own spark and own identity. I'd like to see in a few years that instead of eating hot dogs at halftime, everyone is staying in the stadium to watch the band."



Behind the Music

Nichols gets real about the songs he hates to love, and why he's a sucker for performing in extreme weather with 225 of his closest friends

Favorite song?

I love classic rock, jazz, music from the '80s (yes, I grew up in the days of arena rock bands). I will say that any time I hear the tune *Rock Lobster* by the B52's or *Free Fallin'* by Tom Petty, I have to laugh, because it brings me back to some funny memories of singing along at the top of my lungs with my friends when I was younger.

What's your guilty-pleasure music—the songs you hate to admit you love?

Definitely Broadway. If you don't know me very well you would never guess that I am a serious Broadway buff. I've had the great fortune of playing a lot of wonderful musicals with incredible musicians, and I love listening to all kinds of old standards and current Broadway hits alike. My family laughs whenever Broadway music comes on in the car or at home...they say it's time for Dad's Broadway Karaoke performance again! And no, I can't sing well.

You decided to put down the trombone at some point and go toward drums. Why?

Honestly, I was simply pretty bad at the trombone. My middle school director of course did the typical band director thing and moved me to baritone horn and then tuba because they "needed that instrument." I was drawn to the drums in seventh grade, primarily the drum set. It was from this point forward that I just fell in love with the drums. Once I hit eighth grade, all I knew was I wanted to be a professional musician and bandleader. What I really wanted to do was be the drummer and lead the Count Basie Big Band.

In a marching band, you've got to walk and play at the same time—often in extremes of weather, outside, with a heavy uniform on. Why is this appealing—and what do you think it teaches you?

Nothing about being in the extreme weather is appealing! It's one of the hazards of the gig! All kidding aside, what I truly love about marching band is what it teaches the performers: It instills pride, discipline, and a host of other positive attributes that help students mature and grow, teaching them life skills they can use in whatever profession they choose. Many of my most positive lifelong memories are connected to something that has to do with marching band along the way. Getting rained on stinks, being in the hot sun for hours and hours at a time stinks, but accomplishing a goal with 225 of your closest friends in front of 50,000 people—now, that's something special!

FACULTY & STAFF NEWS

Congratulations to music faculty **Judith Nicosia**, area coordinator of the voice program, on her election to the American Academy of Teachers of Singing, a professional organization dedicated to furthering the vocal arts through research and publication, and offering guidance in the teaching, business, and science of singing.

Visual Arts faculty **Aki Sasamoto's** solo exhibition *Yield Point* was on view at The Kitchen in New York City from April 6 to May 13. The show, which examined different types of elasticity, was highlighted in various publications, including *The New Yorker*, which said: "Sasamoto makes art that thinks out loud, constructing sculptures and environments that double as evocative props and settings for performances, which are equal parts lecture, experiment, and standup routine."

On May 7, **Dean George B. Stauffer** spoke at the Bach Colloquium 2017 at Harvard University, in Cambridge, MA. His topic: newly discovered corrections in the original Bach prints. On May 12

and 19, he presented the Distinguished Scholar Lecture *Why Bach Matters* at the Bethlehem Bach Festival in Pennsylvania.

Bravo to sculpture faculty **Patrick Strzelec**, named a Chancellor's Scholar. The award, announced in June, recognizes promising scholars at Rutgers at the associate professor level.

In May, **Barbara Marchant**, associate chair of the Theater Department, head of acting, and director of the Rutgers Conservatory at Shakespeare's Globe, was honored with the university's Warren I. Susman Award for Excellence in Teaching, Rutgers University's highest honor for outstanding and innovative performance in the classroom by a tenured faculty member.

Percussion faculty **Kyle Zerna** and **Joseph Tompkins** toured Europe in April with the New York Philharmonic, appearing in six countries over a three-week span.

Dance faculty member **Pam Tanowitz** is this year's recipient of the Baryshnikov Arts Center's Cage Cunningham Fellowship. The prize includes \$50,000, access to the center's John Cage and

Merce Cunningham Studio for eight weeks, and administrative support to create a new work. Tanowitz is already planning an evening-length staging of T.S. Eliot's poems *Four Quartets*, with an original score by Finnish composer Kaija Saariaho.

The Harvard Art Museums announced in the spring that they have acquired a collection of 443 printer's proof photographs from photography professor **Gary Schneider** and his partner, John Erdman, accrued since 1981 when they founded their Manhattan-based photography printing business. The Schneider/Erdman Archive also includes test prints, glass plate negatives, vintage material, and business records as well as 30 European modernist photographs from their personal collection—establishing the museums as a primary site for the study, research, exhibition, and interpretation of contemporary photography. The collection, which includes works by Nan Goldin, Mary Ellen Mark, and Richard Avedon, will be featured in the exhibition *Analog Culture: Printer's Proofs from the Schneider/Erdman Photography Lab, 1981–2001*, opening in May 2018. "I did think the people that came to me [for printing] were all really great," Schneider said on *thePhotoShow.org* podcast, "but that's my nature, of suspending any judgment on any of the work in order to catalyze the work, in order to...bring the work up to the expectation of the artist."

Visual Arts faculty Patrick Strzelec and Aki Sasamoto on April 30 at the opening of the Highland Park Sculpture River Walk, a collaboration between MFA sculpture students and the Borough of Highland Park. They're perched atop *Reflective Span (Inverted Arch)*, by Jack Warner and Stephen Williams. The sculpture, one of seven student works that were on view along the Raritan River through September, is meant to echo the arched train trestle that carries commuters along the Northeast Corridor.



NOTE TO SELF

Say Yes. Fail Big. Have Fun.

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



PHILLIP SPAETH

Tony Bordonaro

Dance BFA, 2009
Dancer with Douglas Dunn and Dancers and 10 Hairy Legs

Find your voice and trust it.

You are unique—we all are—and this is what makes you valuable. Don't spend time trying to fit into the box of what is currently being produced and valued. Pioneer! Make something new. Go spelunking into the depths of your subconscious and find out what makes you an artist, and then create. When you believe in your vision, others will too. Think of creativity as a way of going through life, not something you turn on and off when entering the studio.

HAVE FUN and meditate daily.

Be prepared, always.

Lack of prep comes from fear of actually achieving the thing you want. Trust your gut, even if it seems as though it's taking you in the exact opposite direction of where you think you're meant to be heading. I've found, more often than not, it's taking you on a shortcut or sometimes a more informative path than the one you think you should fight for. I'd also tell myself to stop judging what I think I can achieve and instead put it all out there and let the roadblocks come from outside instead of within.



DIRTY SUGAR PHOTOGRAPHY

Stephanie Klemons

Dance BA, 2004
Associate and supervising choreographer on the Tony-winning *Hamilton*, *An American Musical*; *Vanessa* in *In The Heights* at the Pittsburgh Civic Light Opera

Käri B. Berntson

Stage Management MFA, 2017
Production assistant on a development residency for Camille A. Brown at Baryshnikov Arts Center; sound designer for the upcoming *The Sound-Off* at the Theatre at St. Clement's in New York City



THONON ALEXANDER

First: Always say yes.

If someone offers to let you observe their rehearsal, say yes and go to rehearsal even if that means doing your homework on the train. School is such a precious gift of time to learn your craft, and part of that experience is having access to rooms, rehearsals, people, and experiences that you won't have outside of school. Saying yes to everything from working on a side project, designing outside of my concentration, and attending classes outside my major gave me some of the most memorable lessons I had while at school. Second: Make big and bold mistakes. I worried too much about making the "right" choice, and going with what I knew would work, but it wasn't the best choice. The riskier, unknown choice might mean that I'd have failed in the moment, but I would have learned more by the big, bold mistake. School is the perfect place to make mistakes. Your livelihood isn't impacted by the mistakes, and there is a support system of professors, advisors, and other students to help you out. You are here to learn, and hone your chosen craft. Make the most of it.

Evan James

BM, 2011
Elementary instrumental music teacher in Marlboro Township Public Schools



EDWARD YOUNG

Don't be afraid of change or failure.

Growing up, I was always terrified of making mistakes. When I did fail, I would be too critical of myself. It wasn't until leaving a teaching job to go to graduate school that I learned how failure is an integral part of learning as much as change is a part of life. In any aspect of your personal and professional life, assess why you failed, and make an active change to strive for different results. When you look back in a year or two from where you started, you will see how much more mature you are and how far you've come, not only as a musician, but as a human being. As long as you change and fail forward, you grow!

NEWS

STUDENT & ALUMNI



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cerpt From Goldberg Variations,' performed by **Nick Sciscione**, is the evening's knockout. Here the movement really is virtuosically musical," *New York Times* dance critic Alistair Macauley wrote of our dance alumnus's work as part of Stephen Petronio Company's slate of performances at The Joyce Theater in late March and early April. Sciscione was featured on a poster outside the iconic New York City theater, and was nominated for a Bessie Award in the Outstanding Performer category for his work on the piece.

On March 2, *Bull in a China Shop*, a new play by MFA playwright alumna **Bryna Turner**, caught the attention of *The New York Times*, who called it "pugnacious, tender, and gloriously funny." Inspired by letters between Mary Woolley, the president of Mount Holyoke College from 1900 to 1937, and Jeannette Marks, the writer who was her longtime love, the play marks what the *Times* calls Turner's "immensely auspicious professional playwrighting debut" at Lincoln Center Theater.

Rutgers Today producer Cameron Bowman and dance student (and now-alum) **Alex Rosenberg** won the top prize in the electronic news gathering category from the Garden State Journalists Association for their video about dance student **Anna Gichan**. The 2017 winners were honored on May 24 at a dinner in Weehawken. Meanwhile, Gichan, who graduated in May, was named winner of the Paul Robeson Renaissance Award at this year's Chancellor's Student Leadership Gala. The award recognizes Rutgers undergraduate students who have maintained at least a 3.0 GPA and "possess extraordinary talent, commitment, and intellectual energy across a range of disciplines."

Based on the young-adult novel by Jay Asher, the Netflix original series *13 Reasons Why* follows the story of why high-schooler Hannah ends her life, as told on cassette tapes sent to the classmates she leaves behind. Former theater student **Brandon Flynn** is one of the 13 in what the *Los Angeles Times* calls an "addictive mystery." Former theater student **Christian Navarro** has a role in the series too.

Visual arts student **Lauren Loesner** headed to the Cannes Film Festival in May to show *Artist Profile: The Sex Twins*, in the short-film competition. Twin artists who make "bad, man-hating art in the name of feminism" is Loesner's comedic comment on "some of the more aggressive approaches to gender equality" seen in the art and entertainment world. "Being a part of that world myself, I find it important and healthy to be able to self-reflect, find the nuances in the behavior of artists, and poke fun," says Loesner.

Theater alumnus **Pico Alexander** stars as the romantic lead opposite Reese Witherspoon in the romantic comedy *Home Again*, released nationwide on September 8.

MFA visual arts grad **Jennie C. Jones** has been named the recipient of the 2017 Ruth Ann and Nathan Perlmutter Artist-in-Residence Award from the Rose Art Museum at Brandeis University. The award recognizes emerging artists' achievements and supports a yearly residency program at Brandeis. On November 9 at 5 p.m., Jones will deliver a public lecture at the Civic Square Building here on campus as part of the Mason Gross Presents series. Admission is free.

Dance alumnus Nick Sciscione was featured on a poster outside The Joyce Theater in New York City. *The New York Times* praised Sciscione's performance at the theater last spring as a member of Stephen Petronio Company.

SARAH SILVER

Student **Cody Kostro**, on leave last spring to make his Broadway debut, appeared alongside Allison Janney in *Six Degrees of Separation*, at the Ethel Barrymore Theatre. The show ran from April 25 through June 18.

On June 15, vocal students **Andrew Moore** and **Erin Schwab**, along with recent vocal alumna **Dayeong Kang**, sang three arias from Giacomo Puccini's *La Bohème* at The Yard on College Avenue. The performance, which was preceded by Professor Eduardo Chama's short talk on the opera, was part of a series of summer events at the newly constructed outdoor venue. That evening also featured a screening of The Metropolitan Opera's performance of *La Bohème* with Angela Gheorghiu.

Dance alumnus **Scott Schneider** has been invited to join two New York-based dance companies as a full-time company member: Emery LeCrone Dance and Company XIV, directed by award-winning choreographer Austin McCormick.

On May 12, vocal student **Shabnam Abedi** received a shout-out from *The New York Times* as the soloist in Musica Viva NY's concert presentation of Seymour Bernstein's *Song of Nature*. The work, based on Ralph Waldo Emerson's essay "Nature," was performed as a companion to Brahms's "A German Requiem" at Unitarian Church of All Souls in New York City.

On May 4, members of the **Rutgers Marching Scarlet Knights** were one with the Force on *The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon*, celebrating Cinco de Mayo, *Star Wars*, and International Tuba Day with Fallon, Darth Vader, and The Roots. In addition, on June 20, several percussionists appeared on the show performing with the rock band Imagine Dragons.

Philly-based alumnus **Orrin Evans** is taking a gig as the new pianist for avant-garde jazz trio The Bad Plus, a group with a 17-year history of making original music as well as pop and rock covers. Where their musical relationship will go is a welcome mystery to Evans, who says in June's *JazzTimes*, "Man, I'm riding the ride. Wherever this music takes us, and this journey takes us, I'm down for the ride right now."



Remembering Professor Samuel Dilworth-Leslie (1932–2017)

BY KYLE KEVORKIAN MCCANN
(RC 1986, MGSA 2000)



Years ago I chose to study piano at Rutgers for the chance to work with Sam, as he had everyone call him, and I never regretted that decision. His influence on my life is indelible.

Yes, he was a first-rate musician and piano teacher, but he also was someone who truly cared. When he would open his studio door to me for my lesson, he would make me feel I was the one person in the world he wanted to see. I'm sure he made all his students feel this way, and I'm sure he meant it. Though I stopped taking lessons halfway through my undergraduate years, we remained close. As an adult I took lessons with him intermittently and then began graduate music studies, primarily to learn from him.

Sam, who passed away in February at his home in Spain, lived each day of his 84 years for music. He began playing piano as a child in Savannah, GA, and from high school through graduate school studied music in New York City, earning master of music degrees in the mid-1950s from both the Manhattan School of Music and Columbia University.

In the 1960s he moved to France to study with legendary music teacher Nadia Boulanger. His years with Boulanger proved career-defining, as she helped him learn the piano works of then-little-known French composer Gabriel Fauré. Through Boulanger, Sam became a Fauré pianist, performing the composer's complete works (one of the first pianists to do so) during the next two decades in Paris, London, New York City, and, of course, on campus in New Brunswick. Sam also recorded the music of Fauré, as well as that of Frédéric Chopin, Robert Schumann, and Antonín Dvořák.

After completing his studies in France in the mid-1960s, Sam moved to New Jersey to join the faculty at Rutgers. He was the university's first piano professor; he was on faculty for 29 years.

Sam had high standards during private lessons but never criticized sloppy technique or misguided musical interpretations; he simply showed a better way. In my undergraduate years he'd have us students perform for each other a few evenings a month. We'd benefit from his suggestions, from the experience of playing for others, and from the supportive environment he created. As a graduate student, I had only a single year with Sam before his 1998 retirement, but it was one I relished.

In cards he'd send me during school breaks, Sam would write, "Let me hear from you!" I appreciated his caring and hope he's hearing mine now.

RUTGERS

Mason Gross School
of the Arts

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TRUE GRIT

A DILIGENT BRIA BACON LANDS HER DREAM JOB JUST TWO WEEKS AFTER GRADUATION

Hard work has never frightened Bria Bacon. On the contrary, Bacon might be one of those rare creatures who fuels up on challenges. The dancer and former gymnast—she trained in Canada and Russia, as well as in New Jersey, and attended the Junior Olympics in Boston—is the daughter of a retired corrections officer and a Retired Reserve member of the U.S. Navy, and it shows.

"I have to do it until it's right," says Bacon, who speaks the way she moves: with purpose. "The gym instilled in me a steadfast mentality."

Two weeks after graduating from the BFA program in dance last spring, Bacon landed a one-year contract with the renowned Stephen Petronio Company. (Another Mason Gross alum, Nick Sciscione, is a member of the New York-based contemporary dance company as well. See page 10.) Three slots were up for grabs, she says, with just a single opening going to a female dancer.

Competition was fierce—but then, so is Bacon, on leave from the university's five-year master's in dance education program. Bacon believes in destiny, sure—but she also believes in nudging destiny's needle in the right direction. In her estimation, not a shred of the past is wasted, not all those hours tumbling in the gym throughout her girlhood in Rahway, NJ, not the injuries that dogged her last year, as she completed undergrad training at Mason Gross.

Bacon is still grasping the reality that, with the ink barely dry on her college diploma, she's gainfully employed—and with a company that she's been eying since high school. Petronio's oeuvre, encapsulated by critic Siobhan Burke as "brash, hyperkinetic dances that demand precision, attack, and a sense of adventure from his dancers," seems made for Bacon.

Still, "I didn't know that the outcome with Stephen Petronio would be so grand," she says. "Many times, people know they are about to fulfill a dream or goal by the amount of time they spend homing in on that specific achievement. Because of how quickly it all happened, reaching this benchmark was completely unforeseen."

She recalls the moment Petronio phoned to offer her the job: "If tears could have fallen down my face they would have," she says, "but the shock that I was experiencing merely allowed me to say 'THANK YOU!' and 'ABSOLUTELY!' "

Dance faculty member Keith A. Thompson says Bacon's success right out of the box comes as no surprise.

"'Tenacious' is the first word I think of when I think of Bria!" he writes in an email. "I believe she snagged a professional dancing job right after graduation because she is determined, she puts in the work, she takes risks, and she is hungry for it. Her secret sauce is that she has grit, inspiration, and aspiration, and a 'Here-I-am, see-me' attitude.

"There are some dancers who just have it," he adds. "That's what I see in Bria."

Still, Bacon seems to realize that effort—even the titanic effort she tends to devote to any given task—doesn't always yield immediate success, especially in the dance world.

"'No' is part of the game," she reasons. "The best dancers are told no."

In fact, there were days when her senior year at Mason Gross felt like one big "No." Even the indefatigable Bacon found herself wrung out and bewildered at times, attempting to manage a schedule of two-hour evening rehearsals on the heels of three-hour arts-education classes. The low point came when a knee injury kept her from performing her solo in two high-profile student concerts.

"The mental and physical toll that took on me really began to weigh on my heart heavily," she says. "It was very taxing."

But Bacon hunkered down, turning to the core elements that have always sustained her, relying on family, bolstering

her head game, and devoting hours to strength-building exercises meant to help ward off further injury.

"There were many nights filled with tears and questions from myself about whether I would make it to May 2017 for commencement," she says, "but with my parents' and close friends' support, as well as meditation, prayer, and a daily planner, I

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IF TEARS COULD HAVE FALLEN DOWN MY FACE THEY WOULD HAVE, BUT THE SHOCK THAT I WAS EXPERIENCING MERELY ALLOWED ME TO SAY 'THANK YOU!' AND 'ABSOLUTELY!'

”

was able to overcome what I believe to be one of the hardest years to date, and with much success."

Yes, success by any measure: In May, Bacon graduated *cum laude*. In October, she was scheduled to make her debut with the Stephen Petronio Company, at New York City Center's Fall For Dance Festival.

"Bria took on challenges and learned to battle through turmoil and conquer it," Thompson says. "Over four years she really began to believe and trust in who she is and what she has to offer. I'm very proud of her."





STUDENT VOICES

BY JULIE ZEDECK

“ I make sure I warm up on stage before curtain rise with my heels on. Sometimes the floor is slippery, and I want to make sure I know how the ground feels under my feet, ”

says student pianist Enriqueta Somarriba (pictured), a Spain native who performed on May 8 at Carnegie Hall’s Weill Recital Hall in New York City with Mason Gross pianists from 14 other countries. “Last time I performed at Carnegie Hall I did not have time to do this, and someone recorded the rehearsal and uploaded it on YouTube. It was winter in New York City, and I’m playing on Weill’s stage with my snow boots on.” Somarriba managed to keep her shoes on—and the event was, by all accounts, a success. “The concerts . . . give us a sneak peek at some largely undiscovered potential stars,” Rorianne Schrade wrote in her review online at the *New York Concert Review*. Bravi to all!

Music education student and trombone player Julie Zedek spent her summer vacation in a musical whirlwind on Cape Cod in Massachusetts, performing nine—count ‘em, nine—operettas and musicals, under the batons of several Broadway conductors. Zedek performed as part of an 18-piece orchestra at the College Light Opera Company (CLOC), helping to mount nine weeks of shows that included *Grand Hotel* and *Once Upon a Mattress*. Here’s her story:

The big challenge at CLOC was learning a lot of different music at once. As we were performing a show at night, we were working in the mornings to learn the show for the next week. Still, it was always an amazing feeling to get a huge show together in a week. For example, putting together *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* in a week seems impossible, but with the strong work ethic of the orchestra, vocal company, set crew, and costume crew, we made it work, and it was an amazing production.

Also, I felt as if I got a little better after every rehearsal and performance. It was a great experience to play with the same orchestra all summer, because we kept improving as a group.

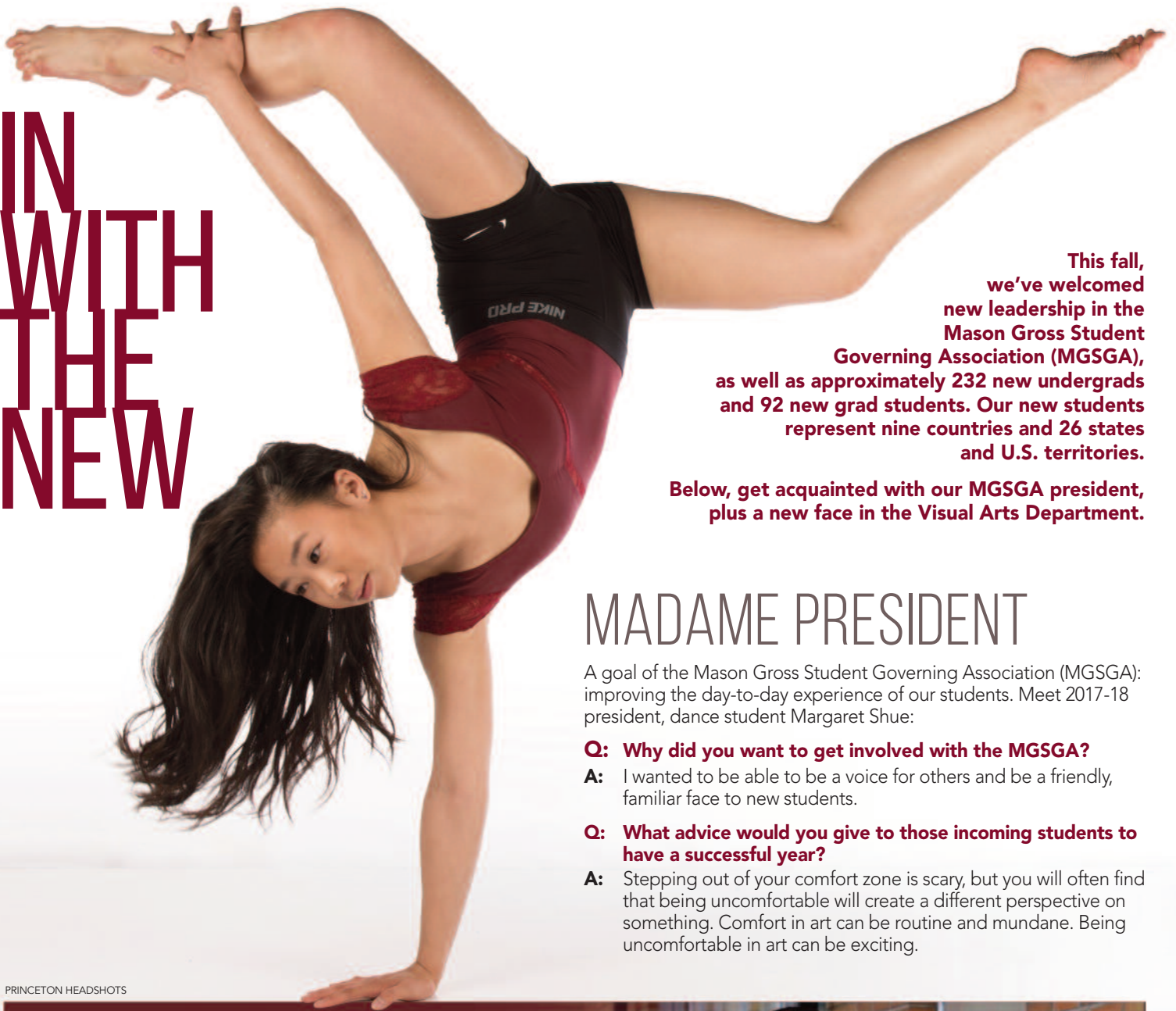
In the orchestra, our schedule included a 10 a.m.-to-12:30 p.m. rehearsal, and an 8 p.m. show, with two shows on Thursdays, a *sitzprobe* (seated rehearsal) on Saturdays, and Sundays off.

I was exposed to music that I had never played before. CLOC opened my eyes to musicals and operettas (we presented three Gilbert and Sullivan operettas) that I had never heard of or studied, and the experience pushed me to reach out of my comfort zone to start to explore different kinds of music.

I would not trade my summer with CLOC for anything. After playing so many different shows, I became a more versatile musician.

JODY SOMERS

IN WITH THE NEW



This fall, we've welcomed new leadership in the Mason Gross Student Governing Association (MGSGA), as well as approximately 232 new undergrads and 92 new grad students. Our new students represent nine countries and 26 states and U.S. territories.

Below, get acquainted with our MGSGA president, plus a new face in the Visual Arts Department.

MADAME PRESIDENT

A goal of the Mason Gross Student Governing Association (MGSGA): improving the day-to-day experience of our students. Meet 2017-18 president, dance student Margaret Shue:

Q: Why did you want to get involved with the MGSGA?

A: I wanted to be able to be a voice for others and be a friendly, familiar face to new students.

Q: What advice would you give to those incoming students to have a successful year?

A: Stepping out of your comfort zone is scary, but you will often find that being uncomfortable will create a different perspective on something. Comfort in art can be routine and mundane. Being uncomfortable in art can be exciting.

PRINCETON HEADSHOTS

DEVOTED

“Art is the only thing I really wanted to do or saw myself doing, and it’s the one thing I’m OK at,” says Giancarlo Venturini, a first-year BFA visual arts student. Venturini, who also plans to study Slavic languages while at Rutgers, adds: “When I start to paint or draw, the sun is out, but when I look up it’s 1 in the morning, and I somehow skipped dinner. Time passes by in a good way, because I get so entranced by the artwork. I can’t say the same thing about anything else.”



ERIKA RUDD

SNOOP

EMMY-WINNING THEATER ALUMNUS SETS THE STAGE FOR VH1'S MARTHA & SNOOP'S POTLUCK DINNER PARTY



DISHING ON DESIGN

BY ALEXANDRA KLAASSEN

It's not every day you get to see Martha Stewart and Snoop Dogg cook dinner together.

But that's just what Emmy-winner and set design alum James Pearse Connelly did when VH1 asked him to work on *Martha & Snoop's Potluck Dinner Party*, a weed pun-filled cooking show featuring the domestic maven and the rapper hanging with a variety of guests and performers, including Robin Thicke and Kathy Griffin. As guest Seth Rogen said of the show: "This is the weirdest group of people ever on a stage together."

Connelly has been nominated twice in this year's Emmys for outstanding production design for both an episode of *Bill Nye Saves the World* and the season finale of *The Voice*. He has also designed sets for Bravo's *Top Chef*, the *MTV Video Music Awards* (for which he won an Emmy in 2009), NBC's *The Biggest Loser* and the recently canceled *The New Celebrity Apprentice* with Arnold Schwarzenegger. He can do weird.

Connelly says he "grew up with a glue gun in hand." No wonder: His mom was an artist, and his dad worked as an architect. He says reality TV allows him to indulge his creative side.

"Your design becomes not just a character, but something to affect the personalities and get a behavior out of contestants," Connelly explains. He describes the *Potluck Dinner Party* set as "another character" between Martha and Snoop.



Above: Odd couple Snoop Dogg and Martha Stewart on the set that alum James Pearse Connelly created for their successful cooking show; facing page: Connelly's red-and-black set for NBC's *The Voice*.

The show, which has emerged as a surprise hit for VH1, debuted in November 2016 and is filmed in Los Angeles. At first glance, the set exhibits a split personality: On one side, all-Snoop-all-the-time—black tiles, glittering backsplash, and gold kitchen ware; on the other, Martha central—white wood panels, ceramic jars, and copper pots.

And why not? The difference between the celebrities' worlds can be summed up in this on-camera exchange:

Snoop: "You and your homies are going to the club?"

Martha: "Yes, Snoop—the country club."

The odd couple's dynamic is inherently wacky, with Martha's nonsense cooking style complementing the often laid-back, sometimes alarmed reactions of Snoop Dogg. Snoop ushers Martha into the world of rap with guests like Rick Ross and Wiz Khalifa, while Martha introduces Snoop to the harrowing job of cooking lobsters, ordering him to "just grab it!" as Snoop hovers nervously above the lobster tank.

'BUILDING LITTLE WORLDS'

Connelly says that choosing to work in set design began to make sense once he landed at Mason Gross.

"There was this magic moment in [former head of design] Vickie Esposito's class," he says. "She was going through her lecture, and I thought: 'You know, this is totally me. I like reading plays and building little worlds,



VH1/BRANDON WILLIAMS

like G.I. Joe and stuff. This is totally cool. I'm super into this. I can do this!" Still, challenges do arise—for example, finding points of intersection between Martha and Snoop's aesthetics proved to be a head-scratcher.

"I wanted Martha and Snoop to bless everything," he says. "If you're going to hold an audience and drive a story, you have to feel comfortable in your space."

Still, Connelly seems to delight in these design riddles.

"Set design comes naturally to me because I'm just a natural-born people-pleaser and problem-solver," he says. "It involves a lot of research on the aesthetics and just staying humble enough to keep the questions coming so you know where you can make adjustments. And I always try to over-deliver."

Connelly says he "got fully educated on what Martha likes... She's incredible. Her knowledge of local vendors here was great," while Snoop's sole request for the set design involved featuring a movie poster and an album cover.

With their feedback in mind, Connelly integrated some key design points to symbolize their unexpected friendship.

"The flooring has got two different kinds of wood in it, just like two different people weaving themselves together," he points out. "I unified them all with a city backdrop that feels urban, metropolitan, and late night, and also with a big oak tree in the middle that felt, to me, like an olive branch between Snoop's personality and style and Martha's taste. It's really a unification of two worlds."

That level of problem-solving comes in handy on a show so irreverent that even Snoop can't quite comprehend how *Martha & Snoop's Potluck Dinner Party* made it to air.

"Just to clarify: I'm not high right now," Snoop quips in a promo, "but whoever gave us this show must have been."

And, set against a warring array of whitewashed wood paneling and gold-painted car grills, Martha and Snoop seem both out of place and right at home.



SET DESIGN COMES NATURALLY TO ME BECAUSE I'M JUST A NATURAL-BORN PEOPLE-PLEASER AND PROBLEM-SOLVER. IT INVOLVES A LOT OF RESEARCH ON THE AESTHETICS AND JUST STAYING HUMBLE ENOUGH TO KEEP THE QUESTIONS COMING SO YOU KNOW WHERE YOU CAN MAKE ADJUSTMENTS. AND I ALWAYS TRY TO OVER-DELIVER.





All the World's a Stage

STUDENTS MAKE INTERNATIONAL CONNECTIONS IN THEATER CLASS

BY RISA BARISCH

Tasha Milkman admits that she got a bit teary-eyed upon receiving her “Global Theater” class assignment last spring.

Milkman and other students taking the course, created and taught by theater faculty member Christopher Cartmill, stepped into Shindell Hall on the Douglass Campus to find themselves in a makeshift airport terminal, complete with seating arranged like a waiting area and the sounds of international arrivals and departures in the air.

Each student was handed a boarding pass to a particular city, whose theater industry they would research over the semester. Cartmill showed a series of picture-perfect destinations, including Madrid and Vancouver, as well as places not necessarily known for their cultural scenes. Milkman’s assignment came last: Aleppo, Syria.

“The image, of course, was of a destroyed city,” says Milkman, a Mason Gross graduate acting student. “To be honest, I cried. We think of all these places as fabulous destinations for culture and experiencing something that is exciting and fun, and then there’s this city where people don’t even have access to shelter and food, and are being killed by bombs. It just felt very jarring.”

Theater students, including designers, stage managers, playwrights, actors, and technical directors, take Cartmill’s two-semester class before heading off to London to study at Shakespeare’s Globe Theatre. Their studies in global theater making culminate with a class presentation that encourages students to connect to other artists to learn about their professional and personal experiences.

Through her research—which included a phone conversation with a Duke University Middle East scholar and online chats with Syrian artists via Facebook—Milkman learned that theater takes on different forms in dangerous parts of the world, where art may be silenced, or destroyed.

“Theater is this thing that we value as fleeting—it happens once and you have to be there, and then it goes away,” Milkman says. “But if you’re an artist living in a place where nothing is permanent, and things could be exploded and gone in the blink of an eye all around you, it’s not appealing to do a form that’s going to be erased after it’s over.”

In speaking with the director of *Top Goon: Diaries of a Little Dictator*, a satirical web series featuring puppets who mock the government, Milkman discovered that Syrian artists value Facebook and YouTube as places to publish their work and disseminate information that isn’t controlled by news outlets.

“What I learned pushed me to expand my ideas of what the form can include, in the sense that theater doesn’t have to be something impermanent,” says Milkman.

Graduate acting student Sydney Mitchell knew little about her assigned city,



MATT PILSNER

“Knowing about the struggles and triumphs of the artists in Dubai has made me feel a part of something bigger, like none of us are alone in the fight if we could just reach out and share more stories,” says MFA actor Sydney Mitchell, shown here in last semester’s production of Aphra Behn’s *The Emperor of the Moon*.

Dubai, other than its location in the United Arab Emirates and evidence of its extreme wealth in the form of glitzy skyscrapers and manmade islands in the shape of palm trees.

Mitchell expected to discover a commercial theater industry overshadowing smaller companies struggling to compete—similar to many Western cities with active arts scenes, she says.

Mitchell acknowledges that she had a lot to learn about the reality of theater in the Persian Gulf coast city.

“Theater artists in Dubai have no government help, very little formal training, a sometimes reluctant audience base, and extreme financial hurdles,” says Mitchell. “I still cannot believe that one of the wealthiest cities in the entire world, with a government so dedicated to the continual improvement of their global positioning and image, does not offer any subsidies for theater.”

Mitchell’s figurative journey to the Middle East was guided by artists in the region whom she researched and then reached out to via email. Her conversations with both Dubai natives and foreign residents presented a grim picture of censorship, endless government involvement in artistic productions, and crushing costs to do business.

But Mitchell also found glimmers of a theater community still eager to create art through venues including the Short+Sweet Dubai Theatre Festival of 10-minute plays, whose director she spoke with over Skype.

Through these connections, Mitchell says she was reminded that borders—geographical, racial, gender, or religious—don’t have to limit the scope of what an artist creates.

“This project has opened my eyes to the global theatrical community and its power to reach across the dividing lines to, at the very least, promote understanding, and in the best of circumstances to use theater as



THE EMPHASIS IS NOT ON THE WIKI-KNOWLEDGE OF A PLACE OR INDIVIDUAL, BUT RATHER ON THE JOURNEY IN TRYING TO CONNECT TO THAT PLACE OR PERSON.

—FACULTY MEMBER CHRISTOPHER CARTMILL, WHO CREATED THE TWO-SEMESTER "GLOBAL THEATER" CLASS.

a unifying force," Mitchell says. "Knowing about the struggles and triumphs of the artists in Dubai has made me feel a part of something bigger, like none of us are alone in the fight if we could just reach out and share more stories."

For some of Cartmill's students, reaching out begins by asking a professor where to start.

Hannah Roessler, an undergraduate stage management student, was assigned to research the theater scene in Bergen, Norway. She first contacted Mason Gross faculty member Ellen Bredehoft, who teaches costume design and had worked with the Norwegian National Opera and Ballet.

"The best thing that Ellen did for me was send me the link for the Bergen National Opera," says Roessler, who emailed that organization's resident stage manager with questions about the demographics of theatergoers, what new plays were in production, and even what people wear to see shows.

"It was incredibly exciting to talk to a stage manager from another culture, and to get her take on theater in Bergen and how stage management operates in Norway," Roessler says. "She was so open and willing to help me—it's amazing how hospitable people can be."

Roessler also learned about theater funding in Norway, which comes largely from the government, as well as the influence of Bergen's tourism industry on the theater and the opera's focus on youth programs and classes.

Cartmill varies the "Global Theater" projects each year—one class may focus on major theater capitals, while the next will study festivals. The goal, Cartmill says, is to get students to expand their ability to ask questions and begin a dialogue.

"Our art form is one of collaboration and connection," says Cartmill. "The emphasis is not on the Wiki-knowledge of a place or individual, but rather on the journey in trying to connect to that place or person."

Studying and experiencing theater culture in other parts of the world is "essential," says Milkman, who traveled to Berlin with Cartmill on a Rutgers study abroad program this summer.

"This was one of the most important classes I've taken," says Milkman. "I really value the fact that the theater program and Christopher's work places an enormous value on contemporary global work and doesn't limit our study of theater history and current practice to our own culture."

For Mitchell, the class offered "a space where we have had some of the most honest, provoking, and illuminating conversations since coming to Rutgers."

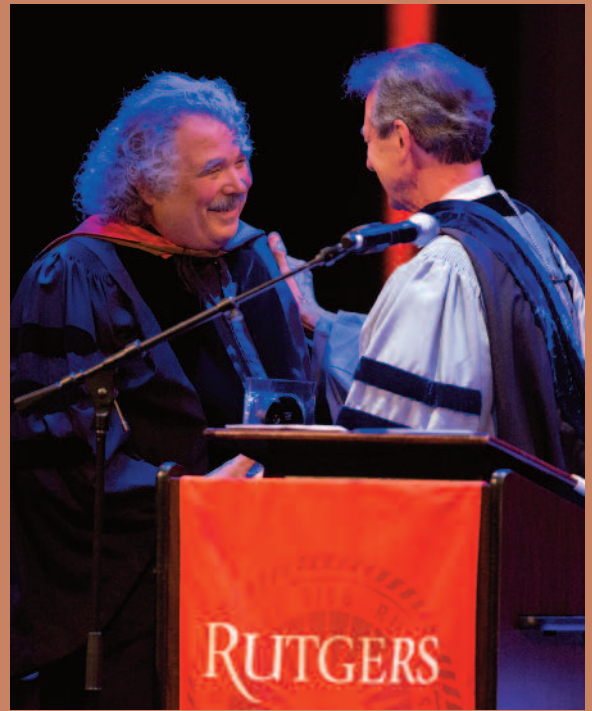
"The class takes all of the theater history information that students may or may not have learned and puts it in a human context," Mitchell adds. "It is where we learn to think like artists and speak like collaborators in a greater global community."



"LOOK FOR UNEXPECTED WAYS YOUR LIGHT CAN SHINE IN THE UNIVERSE OF THE ARTS. YOU ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR INVENTING YOURSELF."

—Alumnus and former faculty member Eric Krebs, theater producer and founder of New Brunswick's George Street Playhouse, in his address to the Class of 2017.

On May 11, New Brunswick's elegant State Theatre hosted a boisterous celebration, also known as the 2017 Mason Gross Convocation. Students danced, pranced, and marched across the stage, some sporting mortarboards festooned with flowers, sheet music, a Pikachu, even a model of Shakespeare's Globe Theatre. Afterwards, students gathered with family and friends at a reception featuring a student jazz trio, cake, wine, and selfies galore.



"FOUR YEARS AGO I CAME TO MASON GROSS AS A DANCER. I LEAVE TODAY AS AN ARTIST. HOW AMAZING THAT THIS IS OUR JOB! WE ARE STORYTELLERS."

—Student speaker Brianna Figueroa, BFA, Dance



“

I'M A DETERMINED PERSON.
I KNOW THAT MANY PEOPLE WILL SAY NO.
BUT SOMEWHERE IN THE WORLD THERE'S
SOMEBODY WHO IS GOING TO SAY YES.

”

—Graduating stage manager Theron Alexander. Alexander has already landed several professional gigs, serving as assistant stage manager for two spring 2017 productions at the neighboring George Street Playhouse.



LIGHTING DESIGN FACULTY AND
TWO-TIME TONY AWARD WINNER
DON HOLDER DISCUSSES THE
ELEMENTS THAT FUEL HIS WORK

sparked



MIKE STOG PHOTOGRAPHY

THE DUTCH MASTERS AND IMPRESSIONISTS

Vermeer, Rembrandt, Cassatt, Degas, Renoir, Van Gogh, and many other painters reveal the world we live in, the people who inhabit it, and the lives that we lead, with such profound poetry and intelligence that it takes my breath away. As someone who works with the medium of light, revisiting the creations of these extraordinary artists is always invigorating.

ARCHITECT ANTONI GAUDÍ

The Sagrada Família (at left), in Barcelona, Spain, is a vast cathedral where the morning sunlight piercing through stained-glass windows creates an explosion of color, texture, light, and shadow that is truly extraordinary and emotionally uplifting.

THE LIGHT IN THE WORLD AROUND US

Some examples: The cool blue light of dawn when the world is revealed only in infinite shades of gray; the golden slashes of light we see on city facades as the setting sun cuts through a multitude of cracks and crevices in the urban landscape; the brilliant violet shadows you encounter on a walk in the woods at twilight.

THE COMPOSERS

Music and light both work in overt and subliminal ways to create the sense of time and place, to tell a story, and to evoke a powerful emotional response. Music and light are ephemeral substances: they can't be touched, but can only be seen, heard, or felt. Both communicate so much to us in non-literal terms, without the benefit of text. Music that transports us, that moves us, that is soaring in its emotional quality and varied in its dynamics, rhythms, and colors is particularly inspiring to me. The symphonic work of Gustav Mahler is so intensely emotional and transcendent that I can almost see the light that I'd like to create for him, especially when I listen for the umpteenth time to his Eighth Symphony, Resurrection, my all-time favorite.

THE RISK-TAKERS

The stories of people who defy the odds, who have the fortitude, tenacity, and passion to push back against conventional wisdom to see an idea through or to accomplish something they all said could never be done: Many people come to mind, including Lin-Manuel Miranda, who created an unforgettable hip-hop musical based on the story of one of our founding fathers—Alexander Hamilton; Christopher Columbus, who almost 500 years ago set out to find a water route to Asia by sailing west over the Atlantic and instead found the New World; Julie Taymor, who reimagined a popular animated film by employing a fusion of African art, music, dance, and Asian puppetry technique to create the groundbreaking musical *The Lion King* (for which Holder won a Tony Award for Best Lighting Design, in 1998). It's the endeavors of individuals like these and so many others who give me the courage and the fortitude to continue to take risks and to create work that pushes past my own self-imposed boundaries and preconceived notions.



THE LAST WORD

M

FA artist Jack Hogan is shown here with rubbings from a spring break research trip to Georgia with a group of Rutgers student artists and Tepper Chair in Visual Arts Kara Walker. While there, they investigated themes

of memory, memorials, and monuments in the American South. The result: their immersive installation, *Atlanta Ladies Memorial Association*, on view earlier this year at the university's Jane Voorhees Zimmerli Art Museum. "Rubbings are intimate," Hogan says. "Doing rubbings informs me in how I'd like people to be intimately engaged with a monument. There's a certain level of give and take. I like that true relationship with a material. I've made monuments to things I hope will end. I've made a monument to toxic masculinity. Monuments can be a tool to provide hope that something could end."



ARI MARCOPOULOS

In Memoriam

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

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

Gabriel Sol Bass, Art, 1976, BA, May 26, 2017

Lee A. Conte, Art, 1990, BA, July 10, 2014

Edythe Bauer Shedden Cowgill, Art, 1943, BA, March 20, 2017

Sheridan Crist, Theater Arts, 1983, MFA, May 17, 2017

Virginia Bogan Dykes, Art, 1946, BA, June 21, 2017

Cecile W. Gardner, Art, 1969, BA, July 24, 2015

Anne S. Gill, Art Education, 1976, BA, June 24, 2017

W. Paul Moeller, Art, 1944, BA, May 19, 2011

Joan O'Kane Moore, Music, 1954, BA, June 26, 2017

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