



**SPECIAL**  
**MUSIC**  
**ISSUE**

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Opera  
Reimagined

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An Orchestra  
for All

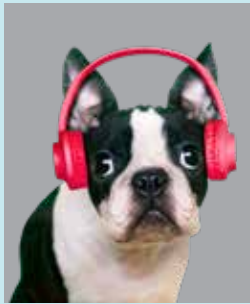
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School of Music  
Celebrates  
150 Years

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Plus: *Seinfeld*'s  
Jason Alexander  
Talks New  
Projects





ON THE COVER: Retales Botijero/Getty Images

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What a wonderful time seeing the #myCFA community come together to celebrate and honor three inspiring alums—from left, Michelle Hurd ('88), Alexi Worth ('93), and Valerie Coleman (BUTI'89, CFA'95), with Dean Harvey Young—at the 2022 CFA Distinguished Alumni Awards! It was an evening of laughs, smiles, and a refreshing reminder of alums who share our college's commitment to excellence and making the arts a welcoming environment for all. ❤️ #ProudtoBU

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A NOTE FROM HARVEY

**Everyone wanted to be a preacher or a musician.** Back in 1872, there was a brief—but pivotal—moment in the history of Boston University when every BU student pursued a degree in either theology or music. Those were the options.

Today, a student can choose among 300+ areas of study. A lot has changed.

What hasn't changed are BU's core commitments. Those aspiring theologians and musicians understood that they had a moral and ethical obligation to improve society. They sought training to attend to the well-being of others and to uplift the communities in which they lived. Selflessness, not self-aggrandizement, was what unified Boston University. It gave students a sense of purpose.

In time, music offerings would expand beyond sacred music, choral singing, and European classical performance to include other genres of music-making. Over the years, other artistic practices— theater and visual arts—would emerge and develop into prominent academic units on par with the School of Music.

The core commitments remain our guide star. Our Prison Arts Project offers educational programs at regional correctional facilities. Our ArtsLab initiative, in partnership with the BU Aram V. Chobanian & Edward Avedisian School of Medicine and Boston Medical Center, provides music as care to patients and physicians. Our art galleries and orchestra concerts, including performances at Symphony Hall, are free and open to the public. We aim to remove cost as a barrier to experiencing impactful artistry. Currently, we are designing a new initiative that will explore the connections between the arts and social justice.

This year, we celebrate the sesquicentennial of the School of Music; 150 years is a big deal! Boston University was the first college or university in the United States to offer a degree in the study of music. Although being the "oldest" and the "first" are major achievements, the embrace of our core commitments across generations is a rare, distinguishing accomplishment. Regardless of your area of artistic interest, I hope that you will take pride in this milestone.

Please consider joining me in Boston on April 1, 2023, for our anniversary concert at Symphony Hall. Whenever your travels bring you back to the area, please email me at [cfadean@bu.edu](mailto:cfadean@bu.edu). If my schedule allows, I would enjoy meeting you.

If you would like to assist in the education of a new generation of citizen artist-scholars, please visit our website ([bu.edu/cfa](http://bu.edu/cfa)) and select "Support CFA."

Harvey Young, Dean of CFA

**WRITE:** Share your thoughts on this brand spanking new magazine—and anything else CFA-related—at [cfaalum@bu.edu](mailto:cfaalum@bu.edu).

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Natasha Moustache

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The School of Music celebrates 150 years of music-makers, educators, and game-changers

OPERA 2.0

BU alums are supporting experimental works and diversifying talent and staff to make opera more relevant and inclusive



THE MAGIC OF MUSIC

Paula Grissom-Broughton ('15) believes that music education holds the power to save us all



AN ORCHESTRA FOR ALL

Nicholas Brown ('15) is on a mission to make classical music more accessible



COMPLEX CHARACTERS

Jason Alexander's ('81, Hon.'95) *Seinfeld* role cemented him in pop culture. Now he's busy acting on screen and stage, directing, and podcasting



# MAKING ART OUT OF THE MUNDANE

Painter Mathew  
Cerletty confronts  
audiences with a  
vivid, hyperreal  
take on everyday  
objects

By Marc Chalufour



Left: *Sconce* (2022)  
Oil on linen;  
58 1/4 x 64 in.

Right: *Fuel 5G* (2022)  
Oil on linen;  
72 x 58 1/2 in.



SHOWCASE

This page: *You're the One* (2020) Colored pencil on paper; 25 x 20 1/4 in.  
 Right: *Dry* (2019) Oil on linen; 69 1/4 x 52 in.



Everyone with a laptop and a Zoom account had to become an amateur lighting expert during the pandemic, rearranging lamps and closing curtains to make ourselves presentable. So it's no surprise to me when I see that artist Mathew Cerletty has propped a giant scone above his desk for a recent Zoom interview.

We start talking about his 2020–2021 exhibit, *Full Length Mirror*, at The Power Station in Dallas, Tex. But my eyes keep sliding over to the black cone of the scone. It's unusually large, maybe four feet tall and just as wide. And it hangs at an odd angle. Then I realize it's not a real light at all, but a painting, leaning against a wall in the background. So realistic is the metal sheen, and so vivid is the glow of the bulb, the image seems to pop off the wall in three dimensions.

For the past few years, Cerletty ('02) has focused on making hyperrealistic, large-scale oil paintings and colored pencil drawings of everyday items: a stuffed bunny, a wooden laundry drying rack, a green velvet ottoman. There's no mystery to the objects that Cerletty chooses or the way he portrays them. But their in-your-face presentation demands a closer study—is it a photo or a painting or a drawing? And why did the artist re-create a snow shovel in such painstaking detail?

“The name of the game is keeping people's attention,” Cerletty says. “If I make a painting and you feel like you can sum it up, that means you can walk away. I'm trying to make it so that every time you see this thing, you're like, ‘Wait a second—I don't feel like I quite know what this is about.’”

**PORTRAIT OF AN ARTIST**

Cerletty hasn't always practiced this form of hyperrealism. He's painted abstracts and landscapes. Christopher Bollen, in a 2008 story for *Interview*, wrote, “Cerletty . . . could have remained his generation's premier portrait artist. But in the last few years [he] went in a completely different direction.” That was when he began making paintings



All images courtesy of Mathew Cerletty





Above:  
**Ottoman (2020)**  
Oil on linen; 48 x 70 in.

Right: **Manila Envelopes (2020)**  
Oil on linen;  
58 1/4 x 56 1/4 in.

of minimalist text and logos. A surreal space-scape phase followed, briefly. “I started to see a lot of paintings like that around and I felt, like, ‘OK—these other people have this taken care of. I should go do something else.’” That’s when he began working on the pieces for *Full Length Mirror*.

The vibrant colors and photorealistic details of that exhibit suggest a fully formed style that belies the way Cerletty’s career keeps morphing. Asked to define his work, he demurs. “I feel like I still don’t have a style,” he says. After further thought he says, “Maybe it’s called ‘uptight.’”

That self-deprecating sense of humor is a recurring theme. Cerletty is careful not to take his art too seriously, but simultaneously hopes that his viewers will. “I’m just trying to figure out a way that the images are compelling enough that you’re drawn to them, but

also elusive so you can’t quite pin them down,” he says. “It’s a balancing act.”

Step one is finding inspiration, which could happen anywhere—though usually it’s online. “I’m Googling things all the time, going through image search and just scrolling around,” he says. If he likes an image, he prints it and tucks it in a folder. He’s had photos stashed there for years and might ultimately paint one because an object ties together an exhibit he’s working on, or it’s a color he’d like to work with, or the image is just lodged in his mind.

For his current exhibit, *True Believer* at Karma in Los Angeles (on view from November 12 through December 23, 2022), Cerletty wanted to paint a gas can. He searched the internet, but couldn’t find an image he liked. So he had a photographer take one for him. They set up the container in his Brooklyn

studio and adjusted the lighting to hit the contoured plastic just so. “It’s perfect in every way,” he says.

It’s a style common in product advertisements, creating a version of an item that is, as he puts it, “a heightened version of itself.” For the gas can photo shoot, he splashed the object with light from multiple directions so every detail is illuminated and the reds and yellows glow. “I’m trying to turn up the volume on a thing.”

#### LAYERS OF MEANING

“People are always interested in the making of the paintings, but it’s very practical,” Cerletty says. “I don’t feel like that’s where the magic is really happening.”

Most of his artistic decisions are made before his brush touches canvas, when he’s creating or editing a photograph. The lighting, the composition, even the pale yellow backdrop for the gas can serves a purpose. “I wanted it to be a little icky and kind of remind you of the smell when you’re pumping gas,” he says. “All of these formal choices are trying to emphasize a mood and steer the viewer in a certain direction. In the end, hopefully you don’t see all of it right away.”

Once his source image is ready, Cerletty projects it onto a canvas, traces its outline, and starts building the painting in layers. Base colors go on first, filling the outline; next, he gradually adds details. It’s a process that can extend over several months, so he also jumps from project to project. He’ll work on the base colors of a painting on one wall of the studio then move over to fill in some of the details on another.

“It does end up feeling like watching a tree grow,” he says. “I finished four square inches today. *Great.*”

Alongside the gas can and scone, Cerletty was working on a series of pieces for his *True Believer* exhibit, including a stack of cardboard boxes, sheets of construction paper, and a large rendering of the sleeve to a *Pretty Woman* VHS cassette with everything but the name removed.

#### PUSHING THE ENVELOPE

For *Full Length Mirror*, Cerletty painted a pair of overlapping manila envelopes. The backside of one reveals an unbent metal clasp

**“I’m just trying to figure out a way that the images are compelling enough that you’re drawn to them, but also elusive so you can’t quite pin them down. It’s a balancing act.”**

and the adhesive flap; the front of the other is a uniform yellow. They’re basic objects that rarely attract a second thought—but they often hold important documents.

Cerletty remembers telling his girlfriend that he planned to paint them. “‘Why would you do this to people?’” he remembers her saying. But she finally came around to his perspective: “She said, ‘Fine—you’re making me think about the different times in life where you might be confronted by one of these envelopes and some of them are horrible and some are exciting.’”

The challenge of teasing meaning out of the mundane motivates Cerletty. “Sometimes I go in with the hope that I can rescue something that you don’t want to think about,” he says. “We live in this super-branded corporate world that at times feels like there isn’t room for humanity. The work should reflect that.” ●





## RISING STAR

## Personal Music

By Steve Holt

## COMPOSER AND SINGER

**ANAÍS AZUL ('17)** creates dreamy soundscapes in Spanish and English that are often raw and reflective. In fact, their new solo EP is titled *Vulnerable*. The child of Peruvian immigrants, Azul learned music theory covertly from a violist they sat next to in an advanced high school math class. They began arranging their own pieces at a Berkeley, Calif., after-school music program. At BU, their art and study ranged from salsa to orchestral, including composing a piece for the Chamber Orchestra of Boston. In 2020, Spotify included Azul's song "Mi Piel" on its Best Non-Binary+ Artists 2020 playlist.

## Did you grow up around a lot of music and art?

Both of my parents are visual artists. In the Bay Area, I grew up in art galleries, where there was always a piano. Wherever there was a piano, I would just kind of pounce on it and start tinkering around.

I grew up singing with my mom a lot, mostly carols during Christmastime. My dad and I made mix CDs together, and he would play me different albums. **Favorite class at CFA?** Orchestration. We learned hands-on techniques, like how do you construct a sound that you want to hear? What are the ways that you put a flute with a tuba (a surprisingly cool combination)? It was theoretical, but also architectural. **What inspired *Vulnerable*, your first solo EP?**

After I got hit by a car in 2018, I realized I needed to be around creative environments and people that I really love—not just people that I can make

really great music with. *Vulnerable* is a dreamy, bilingual, singer-songwriter-with-Latin-percussion-type EP.

**Your songs include aspects of yourself, including queerness and mental health.**

"Mi Piel" is about finding peace in not compartmentalizing me—yes, I am queer; yes, I am bilingual; yes, I am a teacher; yes, I am a community arts organizer; yes, I am a composer and singer. Yes, I am all of these things, and I'm not going to be ashamed of it.

As far as mental health, I was lucky to have parents that took me to therapy as a kid when they divorced. I have now been doing various forms of talk therapy for

eight years. Each session allows me to open portals that often lead to songs of healing.

**What's your message for artists who are immigrants, or LGBTQIA+, or struggle with their mental health?**

Our minds are really powerful. Be honest with yourself about your emotions. That means letting yourself be sad if you need to be sad, angry if you need to be angry. I made very intentional decisions in Boston about the people who were really supporting me there. This has led me to get an MFA in fine arts [from California Institute of the Arts] and to produce my own music and feel super empowered.

Erica Yi

## SOUND BITES

**"When you challenge yourself, you grow. And when you grow, you are moving forward."**



At the 2022 CFA Convocation, ad legend **FRANK GINSBERG ('65)** told graduates about his recipe for a fulfilling career. Ginsberg is founder, chair, and CEO of AFG& (formerly known as Avrett Free Ginsberg), a global full-service advertising agency based in New York City. His style and vision have helped build brands like *Purina Cat Chow*, *U.S. Trust*, the *Financial Times*, *Thomson Reuters*, *Enterprise Rent-A-Car*, *Bacardi Rums*, and *Van Cleef & Arpels*.

## THE RED CARPET

## CFA ALUMS RECOGNIZED AT THE 2022 TONY AWARDS

**THE 2022 TONY AWARDS** featured multiple CFA alum winners, including **Sue Wagner ('97)**, producer of *The Lehman Trilogy* (Best Play), actor **Greg Hildreth ('05)**, part of the cast of *Company* (Best Revival of a Musical), and **Drew Levy ('03,'04)**, sound designer of *A Strange Loop* (Best Musical). Levy also received a nomination for Best Sound Design of a Musical.

Other CFA alums received Tony nominations, including **Uzo Aduba ('05)** (Best Featured Actress, *Clyde's*), producer **Stewart Lane ('73)** (Best Play, *The Minutes*), and playwright **Craig Lucas ('73)** (Best Book of a Musical, *Paradise Square*).

Dave Green (Kahn Awards); Lev Radin/Alamy (Drew Levy)



## AWARDS

## Kahn Awards Recognize Outstanding Grads

**GAVIN FAHEY ('22)**, third from left, was named the \$20,000 grand prize winner of the 2022 Esther B. and Albert S. Kahn Career Entry Awards. The stipend will help him with buying supplies, renting a studio, and living and transportation expenses.

Fahey, who received his MFA in painting, created a series of sculptures about "bad actors" throughout history, such as I. Lewis "Scooter" Libby (the George W. Bush aide jailed in connection with leaking a CIA operative's identity). He painted an oil portrait of each person and then hid the portraits deep within wooden sculptures.

"My sculptures are, in a sense, Trojan horses, smuggling sinister characters into the white-cube gallery under the guise of formalist sculptural explorations," he says.

Last year's other finalists, winners of \$2,500 prizes, are, from left, Savannah Panah ('22), music and vocal performance; Devon Russo ('22), music and vocal performance; Chen Peng ('22), painting; Mya Ison ('22), theater arts and performance; and Noah Putterman ('22), directing.

FOR MORE NEWS  
AND EVENTS VISIT  
[BU.EDU/CFA](https://bu.edu/cfa).



# MUSIC-MAKERS, EDUCATORS, AND GAME-CHANGERS



As the School of Music celebrates 150 years, we highlight some amazing stories of its alumni, faculty, and friends

IN JULY 1872, BU officially established the first degree-granting school of music in the United States. Over the many years since, hundreds of colleges and universities have followed suit, establishing a rich, dynamic culture of music in the US and beyond.

Known as the College of Music at the time of its founding, it was originally part of BU's graduate theology program. In 1929, it became a part of the School of Education, placing a new emphasis on educating top music teachers. In 1954, the College of Music—then located behind the Boston Public Library—merged with the theater and visual arts departments to form the School of Fine and Applied Arts. Nearly four years later, in January 1958, what is today known as the College of Fine Arts moved to its home at 855 Commonwealth Avenue.

The School of Music—as it has been named since the 1970s—has grown in repertoire and reputation over the past century and a half. It has spawned much-lauded affiliated programs, such as the Boston University Tanglewood Institute

in Lenox, Mass., and the Opera Institute, a highly selective training program for future operatic artists. It has hosted internationally recognized faculty and visiting artists. Its alumni include renowned composers Samuel Adler ('48) and Missy Mazzoli (BUTT'98, CFA'02), influential classical music critic Anthony Tommasini ('82), award-winning bass opera singer Morris Robinson ('01), and acclaimed actor Uzo Aduba ('05). Nearly every major symphony orchestra on the planet has counted School of Music alumni among its members. The school continues to develop the minds, bodies, and voices of the next generation of artists, musicians, and scholars. Today, its students have access to world-class stages and all of the collaborative opportunities of a top-tier research university.

This year, we mark with pride 150 years of music-makers, educators, and game-changers. In the features that follow, we celebrate some of the amazing stories of School of Music faculty, alumni, and friends—and we look at what's ahead with excitement and optimism. ●



Samuel Adler ('48)



Morris Robinson ('01)

[LEARN MORE ABOUT THE SIGNATURE EVENTS COMMEMORATING THE SCHOOL OF MUSIC'S 150TH ANNIVERSARY AT BU.EDU/CFA/BUMUSIC150.](https://www.bu.edu/cfa/bumusic150)



The 2022 concert at Symphony Hall.

Student musicians performed at Carnegie Hall in March 2022.



Uzo Aduba ('05)



Missy Mazzoli (BUTT'98, CFA'02)



Roman Totenberg teaching at the Tanglewood Institute in 1968.

Mickey Adair/Getty Images (Adler); David Herwaldt/Boston University Photography (Robinson); Jake Belcher (Symphony Hall); CoolFoto (Carnegie Hall); Caroline Tompkins (Mazzoli); Boston University Photography (Totenberg); Jaguar/Alamy (Aduba)



# CONVER SATION

**BASSIST  
JOSEPH CONYERS  
AND HARPIST  
ANGELICA  
HAIRSTON ON  
THEIR PIVOTAL  
EXPERIENCES  
AT BOSTON  
UNIVERSITY  
TANGLEWOOD  
INSTITUTE AND  
THEIR PASSION  
FOR PROMOTING  
DIVERSITY IN  
CLASSICAL  
MUSIC**

Dana J. Quigley Photography

By Mara Sassoon

Stephanie Eley



**JOSEPH CONYERS AND ANGELICA HAIRSTON** attended Boston University Tanglewood Institute (BUTI) a decade apart. But they are quick to use the same phrase to describe their experiences there: life-changing.

“To experience the camaraderie at BUTI was remarkable,” says Conyers (BUTI’98), assistant principal bassist of the Philadelphia Orchestra. “There are folks I met who I am still friends with now, 24 years later. That speaks to the power of BUTI and the memories that come from those hallowed grounds. Just being around a lot of people your age who are as passionate about music as you are—it was heaven.”

Hairston (BUTI’08,’09), an Atlanta-based harpist, says studying under Ann Hobson Pilot, former principal harpist for the Boston Symphony Orchestra (BSO) and former director of BUTI’s Young Artists Harp Program, was especially inspiring. “To work with Ann, and to see her perform with the BSO—to see this Black woman up there just nailing her parts, to see myself represented on that kind of stage—was so significant and it totally changed the trajectory of my life,” she says. “I know I wouldn’t have ended up where I am now. Even though orchestra isn’t my primary line of work today, Ann just represented to me the ability to show up as yourself, regardless of the space you’re in.”

Drawing from their experiences at BUTI and in their careers, Conyers and Hairston each created a nonprofit aimed at promoting diversity in classical music and empowering young musicians. In 2010, Conyers founded Project 440 in Philadelphia, Pa., which shows high schoolers interested in music how to do good in their communities and helps them with college and career preparedness. Since 2020, Conyers has also been the artistic advisor for BUTI’s Young Artists Orchestra.

Hairston runs her own nonprofit, Challenge the Stats, which strives to empower BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and people of color) musicians through concerts, events, and workshops. The name of the organization refers to statistics that show the lack of diversity in orchestras.

Conyers and Hairston spoke over Zoom in October 2022 about their BUTI experiences and their passion for promoting diversity in classical music.

**Joseph Conyers:** Angelica, I find your work with Challenge the Stats really interesting. I’d

“Seeing more people of color in orchestras is a barometer of equity in our society. Who is there versus who is absent shows us who has gotten the opportunity, who has gotten the resources needed to get there, and who hasn’t.”

JOSEPH CONYERS (BUTI’98)

love to hear why you started it. I find it ironic that the two of us, who are both Black, felt the need and the urge to do something beyond what the profession technically calls of us. **Angelica Hairston:** Growing up, I always had this vision of playing in an orchestra. That was presented as the ideal route for me. I didn’t know that there were other ways that I could have a viable, exciting career outside of that.

I did my undergrad [at The Royal Conservatory] in Toronto. I remember I was working on Mozart’s Concerto for Flute and Harp in a practice room there. That same day, I had learned about the murder of Trayvon Martin. I remember thinking, I love classical music—I love it—and yet, I also started feeling this friction between this path that I’m taking and addressing the fact that my people are being targeted and murdered. I was like, wait, these are two things that I’m deeply passionate about. But how do I find an intersection?

I finished my undergrad, and I did a master’s at Northeastern in music business. That was when I started to learn about the Sphinx Organization [dedicated to promoting

diversity in the arts]. I started to find ways that music intersects in this world of social justice, and I put on a concert to celebrate African American musicians and artists as part of my master’s degree and call it Challenge the Stats. I remember after the concert there was this buzz of people saying, “Wait, where’s more? What else is happening? How can we continue to support this?” I decided to make Challenge the Stats a nonprofit and promote music as a tool for conversation, as a tool of justice, and as a tool to elevate communities of color.

**JC:** I love that you said “music as a tool” because I say that all the time. I literally just said that this morning. It’s something we as musicians and as artists don’t think about enough. As a musician in an orchestra, you play your notes, you do your job. But we aren’t forced to actually think about music outside of the box. With my nonprofit, Project 440, it really is a matter of using music as a tool. We’re doing music education differently—in that we don’t actually teach music lessons. We use music as a lens for high school students to explore the world. Their passion for music ignites them and inspires them to not only find success for themselves, but help others along the way. It’s not that we are just going to develop these new, fantastic musicians. We’re going to develop better people, so we’ll have fantastic musicians who are also great people who know how to use music as a tool for good. **AH:** I love that. I think that’s so powerful. There’s so much creativity that can be shared and celebrated outside of the concert halls. I think we’re both motivated by these questions of how do we create space for people to tell their stories, to bring every single piece of who they are to the table regardless of the music that they are playing? What does it look like to commission new voices, who say, “This is who I am and, regardless of the audience, I’m going to show up as me and say something”?

**JC:** When people say classical music is dying, I’ve always said, “If that’s true, it’s because we’re the ones killing it,” just because there are so many opportunities for it to be inclusive that we should be taking. Seeing more people of color in orchestras is a barometer of equity in our society. Who is there versus who is absent shows us who has gotten the opportunity, who has gotten the resources needed to get there, and who hasn’t. Music belongs

to no one person—it belongs to everyone. I would love to see our industry continue to embrace that notion.

**AH:** Since you work with young musicians, I’m curious: What’s your hope for them?

**JC:** That it’s just easier for them. We were talking about Ann Hobson Pilot—I’ve heard stories of some of her experiences. She paved the way for future musicians, like yourself, so that they have it better and easier. I feel like that’s what we’re doing too. I hope that the next generation is doing the same, so then it’s not special. It’s just how it is and who we are.

Something we’re missing in the profession is the embracing of the whole individual in our art form, so much so that I would even caution the classical music industry from leaning into itself too much. That has, for some, created a space where people don’t feel comfortable. I know folks who had full-time jobs in orchestras who left because they don’t have the agency to grow. They don’t have the encouragement to be better and do better for the world because there’s no part of the job that acknowledges it or embraces it. So, what is being done so that these folks who can make the industry and the organizations better want to stay and be part of these institutions instead of running away from them?

**AH:** Absolutely. We have a roster of musicians who perform with Challenge the Stats, and so many of them maybe play in the opera or with an orchestra, but also find this other space in Challenge the Stats performances where they can bring all of themselves—and not necessarily just during Black History Month or on specific days. We can perform music of all backgrounds, of all styles, by composers of color, in conversation with things that may have been more “traditionally” performed. We question who “the greats” are. How can we redefine what great really is or what it means to be a musician, an artist, a composer?

**JC:** I am a big fan of that because I think there is a little bit of gatekeeping in our industry around what a certain type of musical excellence is. Some of the young people I work with through Project 440 will go into music, some will not, but what they are all doing is making a difference in the world—most of the time with instrument in hand, which I think is important.

We were talking about the diversity of performances and diversity of people onstage.

Equally important is diversity of thought and of experience. As you bring those into the fold, it’s just going to make the ultimate product fuller and better. Yo-Yo Ma gave a lecture where he talked about this thing called the edge effect, when two ecosystems come together, and that place where those two ecosystems meet is where you find the most diversity, resilience, and creativity. That’s the opportunity we have with music. We should not be afraid of this or that thing, but we should take our circles and bring them together to make this beautiful Venn diagram of sorts.

**AH:** We should make a collage, with jagged edges and different colors. Joe, you are such an incredible role model for the next

“We question who ‘the greats’ are. How can we redefine what great really is or what it means to be a musician, an artist, a composer?”

ANGELICA HAIRSTON (BUTI’08,’09)

generation to look up to and say, “Well, maybe I can do it too.” I think that by having more leaders of color who look like these young musicians, we are opening those doors big and wide. Our responsibility is to keep them open.

**JC:** It’s important. Last summer was my first summer in person at BUTI in my role, and it was great to be able to observe that the program that I love so much—and that has been a part of my life for so long—is still going strong. That same spirit of community and musicianship between the students and the faculty and staff remains. I’m excited about what the future might hold and what we’ll be able to do.

**AH:** I think it’s also such a unique time, when orchestras are finally realizing, okay, we have to do things differently. We have to change.

**JC:** All without sacrificing what the art is. I think that’s what scares people. They have this feeling of, “Oh, you’re going to water it down.” Change can only make it better, and I think audiences will pick up on that right away. The programming at BUTI this summer was really fantastic. I think the students got a whole lot out of it. Talking to the students about leadership and having guest artists like yourself coming in to talk about their experiences, to get them thinking outside the box, was really important. We train these young people to be open-minded, and I just hope the institutions beyond BUTI start to embrace that more as well. If they start doing that, everyone has to follow. ●





**N**ICHOLAS BROWN is the principal clarinet with the New Bedford Symphony Orchestra and second bass clarinet with the Boston Lyric Opera. With an undergraduate degree in performance from BU and a master's from the New England Conservatory of Music, Brown ('15) also freelances with the Boston Pops, Boston Philharmonic, Landmarks Orchestra, and others.

In 2019, the Maine native was trying to establish a career in Boston as a working musician and noted the dearth of gigs in the summer. He worked as community outreach coordinator for the North End

Music & Performing Arts Center, connecting culture to underserved communities, ranging from music classes to concerts, and taught in the New Bedford Public Schools.

A light bulb went on. Maybe he could provide work for himself and his colleagues and also spread their brand of beautiful music to people who don't normally get to hear it. He needed a collaborator, though, and found the ideal one in his friend Alyssa Wang, assistant conductor of the Boston Ballet and a concert violinist.

In November 2019, they founded the Boston Festival Orchestra (BFO). Brown is the organization's executive director and plays clarinet in the orchestra; Wang is artistic director and principal conductor.

# AN ORCHESTRA FOR ALL

**Nicholas Brown is on a mission to make classical music more accessible**

**By Joel Brown**

Photos by Ciara Crocker





The BFO offered no in-person concerts in 2020 besides a couple of small introductory recitals just before the pandemic. But in 2021, they managed three sold-out concerts at the Boston Center for the Arts (BCA) Calderwood Pavilion.

In July 2022, they held three concerts at the 1,100-seat Jordan Hall, three times the size of the previous venue.

CFA spoke with Brown about bringing his idea to fruition, his partnership with Wang, and his hopes for the orchestra's future.

**CFA: Tell us how you and Wang got started.**

Nicholas Brown: We met in class our last semester, when we were studying for our master's degrees at the New England Conservatory (NEC). It was a class called All About Bach's *St. Matthew Passion*, and our friendship started with talking about how much we loved the class. We clicked personally, we clicked musically, and then we graduated. She said she was going to be sticking around Boston, which was always my plan, and I said, "Oh, we should chat."

I've always struggled to understand why so few musicians stay in Boston after graduation. They graduate NEC and either move to New York or they go back home. But in the summer there's not a lot of [concert] work in the city—thank God I teach. Finally, I thought, Alyssa wants more conducting work, too, and the city of Boston needs more work over the summer for all these incredible musicians I work with.

So, Alyssa and I met at Caffè Nero in Brighton, and I pitched her my idea. We each came up with our own timeline, so we could be sure our visions aligned, and honestly, it was a mirror image—what we each wanted, how it was structured. And it's pretty much been like that ever since. She wears her hats and I wear mine. We have been able to work side by side, stay in our lanes, but ask for help when we need it.

**How did you choose the musicians?**

We wanted a diverse group, across all races, ethnicities, and ages. With a lot of new projects, you see people hire all their friends, which is fine. But it can very quickly become an orchestra of all 26-year-olds or all 64-year-olds, and we needed that not to be the case.

This is where my freelancing for years has really come into play, because I had this whole network of incredible talents, from fresh out of college to approaching retirement. We each put out a whole list of every single person we knew who played an instrument in the Boston area, and then we started putting the puzzle pieces together.

We took it to those closest to us first, and said, "This is our project. Would you be willing to be part of it? We want this to be a long-term thing, where each year you are guaranteed this amount of work, and we want you to help shape

**“When Alyssa and I started talking about ways to grow BFO, we knew we needed to get into those untapped communities—communities that would love to go to a concert, but probably would never seek it out on their own.”**



this organization.” And all these conversations were met with extreme gratitude and well wishes, and most of them accepted. We had a similar conversation with the Boston Musicians' Association, so all of our musicians are fairly compensated.

[In 2021] we had 60 musicians take part; the most ever onstage was 51. [In 2022] we added 13 new positions, to almost 75 total, but we had about 60 maximum onstage at any one time.

**There's a phrase in your marketing materials that's sort of a slogan: “Music is the answer.” What is the question?**

That was our response to COVID-19, pretty much. What started as our legacy quickly transformed into a way to heal, especially after all the social unrest across 2020. People were asking huge questions about race in America and policing and other issues.

BFO is by no means a political or social organization, but we thought, as clichéd as it is, music really can be a kind of universal language. It can be healing, transformational, supportive, cathartic. It satisfies so many human needs. And beyond that, it provides for our musicians, it adds to our economy.

**How are underserved communities part of that?**

When I came back to Boston to finish my degree at NEC after a couple of years in Chicago, I got involved with the North End Music & Performing Arts Center. Their tagline is “music for all.” I taught and I got involved with administration and that really struck a chord with me. And as the social landscape started changing, I realized we could be a huge part of expanding music in Greater Boston.

When Alyssa and I started talking about ways to grow BFO, we knew we needed to get into those untapped communities—communities that would love to go to a concert, but probably would never seek it out on their own, especially if they had to travel too far or pay \$50 or \$100 or \$200 for a ticket.

From there, we started developing community partnerships, approaching organizations we thought would benefit from the music. Our goal is for 10 solid partnerships, and we've reached out to organizations such as Horizons for Homeless Children, the Boston Center for Refugee Health and Human Rights, Big Brother/Big Sister, and Tunefoolery.

**How are those outreach efforts going?**

Our first entry point is to establish connection and trust with those communities who might not feel comfortable going into that concert hall. We've offered blocks of tickets to their administrators to give to their communities, and free or heavily discounted tickets for their staff and

volunteers. And we're preparing an educational packet for them on the symphony orchestra.

There are all these preconceived notions—you show up in your Sunday best, you're silent, you wait for other people to clap before you do, you don't speak. We want to make people realize there's a lower threshold for the casualness of these concerts. It's an entry point.

And we're in conversations to send a musician or a chamber group to these programs onsite, to be on their home turf.

**So, Wang gets to be artistic director and you get all the dirty work like budgets and contracts?**

I've always juggled tons of different things. I don't want to say I'm easily bored, but I need a whole bunch of stimulation professionally to keep me going. I'm definitely one of those people who works better under pressure, with deadlines and high stakes, and if this isn't that, I don't know what is.

My work with the North End center has been very, very helpful. I got to see how Sherri Snow ('06), the executive director, did all these things. She continues to be a mentor on how things work for nonprofits, dealing within the city and contractors and things like that. I went to her when I was trying to choose a bank. And when the season starts, we have Rebecca Mansfield (MET'21), a former marketing coordinator with the Handel & Haydn Society. She comes on as general manager seasonally and ramps up at concert times, dealing with the front of house and that sort of thing.

**By the way, what's with the word “festival”?**

In classical music, festival orchestras are orchestras that typically operate during the summer.

**It must be tremendously satisfying to see what has come from your idea...**

Alyssa and I feel so lucky to have so many high-level artists who've become good friends and confidants, and to have had them all in one place last year, especially after the pandemic. To make it back onstage for the first time, surrounded by some of the best musicians and closest friends I've ever had, and to have that happen out of my and Alyssa's hard work, is something I will never forget.

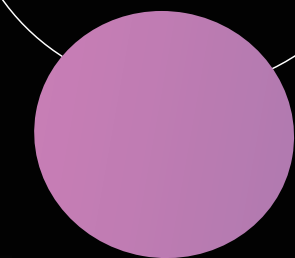
**Long-term goals?**

I had originally envisioned it as a five-program season, and we will do at least four next year for season three, with an educational component, a little different experience. We have bigger dreams in the pipeline for a decade down the road, but that involves far too many moving parts to get into right now.

And we will always take off July 4 weekend. The Pops has that on lockdown. I would never come close to that! ●



FEATURE



# PERA

# 2.



BU alums are supporting experimental works and diversifying talent and staff to make opera more relevant and inclusive

By Keith Powers



Opera Columbus' reimagined 2021 production of Mozart's *Don Giovanni*

Terry Gilliam/Courtesy of Opera Columbus



pera companies come in all sizes. The largest present grand opera, with enormous casts, expenses, and ambitions. The smallest—still involving dozens of artists—present one-off stagings, or seasonal productions.

No matter the size of the company, all are experiencing a moment of reckoning and change. The pandemic stopped performances everywhere and social upheaval forced arts organizations to examine their own shortcomings, including a glaring lack of diversity, onstage and off. And they need to bring in broader audiences to survive.

Those who work in the field, in every capacity—singers, executives, directors, board members—feel the urgency to transform and revitalize the art form.

In June 2022, the trade organization OPERA America published its 2021 Field-Wide Opera Demographic Report, which surveyed administrators and board members of 97 US and Canadian opera companies to learn the current demographic landscape of the opera field (they plan to publish a survey of soloists, choristers, and instrumentalists in 2023). They found that of all staff members at the senior leadership level surveyed, only 18 percent identify as BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and people of color) compared to 80.5 percent who identify as white. Still, they pointed out, there is hope. The findings, they said, “show that the younger generations of administrators and trustees are more diverse than their older colleagues.”

Many BU graduates are at the forefront of this rapidly shifting opera world. They are supporting experimental works, trying to attract broader audiences, and diversifying talent and staff. Beth Morrison (BUTI’89, CFA’94), a creative producer, is founder and CEO of Beth Morrison Projects (BMP), which nurtures composers and production teams through their first works. Morrison says that she initially “felt disconnected from opera. In Boston, I saw experiments in theater, and I wanted to make opera more relevant to younger audiences.”

Her company has done just that, championing dozens of new productions in the past two decades, like Ellen Reid’s *p r i s m*, winner of a 2019 Pulitzer Prize for music.

## “Thirty percent of our audience has never seen an opera before.”

JULIA NOULIN-MÉRAT,  
OPERA COLUMBUS

It has also shown dedication to supporting opera innovation and embracing up-and-coming talent through its programming, such as the PROTOTYPE Festival, which Morrison cofounded in 2013. PROTOTYPE showcases nontraditional operas and experimental theater works and is now a model for festivals around the world. Morrison’s BMP Next Generation program has also committed to future productions from new composers and directors. In all, BMP has developed and staged more than five dozen productions since its founding in 2006.

Morrison grew up in Maine and dreamed of working in musical theater, on Broadway. A summer in high school at the BU Tanglewood Institute left her rethinking those



Vincent Tulo/PrototypeOpera (Morrison); Adam Cairns (Noulin-Mérat)

Maria Baranova/Courtesy of BMP

Clockwise, from left:  
Beth Morrison, CEO  
of Beth Morrison  
Projects (BMP), which  
nurtures composers  
and production  
teams through their  
first works; BMP  
commissioned Ellen  
Reid’s *p r i s m*, winner  
of a 2019 Pulitzer  
Prize for music;  
Julia Noulin-Mérat,  
general director  
and CEO of Opera  
Columbus, promotes  
experimental works  
in an effort to bring in  
first-time operagoers.

plans. “It was a world of classical music that I didn’t know existed,” she says. “Battle, Hampson, Bonney, Ozawa—that changed my direction.”

She studied voice performance as an undergraduate at BU, but “just singing was not what I wanted,” she says. “The ability to think big—that was the turning point. That was germane to who I am. I thought it would be interesting to create an opera company with an avant-garde theater aesthetic.”

She went on to receive her master’s degree in music from Arizona State University and an MFA from the Yale School of Drama, and eventually became chief administrator at BUTI.

Beth Morrison Projects has offices in New York and Los Angeles, but doesn’t operate rehearsal spaces. Instead, each opera production has its own home.

“We are a project-based company,” Morrison says. “We don’t manage artists, we do projects. What drives me is creating the next generation of artists in the field, and pushing the boundaries of the art form.”

Although her company presents new work exclusively, Morrison is keenly aware of the crisis facing those trying

to make standard operas—the *Aidas*, the Ring Cycles, and the *Il Trovatores*—appeal to contemporary audiences.

“Finding a way to make the traditional repertoire relevant,” she says, “that mandate is challenging.”

David Kneuss knows that well.

Kneuss (’70) was the executive stage director of the Metropolitan Opera for 25 years. Staging grand opera productions for decades at the Met—and around the globe—gives him a unique perspective on the massive undertaking.

“I felt that my experience at the Met grew every day,” says Kneuss, who has maintained a long-running tenure as artistic advisor to the Ozawa Music Academy, through which he produced an experimental outdoor production of *La Damnation de Faust* at Matsumoto Castle, a few hours from Tokyo. He has also staged works for opera companies in Chicago, Houston, San Francisco, London, and Florence. “I ended up directing more than 100 productions. There were always complications and challenges. The job grew exponentially—you’re really running things.”

Kneuss retired from the Met in 2017—“It was 15 hours a day, 6 days a week,” he says, “you couldn’t do the job otherwise”—but still directs productions around the





world. His view of the future of grand opera is sobering.

“There is an enormous audience who couldn’t care less about opera,” he says. “I studied opera in seventh grade—nobody does that now. If you’re a manager, how do you sell tickets?”

“The trend is toward more opera in the Mozart tradition—a good comedy or drama, with a small orchestra and cast. You have to do something controversial, any tag that could help you latch on to a segment of the population. People are scrambling to make opera sellable.

“Students are going to have to be equipped to learn new music and act in contemporary theater,” he adds.

#### ATTRACTING NEW TALENT—AND NEW AUDIENCES

There are companies trying to meet the demand for new works that represent diverse concepts, stories, and execution. One troupe working vigorously toward that mission is Opera Columbus, a 40-year-old regional company in central Ohio.

Julia Noulin-Mérat, the general director and CEO since 2021, says the work they are doing is experimental, which in turn is bringing in first-time operagoers. “We’re doing *Don Giovanni* in the science museum and *La Bohème* in an old warehouse, with 200 other artists-in-residence,” says Noulin-Mérat (MET’06, CFA’08). Not every presentation that broadens the audience has to be a full-scale opera. “Our Drinks and Drag drag show events opened doors to an



incredibly interesting LGBTQIA+ community. Thirty percent of our audience has never seen an opera before.

“When I moved to Boston, I fell in love with BU, and the city—incredibly rich in arts. I was drawn by the Opera Institute, not just to learn the business, but to have close proximity to business,” says Noulin-Mérat, who studied set design as an undergraduate at Concordia University in her native Canada. She received two masters at BU—in arts administration and in set design. She went on to work at Boston’s Guerilla Opera and the Boston Lyric Opera. Now, she thinks of herself as an impresario.

“At Opera Columbus I lead a company, and can make a change,” she says. “The board is supportive, the energy is very young. And all the arts organizations here are collaborative—they want to produce great work together.”

Many arts groups also want new audiences. Counter-tenor Patrick Dailey is finding ways to reach them.

“I tell people I’m an opera singer, a voice professor, an art curator, a choral conductor, and a community arts advocate. I specialize in Black concert music, and the civil rights era,” says Dailey (’14). He teaches voice at Tennessee

From left: Patrick Dailey founded the Big Blue Opera Initiatives at Tennessee State University (TSU), a program for students at TSU and other historically Black colleges and universities; Guerilla Opera’s production of *Gallo* featured a stage covered in Cheerios; Guerilla Opera’s world premiere of *Chronohotonthologos*.

Courtesy Patrick Dailey; Liz Linder/Courtesy of Guerilla Opera (Gallo)

Courtesy of Guerilla Opera



State University, where he founded the Big Blue Opera Initiatives, a performance, outreach, and fundraising program designed for Tennessee State University vocal performance students, for students at other historically Black colleges and universities, and for underserved communities. He also created the Wakanda Chorale, Tennessee State’s resident ensemble. “With the Big Blue Opera Initiatives, my goal is to reposition what opera is, and who it’s for. The best thing an educator can do is be active in the field, and teach from an informed place. To stand in the gap for young people who are not aware of these options.”

Reimagining opera is Boston-based Guerilla Opera’s mission. Unlike traditional opera companies, the women-run company’s ensemble performs without a conductor. Guerilla Opera has performed exclusively new work—more than 40 world premieres since its founding in 2007. That means everything is experimental—the music, the staging, the concept, the setting, and the audience.

The stage for composer Ken Ueno’s *Gallo* was covered in Cheerios to signify sand on a beach as well as represent childhood memories, drawing from Ueno’s (’97) own recollection of growing up eating the cereal. Hannah Lash’s *Beowulf* transformed the protagonist into a nursing home doctor.

The company has also committed to having its programming reflect at least 50 percent women and BIPOC creators, including composers, librettists, guest artists, designers, and administrators.

Sarah Schneider (’17) is Guerilla Opera’s artistic projects and production manager.

“We work as an ensemble, with nontraditional music and design.” Host venues, she says, are more welcoming to experimentation—much more so than a rented hall. “We dropped 25 pounds of aquarium sand at the Museum of Science.”

Schneider says Guerilla Opera expanded to more livestream video since the pandemic, as well as “more combinations of film and opera. Not just a camera at the back of the theater—film in conversation with opera. Not everyone comes from an opera background at Guerilla. Our main projectionist was a sculpture major at RISD.”

Schneider says at Guerilla Opera, she has experienced the energy that comes from diverse backgrounds. “It’s the variety of artistic backgrounds that makes it a special place,” she says. “We think critically and carefully about why we are producing a given work, whose voices we are bringing in, and whose we are excluding.”

#### MODERNIZING OPERA

Making a traditional art form relevant to new audiences is no easy task. “In terms of modernizing, you have to think of the whole package,” Noulin-Mérat says. “That’s very important. Some people think you have to throw jeans on opera singers. That’s just not truthful.”

Part of modernizing opera means improving representation both on and off the stage, she says. Opera Columbus recently started an immersion program for BIPOC producers. “They are always assisting,” she says, “then eventually move on to Broadway or to the dance world, because there is space for them there.”

Morrison acknowledges the entire field must become more inclusive and supportive. “The next generation of creative producers must be trained—with a focus on BIPOC producers and administrators—to show them the whole process of what it takes to create an opera.”

Dailey agrees. “The pandemic provided a push to make changes on stages and in the infrastructure. We need to rethink who we have onstage, to create space for people to lead, to give artists the agency to try a number of things.” ●





T H E

M A G I C

Paula Grissom-Broughton  
believes that music, and  
music education, holds  
the power to save us all

O F

M U S I C

By Marc Chalufour  
Portrait by Natalia Agatte



# MUSIC WAS EVERYWHERE IN PINE BLUFF, ARK.,

where Paula Grissom-Broughton was born into a family that gathered around the piano rather than the television. At church, she heard gospel, blues, spirituals, Bach, and Handel. “We saw Black faces singing every musical genre,” she says. At school, her teachers signed her up to play piano and sing in every musical—just as they had for her 10 older siblings.

“We weren’t asked if we wanted to,” says Grissom-Broughton (’15). “I was very shy, but I had a tribe of teachers and mentors who said, ‘You can do this.’” She jokes that “people telling me what to do” has been a theme in her life. But time and time again, someone saw a talent that Grissom-Broughton hadn’t yet recognized—and she listened to them.

It took her many years to see her own path clearly, but now Grissom-Broughton is a music educator as well and she appreciates the role she can play in the lives of young people, as the members of her network did for her. “Music education was the door of opportunity,” she says. “That was molding me, even when I didn’t realize that it was.”

Grissom-Broughton is an assistant professor and the former chair of Spelman College’s music department, where she’s using her expertise in race and gender in music

education—and specifically Black feminist pedagogy—to keep that door open for future generations. It’s work that she considers more important than ever because music, she says, has a “supernatural” power, capable of saving the world.

“With everything that’s going on in our society, we’re going to need a type of healing that won’t be able to be addressed through science. It’s going to have to be something more of a supernatural realm,” she says. “The arts are going to be the balm that’s going to heal the sin-sick soul of our world. It’s going to be a song. It’s going to be a dance. It’s going to be somebody’s voice, or even someone playing an instrument.”

## AN ACADEMIC SEGUE

Grissom-Broughton very nearly stopped listening to that supernatural call before she’d had the chance to fully embrace it. As an undergraduate, she arrived at Spelman College with a plan to major in psychology and prelaw. She also wanted to study piano on the side, so she met with the music department chair, Joyce Johnson, now a professor emerita, who has been at Spelman since 1955. She asked Grissom-Broughton to step into her studio and play something. The young student performed the only piece she could play without sheet music, *Clair de Lune* by Claude Debussy.

“I think you need to change your major. Go to the registrar’s office and let them know,” Grissom-Broughton recalls her soon-to-be mentor saying. “Dr. Johnson saw something in me that I didn’t see in myself.”

At Spelman, she studied the classical Western canon, learning the music of a series of white men. “In order for the program to produce Black women who could go out and compete, we had to learn the game book, right?” Grissom-Broughton says. But she also learned about Black composers and musical genres, like spirituals, blues, gospel, and jazz. It was as though they had two parallel curricula. “It was sort of like a double consciousness,” she says.

## TRANSFORMATIVE TEACHING

“I was very intimidated,” Grissom-Broughton says of entering the doctoral program at CFA. Being the only Black woman in the program added to her anxiety, but, she says, “that was also my strength.” Her identity sparked the dissertation work that continues to shape her approach to education.

Using the music program at Spelman, she examined music education through the lens of feminism and Black feminist pedagogy. She says that Black feminist pedagogy goes beyond what many people associate with the term—the promotion and centering of Black women—to “teaching from a place of inclusion, teaching from a place of empowerment and transformation.”

She brought that philosophy back to Spelman.

Taking a narrow, Western, white-centric view of history isn’t an issue unique to music. It’s a pattern that

educators in all of the traditional humanities have grappled with. But music—especially the music of Black women—is different in substantial ways, Grissom-Broughton says.

Black women have historically been objectified and their work diminished as a result, she says. “Our bodies were our instruments. So when women perform, particularly Black women, music isn’t the only thing that’s heard. They also see our faces and our bodies.” At Spelman, “students are encouraged to examine and, perhaps, redefine the women’s position in various fields of music. We also want to raise the consciousness of our students’ understanding of how race and gender and other modes of oppression can impact their lives as Black women musicians, performers, and educators.”

As a former chair of the department *where* she once studied and *which* she once studied, Grissom-Broughton has had a unique opportunity to apply her research in classrooms filled with Black women. That still means teaching the traditional classics, but she tries to do so on the students’ terms. “We’re twisting it a little to say, ‘This is what’s been taught—what do you think?’ It’s a more com-

**“The arts are going to be the balm that’s going to heal the sin-sick soul of our world. It’s going to be a song. It’s going to be a dance. It’s going to be somebody’s voice, or even someone playing an instrument.”**

munal way of learning about the white patriarchal canon. We’re going to learn it from the perspectives of your voice.” An important part of that is taking the time to examine what was going on elsewhere in the musical world that those who established the canon ignored.

At the center of Grissom-Broughton’s teaching, informed heavily by her study of Black feminist pedagogy, is a single question: “Am I becoming the center of the teaching process? If so, I need to decenter myself, because that’s not what’s going to work nowadays.” The students wouldn’t accept anything else. “They are coming in with bold questions. They are questioning what we are giving them, and that’s a good thing,” she says. “Black feminist pedagogy is not about who or what you teach. It’s about empowerment, transformation, inclusion.”

Something else that Grissom-Broughton has noticed about today’s students is less encouraging: a decrease in the level of performing talent. “The effects of not having music programs or music programs having been eliminated, the lack of private lessons prior to college—it’s

prevalent,” she says. One victim of that trend was Spelman’s jazz ensemble, one of the only jazz programs for women in the US, which the college eliminated in 2016.

In the face of these changes, Grissom-Broughton recognizes that the music department must pivot to meet new demands. “We’re now looking at the type of students and saying, ‘Where can we meet the needs of these students in order to make them who they need to be?’” she says. Courses in songwriting, music for films and games, and technology provide new avenues to a range of offstage careers. “We’re cultivating leader musicians. Our students are still getting into top grad schools, working for major record labels, or they’re starting their own businesses with undergraduate degrees.”

## KEEP THE MUSIC GOING

The elimination of music programs has become an unfortunate trend, with the arts often the first subjects cut when school budgets are tightened. An American Federation of Teachers report showed that 42 percent of Georgia public schools eliminated art and music programs between 2008

and 2016. “I get very passionate when I hear about people ending music programs because I’m a product of what music education can do,” says Grissom-Broughton.

Before CFA, she taught music in the Atlanta and Fulton County public school systems and appreciates the tough financial decisions that school administrators face. “I think we have to reimagine what music education looks like in our public schools. We’ve been on the soapbox of ‘stop cutting our budget’ for over 20 years and guess what? They’re still cutting the budget.” Her friends who teach in public schools have begun finding other ways to introduce music to their kids, like inviting the Atlanta Opera to perform for them.

“Exposure plays a huge role—more than anything else,” says Grissom-Broughton, whose own exposure to music began before she can remember. “I’ve seen students come into themselves. I’ve seen music mold them, like it did me. And I’ve seen it heal a lot of students,” she says. “You just never know what the impact is going to be once you expose somebody and allow them to experience that supernatural feeling.” ●



# ART EVOKES NATURE, RITUAL...



**School of Visual Arts celebrated more than 20 years of the Venice Studio Arts Program with an exhibition of alumni work in Italy**

Photos by Clelia Cadamuro



**THE SCHOOL OF VISUAL ARTS** celebrated more than 20 years of the Venice Studio Arts Program with an exhibition of alumni art in Italy from July 29 through August 19, 2022. The school, along with BU Study Abroad, Global Programs, and BU's Venice Studio Arts Program, partnered with the School for Curatorial Studies Venice for the exhibition *Figure, Character, Sign* at A plus A Gallery in Venice. The show coincided with the 2022 Venice Biennale and featured pieces by two alumni who studied abroad in the program: Maria Molteni ('06) and Adrienne Elise Tarver ('07). Dana Clancy ('99), director of the School of Visual Arts and an associate professor of painting, curated the exhibition and Mary Y. Yang, an assistant professor of graphic design, was the exhibition designer.



# ...A RETURN TO THE PAST

Molteni's and Tarver's paintings, drawings, and installations examined the concepts of ritual and circling back to the past. Patterns of stones, water, stars, and leaves evoked nature, spiritual ritual, the context of Venice, and connections between the human and nonhuman—a theme of the 2022 Venice Biennale.

The show also included pieces from the fall 2021 Stone Gallery show *Radical Return*, a group project of works by 36 Chinese and Chinese American artists and designers, which was curated by Yang and New York-based artist Zhongkai Li and was centered around visual meditations on the Chinese character 回 *hui*, which means to return, to turn around, to circle, or to reply.



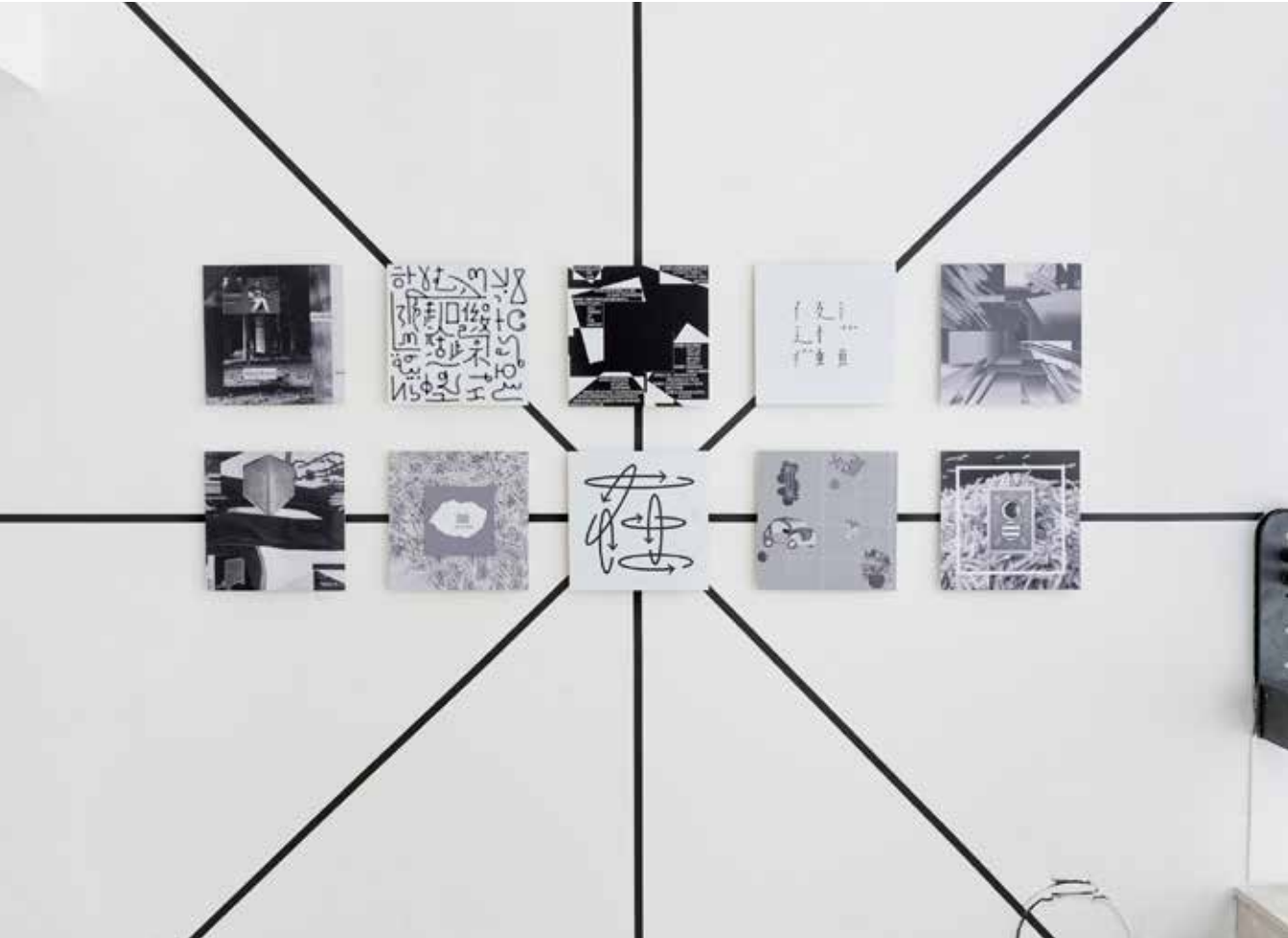
Molteni's installation *Counting to Infinity: Sweeping Stars* (*Contando All'Infinito: Stelle Scopa*) references the Italian card game *Scopa*, which means "broom" or "to sweep." Molteni designed an original deck of cards, which she depicted on posters on the walls and scattered on the floor of the gallery. The installation also included five traditional Venetian street-sweeping brooms, each named after a notable Italian astronomer.



Tarver included pieces from her ongoing *Mirage* series of small watercolors in the show, such as the one on this page, at top. The works, on tarot card-sized paper, depict nude women lounging, resting, and bathing in hazy tropical settings and explore assumptions around voodoo, magic, and swamps, in conjunction with the concept of the nymph figure or a muse. Tarver examines the

complexity of Black female identity, questioning tropes of the past—such as oversexualized, exoticized, voyeuristic depictions of women in art—while looking toward a reframing for the future.

Also on view in the show was Tarver's large ink on paper collage, *Immersed*, below, which evokes the sea and subtly includes figures of women immersed in water and swimming.



These images from the *Radical Return* show represent a selection of pieces from an international call for submissions that prompted artists to use the Chinese character *hui* as a grid—visually and conceptually—to consider acts of return through language, tradition, memory, identity, and history. This was the first exhibition presented by Radical Characters, a study group and curatorial project focusing on the relationship between design and culture in the Chinese and Chinese American communities.





Jason Alexander's *Seinfeld* role cemented him in pop culture. Now he's busy acting on screen and stage, directing, and podcasting

# CHARACTERS

By Mara Sassoon

Illustration by Pablo Lobato





This page: Alexander, left, in a dress rehearsal for a 1979 BU production of *A Month in the Country*.

Opposite page: One of Alexander's notable film roles was as the antagonist Philip Stuckey in 1990's *Pretty Woman*.



When Jason Alexander was a sophomore at BU, he received some life-changing advice. Jim Spruill ('75), then an associate professor of theater, called Alexander into his office and had him look in a mirror. "He said to me, 'Listen, I know you see yourself as a Hamlet, and you might actually be a really good Hamlet. But no one's ever going to cast you in that way. So you might want to get good at Falstaff,'" recalls Alexander ('81, Hon.'95). In mentioning the comedic character in Shakespeare's *Henry IV*, Spruill "was basically telling me that if I wanted to have any kind of a commercially successful career, I should start looking at comedy."

About a decade after Spruill (who died in 2010) uttered those prescient words, Alexander landed the comedic role of a lifetime: the self-absorbed yet hilarious George Costanza in NBC's *Seinfeld*. The part would eventually earn him a Screen Actors Guild Award for Outstanding Performance by a Male Actor in a Comedy Series as well as four Golden Globe and seven Emmy nominations. He's appeared in notable roles in movies such as *Pretty Woman* and *Shallow Hal*, but no other part has had the pop-culture staying power of George, a character loosely based on *Seinfeld* cocreator Larry David. There's a Costanza-themed bar in Melbourne, Australia—George's Bar—whose walls are plastered with the character's quotes and likeness. Costanza fandom runs so deep that many were quick to

notice a viral 2021 Tide Super Bowl ad, in which Alexander's face is on a teen's hoodie, features the track "Theme from The Greatest American Hero (Believe It or Not)," a song Costanza sings a parody version of for his answering machine message in a season eight episode of *Seinfeld*.

"Comedy has clearly been the mainstay of my professional life," says Alexander. "And I am indebted to Jim Spruill for pointing me in that direction."

#### MAKING IT

Before his memorable meeting with Spruill, Alexander had envisioned himself as a dramatic theater actor. "I thought, 'I'm going to play the great roles of all time—Willy Loman, Richard III. My fantasies of a career did not really have film and television in them. If I could find a way to make a living on the stage in New York City, that would be the most fantastic thing that could ever happen.'"

He'd found the theater at a young age. In middle school, Alexander was an emergency replacement for a cast member who'd dropped out of *The Sound of Music*. "Once you join a company, a cast, a show, a project, you kind of have a new set of instant friends," he says, "and I found that rather fascinating. What initially grabbed me was not so much the performing part, but the community part in the world of theater."

He remembers seeing an early preview production of *Pippin* in its first Broadway run: "It blew my mind. I watched Ben Vereen doing his thing on the stage, and I went, 'I think

## "I thought, 'I'm going to play the great roles of all time—Willy Loman, Richard III. My fantasies of a career did not really have film and television in them.'"

I would like to be that guy,' not at the time understanding there might be a world of difference between what he could do and what I could do, but I wanted to at least try."

After that performance, Alexander became more heavily involved in school and community productions. He joined the Pushcart Players, a children's theater group that went on to do a TV special. He was signed by a management company after they saw him in the special, which opened up more professional acting opportunities.

When it was time for college, Alexander knew he wanted to attend a theater program. "While I was already technically a professional actor, I had no idea what I was doing. I had no real training."

At CFA, he performed in productions including *Othello* and *A Month in the Country*. The summer before what would have been his senior year at CFA, he landed a part in a horror film called *The Burning*. Filming wound up running three weeks longer than initially slated, so he couldn't make it back for the beginning of the first semester of his senior year. His plan was to take a semester off, but weeks later he was cast in the Broadway premier of the Stephen Sondheim and George Furth musical *Merrily We Roll Along*. "Suddenly, I was turning to BU and saying, 'I don't know when I'm going to be back.'"

Although he had an 18-month contract for the show, the production closed after a few months of previews and only 16 performances because of negative reviews.

By that time, Alexander had met Daena Title—they would later marry—and directors and casting agents were interested in him for other acting roles. "It just didn't seem opportune to go back to BU at that time," he says. "What was hard about not going back was I felt like I had not completed my understanding of the things I was being taught. At BU, I learned about all these tools and techniques and ideas that I felt I didn't quite have mastery of yet." Instead, he took classes with the acting coach Larry Moss, lessons he continued for years.

#### BEING GEORGE

For Alexander, 1989 was a pivotal year. He starred in the musical *Jerome Robbins' Broadway*, a role that earned him a Tony Award for Best Performance by a Leading Actor in a Musical.

It was also the year *Seinfeld* premiered.

"They called me out to LA, and I met Jerry and Larry, and they gave me a little bit more direction," he says of his audition for the show. "I literally went in with Jerry, read for NBC at their offices, got back on a plane right after the audition to go back home thinking, 'That'll never happen.' By the time I landed, there was a message saying, 'You've got it.'"

But for a time, Alexander thought the show was doomed to fail. "I like to tell this story—when we were done with the pilot, Jerry asked me if I thought our chances were good and, not to be a jerk, I said, 'No, I don't think so because the audience for this show is me. And I don't really watch TV,'" he says.

"The number one comedy in America when we did our pilot was *ALF*, I believe—very different vibe from what we were doing on *Seinfeld*. So, I just thought there wouldn't be an audience for this. I thought it was very good. I thought it was very funny. I thought it was the kind of thing I *would* watch if I watched TV."

At first, he was right—the show didn't get a favorable response. But then it caught on with one particular demographic—"guys like me who were 18 to about 35 years old, who had jobs or were students and lived in cities," says Alexander. Advertisers eager to target those viewers began sponsoring the show, he says. "That's what kept us chugging along until it finally caught on. I don't think any of us thought it would be so successful. I mean, maybe Jerry and



Boston University Photography

PictureLux/The Hollywood Archive/Alamy Stock Photo



Alexander's career-defining turn as George Costanza in *Seinfeld* earned him a Screen Actors Guild Award for Outstanding Performance by a Male Actor in a Comedy Series as well as four Golden Globe and seven Emmy nominations.



Larry had—they always seemed pretty confident that they thought it would be a thing—but I think for the rest of us, we were all shocked as it started to gain momentum.”

That confidence was something he says he came to admire in *Seinfeld* and David. He often cites season two’s “The Chinese Restaurant” as an episode that really made him believe in the show. The format, filmed entirely in real time, was experimental. “It actually happens in 22 minutes and it has no story at all,” he says. “It’s just Elaine, Jerry, and George waiting for a table at a Chinese restaurant—and not getting one through a series of mishaps. When we first read the episode for the network, they were adamantly against it.”

*Seinfeld* and David ran with it anyway. “I remember thinking that these guys have the courage of their convictions. They know that we’re hanging on by a thread. Most people, if a network said, ‘We’re not happy,’ they go, ‘What can we do to make you happy?’ But these guys were not about to do that. They were going to be true to their vision and their sense of humor. If it meant that the show went off the air, then the show went off the air. But they weren’t going to go and become something they didn’t believe in, in the hopes that they’d get a pat on the head and stay on the air. I remember thinking that is something to be proud of.”

#### ON HIS OWN TERMS

In a March 2013 interview with *Backstage* magazine, Alexander said, “I think the trick to happiness with this stuff is to admit that in my 30s I probably hit the pinnacle of popular success. I can’t imagine doing anything . . . that’s going to hit as large an audience and sustain their interest for as long. But I had that shot, that’s the unique thing; so you have to kind of embrace that and go, ‘OK, so what I do now, I’m doing for me.’”

Since *Seinfeld* wrapped in 1998, Alexander has been living by that mantra, taking on theater roles—he appeared in *The Producers* opposite Martin Short in 2003, replaced his former boss, Larry David, in David’s 2015 Broadway play, *Fish in the Dark*, and has lent his voice to notable animated television shows, including *Harley Quinn* on HBO Max. In 2021 and 2022, he played Jeff Bezos in viral comedic bits for *Jimmy Kimmel Live!* and *The Problem with Jon Stewart*. The latter had him portray Bezos in a mini musical parody, *Bezos Over Broadway*.

This year, Alexander will launch the iHeart podcast *Really, No Really with Jason Alexander* with Peter Tilden, his longtime creative partner and a talk radio host. “It began life as the simple notion of, we would tell each other stuff and the

Album/Alamy Stock Photo

Featureflash Archive/Alamy Stock Photo



“When we were done with the pilot, Jerry asked me if I thought our chances were good and, not to be a jerk, I said, ‘No, I don’t think so because the audience for this show is me. And I don’t really watch TV.’”

other one would go, ‘Really? No. Really?’ It was just stuff that we couldn’t believe—How could this exist? How could this be? How do people do this? Who would make that decision? Then we try and figure it out in the course of the podcast.”

Episodes explore topics ranging from silly to profound. In one, they explore why stall doors in public restrooms don’t go all the way to the floor—“Jerry Seinfeld had a comedy routine where he talked about this. ‘Why don’t they go down to the floor? Why is there this little viewing window?’” Alexander and Tilden found an award-winning designer of public restrooms to get to the bottom of it.

In another, they interview a former neo-Nazi. “He left the movement and has gone on to do amazing things,” he says. “One of the reasons that he left the movement was he really liked *Seinfeld*, and he couldn’t figure out how to hate Jews when these Jews were making him laugh so much. That conversation became very profound.”

Alexander is also speaking up when he admires a show. After the first season of *The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel* aired on Amazon Prime Video, he asked his manager to call series creator Amy Sherman-Palladino and let her know he would be delighted to be considered for a part if the right one opened up. Sure enough, Alexander was cast as

Asher Friedman, a blacklisted playwright and old friend of Maisel’s father, played by Tony Shalhoub (Alexander had previously guest-starred in Shalhoub’s *Monk*) in the show’s third and fourth seasons. “I thought, ‘Well, we should just call everything that I like if that’s the trick,’” he says with a laugh. “The writing was extraordinary and Asher is a great character. It was also lovely in that it wasn’t a completely comedic character. He’s a guy who nursed a terrible wound in his life. It was a really lovely opportunity to showcase a different set of performance muscles.”

Over the years, Alexander has drawn from the advice he received from Spruill and other CFA faculty. “I had one professor who said to me, ‘Are you sure that you wouldn’t prefer to be a director?’” after Alexander had directed a student production of *Godspell* as an assignment. He’d enjoyed the assignment, but thought of himself as a better actor than director: “So, I took that professor’s advice as a bit of criticism at the time.”

Eventually, he understood the professor wasn’t trying to steer him away from acting, but rather pointing out his knack for directing. “He was saying that I had a natural sensibility of looking at projects from a sort of bird’s-eye view, seeing it as a whole,” Alexander says. “In that point of view, I would assess what my character was supposed to bring to the production and then I would do what I could to deliver exactly that. Whereas some of the best actors I’ve met both then and since see the whole thing through the eyes of their character—nothing else really exists.”

Alexander went on to direct a few episodes of *Seinfeld* and of hit television shows like *Criminal Minds* and *Mike and Molly*, and even a Brad Paisley music video that earned Paisley a Country Music Association Video of the Year award. In summer 2022, he directed the plays *Windfall*, a dark comedy about five office workers who bet all their money on a \$1 billion lottery jackpot to escape their manic boss, at the Bay Street Theater in Sag Harbor, N.Y., and *If I Forget*, about three siblings grappling with their Jewish identities in the early 2000s, at the Fountain Theatre in Los Angeles. Both opened to positive reviews. More big directing projects are on the horizon.

“When you’re an actor, you can only make a contribution in one very specific way. But as a director, you get to participate on every possible level,” says Alexander. “What brought me into performing was community. I get to be in a community with many more people as a director than I am as just an actor. And it is not about what most people probably assume—it is not about having control. If I put it in music terms, a great conductor probably can’t play all those instruments, and surely cannot play them as well as the people playing for him. He coordinates all of them as an orchestra so that the whole is greater than any of its individual parts. That challenge, at this point in my life, is really rewarding.” ●



# CLASS NOTES

## 1970s

**Edward Evensen ('71)** retired in 2020 and remains active playing woodwinds in the pit for musicals, directing the Claremont American Band in Claremont, N.H., leading The Firehouse Six Dixieland Band on clarinet, playing saxophone and clarinet in the East Bay Jazz Ensemble and Temple Band, subbing in area bands, and doing woodwind repairs. He and his wife, Anne, are proud of their son, Erik, an associate professor and director of the MFA in design program at

the University of Wisconsin–Stout, and his wife, Erika Svanoe, concert band conductor at Augsburg University; their daughter, Keira Christian, a guidance counselor at Fall Mountain Regional High School; and their granddaughter, Cadence, a trumpet player.

**Michael Mosorjak ('71)** exhibited 31 of his paintings in the show *From Conservator to Artist* at the Southern Alleghenies Museum of Art in Bedford, Pa., in June and July 2022.

**Jerry A. Straus ('74)** was appointed to the Berkshire Music School's

## WRITE TO US!

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board of trustees in winter 2022. He is a founding partner and current chair of JMW Consultants, an international management consulting and leadership development firm.

**Geena Davis ('79, Hon. '99)** was named to the 2021 *Forbes* "50 Over 50 Vision" list. Davis started the nonprofit Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media in 2004, which advocates for increased diversity and inclusion in children's entertainment. She is also chair of BFFoundation, which promotes content made by and starring underrepresented people and produces the annual Bentonville Film Festival.

## 1980s

**Cindy Gold ('80)** appeared in *The Most Spectacularly Lamentable Trial of Miz Martha Washington* at Steppenwolf Theatre in Chicago, Ill., in fall 2022. In winter 2021, for the third year, she played Fezziwig in Chicago's Goodman Theatre's *A Christmas Carol*. In June 2023, she will retire after 26 years as a professor of theater at Northwestern University.

**Julia Shepley ('80)** showed her open-framework wood sculptures and new drawings and prints in a solo exhibition, *Carry*, at Boston Sculptors Gallery in Boston, Mass., in spring 2022. She also had new pieces included in the *Boston Sculptors Gallery Members & Alumni 30th Anniversary Exhibitions* in summer 2022 at both Boston Sculptors Gallery and Highfield Hall & Gardens in Falmouth, Mass. Additionally,

Shepley had selected works in the group exhibition *Material Drawing Redux* at the Piano Craft Gallery in Boston in March 2022.

**Julianne Moore ('83)** performed a rendition of "What the World Needs Now Is Love" with other celebrities in July for *Ukraine: Answering the Call*, a televised fundraising special on NBC. She also spoke out against gun violence and advocated for policy change as a featured speaker at the Tory Burch Foundation's 2022 Embrace Ambition Summit: Confronting Stereotypes and Creating New Norms in June 2022.

**Laurence C. Schwartz ('83)** published *Teaching on Borrowed Time: An Adjunct's Memoir* (Page Publishing, 2022), which chronicles

his journey teaching 23 different subjects at 20 different colleges over 30-plus years as an adjunct lecturer.

**Brooke Karzen ('84)** served as the executive producer of HBO Max's *Harry Potter 20th Anniversary: Return to Hogwarts*, a retrospective special featuring the cast and filmmakers of the *Harry Potter* film series.

**Michael Chiklis ('85)** will star in *The Senior*, a football drama based on the true story of Mike Flynt, who goes back to college at age 59 and rejoins the school's football team.

**Roy Conli ('87)** produced Disney-nature's *Polar Bear* and *Bear Witness*, which premiered exclusively on Disney+ on April 22, 2022, in

celebration of Earth Day. *Polar Bear* tells the story of a polar bear experiencing motherhood for the first time, and *Bear Witness* is the accompanying behind-the-scenes documentary that reveals the bears' struggles with their changing environment due to global warming.

**Neal Hampton ('88)** was the special guest conductor for the Merrimack Valley Philharmonic Orchestra's Almost March Madness movie-themed concert in February 2022 at the Timberlane Performing Arts Center in Plaistow, N.H. Hampton is the director of the Brandeis-Wellesley Orchestra and assistant conductor of the Plymouth Philharmonic.

**Michelle Hurd ('88)** starred as Raffi Musiker in the second season of

*Star Trek: Picard*, which premiered in March 2022.

## 1990s

**Stephanie Stathos (BUTI'86,'87, CFA'90)**, a flutist with the Cape Ann Symphony, performed in the symphony's Spring Bouquet concert in the Crowell Chapel in Manchester-by-the-Sea, Mass., in April 2022. The concert featured a lineup of five international musicians.

**Kim Raver ('91)** reprised her role as Dr. Teddy Altman in season 19 of ABC's *Grey's Anatomy*. Raver was also the coexecutive producer of the Lifetime crime drama *Suitcase Killer: The Melanie McGuire Story*, released in June 2022.

**Rhett Martinez ('93)** directed *Bob: A Life in Five Acts*, a play that chronicles Bob's lifelong quest to become a "Great Man." Firecracker Productions presented *Bob* in April and May 2022 at Garza Studios in Houston, Tex.

**Darryl V. Jones ('94)** directed and choreographed *Blood at the Root*, an ensemble drama play inspired by real-life events that "examines the miscarriage of justice, racial double standards, and the crises in relations between men and women of all classes." It was presented by Custom Made Theatre Co. at the Phoenix Theater in San Francisco, Calif., in May and June 2022.

**Valerie Coleman (BUTI'89, CFA'95)** created a world premiere work that was presented in April 2022



**SEDRIK HUCKABY (BUTI'95, CFA'97)** founded Kinfolk House, a collaborative art space in what was originally his grandmother's house, in Fort Worth, Tex. Huckaby and his wife, Letitia, opened the doors of this historic space in March 2022 with the project *Welcome*. It featured Huckaby's paintings of his grandmother, Hallie Beatrice Carpenter, whose maiden name was Welcome, and Letitia's landscapes of places connected to Carpenter's past.



**MISHKA YAROVY ('23)**, left, **PAULA PLUM ('75)**, right, **STEVE AUGER ('83)**, **MARK H. DOLD ('86)**, and **TRAVIS DOUGHTY ('22)** were featured in the SpeakEasy Stage Company's spring 2022 production of *The Inheritance*, a drama about generations of gay men in New York. **CRISTINA TODESCO ('94,'05,'09)** was the show's set designer, **JEFFREY PETERSEN ('18)** was the technical director, and **ANNA BREVETTI ('21)** was the lead electrician.



by an all-star flute quartet as part of the Celebrity Series of Boston’s *Solo(s) Together*, a Neighborhood Arts commissioning project that featured works for four soloists by five contemporary composers. Coleman was also named to the Metropolitan Opera/Lincoln Center Theater New Works dual commissioning program in 2021 and 2022. The season saw performances of her works by orchestras around the United States including the Minnesota Orchestra, Baltimore Symphony Orchestra, Sarasota Orchestra, New Haven Symphony Orchestra, Yale Symphony Orchestra, Vermont Symphony Orchestra, and The Louisville Orchestra.

**Michael Walden (‘96)** had his paintings, including portraits of his personal trainer in colorful sneakers, on display inside the Old Southworth Library in Dartmouth, Mass., in April 2022.

**Dan Fogler (‘98)** starred in *Fantastic Beasts: The Secrets of Dumbledore*, the third installment of the *Harry Potter* spin-off franchise, which opened in North America in April 2022.

**Scott Allen Jarrett (‘99, ‘08)**, director of music at BU’s Marsh Chapel, conducted the Marsh Chapel Choir at the 2022 BU Baccalaureate Service, featuring organist **Justin Thomas Blackwell (‘08, ‘09)**, Marsh Chapel’s associate director of music.

## 2000s

**Martin Benvenuto (‘01, ‘09)** is interim artistic director and head of staff for the 2022–23 season of the Young Women’s Choral Projects of San Francisco. Benvenuto is founder and artistic director of 21v, a Bay Area professional ensemble of soprano and alto voices of all gender identities.

**Ginnifer Goodwin (‘01)** starred as Jodie in the Fox comedy *Pivot-ing*, which tells the story of three women who make a series of life-changing decisions following the death of their childhood friend.



**JOE WARDWELL (‘99)** had work on display from May to September 2022 in the ICA Boston’s exhibition *Revival: Materials and Monumental Forms*. The show featured large-scale installations by six international artists who reclaim and reuse industrial and everyday materials. Wardwell’s mural, *Gotta Go to Work*, includes song lyrics about work from musicians and quotes from workers reflecting on how their lives have been turned upside down by the COVID-19 pandemic. Wardwell also created a playlist to accompany the exhibition.

Goodwin also appeared in the HBO Max series *About Last Night*.

**Missy Mazzoli (BUTI’98, CFA’02)**, named “Brooklyn’s postmillennial Mozart” by *Time Out New York*, was recently composer-in-residence with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, where her commission, “Orpheus Undone,” premiered in spring 2022. Mazzoli is writing an opera based on the George Saunders novel *Lincoln in the Bardo* for the Metropolitan Opera, and *Musical America* named Mazzoli its 2022 Composer of the Year. Mazzoli also serves as an advisor for the Boston University Tanglewood Institute Composition Fundamentals Workshop.

**Kayla Mohammadi (‘02)** showed her work in the group exhibition *The Shaping of America* at the Painting Center in New York City in January 2022. The exhibition featured the work of 10 women artists and aimed to show that “landscapes cannot be interpreted without considering the con-

nections artists have to memory, experience, and ownership.”

**Sam Tucker (‘03)** was appointed musical director of the Middlesex Hospital Vocal Chords. Tucker is also the choral director for Portland, Conn., secondary schools, where he teaches students in grades 7–12.

**Katie Calahan (‘04)** played the professor in ThinkTank Theatre’s production of *All the Great Books (Abridged)* at the Shimberg Playhouse at the Straz Center for the Performing Arts in Tampa, Fla., in February 2022. Calahan directs and oversees the programming for Big Break Youth Stage, a children’s theater program based in St. Petersburg, Fla.

**Joel Christian Gill (‘04)**, a cartoonist and historian, became an associate professor and the inaugural chair of the new MFA in visual narrative at CFA in fall 2022.

**Amber Gray (‘04)** shared her acting career experiences while

visiting Fordham University’s theater program, as part of its guest lecture series “Calling Up” in spring 2022.

**Uzo Aduba (‘05)** voiced Alisha Hawthorne, Buzz Lightyear’s commander and friend, in the Disney Pixar movie *Lightyear*, which premiered in June 2022. Aduba was also awarded the 2022 Broadway.com Audience Choice Award for Favorite Featured Actress in a Play for her role in *Clyde’s* and received an Entertainment Community Fund (previously known as the Actors Fund) Medal of Honor in spring 2022. Her performance in *In Treatment* was recognized with a 2022 Critics’ Choice Awards nomination for Best Actress in a Drama Series and a 2021 Emmy Award nomination for Outstanding Lead Actress in a Drama Series. Aduba will star in a film adaptation of *Clybourne Park*, the Pulitzer, Tony, and Olivier award-winning play about race and real estate in America, and she’ll be a part of the cast of the dark comedy *Providence*.

Kris Wilton/Courtesy of the ICA

Samantha Cohen

**Clay Hopper (‘05)**, a CFA senior lecturer in directing, conducted research in which he merged conventional mapping technology with interactive, generative computer graphics and computational vision to facilitate a more suitable environment for the actor. As part of the research, he is developing a software tool called RANDOM ACTOR, a new application for theater design that works by using an actor’s movements to generate imagery based on the program’s code parameters. Hopper and a team of graphic designers and software engineers partnered with Paolo Scoppola, an interactive media artist, to use RANDOM ACTOR on the production of the CFA play *Exit the King*.

**Lee Sunday Evans (‘06)** directed the music-theater piece *Oratorio For Living Things*, which ran at Ars Nova in New York City from March 17 through May 22, 2022.

**Julia von Metzsch Ramos (‘07, ‘10)**, **Emily Leonard Trenholm (‘11)**, and the late **Jon Imber (‘77)** had work featured in an exhibition titled *Prism: Waterscapes* at Gallery NAGA in Boston in February and March 2022.

**Autumn Ahn (‘08)** completed a residency at Headlands Center for the Arts in California in summer 2022.

**Judy Braha (‘08)**, an assistant professor of directing and acting at CFA and former MFA directing program head, retired in spring 2022 after a 29-year career at BU. Braha directed *Shakespeare in Love*, a theatrical adaptation of the 1998 film, as her valedictory production. The production ran in April and May 2022 at the Joan & Edgar Booth Theatre. During her tenure at BU, Braha also collaborated with the BU Prison Education Program and with the Race, Prison, Justice Arts Program run by André de Quadros, a CFA professor of music and music education. In summer 2022, Braha directed *Mr. Fullerton Between the Sheets* at Gloucester Stage Company and *Things I Know To Be True* at the Great Barrington Public Theater.

**Joel Turnham (‘09)**, **Austin Boyle (‘18)**, **David Orlando (‘18)**, and **Danielle Elegy (‘20)** worked with Mark Stanley, a CFA professor of lighting design, on *Merry Wives of Windsor* at Juilliard Opera. Stanley was the production’s lighting designer, Elegy and Boyle were assistant lighting designers, Orlando was programmer, and Turnham was electric shop supervisor.

## 2010s

**Ryan Anderson (‘10)** and **Jessica Stansfield (‘10)** live outside Seattle with their daughter and two cats. Anderson is in his sixth year as an event operations manager at Resonance Events and recently began rock climbing. Stansfield worked as a COVID site monitor at the Seattle Opera and now works as the operations coordinator at Flatiron School.

**Justin Antos (‘10)** was named a 2022 Regional Teacher of the Year for Cook County in Illinois and was one of 10 finalists for the Illinois State Board of Education Illinois State Teacher of the Year Award. Antos, a music teacher at Eisenhower High School in Oak Lawn, Ill., has worked to include the music of composers from underrepresented communities in school concerts.

**Brian August (‘10)** obtained a labor studies certificate from Cornell University and became more involved in his union, the American Guild of Musical Artists (AGMA). He founded and chairs AGMA’s national Staging Staff Caucus and serves on AGMA’s National Joint Anti-Harassment Task Force, in conjunction with Opera America and the federal government. August is the lead for the New York City Opera Negotiations, and led the unionization campaign for Des Moines Metro Opera. During 2021 and 2022, August worked with Seattle Opera, Houston Grand Opera, and the Des Moines Metro Opera. He lives with his dog.

**Michael Besancon (‘10)** works as a scenic artist in Chicago, usually for the Lyric Opera of Chicago or Chicago Scenic Studios. He is married with two cats.

**Kate Boucher (‘10)** has been running an Etsy shop for 10 years, selling dolls and stuffed animals she creates by commission. Boucher lives in New Hampshire with her wife.

**Michael Dobrinski (‘10)** and **Adam Gautille (‘13)**, along with CFA professors Terry Everson and Bruce Hall, performed in an all-BU trumpet section at the Boston Pops celebration of Strayhorn and Ellington in June 2022.

**Elizabeth Durst (‘10)** works as an events manager for the Chartered Institute of Archaeologists. She moved to Edinburgh, Scotland, in 2019 and lives with her husband and son.



**JANINA KIOK (‘06)** created the winning design in the annual BU Pint Glass Design Challenge. Her artwork is featured on the 2022 limited edition BU pint glass.

**Deanna Knudsen (‘10)** lives in New Jersey and is involved in her children’s schools as well as her husband’s businesses player.com and kcinvestors.com. Knudsen also works with Broadway San Jose on its high school musical awards program and traveled to California in May 2022 for the ceremony.

**Rebecca Landau (‘10)** relocated from Chicago to southern Indiana in 2021 and works remotely as a product owner for a data consulting firm near Washington, D.C. Landau, who lives with her husband, dog, and cat, is renovating her house and restoring the outbuildings.

**Elizabeth Luchs (‘10)** works remotely as a project coordinator at an insurance company.

**Dale Placek (‘10)** continues to teach theater, film, and public speaking at a high school in the Washington, D.C., metro area. He earned his PhD in education from the University of Maryland, College Park, in 2022.

**Danielle Schafer (‘10)** works remotely as a project manager for a tech company and lives with her husband and two daughters.

**Heather Sparling (‘10)** moved to Maui, Hawaii, in 2020 and began bartending and waiting tables. She got married, became scuba certified, and took an interest in aerial skills. She has programmed moving lights for performances by Flo Rida and Pat Benatar. Sparling returned to Chicago in June 2022 to work on lighting for a Chicago Shakespeare production.

**Elizabeth Tamporello (BUTI’05, CFA’10)** joined the law firm Stone Pigman Walther Wittmann in spring 2022 as special counsel following several years specializing in litigation and insurance defense. Before her law career, Tamporello was an opera singer and performed with the Houston Grand Oaks Opera Chorus and Opera in the Ozarks.

**Katy Whistler (‘10)** became a nurse in 2018 and moved to Denver, Colo., in 2020. She lives with her husband and daughter.

**Susan Calkins (‘12)** recently retired from a long teaching career to compose, write, and publish music and books for children as well as lesson materials for music educators. Visit octaviasworld.com to learn more.

**Cloteal Horne (‘12)** participated in the youth conference Next-Gen Theatre Industry Forum. Horne also played 26 characters in the play *Fires in the Mirror: Crown Heights, Brooklyn, and Other Identities*, which ran in November and December 2021 at Baltimore Center Stage and in January and February 2022 at Long Wharf Theatre in New Haven, Conn. The play explores the aftermath of the Crown Heights



riots through the viewpoints of Black and Jewish people and is composed of monologues taken from interviews that playwright Anna Deavere Smith conducted.

**Jeremiah Moon ('13)**, a Seattle-based singer, songwriter, classically trained cellist, and illustrator, released his debut EP, *Sputnik*, in January 2022. The tracks were recorded at a remote cabin in Florence, Ore.

**Megan Ross ('13)** has been executive director of the Worcester, Mass., chapter of the Hip Hop Congress, an international nonprofit focused on the evolution of hip hop culture, since January 2021.

**Elizabeth "Lizzy" Rich ('14)** became chair of BU's Young Alumni Council (BUYAC) on July 1, 2022. This is a two-year term, and Rich will be the third BUYAC chair since the board's founding in 2018. She will oversee a 24-member council.

**Taylor Apostol ('15)** is a sculptor specializing in marble and clay. Her most recent work, *List Maker*, is a part of a recent series featuring household items, and her marble sculpture *Soft Cones* is permanently installed in Mine Falls Park in Nashua, N.H.

**Kelly Galvin ('17)** directed *Beasts*, a drama written by Cayenne Douglass (GRS'21), which explores the chaos of American womanhood and centers on the fraught relationship between a pregnant suburbanite and her older sister. *Beasts* ran in April 2022 at the Boston Playwrights' Theatre.

**Rachel Betterley ('18)**, an art teacher at North Woods School in Cook, Minn., was crowned Mrs. Minnesota America in June 2022 and competed for the Mrs. America title in Las Vegas in August 2022.

**Nicki Kerns ('19)** was the music director for *Little Shop of Horrors* at San Lorenzo Valley High School in Felton, Calif., which ran in March 2022. The production was Kerns' fifth stint as music director for San Lorenzo Valley High School since 2017.



**HANA YILMA GODINE ('20)** had a two-gallery solo exhibition, *A Hair Salon in Addis Ababa*, at Fridman Gallery in Beacon, N.Y., and Rachel Uffner Gallery in New York, N.Y., in winter 2022. Godine's paintings portray female protagonists in domestic and public spaces, drawing on everyday scenes of her hometown of Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Godine was also the first artist-in-residence at Fridman Gallery, from January through April 2022.

**Afsoon Pajoufar ('19)** is a designer and collaborator for *We Hear You—A Climate Archive*, a project with the Royal Dramatic Theatre of Sweden; the Earth Commons, Georgetown University's Institute for Environment and Sustainability; the Embassy of Sweden in Washington, D.C.; and the Laboratory for Global Performance and Politics. The project is inspired by Greta Thunberg's famous question "Can you hear me?" and aims to document ways that today's youth are experiencing climate change.

2020s

**Ibrahim Alazza ('20)** had his CFA thesis project, *All that Remains*, which centered around the Palestinian narrative and collective memory, displayed in the Museum of Palestine's 2022 Venice Biennale exhibition, *From Palestine with Art*. Alazza also designed the book accompanying the exhibition. Alazza has taught design classes at BU's College of Communication,

Endicott College, and Northeastern University.

**Kabita Das ('20)** displayed her public art project, *Home, Reconstructed*, in April 2022 at the BU Beach. The installation was an immersive experience that addressed the relationship between the understanding of home and space, and how to navigate shared environments.

**Peter Everson ('20)**, along with his father, Terry Everson, a CFA associate professor of music, performed at February Fest, presented by the Peninsula Music Festival, in Wisconsin in 2022. The duo also performed as associate artists with the Rodney Marsalis Philadelphia Big Brass in 2022. Peter Everson is a freelance musician in the Boston area and works in order management, administration, and sales at the S.E. Shires Company, a brass instrument manufacturer. He also is involved with the music ministry at Metro Church in Marlboro, Mass.

**Blair Cadden ('21)** directed and **Isabel Van Natta ('22)** and **Lila Heller ('23)** performed in *Rx Machina*, a BU New Play Initiative production about Big Pharma's impact on everyday American culture, seen through the eyes of five women on the opioid epidemic's front lines. The play was written by Caity-Shea Violette (GRS'21) and ran in February 2022 at Boston Playwrights' Theatre.

**Julian Manjerico ('21)** will appear in the film *A Man Called Otto*, starring Tom Hanks and set to premiere in December 2022.

**Oscar Morel ('22)** was named one of "6 art-school stars from around Boston to watch in 2022" by the *Boston Globe*. His work depicts his life growing up in the Bronx with his Dominican family and the neighbors in his apartment complex, and incorporates mythic and historical narratives. Morel had a residency at MASS MoCA in summer 2022.

Courtesy of Hana Yilma Godine and Fridman Gallery

HOW JULIAN SHAPIRO-BARNUM TURNED INTERVIEWS WITH KIDS INTO A HILARIOUS—AT TIMES TOUCHING—ONLINE HIT

By Steve Holt

**JULIAN SHAPIRO-BARNUM** originally intended to write and perform a monologue as a historical figure for his senior thesis at CFA, but he wasn't feeling inspired. Instead, he grabbed a camera and headed to a Boston playground to ask children how they stay happy.

"It's now been over a year since COVID's been around, and I've been feeling incredibly down recently," Shapiro-Barnum ('21) says in the video's introduction, filmed in April 2021. "I knew I needed to talk to someone, so I went to the playground."

Their answers to the question "What do you do when you're feeling sad?" ranged from "sit completely still" to "drink a lot of water and go to sleep" to "play with my cousins."

Shapiro-Barnum edited the 45 minutes of footage into a quick-cut, nearly 3-minute video and turned it in to his professor. He also sent the final project to the CEO of an online content company, Doing Things Media, for which he had done some technical work. They loved it, and before he knew it, they provided the then-BU senior with an editor and a small budget and commissioned him to crank out videos of children answering questions on a variety of topics, such as their experiences with death to their thoughts on whether aliens exist.

Two million Instagram followers later, *Recess Therapy* is a hilarious, feel-good hit.



No matter how serious the topic, every video is funny. He once asked a kid to spell the worst word he knows ("s-t-o-o-p-i-d") and had a girl tell him she thinks pigeons are government spies. A recent video of Corn Kid, a little boy relishing his corn on the cob, itself had almost two million likes on Instagram.

The web series' success likely wouldn't surprise Shapiro-Barnum's five gay parents (his biological mom and her ex-wife, his biological dad, his dad's husband, and a stepmom), his high school and CFA teachers, or his camp counselors. Growing up, he knew everyone in his Cobble Hill section of Brooklyn and says he was the kind of kid he'd interview for *Recess Therapy*.

At BU, Shapiro-Barnum thought he wanted to be a playwright or a puppeteer, and names Muppets creator Jim Henson, Mister Rogers

(Hon.'92), and Steve from *Blue's Clues* as his biggest creative inspirations. Today, stars like John Mayer, Demi Lovato, and Jennifer Aniston follow *Recess Therapy* and like and comment on his videos. "I'd really like to bring some celebrities on the show," he says.

So, how does Shapiro-Barnum get kids to open up on camera to a complete stranger—and be funny? He likens it to fishing. He starts with a loose topic—like what they think of the internet—and dangles it like bait in front of a kid.

"A lot of times they won't know or they won't care," he says. "But once I've found the right flavor of a thing, a kid will take it and run with it. I'm just trying to provide them with leading questions that will bring their ideas to the next level. I think it's one part listening but another part me trying to use my comedic mind to shape the conversation." ●







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