UMass Amherst
Department of Theater
Year in Review 2021-2022
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Finding our way back to being in person

The pandemic isn’t over, but in Fall 2021, as we learned to manage the risks, UMass Theater was able to return to in-person classes and productions for the first time since the winter of 2020.

It wasn’t always easy, and the watchword for our work has continued to be “nimble” — dealing with changing safety requirements, as well as flare-ups of COVID cases on campus and in the department, required our faculty to adapt on the fly how they taught students. While students and faculty alike embraced the many ways we could learn while distanced, the return to in-person learning also revealed where we needed to fill in gaps in understanding and experience. Our production schedule found us dealing with analogous challenges, as we had to bring a technical crew up to speed — at lightning speed — while also navigating the safety guidelines to keep students safe on top of the regular requirements of a production process.

And yet, through all of that, the year was marked by enthusiasm and gratitude at being able to create and learn in community, and by a joyful perseverance in navigating our challenges. The numbers of both majors and minors are the highest they’ve been in a half-decade and are a testament to our students, faculty, and staff’s resilience and creativity. Audiences were cautiously welcoming in the fall, gained in confidence throughout the year, and were delightfully accommodating of the ever-changing requirements and challenges posed by both COVID and the weather. Our Fringe Fest ’22 became a lovely end to the year as friends, family, and community sampled the impressive fruits of our students’ learning labors. They wrote, directed, designed, and managed original and classic works, all enthusiastically supported by fellow department members as well as our community.

The cast of Witch acknowledges the crew. Photo by Derek Fowles.
There will be challenges next year: belt-tightening at the UMass level which we’ll have to navigate skillfully to keep our program strong, as well as whatever the evolving pandemic chooses to throw our way.

However, we are well positioned to meet the challenges of next year, including a bigger season than we’ve had in years, which includes a full-on musical; a revised major and minor designed to better meet students’ needs while eliminating some gatekeeping; and a community that keeps growing.

This Year in Review looks back at all of our activities and triumphs, and offers a sneak preview of what we’re looking at for 2022-2023.

Read on for details!

A scene from Everybody by Branden Jacobs Jenkins, our first in-person production since March 2020. Photo by Derek Fowles.
**By the numbers: Box Office 2021-2022**

This year saw us returning to charging for most of our Mainstage events. We did not expect to rebound to pre-COVID numbers right away thanks to two challenges: across our industry in the fall, sales were still down with 20-30 percent no-shows depending on what sources you consult, and we intentionally set a low capacity for shows as we figured out the right mix of audience comfort and performer safety. Thrillingly, we hit that cap in presales for a majority of our events and had enough walk-up traffic to make up for our no-shows in most events as well.

A number of productions also remained free to audiences — a Zoom reading of Prof. Elisa Gonzales’ *Olvidados: A Mexican American Corrido*, our two Play Lab presentations, as well as the student works that were part of the Fringe Fest.

And while we were excited to return to in-person theater, Zoom and online as a medium for presenting content haven’t been abandoned, with one Zoom reading and one audio play going up for audiences to enjoy. Behind the scenes, Zoom rehearsals made it possible for us to work with a team from California.

Despite some COVID-related absences in rehearsals, the only 2 events were cancelled this year — a performance of *Witch* and one outdoor performance of Play Lab’s *Red* — were for weather, not illness!

**PAID EVENTS**

*EVERYBODY*
Box Office: $2,572.99
Attendance: 510

*DANCE NATION*
Box Office: $2,379.89
Attendance: 562

*WITCH*
Box Office: $3,039.75
Attendance: 670

*OLVIDADOS: A MEXICAN AMERICAN CORRIDO*
Box Office: $2,569.25
Attendance: 602

**TOTAL REVENUE FOR PAID EVENTS: $10,561.88**

**FREE EVENTS**

*OLVIDADOS: A MEXICAN AMERICAN CORRIDO (Zoom reading)*
Attendance: 41

*PLAY LAB:*
Attendance: 187

**FRINGE FEST ’22:**
Estimated 750-800 (exact figures not available for all events)

**ESTIMATED TOTAL AUDIENCE FOR 2021-2022: 3322-3372**
Laughter, inspiration, and a little well-placed cathartic rage — we return to our theaters with a 2021-2022 season that embraces all of those and more as we reckon with the past 18 months and look toward the future. The plays scheduled for our season explore how to make art in a way that honors our artists and expresses hope for a stronger way forward for our community, including our beloved audience members. We can’t wait to get started!

EVERYBODY
by Branden Jacobs Jenkins
Directed by Rudy Ramirez
Oct 15, 16, 21, 22 at 7:30 p.m., Oct. 23 at 2 p.m.
The Rand Theater, Randolph W. Bromery Center for the Arts

“You’re dying, Everybody. And you’re dying alone.”
Branden Jacobs Jenkins’ play, written before the pandemic, proves a prophetic boon in bringing an audience an opportunity to deal with the fear and grief that we will probably still carry long after we put away our masks. EVERYBODY offers a funny and cathartic confrontation with Death (who is just trying to do their job, after all) through an adaptation of a 14th century morality play. Death comes for Everybody on what should have just been a fun night at the theater, and Everybody must confront the limits of friendship, family love, material comfort, and the human body itself in an attempt to determine the one thing that they can bring with them as they leave this world.

Content advisory: Strong language, discussions of death

PRODUCTION NOTES:
Everybody marked our return to the Rand Theater. We eased in with reduced capacity and with stringent vaccine and masking requirements for audiences. While we were concerned about pushback on both, our audiences were, for this show and throughout the year, extremely accommodating and understanding. Overwhelmingly, they were more interested in expressing their delight at being able to attend theater and thrilled with the work we presented.
This production marked grad student Rudy Ramirez’s first show in our theater despite it being their second year with us, and it was an inventive and challenging work that nimbly managed a cast that rotated through different roles every night, as well as folks who were understudying others. Every audience had a slightly different experience based on the cast performing on a given night, and we saw repeat attendance from folks wanting to catch those different configurations.

DANCE NATION
by Clare Barron
Directed by Dawn Monique Williams
Nov. 12, 13, 18, 19 at 7:30 p.m., Nov. 20 at 2 p.m.
The Rand Theater, Randolph W. Bromery Center for the Arts

Somewhere in America, an army of pre-teen competitive dancers plots to take over the world. And if their new routine is good enough, they’ll claw their way to the top at Nationals in Tampa Bay. An ensemble of dancers of different ages, races, ethnicities, body types, and gender presentations examines the challenges and triumphs of growing up in this play about ambition, coming of age, and finding one’s soul in the heat of it all. Dance Nation
interrogates what “womanhood” is, and embodies a powerful release of rage, joy and liberation.

Content Advisory: Gore, coarse language, depictions of self-harm, simulated masturbation and descriptions of masturbation, sex and sexual violence

Production Notes
This go-for-broke parody of the world of competitive dance examined adolescence and required a deft hand on the wheel. We called upon talented alum Dawn Monique Williams, who has made a name as a director and as Associate Artistic Director of Aurora Theatre Company, to be our director and co-choreographer, and we also brought aboard intimacy choreographer and co-choreographer Roberta Inscho-Cox to ensure the play received due care in production. Dawn also stepped in to take over teaching a section of Theater 140 when one of our graduate students became unavailable until the spring semester.

WITCH
by Jen Silverman
Directed by Rudy Ramirez
Feb. 25, March 3, 4, 5 at 7:30 p.m., Feb. 26 at 2 p.m.
The Rand Theater, Randolph W. Bromery Center for the Arts

“What if there is something amazing ahead of us, and all we have to do is burn down everything we know to get to it?”

Based on a Jacobean play written when witches were still being burned across Europe, Witch follows a devil named Scratch as he plays with the desires, grievances and ambitions of two young men, only to see him shocked and intrigued when an outcast woman becomes the first to refuse his offer. Jen Silverman’s play offers a collection of richly drawn characters all forced to confront how their desires are shaped by, and may even be able to do undo, the systems of power that limit them.

Content Advisory: Strong language, violence, and blood

Production Notes:
Director Rudy Ramirez directed a play by a favorite writer among our undergrads, Jen Silverman. Feeling more confident about COVID safety plans, we upped our capacity to 150 for the spring, a move we were particularly happy about when snow scuttled one of the Witch performances and we needed to accommodate audience members at subsequent performances. This production was also marked, in the dramaturgy area, by the debut of a dramaturgy Tumblr account that enabled the team, Percy Hornak and Jemma Kepner, to share additional content about the play, the historical background, and the type of work they do. They further fleshed out their work on the show with an interactive display that invited audiences to imagine what a better world might include, as well as tons of witty Easter eggs to discover as they viewed the performance.

Photos by Derek Fowles
OLVIDADOS:
A MEXICAN AMERICAN CORRIDO
By Elisa Gonzales
Lyrics by Elisa Gonzales
Musical Arrangement, Composition, and Additional Lyrics by Moises Vázquez

A workshop production presented in partnership with Breath of Fire Latina Theater Ensemble (www.breathoffire.org).
Made possible in part by a University of Massachusetts Amherst Faculty Research Grant /Healey Endowment Grant.

Directed by Sara Guerrero
Musical arrangement and composition by Moises Vázquez
April 7, 8, 9 at 7:30 p.m., April 9 at 2 p.m.
The Rand Theater, Randolph W. Bromery Center for the Arts
Also presented in a Zoom performance Oct. 6

Inspired by the classic structure of a corrido, a traditional Mexican song style that draws on storytelling, folklore, and oral history, Olvidados: A Mexican American Corrido, is a new, musically-driven, theatrical re-imagining of the many untold stories of the Mexican Repatriation of the Great Depression, where over one million Mexicans and Mexican-Americans were illegally and unconstitutionally deported, or repatriated to Mexico. In this workshop production, we see the Repatriation and its effects unfold through the eyes of four women, including the playwright’s grandmother and great-grandmother, who were repatriated to Mexico in 1931, the effects of which still echo through the Mexican-American community today.

Content advisory: Use of racial slurs, and discussion of a child’s death

PRODUCTION NOTES
New faculty member Elisa Gonzales came to us with a story about her great-grandparents’ experiences with the Repatriation of the 1930s. Elisa had connections to California’s Breath of Fire Latina Theatre Ensemble, which presented an earlier version of the play in summer 2021. Members of the company became part of our community this year, first in a free reading over Zoom held in October to present a new version of the script and songs, and then, most significantly in April, when we were able to stage what had become a musical play in the Rand. Elisa played herself as well as several other roles, a small band sang beautiful music composed by Moises Vázquez, and we welcomed BOF founder Sara Guerrero to direct the play. After a glowing reception here, the piece went on to be performed in excerpted fashion in New York City’s LATEA, which presents works by Latine artists.

FRINGE FEST ‘22
A celebration of varied projects, featuring UMass New Play Lab
April 21 to May 8 at multiple venues
One festival, dozens of pieces to view. Every year, in classes and indie productions, our students, faculty, and staff explore so much theater. This year, we’re gathering them all into a festival of free events showcasing everything from outrageous experimental work to shining new voices to expertly-rendered productions of classic scenes.
The Fringe Fest will be anchored by our UMass New Play Lab, a graduate student-driven project that explores various facets of new play development. This year, a collective of graduate students from various theater disciplines will collaborate to cultivate brand-new work in a nimble and flexible process that’s responsive to the needs of each individual project.

UMASS NEW PLAY LAB is the anchor of our Fringe Festival with two exciting new works by two of our graduate students.

Free, but reservations are encouraged.

**Parzival**
by Percival Hornak
April 22, 27, & 30 at 7:30 p.m.
The Rand Theater, Randolph W. Bromery Center for the Arts

*Parzival* is a contemporary trans retelling of Wolfram von Eschenbach’s Parzival, about a young knight who stumbles into a quest that changes his life and reveals his hidden destiny. The play takes inspiration from fanfiction to tell the story of a teen who explores his gender through the Parzival story as its protagonist learns about chivalry, becomes a knight, and searches for the Holy Grail, winning jousts and the hearts of fair young maidens along the way.

**Red: Passion and Patience in the Desert. A Wild Adaptation**
by Bianca Dillard
April 21 & 28 at 7:30 p.m. and April 24 at 2 p.m., May 4 at 6:45 in Durfee Gardens. The Curtain Theater, Randolph W. Bromery Center for the Arts

*Red* dramatizes the writings of Terry Tempest Williams and the urgency of climate action. Williams is a naturalist who wrestles with community, religious tradition, politics, always with her eye on the fragility of human life. This piece explores questions like: how do we create and claim a personal ethos and sense of spirituality while being rooted in a place and a community bound to conservative religion and politics? Can we honor where we’ve come from in a way that protects life on this planet as we all hurtle closer to climate disaster? What mix of tools can aid us on our journey: grace, rage, community, empathy, acceptance, wilderness itself, magic? Unabashedly & wildly theatrical, 4th wall breaking, embracing of movement, extreme casting and our collective imaginations!

**Taylor Rose Mickens ‘Bye UMass’ Senior Recital and Visual Art Exhibit**
by Taylor Mickens
April 22 at 7:30 pm in Randolph W. Bromery Center, Room 413
A concert with original music written and performed by Taylor Rose Mickens.

**Cry Wolf**
An online audio drama by Shelly Hed
In the small mining town of Rosewood, tensions between the fae and the flesh boil over when the werewolf Lewis siblings are accused of a double homicide. Instinct kicks in, and the town struggles for survival. This three part audio drama explores the nature of fear, and asks the question: who’s afraid of the “big, bad wolf”? An online part of the Fringe Festival, episodes released April 23, April 30 and May 7.
24-Hour Play Project
Produced by Ali Farina
April 23 at 7:30 p.m. in the Curtain Theater, Randolph W. Bromery Center for the Arts
Students take on the daunting task of going from a blank page to a staged play in 24 hours. Join us to see the results of their mad creative dash.

A Midsummer Night’s Dream
by William Shakespeare
Directed by Ivy Linden-Dionne and Claudia Maurino
Produced by Kaliska Wiley and Madeline Choiniere Barr
April 29 at 7:30 p.m., April 30 at 2 p.m. in the Curtain Theater, Randolph W. Bromery Center for the Arts

The Other America
Written by Pedro Eiras, inspired by Nobel Prize Winner Dario Fo’s Johan Padan and The Discovery of the Americas
May 1 at 2 p.m. in the Curtain Theater, Randolph W. Bromery Center for the Arts
The Other America is a staged reading inspired by Nobel Prize winner Dario Fo’s Johan Padan and The Discovery of the Americas, but instead of telling the story of a stowaway in the 17th century who ends up in a whole different continent, it tells the story of João da Silva, a young man who leaves Brazil to start a new life in the United States of America in the year 2025.
In his epic, difficult and often-times comedic journey, João encounters the many extraordinary challenges that all immigrants face as they cross the border towards the land of opportunity, freedom, and bravery… only to discover that there is another America, one in which opportunity is only for a very few, freedom often unattainable, and bravery an act of daily survival.

Playing With Fire
August Strindberg’s comedy in one act
Translated from Swedish and directed by Ulrika Brand
May 3 at 6 p.m. in the Randolph W. Bromery Center for the Arts, Room 413
A Reading with DJ Dragicevich, Milan Dragicevich, Ivy Linden-Dionne, Claudia Maurino and Michael O’Malley
Strindberg, known as a “father of Modern Drama”, is famous for Miss Julie, A Dream Play and The Dance of Death. This short play, in a lighter vein, was inspired by his own love triangle with Baron Wrangel and Siri Von Essen, who was to become his first wife.

Webgirl
by Sena Yacteen
May 6 at 7:30 p.m., May 7 at 2 and 7:30 p.m., May 8 at 1 and 6:30 p.m. in the Curtain Theater, Randolph W. Bromery Center for the Arts
Something exciting is swinging onto the UMass stage this spring. It’s your friendly local Super-Cool, Super-Awesome, Super-Hot, Super-Smart, Superhero…Webgirl!
During the day, Winnie is your average teen girl, living in the city with her Aunt Fay and Uncle Lenny, and trying to navigate the social chaos of high school. At night, she transforms into Webgirl, a web-shooting spider-hero, fighting crime and saving lives left and right, under the watchful (and sometimes critical) eyes of her adoring fans. When a new Villain appears, Winnie is called to action, and her life is turned upside down in a frenzy of TV cameras and unpredictable attacks. How will she learn to defeat the Villain, protect her family, and—through it all—be herself? A side-splitting superhero parody, hilarious and full of heart, come let Webgirl save your world!
Class Showcases

Class projects and showcases being presented by the Department of Theater.

“ACTING SHAKESPEARE” PERFORMANCE SHOWCASE

Tuesday May 3rd, at 8:30pm in Arts Bridge, Room 413, Randolph W. Bromery Center for the Arts

An exciting medley of scenes interwoven seamlessly with monologues.

MUSICAL THEATER SHOWCASE

All are welcome to join us for our Musical Theater Showcase in the Curtain Theater at 7:30 on Monday, May 9th!

We’ll share pieces from Hamilton, Chicago, Sweet Charity, Wicked, Legally Blonde and Into the Woods.

Co-taught by Gina Kaufmann (Theater), Lauren Cox (Dance) and Marjorie Melnick (Music), the showcase features Ali Farina, Carolyn Ferris, Michael Filip, Parker Fisher, Clara Franklin, Charlotte Hogan, Caleb Kovalchik, Beth Laine, Arianna Morales, Jimmy Murphy, Caroline Richardson, Kitty Ryan, Sophie Schweik, Emrose Seidenberg, Emma Stankiewicz and Sarah Tonks.

End your semester, with some singing, dancing and musical theater joy!

Production Notes

Our year ended in a celebration of student work. The end of our semester has traditionally been crowded with independent student works from new play readings to fully-mounted musicals. In creating Fringe, the hope was to make a “container” for all of those events, and in doing so, to acknowledge the quality of the students’ work and elevate its status in our community.

Students more than rose to the occasion, as the preceding list of works showed — original theater, the first Shakespeare to hit our theaters in years, and even a senior music recital took place during the festival. The myriad works also included this year’s iteration of Play Lab, our grad student-led series to nurture new plays. This year’s Play Lab brought us two grad student works, each adapted from radically different texts, Parzival and Red.

We were pleased to note that two productions, Midsummer Night’s Dream and Webgirl, had sell-out crowds and waitlists. The Shakespeare Acting class showcase ran out of programs, we thrilled to hear musical theater excerpts, and the 24-Hour Play Project, after 2 years of COVID delays, brought us plays made in a day. The Other America drew a crowd, including Latine students and community members, who found resonance in this adaptation that looks at the lives of undocumented immigrants. Cry Wolf, an audio play, offered theater to folks who weren’t comfortable going to communal spaces yet. Taylor Mickens, a talented musician as well as actor, produced her own concert and livestream and in so doing became the first person to present an event for the public in the renovated Arts Bridge Room 413, where, the following week, a student-created translation of Strindberg’s Playing With Fire got its first airing.

Absolutely crucial to all of these success where the efforts of the staff in our various shops, who mentored, problem-solved, and spent countless hours helping students bring these projects to fruition. General Manager Willow Cohen coached students to successful grants totalling in the thousands, and when production manager Julie Fife had to step away due to an emergency, Willow led the team of staff and faculty who kept the festival running smoothly. Faculty advised and cheered on students, some of whose works had been in progress for three or four years.

The marketing of Fringe also brought us a delightful opportunity to collaborate with a class of graphic design students from the Architecture Department, who made the Fringe poster we used to advertise the series as a whole. Public Relations Director Anna-Maria Goossens worked with Professor Jan Sabach to create a brief for his students to work from, then visited the class twice to offer feedback on draft designs before finally selecting a design that was spread far and wide on social media and in print.

The top comment from students who participated was that they wished the events were more spread out so they could enjoy even more of them, so we’re taking that as a win and will take what we learned this year to create an even better festival next year.
A year of work!
On this page, a door covered in posters for Fringe events, Webgirl cast members pose in rehearsal, a key moment in Everybody, and Elisa Gonzales plays ukulele in Olvidados. Photos by Anna-Maria Goossens, Sena Yacteen, Derek Fowles and Ben Barnhart.
On this page, Dance Nation, bows for the 24-Hour Play Project, Jr Moreno in The Other America, and a confrontation in Witch. Photos by Derek Fowles, Ali Farina, Aishah Tolentino, and Derek Fowles.
### 2022–23 Season

**DRAFT.**
**EVENTS, DATES, AND DESCRIPTIONS SUBJECT TO CHANGE PENDING RIGHTS**

Theater at UMass: Once an extra-curricular, then a part of other majors and departments, we officially became the Department of Theater in 1973. We mark the 50th anniversary of our founding with an adventurous season that joyfully explores the wide range of what we do with boldness, imagination, and resourcefulness. Our season has heightened language, epic myths, queer narratives, Afro-Cuban performance, a big-name musical – and dancing flamingos. We offer adaptations drawing inspiration from the past to shape stories for a future that embraces the breadth of global theater. We honor UMass’s tradition of Black artistry. We present productions that showcase the audacity and skill of our designers. 

Come celebrate our 50th with us!

Event pricing:
Black Playwrights; Orlando; Aurash; and Many Cloths, One Pattern: $15 general admission, $5 students and seniors
Into the Woods: $20 general admission, $10 students and seniors
Flamingo Murmuration and Fringe Fest ’23 events (TBA) are free.
Tickets for all events EXCEPT Flamingo Murmuration and Fringe are sold through the Fine Arts Center Box Office (call 1-800-999-UMAS or visit the website).
Season and group discounts available through the Fine Arts Center Box Office.

UMass Theater follows UMass Amherst weather cancellation and COVID policies; please visit our website for details.

**Flamingo Murmuration**

An outdoor performance piece created by designer Anya Klepikov
Directed & choreographed by Rudy Ramirez
Production coordinator Fleur Kuhta
September 17 at 2:00–4pm, with rain dates Sept. 24 or Oct. 1
In the Campus Center/ILC Courtyard at UMass Amherst
Free, no reservations necessary

Inspired by starling murmuration, this piece is a witty and much pinker version of the celestial phenomenon where a flock of starlings moves as one in response to environmental perturbations. There’s whimsy and delight to be found in dozens of participants, all sporting flamingo pool floats, performing coordinated movements, but there’s a thoughtful enquiry for audiences to ponder as they watch: are we humans capable of acting in concert for our evolutionary benefit?

**Black Playwrights: 50th Anniversary Special Event**

Directed by Behnam Alibakhshi
Curated by Dr. Priscilla Maria Page
October 27 & 28 at 7:30 p.m.
In the Curtain Theater
$15 general admission, $5 students and seniors, available through the Fine Arts Center Box Office

The UMASS Department of Theater marks its 50th anniversary with an evening celebrating Black theater-makers whose bold work has appeared on our stages. We will honor Black creativity with staged readings and a conversation on Black creativity, past, present, and future. Check back for the full details of artists who works will be presented as part of this celebration.


**Orlando**

by Sarah Ruhl  
Directed by Iris Sowlat

November 11, 12, 17, 18, and 19 at 7:30 p.m.  
November 19 at 2 p.m.  
School matinee Nov. 16 at 10 a.m.  
In the Rand Theater  
$15 general admission, $5 students and seniors, available through the Fine Arts Center Box Office  

“He needed something he could attach his floating heart to.”  
Based on the Virginia Woolf novel and adapted by Sarah Ruhl, *Orlando* is the story of a charismatic genderfluid English noble and poet who journeys from Queen Elizabeth I’s court to Shakespeare’s London, from Constantinople to Victorian England, and finally to the bustle of the 20th century. As they fall in and out of love, create poetry, and explore their gender, their world expands and time leaps forward. *Orlando* is a joyful romp through the universal quest to discover one’s true self, one’s place in the world, and one’s happiness.

**Aurash**

An Iranian epic adapted by Bahram Beyza’ie  
Translated/adapted by Soheil Parsa and Brian Quirt  
Directed by Behnam Alibakhshi.

February 24, 25 and March 1, 2, 3, 4 at 7:30 p.m.  
February 25 at 2:00 p.m.  
In the Curtain Theater  
$15 general admission, $5 students and seniors, available through the Fine Arts Center Box Office  

*Aurash* is a retelling of the ancient Persian tale of Aurash the Archer, a foundational Iranian myth. Millennia ago, Aurash was sent by the Shah to fire an arrow from the top of a mountain, thereby ending decades of bloody war between Iran and Aniran and ushering in a glorious era in Persian history. This Persian myth may be new to them, but local audiences will find in it universal themes that translate across cultures and time: that hope, belief, hard work, and persistence matter, and that, in a world short on heroes, even an ordinary person can make a difference.

**Many Patterns, One Cloth**

A multi-disciplinary performance project led by Dr. Priscilla Maria Page and Professor Judyie Al-Bilali

March 30, 31, and April 1 at 7:30 p.m.  
April 1 at 2 p.m.  
In the Curtain Theater  
$15 general admission, $5 students and seniors, available through the Fine Arts Center Box Office  

This multi-faceted performance piece draws its inspiration across time and place to explore how the artistic and spiritual traditions of the African Diaspora can restore balance in contemporary society. With a close look at the revolutionary resilience of centuries-old terrieros (spiritual houses) of Candomblé led by Brazilian women to the fierce and famous Baby Dolls of New Orleans’ Mardi Gras celebrations to Beyoncé’s bold embodiment of Osun in *Lemonade*, the celebration of female power, beauty, and agency is central to African Diasporic religion and culture. With *Many Patterns, One Cloth*, the creative team melds storytelling, music, and dance as research into trans-Atlantic traditions in Cuba and the US. Professors Page and Al-Bilali, together with student creators, will collaborate with master percussionist and scholar Román Díaz, leading scholar/translator Ivor Miller, and a cohort that includes a playwright, choreographer, dancers, and musicians to create a brand-new work.
**Into the Woods**
by Stephen Sondheim & James Lapine
Directed by Rudy Ramirez
April 28, 29, May 4, 5, 6 at 7:30 p.m.
May 6 at 2 p.m.
School matinee May 3 at 10 a.m.
In the Rand Theater
$20 general admission, $10 students and seniors, available through the Fine Arts Center Box Office
Twisted takes on fairy tale conventions make this offering from the late, great Stephen Sondheim an utter delight. These tales came from Germany, France, England and other countries, but it is in the United States where, thanks to a certain mouse, they blended into the versions that became cultural megaliths — which in turn are filtered through the equally American art form that is the musical. What happens when Cinderella, Red Riding Hood, Rapunzel, a brace of princes, and a boy with some magic beans are threatened with an ending that’s not so happy? Can they find a way to come together as a community to triumph over adversity?

**Fringe Fest ’23**
May 17–21
Locations around the UMass Campus TBA
Free, reservation details TBA
Curious about what Fringe will bring us in 2023? So are we! This annual festival is in the hands of our students, who take what they’ve learned and use the opportunity to take the lead on independent projects. They write new works, produce pieces from every possible genre, design and build from scratch. All festival events are free and open to community — we hope you can join us to celebrate our students’ creativity!
**The Arts Bridge Grand Opening and Facilities Updates**

On the facilities front, this year’s biggest news was that we were finally able to achieve a long-held dream: moving into the Fourth Floor Arts Bridge. After years of first advocating for, then planning and renovating the space (a process halted at various points by much-needed abatement work and the pandemic shutdown), we were thrilled to take possession of a gleaming new space this fall.

Of course, UMass celebrated, with an event that also marked the renaming of our building after an arts supporter/pioneer on campus, the late Chancellor Randolph W. Bromery, as well as the naming of two of our spaces, and costume shop and the recording studio.

From our report on the event:

On Oct. 26, 2021, friends of UMass and the arts gathered to celebrate the arts on campus with a series of presentations marking the renaming of our building, now the Randolph W. Bromery Center for the Arts.

The Department of Theater was thrilled to be involved with two naming celebrations of its own up in our brand-new Arts Bridge space, namely the Laura Bailey Costume Shop and the Julie C. Hayes and Claude Bersano Recording Studio!

The event was an opportunity to say thank you to donors and supporters by showing them some of the stellar work we have produced with their support. During the main ceremony, musicians performed, and speakers honored the arts on campus and Randolph Bromery as well as Frederick Tillis, for whom the Concert Hall is now named and who boosted UMass to prominence for its jazz music program. During the reception following the speeches, actors performed a short excerpt from our recent production of Branden Jacobs-Jenkins’ *Everybody*.

Afterward, guests joined us on the Fourth Floor, where they were greeted by an exhibit of work by students, faculty, and staff, including a reprise of Truth from *Monuments for the Future*, costume drawings and designs, scenic drawings and designs, and items created in our shops for classes and productions.

**Additional Facilities Work:**

Additional work in our facilities this year included the reflooring of Room 203. With a new floor installed, this space will now be more suitable for movement work. The room will also be freshly painted before we resume instruction in the fall.

The donation of a piano by Stephen Driscoll for Room 413. This performance classroom/rehearsal space was in heavy use for our musical theater class and was the venue for a first-ever concert during Fringe Fest ’22. Stephen’s gift of a piano will help instructors teaching performance classes in the space.
Among the stand-out moments of the naming and celebration of the Arts Bridge and Bromery Center for the Arts are depicted in the collage of photos by UMass photographer John Solem below and at right:

Chair Harley Erdman was among the speakers welcoming special guests to the celebration of the building, an event that also included a performance of a scene from Everybody.

The Baileys, including alumna Laura Bailey ’03, and Dean Krauthamer cut the ribbon on the Laura Bailey Costume Shop. Before the cutting, Laura also visited with Costume Shop Manager Kristin Jensen in the shop.

Chancellor Kumble Subbaswamy and Dean Barbara Krauthamer welcomed guests to the renovated Arts Bridge space against the backdrop of an exhibit of work by faculty, students, and staff, including sculptures of “The Simpsons” from MR. BURNS.

Former Dean Julie Hayes with Dean Joe Bartolomeo at the renaming of the Julie C. Hayes and Claude Bersano Recording Studio.

Daniel Bersano-Hayes and Dean Hayes shared ribbon-cutting duties on the studio with donor Bill Noland whose gift supported the renaming, and current Dean Barbara Krauthamer.
Good news abounds in the Undergraduate major this year, and nowhere more so than in the numbers. As the chart above shows.

After a downswing of several years as we navigated factors including a new minor and COVID’s limitations on how we can practice theater, we’re pleased that not only have primary major numbers skyrocketed back to pre-pandemic levels, our minor continues to show strong gains. We ended the year with 180 students who are minors or majors in theater — and that doesn’t include all the students who interact with our department by taking our courses as gen eds or electives, or who act in our shows.

We also completed an examination of what our majors need from us, and how we can adapt the major to meet their changing needs. For many students, their needs come down to increased flexibility. This makes it easier to find courses that fit their schedules, and to complete production related work that competes with jobs, labs, and other evening commitments.

Starting Fall 2022, our new major and minor will take effect for all undergrad students. This will be a new, more flexible course of study that will make it less complicated to complete the requirements for theater, while still enabling students to explore the full range of disciplines within theater and to delve deeper in their particular areas of interest.

The new major makes Theater 130, Contemporary Playwrights of Color, the required course in dramaturgy. It also drops the number of upper-level dramaturgy courses to TWO instead of three. This is in line with the other areas. Additionally, the number of 110 courses drops to two, and students may choose between Performance OR Design, Technology and Management (DTM) courses for their additional elective. The minor will also change the required dramaturgy course from Theater 120 to 130.

Student Recognition
We are proud of what our students achieve every year; students win recognition at the university-wide level as well as within the department for their work. They’re honored as part of our year-end, and this year’s awardees included the following:

The William F. Field Scholarship is given by the Alumni Association to recognize outstanding academic achievement by UMass juniors in their major. We are proud to note that Theater major Jemma Kepner has received the Field Scholarship.

The Susan M. and Larry G. Benedict Scholarship is given to undergraduate Theater students for achievement in design, production, and management. Special consideration can be given to sophomores and juniors. This year’s Benedict Scholarship recipients are Bobby Gaffney (electrics and lighting) and Eddie Pizzano (sound).

The Ed Golden Acting Scholarship is given to Theater majors who are either sophomores or juniors, and
who have demonstrated outstanding promise and commitment to the art. This year’s Golden Acting Scholarship recipients are Claudia Maurino (Dance Nation, Fringe Fest Midsummer Night’s Dream), and Kaliska Wiley (Dance Nation, Witch, Fringe Fest Midsummer Night’s Dream)

The Frank Prentice Rand Scholarship in Drama is given to Theater majors of exceptional scholarship and achievement in Directing, Dramaturgy, Playwriting, or Producing. This year’s Rand Scholarship recipients are Ali Farina (producer, 24-Hour Play Project), Shelly Hed (writer, Cry Wolf), Jemma Kepner (dramaturg, Witch), Taylor Mickens (senior recital and art show).

The Penny Remsen Design and Technology Internship Award provides internship support to students who have shown exceptional dedication to theater design and technology within the Department of Theater. This year’s Penny Remsen Internship Award Recipients are Drishti Chauhan (scenic design), Bobby Gaffney (electrics), Jemma Kepner (lighting design), Malory Rojas (costume design)

The Stephen Driscoll BADA Scholarship is awarded to the top-scoring UMass student auditioning for the British Academy of Dramatic Art program in Oxford. The pandemic prevented the 2020 recipient from using the scholarship that summer. The 2020 Driscoll Scholarship recipient, attending this summer, is Dylan Castro; the 2022 recipient is Sam Patterson.

The Denise Lessard Wagner Community Spirit Award is given to senior Theater students who have made an outstanding contribution to the community spirit of the Department. This year’s Community Spirit awardees are Ali Butts, Elisabeth Castellon Goncalves, Becca Cottrell, Ali Farwina, Shelly Hed, Taylor Mickens, Eddie Pizzano, and Billy Waisnor. This was the first time since 2019 that we were able to hand graduating students their Alumni Lifetime Pass, and to take a photo of the soon-to-be alums on the Rand stage.

The class of 2022 shows off their newly-received alumni lifetime passes. Photo by Anna-Maria Goossens
**Multicultural Theater Certificate**

Multicultural Theater Certificate Program Director Dr. Priscilla Page awarded a certificate this year to student Taylor Rose Mickens, the first to complete the program in 2 years.

Three new students are currently working toward the certificate.

Being largely online during 2020-2021 posed a challenge to certificate recruitment, as the program typically draws in non-majors and even folks from other campuses. We expect that the number of students will increase as Dr. Page reforms her usual connections in the Five College community.

We are also excited to see the effects of the new major upon the certificate. Theater 130, Contemporary Playwrights of Color, now a required course for the new major, is also required of certificate students.

**Graduate Program**

This year, we welcomed a new group of grad students, even as some from the current cohort prepared to depart.

Lighting designer Ben Stanton finished his MFA, working with his undergrad mentor Penny Remsen to add his skills as a teacher to his talents as a Tony-nominated designer. Meanwhile, Bianca Dillard presented *Red: Passion and Patience in the Desert*, the adaptation of Terry Tempest Williams' writings she was working on as part of her thesis as she prepares to finish her work with us as well.

New students came to us from the US, Brazil, Costa Rica, India, Iran, and Korea, and jumped right into working with us in our shops, our classrooms, and on our productions. Our graduate students directed, designed, adapted works for Fringe. Over the summer, students’ plan include an internship at WAM Theatre in the Berkshires, a presentation at a Melville conference in Paris, working on props and scenic design in Baltimore, and working on a production of *The Notebook* musical in Chicago.
UMass Theater Achievements and News

Our faculty, staff, students, and alumni make theater and theater scholarship happen wherever they are. Rare is the weekly theater calendar in the Pioneer Valley that doesn’t include an event with a UMass Theater connection! Here are some lightlights of our community’s work, followed by excerpts from longer articles that appeared on our news page. For real-time news, follow our social media and check our website’s News page.

Merrimack Repertory Theatre’s winter production of *The Rise and Fall of Holly Fudge* featured costume designs by costume design professor Yao Chen.

Alum lighting designer Jane Cox was nominated for a Tony Award for the second year in a row, this time for *Macbeth*.

Axel Cruz ’13, who studied at Holyoke Community College before finishing his degree with us at UMass Theater, directed a production of *Jesus Hopped the A Train* at HCC this winter.

Jeff Donovan ’93 (far left) has a role on the new *Law & Order* as Det. Frank Cosgrove.

After several COVID-related delays, *My Evil Twin*, with libretto by Chair Harley Erdman, was performed in May 2022 at the Northampton Center for the Arts at 33 Hawley. Student Jemma Kepner programmed lights and assistant stage managed. The opera will also be presented at the Rochester NY Fringe Festival.

WAM Theatre’s fall 2021 production of *Kamlooopa: An Indigenous Matriarch Story* featured a cast of Indigenous women and an all BIPOC female creative team, including several UMass folks. UMass grad Jasmine Rochelle Goodspeed ’19 of the Nipmuc Nation was one of the stars of the production. Calypso Michelet ’21G was scenic designer and Tatiana Godfrey ’21G was the dramaturg.

We marked the appointment of Ryan Hickey as the manager of the new recording studio on the Arts Bridge.

Professor Gina Kaufmann directed, and incoming grad student Kyle Boatwright acted in *Bright Half Life* for Silverthorne Theatre (founded by Lucinda Kidder ’02G) in the winter and then offered a reprise of their work for WAM Theatre (with Associate Artistic Director Talya Kingston) in June.

Longtime theater friend Arthur Kinney of the Renaissance Center passed away this winter. We honored him with a tribute by Midori (Harris) MacLean, who recalled his warm support and mentorship when she and her friends launched the Shakespeare Festival, held on the grounds of the Center, while she was a student at UMass.

Baltimore Center Stage opened a new version of Euripides *The Bakkhai*, with costumes by Scenic Design Professor Anya Klepikov. First-year scenic design grad student Drishti Chauhan shadowed the scenic designer and worked on props for the production. Prof. Anya Klepikov also worked on the Gloucester Stage Company’s summer 2021 production of Teresa Rebeck’s *Seared*, which was nominated in spring 2022 for the Boston area’s Elliot Norton
Award for “Outstanding Production by a Small Theater.” She designed the set, which was outdoors AND a fully functional restaurant kitchen, seen here in a digital model. Kathleen Doyle ’92, who graduated with a BDIC degree that included studying textiles and costumes, designed the costumes.


Alum Celena Love Mendes Lopes ’21 popped in a cameo next to Pete Davidson in the “Three Sad Virgins” skit on Saturday Night Live in the spring.

This Sinking Island, an original play created by The Anthropologists, founded by alum Melissa (Fendell) Moschitto ’00, was presented at RisingSunNYC on Governor’s Island on August 2021.

Faculty and alum Dr. Priscilla María Page ’00G, who has served as the Multicultural Theater Certificate Program Director for many years, started her first year as Assistant Professor. She also visited George Mason University in the spring to moderate a panel on Latinx Theater with participants Adelina Mitchell, DC-area professional actor and George Mason alum; Elena Velasco, Professor of Theater at Bowie State University and director/performer; and George Mason faculty member and theater maker Stefan Sittig. The event was held in conjunction with a production of Karen Zacarias’s Just Like Us at the school. Dr. Page also held a Five at Four talk at the College of Humanities and Fine Arts on the same subject in the fall.

Bostonians caught Sandra Seoane-Serí ’17 at Speakeasy Stage’s BLKS.

Justin Townsend ’97 had a banner year. He won a Tony for his lighting design of Moulin Rouge, the first UMass Theater alum to ever do so, and his first after four nominations. He was also appointed as the Chair of Design for Stage and Film for New York University starting in Fall 2022.

Sabrina Victor ’17 was a standby for the 1776 production presented at ART in Boston over summer 2022, and got the call to perform the night Senator Elizabeth Warren attended the show.

FEATURED ARTICLES

CHLOE SOTO ‘20 APPLIES HER THEATER EDUCATION TO COMMUNITY PROGRAMMING

A story slam, a summer cultural festival, an ambitious mural project: These Holyoke-based projects share a common organizer in UMass Theater alum Chloe Soto ’20.

Soto is the program manager for Nueva Esperanza, an organization which fosters “a vibrant, sustainable and powerful Puerto Rican/ Afro-Caribbean community in Holyoke.” And while the connection might not be immediately apparent, Soto has found that many of the lessons she learned as a UMass Theater major apply beautifully to community organizing and cultural event planning.

“It’s the tools that you have in your toolbox that you never know you’re going to pull out, right? It’s not the exact tool, but I have the basics, and I’m going to figure it out,” she said.
Take essay-writing, for example: “All the essays I wrote, all the research papers I wrote, prepared me to write grants. A grant is really just another fancy name for a research paper or an essay — being able to use language and adapt it to whatever the situation is,” she explained.

It’s been validating for Soto, a nontraditional student (older, trans, a woman of color) who said she had always gotten the message that “people like you don’t go to college.” She tried a semester at Holyoke Community College (HCC) after high school, but even though she did well academically, she lacked confidence and, financially strapped, she left school to work instead. In her 40s, she decided to revisit her dream. “Coming into my own and knowing myself as a person, I said, you know what, I don’t think this is beyond my scope,” she explained.

She started her academic career anew at HCC, and has high praise for the school’s “amazing support,” which she said prepared her for her “voyage to UMass.” Though she looked at other universities, her decision “was about the financials,” she said, noting that the Mass Transfer program enabled her to transition from HCC to UMass Theater to complete her degree at much lower expense than other options.

Majoring in theater was the right call, as Soto found instructors willing to engage with her desire to learn. “Professors were quick to turn any question into a learning experience, not in a way that would make you feel less than, but in a way that encourages you to learn and to grow from whatever question you’re asking,” she said, citing dramaturgs Priscilla Page and Harley Erdman as well as scenic design professor Anya Klepikov as examples.

She also loved working in the costume shop, where she came to regard costume shop manager Kristen Jensen as a mentor. “I think my love of fashion and clothes were the factors that got me into the costume shop. But what kept me there is what costuming does to a production,” Soto said. Learning how transformative costumes could be for an actor in embodying a character galvanized her interest in all areas of theater. “From set design to costume design, to the dramaturgy, to the research of the characters, to the practice of acting, it’s this beautiful chaos that at some point comes together and creates an amazing show,” she said.

Her big-picture approach to theater has meshed well with her current work. “I’m part of a team that’s bringing arts into my community through mural work and place keeping, and starting with the Puerto Rican cultural district,” Soto said. One of her biggest projects is a mural project happening in partnership with a nonprofit organization called Beyond Walls in Lynn, bringing to fruition a plan to put dozens or mural on the walls of building around the city of Holyoke over the summer of 2022. This involves both finding artists who have a vision for what should go on the walls, as well as the walls themselves.

**FINN LEFEVRE ’17G WORKS AT THE LEADING EDGE OF TRANS AND THEATER SCHOLARSHIP**

Finn Lefevre ’17G is a trans non-binary scholar who first came to the Department of Theater at UMass Amherst as a graduate student in dramaturgy, and has now won a following among undergraduate students by teaching exciting new classes such as Sci Fi and Queer theatre. Lefevre works at the leading edge of trans and theater scholarship and has had several of their writings in queer theatre published over the past year, the most recent being an account of the work of Queer & Now, a collective founded at UMass, in the Palgrave Handbook of Queer and Trans Feminisms in Contemporary Performance. Natasha Hawkins, first-year MFA dramaturgy student, contacted them to ask some questions about their work and writing and how these connect to their time at UMass and with Queer & Now.

Hawkins: What is *Queer & Now*? How did it come to fruition?

Lefevre: *Queer & Now* started as an experiment in drag. A then-undergrad in our department, Garrett Sager, was assigned a project in Megan Lewis’ Theaters of Dissent class, and it inspired him to explore mixing physical theater with drag and lip sync. There was so much thirst in the community for this kind of work, that we quickly became a collective of artists, devising our first production. Now, 4 years later, we’ve had dozens of shows (online and in person), performed in multiple states and stages, and expanded to explore burlesque, cabaret, and other queer performance forms.
Hawkins: Where did the science fiction/futuristic elements of it come from? How/why are you connecting queerness with the future?
Lefevre: *Queer & Now* has always been interested in queer futures—imagining celebration of queer life and queer joy as a form of dissent. In exploring these futures, several of the artists started tapping into sci-fi aesthetics. By the time we started working on our second full devised show, *Sync or Swim*, we wanted to dive completely into the waters of science fiction and fantasy. These aesthetics helped us push our drag past limits of human genders, incorporating themes of monstrosity, magic, shadow selves, and the grotesque. We were imagining these queer possibilities while simultaneously working to build those futures in our own company—focusing on the process of playmaking as much as, if not more than, the product.

Hawkins: Can you tell me about your theater journey? How did you get into it?
Lefevre: I’ve been in theater my whole life. My parents dropped me at a theater day camp when I was 5 and I never really came home. After undergrad, I focused my attention on the trans work, co-founding a small non-profit that provided support groups for trans community members and continuing education trainings for health providers and local institutions. A couple years into that project, I started using some of my applied theater techniques in support group spaces, and suddenly everything clicked. My theater work and trans work were coming together in a really exciting way, but I was also hitting the limits of my training. I decided to go to grad school at UMass to get the support I needed to continue developing my work in trans applied theater. At UMass I was able to form a trans applied theater troupe that spanned 3 years, did several workshops, and has now been documented in a few publications.

Hawkins: Was this difficult as a non-binary person?
Lefevre: I think I’ve probably been non-binary my whole life too, but I came out in college. I was in a theater program in an area that was neither super aware nor super accepting of queer folx, let alone trans folx. For a while I thought my trans life and my theater life would just have to stay separate if I wanted to keep working.

Hawkins: How did your experiences at UMass as a student shape you, and how do they shape you now as a professor?
Lefevre: My time in the UMass MFA program had a huge influence on the work I’ve done since. My cohort in the program was instrumental in expanding my thinking, making me feel seen and heard, and most importantly deepening my ethic of people over products. I also fell in love with teaching while in grad school. I had never even considered academia as part of my career path until then. I loved TAing for various faculty members and cataloguing all the different ways they approached teaching. I loved that when I started teaching on my own, my advisors supported my unique brand of teaching. From *Queer Theater* to *Sci Fi Theater*, I still can’t even believe the cool things they let me teach here. And to have come from a place where I couldn’t have my chosen name in a show program to now having my pronouns published on the department website, I feel like my time at UMass has really let me be and share my full self.

**UMass alum Kathleen Doyle ’92 uses her theater-making skills to raise awareness of climate change**

The video is only a few seconds long, but it’s poignant: A life-size polar bear puppet, constructed of lacy white fabric that evokes snowflakes, shuffles into a New York city bodega. She finds the freezer containing bags of ice and rests her forehead against the freezer door.
This is Qanuk Nanuk — which translates to Snowflake the Polar Bear — and she was created by theater-maker Kathleen Doyle who graduated from UMass in 1992 with a BDIC in Costume Design, Fashion History, and Textile Printing. Doyle’s interested in what design can communicate, so while she wasn’t building puppets as a student, using fabric and textiles to talk about important issues is right in her wheelhouse.

Originally created two years ago as a collaboration with the Museum of Natural History to educate children about the effects of climate change, Qanuk Nanuk has since traveled throughout New York City and beyond to delight and warn viewers of all ages in equal measure.

The icebox moment hit home with folks at the bodega; one person told Doyle that initially, the moment felt hallucinogenic, but by the end of the encounter, “I actually had tears in my eyes, I never thought a puppet could make me feel moved.”

Qanuk Nanuk is in a distillation of Doyle’s various interests. “I knew I loved textiles and I knew I loved working with my hands, and then I just so excited with these courses on the meaning of adornment, and what does it mean when humans put something on the body.”

Out of these interests, she crafted a BDIC program for herself that brought together courses in costume design, fashion merchandising, African American textile art and more. Though not a theater major, she did much of her work in the Department of Theater and has fond memories of Gail Strege, who was a mentor, and of her first work-study job in the Costume Shop.

Upon graduation, she headed for Disney, where she landed a job working in the costume shop. She also worked for Santa Fe Opera and San Francisco Opera, as well as the Spoleto Festival, before heading for Villanova to get a master’s degree in dramaturgy.

“I felt that I was going too far in the direction of costume and I was losing my footing in theater,” Doyle explained. She also earned an MFA in theater design from NYU Tisch in 2012.

Qanuk Nanuk is not the first time Doyle has worked with the Museum of Natural History. A few years ago, the museum produced a play she created about sea life around Hawai‘i. When the museum offered her the chance to be part of its Day of the Polar Bear celebration, she jumped at the opportunity and pitched the idea of a walkabout puppet.

The concept, Doyle explained, was that the bear had wandered down from Alaska “looking for a more hospitable climate” and saw the museum’s dioramas of other Arctic animals and thought that she’d found a new home. In this new home, she mingled with families, posed for photos, and answered some questions from scientists by shaking her head yes or no (as at Disney, this character never speaks).

Doyle designed the look of the bear, which was then built by Sue Kassirer at Hidden In The Hills Studio in Leverett, a frequent collaborator. To operate the bear takes two puppeteers inside the structure, usually Doyle and colleagues in dance or theater. It’s a warm job, says Doyle, because they have to be fully covered — including face paint — to help
“The very first time we performed at the Museum of Natural History, I was in front and a friend of mine was in the back, and you know, the learning curve was sharp, because we did have some stairs to climb,” Doyle laughed.

Lights up: on tour with alum Jordan Mitchell ‘20

Has Cats come through your town recently? If it did, you should know that a recent alum, Jordan Mitchell ‘20, was the one responsible for making sure the lights did what they were supposed to. Last year, she joined the tour as Head Electrician. We wondered what it’s been like, so we sent her a bunch of questions, which she graciously answered via email. Read on to learn what a head electrician of a major touring production does.

Question: You are Head Electrician for the touring production of Cats — can you talk about what your job entails?

Jordan: My job is to move anything related to lighting from city to city and maintain the lighting rig. I oversee load in and load out with a local crew of 10, alongside an assistant electrician. During the show I’m the one running the console (pressing go for lighting cues) and the assistant on this tour is a follow spot operator as well as the one calling followspot cues for two local spots. We build the show, run it a bunch and take it down over and over! I also have to order supplies and parts as things are constantly breaking from wear and tear on the road.

Question: What does a typical day on tour look like for you; what’s the usual pattern when you get to a new theater?

Jordan: On load in day at a new theater, I’ll typically get there before 8am, meet the crew, ask questions about the space then get started right away. Our 4 trucks get unloaded and we starting building my side of the stage, often called “dimmer beach”. Eventually we get trusses full of lights hung up in the air, and once the set is in place, we build set electrics and booms.

Obligatory UMass Theater question: Can you talk about any lessons or advice you got at UMass that you have found valuable as you’ve done this job?

Jordan: I got a very strong foundation in electrics knowledge from UMass. (shoutout Michael Dubin) As well as how to communicate with a team and maintain the original design of the show. (shoutout Penny Remsen)

Question: Is there an aspect to the job that has surprised you (good or bad) about working on a touring production?

Jordan: We’ve done 150 shows already and I’m surprised I haven’t gotten sick of it. But some people do stay with the same show for years.

Question: What’s the biggest difference in your opinion between what you did at UMass, i.e. being part of producing
a show from scratch, to bringing a touring show into a new location?

Jordan: "Cats" is a much bigger show than what we put on at UMass, but it's still not very hard to set up and breakdown because there is a very specific order to do it and everything is almost exactly the same in every theater. When being a head electrician in the Department of Theater, a lot more time is spent planning how to hang and circuit the lighting plot. Every city has its challenging architecture and personalities that make my job exciting and new.

Lily Kaufman '12 brings a new Robin Hood to the stage

For the Arts Administration graduate program she's enrolled in at Boston University, Lily Kaufman '12 had to assemble an imaginary Broadway musical. A desire to put her knowledge to a real-world test resulted in a folk-and-Americana musical take on the Robin Hood story, Robin B. Goode and the Ballad of Badger Flats, which ran at Chelsea Theatre Works this winter. Kaufman produced and starred. While she once focused on acting, she now foresees a shift into producing or artistic direction as part of a larger organization or at the helm of her own company.

"I still have a pretty active career in acting but my soul isn't completely satisfied by that. I like putting together moving parts, I like knowing how to combine the best people to make the best production. I need to have my hand in the business of theater to be who I want to be and to feel satisfied with my work," Kaufman said.

Robin B. Goode was written by English Department alum Peter Storey, a friend of Kaufman's since her time as a student. "He's unbelievably out of this world as a poet," she said.

Kaufman asked him if he had any ideas percolating, and he told her, "I want to write a story about a female Robin Hood." Robin B. Goode is set circa 2010 and follows combat veteran Robin, played by Kaufman. Robin returns from Afghanistan disillusioned and traumatized by her experiences and lacking hope for her future. At Robin's wedding to Maggie Ann, Robin is falsely accused by Governor John and the more openly nefarious Park County Sheriff of treason. As a veteran who 'bled for this country', to be met with this false accusation "is ultimately what makes her snap," Kaufman said, and embark on her anti-capitalist crusade. Joining her is an updated version of the Merry Band: for example, Juanito (Little John in the original) and Red Billy (Will Scarlett, now a woman). Robin's engaged to Maggie Ann, aka Maid Marian. The piece is scored by musician Jeremy Van Cleave. Originally, the intent had been to focus just on folk music, but Van Cleave diversified into Americana and rock, all played by a five-person band.

Post-graduation, Kaufman acted professionally in the Boston area, but when COVID shut down her industry, it was BU’s Performing Arts Enterprise certificate that intrigued her. "I'm getting a master's in Arts Administration but I've got an Advanced Graduate Certificate in what's called Performing Arts Enterprise, which is basically studying the business of commercial theater using Broadway as a model," Kaufman explained.

One of Kaufman's biggest challenges on the production has been to balance her two roles, running meetings and taking care of details like ticketing while learning lines. In meetings, meanwhile, she's worked hard to be clear about her motivations. "It's about trying to not only find out when my producer hat needs to be on and when my actor hat needs to be on, but how to
effectively communicate that to other people,” she said.

Kaufman credits her UMass Theater advisor, Technical Director Michael Cottom, for giving her an opportunity that helped prepare her for this project. Kaufman had a hard time when she came to the theater major. She joined late, as a junior, and “was just super intimidated” because her peers already had established their own communities within the department. She was also struggling in school with then-undiagnosed ADHD. She had a class with Cottom, and even though she was focused on acting, he offered to be her advisor.

“Michael said, ‘you know what, you’re an absolute banana and you need something to focus you, I’m going to teach you how to build props’,” Kaufman recalled. She started building props for the mainstage shows, which helped her land props jobs at Boston Lyric Opera and other companies — but that wasn’t even the most important effect of Cottom’s mentorship.

Being the prop artisan, Kaufman said, “got me in production meetings with all of the faculty... who have all worked professionally and have a very, very solid understanding of how the process needs to go,” she said. She spoke relatively little during those meetings and instead studied the examples being set by others in the room. Now, in her own production meetings, “I know exactly what I’m looking for, exactly what every department needs.”

**WAM Theatre brings UMass alums and students into its activism**

Where Arts and Activism Meet: This is the abbreviation and mission of WAM Theatre in Lenox, MA. WAM Theatre aims to create more inclusive and ethical theatre. For the last couple of seasons this has included putting BIPOC artists at the forefront of their theater-making.

Among of the company's outreach programs are paid internships, devising workshops, and other opportunities for students of color. Several UMass students, including WAM’s current company dramaturg, Tatiana Godfrey ’21G, entered WAM through these programs.

It is difficult to create ethical theater in a regional theater system that includes practices we consider unethical today. But in an industry that often does not pay its artists or interns, WAM’s efforts are a hopeful step in the right direction.

“We’re trying, but you shouldn’t applaud us just yet.” said Talya Kingston ’09G, who graduated with an MFA in Dramaturgy from UMass Theater and now serves as Associate Artistic Director of WAM Theatre.

Using the money raised from shows to not only pay actors, but to give to grassroots organizations, has always been central to WAM’s mission. (Since 2010 over $80,000 has gone to 22 global and local organizations taking action for women and girls.)

However, WAM has not always been as inclusive in their theatre practice as they are working to be now, explained Kingston, and has shifted in response to both local and industry-wide events. In 2018 the company produced Dominique Morisseau’s play *Pipeline* in collaboration with a local anti-racism social justice organization called MultiCultural BRIDGE. This year-long collaboration changed WAM’s perspective from unintentionally white-centric feminism to an understanding of how important active anti-racism was in making its feminism intersectional and welcoming to all. Then, in 2020, in the wake of the We See You White American Theatre petitions, theaters were asked to take a hard look at what they considered ‘inclusive’.

During WAM’s run of *Kamloopsa*, a comedy by Kim Senklip Harvey which included UMass alum Jasmine Rochelle Goodspeed ’19 in the cast, the theater partnered with the Family Services Center of the Stockbridge-Munsee
Community.

“Everyone is grateful for money, but it’s more meaningful if people can be actively involved and connected,” Kingston said. “If we allow these practices to crack open our organization, it can enrich us in ways we can’t even measure right now.”

Sometime the work is complicated. Godfrey cited her involvement with Kamloopa. She noted that the entire design team for Kamloopa consisted of women or nonbinary BIPOC artists and had several Indigenous artists on the production team. Kingston added that WAM also consulted Maynard McRae Jr, from the n’syilxcen community in which the play is set, and Heather Breugl from the Mohican Nation on whose ancestral lands it was performed. During the run of Kamloopa, WAM also offered a Zoom presentation by Amanda Nita Luke (Choctaw Nation) on “Presenting Indigenous Theater in non-Indigenous spaces”.

However, Godfrey said, she is of Black and Puerto Rican descent. The director of Kamloopa also was not indigenous. The perspective of an Indigenous dramaturg would have been valuable for the production. But there would not have been a dramaturg at all otherwise if Godfrey hadn’t taken on the role. Kingston believes that these uncomfortable situations are part of a larger change. “The work we are doing and the plays we are putting on,” she said. “It’s very uncomfortable, but it’s uncomfortable in ways that activism should be… and hopefully more meaningful.”
**Guest Artists and Scholars**

Our faculty and staff are experts in their own fields, but they also have a strong network in the industry. That means our students have access not only to the wisdom of their instructors, but to an array of working theater professionals. Every year, we bring these folks into our classrooms and theaters, whether for in-person work or via Zoom conversations. This year’s guests came from around the area and around the country.

**CLASSROOM GUESTS**
These scholars worked in classes as guest speakers, advisors, or assistants to run a class:

- Travis Coe, Associate Artistic Director, Double Edge Theater — Theatrical Frontiers
- Jillian Courtney, faculty member at Boston Conservatory — Guest speaker in Voice for Social Justice
- Dorothy Englis, St. Louis-based costume designer — Guest speaker in Costume Design Studio
- Daniel Goldstein, Director and playwright, Co-author of *Row* (Williamstown Theatre Festival); Associate Director of “Come From Away.” — Guest speaker in Musical Theater
- Olivia Holcomb, performer and member of Re/Emergence — Guest instructor for Contemporary Playwrights of Color - Honors
- Omi Osun Joni Jones, instructor, theatrical jazz at UT-Austin — Guest speaker in Devised Theater
- Urgyen Joshi, member of Re/Emergence — Guest instructor for Devised Theater
- Chelsea Kerl, Boston-based costume designer — Guest speaker in Costume Design Studio
- Talya Kingston, Associate Artistic Director, WAM Theater — Guest speaker at Dramaturgy Roundtable
- Lucy Mackinnon, projection designer, *Jagged Little Pill* (Broadway) — Guest advisor for Lighting project
- Jennifer Onopa, director and member of Re/Emergence — Guest instructor for Devised Theater
- Austin Pendleton, Tony Award-winning actor and director — Guest speaker in Scenic Design Studio
- Amrita Ramanan, Director of New Work Development, New York Public Theater — Guest speaker at Dramaturgy Roundtable
- Gina Razon, Boston-based voice teacher and performer — Guest speaker in Voice for Social Justice
- Tatiana Rodriguez, doctoral students in Afro-Am member of Re/Emergence — Guest instructor for Devised Theater
- Charles Turner: Broadway production stage manager, *By the Skin of Our Teeth*, Lincoln Center Theater — Guest instructor, Stage management
- Fan Zhang, New York-based costume designer — Guest speaker in Costume Design Studio

**PRODUCTION GUESTS**
These guests worked on mainstage or Fringe productions, either as performers or as part of the creative team:

- Bart Bales, Morris dancer — Choreographer for *Witch*
- Hilary Dennis, New York/Northampton-based director — Director of *Red: Passion and Patience in the Desert* for Fringe Fest ’22
- Michelle Erard, research associate at Smith College — Dramaturg of *Red: Passion and Patience in the Desert* for Fringe Fest ’22
- Sara Guerrero, director and founder, Breath of Fire Latina Theatre Ensemble — Director for *Olvidados: A Mexican American Corrido* (Photo by Priscilla Page)
Mexican American Corrido

- Roberta Inscho Cox, choreographer, intimacy director — Co-choreographer and intimacy director for Dance Nation
- Wynn MacKenzie, sound designer — Sound designer for Faculty Research Production of Bright Half Life
- Jordan McNair, community performer — Ensemble member for Olvidados: A Mexican American Corrido
- Charles Robinson, musician — Musician for Taylor Rose Mickens Senior Recital for Fringe Fest ‘22
- Julissa Rodriguez, community performer and musician — Percussionist for Olvidados: A Mexican American Corrido
- Lucas Solorzano, community musician — Bassist for Olvidados: A Mexican American Corrido
- Ryan Winkles, fight choreographer — Fight Director for Witch
- Charles Vadala, keyboard player — Musician for Taylor Rose Mickens Senior Recital for Fringe Fest ‘22
- Moises Vázquez, musician and member of Breath of Fire Latina Theatre Ensemble — Composer and music director for Olvidados: A Mexican American Corrido

OUR ALUMS

Our strong network of alumni frequently brings talented folks back to our building to pass on what they’ve learned in their professional lives:

- Christina Beam, costume designer — Costume Designer for Bright Half Life, Faculty Research Production
- David Korins ’99, production designer for theater (Hamilton), television (Grease live) and installations (Immersive Van Gogh) — Career discussion for grad and undergrad students
- Gaven Trinidad, Community Engagement Associate, New York Theater Workshop — Conversation about community engagement, social justice, and creativity in theater
- Dawn Monique Williams, Associate Artistic Director at Aurora Theatre — Conversation about community engagement, social justice, and creativity in theater, instructor of Theater 140, and director of Dance Nation

Alums Gaven Trinidad and Dawn Monique Williams talked to students about community engagement, social justice, and creativity in theater. Dawn also taught Theater 140 and directed Dance Nation for us in the fall.
In the fall, alumnus David Korins, who has designed for Broadway, TV, film, music tours, and immersive experiences, visited UMass to record a video about how his time at UMass, and specifically in theater, prepared him for the career he now enjoys. He toured our department, recording in several of our spaces, and took time out to share his perspective on the industry with our students. (photos courtesy of UMass)
**Anti-Racism Roadmap Progress Report: More listening**

This year, we did not have an Anti-Racism Committee. Instead, that work moved out into the department as a whole, as various stakeholders worked to take information learned in the committee and put it into practice.

**The Undergraduate Program**

Some of the most important changes that came to our undergraduate program this year were enacted in part because we hope they will help us achieve Anti-Racism goals and eliminate gatekeeping in general.

The committee that met to revise our major originally considered the possibility of doing away with the minor, fearing that it was siphoning off potential majors. We decided against this as a department, however, because we noted that it was bringing in students of color who might be hesitant about majoring, as well as first-generation and low-income students whose families might be counseling them toward a more career-oriented course of study.

As for the changes to the major and minor themselves, which are highlighted elsewhere in this review, we hope that by centering a course about work by contemporary playwrights of color, students become both more aware about a large swathe of theater-making that is often marginalized, excited about engaging with this work.

We also loosened some of the requirements of the major. We know that students of all backgrounds, including many students of color, are carrying double-majors, working at least one job, and dealing with time and financial constraints. Giving them a more flexible major will, we hope, both draw in students who might not otherwise have joined the major, as well as giving all of our students greater opportunities to explore courses within the department that they might not have felt they had time for in the past.

**Asking for Feedback**

When our consultant, Trenda Loftin, surveyed our community in spring 2021 as part of our Anti-Racist work, she identified places where students experienced gatekeeping around race, LGBTQ status, and other marginalized identities, and counseled us to increase opportunities for students to weigh in on the running of processes, and to work on greater transparency about those processes. We recognized that sometimes, faculty and staff make assumptions on what we think students feel or know, and that sometimes things need to be explicitly expressed.

Accordingly, in our season selection process this year, we invited students to respond to a survey asking them about their season production priorities. While we weren’t able to meet every wish expressed in the survey responses, we were able to address a number: We took care, when selecting our work, to find instances to celebrate joy, and to not ask our actors of color, to perform trauma for a white audience. We have shows that celebrate the LGBTQ community, which includes many of our students. We have shows with name-recognition: Sondheim’s *Into the Woods* and Sarah Ruhl’s adaptation of Virginia Woolf’s *Orlando*. We have a bona-fide musical. We have work by women and by writers of marginalized and underrepresented communities.

We tried to be more transparent about the process, sharing anonymized responses from the survey, as well as how we intended to use it, with our community at the start of the selection process, along with a rough explanation of the process. Then we shared with them our eventual season slate, which included justifications for each choice.

We followed the success of that survey with another, asking for feedback of the Fringe Fest ’22 process. Students’ feedback there will affect how we move forward with the festival we put on in 2023.
Development and Grants

Our faculty and staff are diligent about seeking out opportunities for additional funding to help them realize their research. The funds they received this year helped them with travel and conferences, as well as productions on and off campus. We are grateful to the University for this support.

Our students, too, know how to access these resources to bolster their experiences. Travel grants enabled students to work with their mentors on outside projects. Arts Council support, generous as always, was the key to allowing student presenters of our Fringe Fest bring added technical and artistic elements to their events — everything from musician honoraria to a snow machine, as well as more mundane items such as advertising, was able to be covered thanks to grants.

GRANTS AND AWARDS

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Development

Our friends and alumni continue in their generosity even in difficult circumstances.

In addition to the gifts from the donors who make various scholarships possible (see our undergraduate program pages), friends continue to help us grow our gift funds.

Gifts as of May 2022 for the year were $17,493.49

This money was donated through box office requests, direct appeals, and UMassGives and includes donation into our general gift fund as well as those restricted for a specific purpose.

Not included in the tally but much-appreciated was the gift of a piano, also mentioned on facilities updates, from Stephen Driscoll. Our musical theater students recorded a thank you to him and sent it via social media.

Our UMassGives campaign focused on future Fringes and student work, asking our donors to bolster the resources we offer the students at no or little cost to them as they self-produce. The effort garnered widespread support to be our most successful UMassGives to date with 27 donations totaling $4,420.00!

A key point of our successful campaign was testimonials from students who were benefitting from being Fringe producers this year:

I was taking an Adaptation class with Professor Harley Erdman when the idea came to me to transform a Dario Fo classic into a play about the immigrant experience in the US. It started as just a class project, but through the support of Harley and the Department, I was able to grow it into a full play and encouraged to produce it at our Fringe Festival. This is a one-man staged reading about a difficult topic, but the Department never faltered in its support, helping me with funds, rehearsal space, technical assistance, advertisement, as well as guiding me to write a successful grant proposal for the UMass Arts Council. I would never have been able to put this on by myself, and at the Theater Department, I found so much support to write and
direct my first show here in the US, which is a learning experience so important to supplement what we do in the classroom. I’m thankful and excited to see The Other America come to life in the Curtain Theater and am learning so much in the process of producing, writing and rehearsing it with an amazing team of collaborators!
—Grad student Pedro Eiras is presenting his adaptation, *The Other America*, on May 1 as part of our Fringe ’22. This opportunity is truly valuable to him.

The Fringe Fest has allowed me to grow as a theater maker in a safe environment. I am able to make big choices and try new things without the worry of it failing. Fringe Fest gave me the support I needed to do the work I want to do after graduation.”
— Sena Yacteen
Sena wrote a superhero parody, *Webgirl*, that’s going up May 6–8 as part of Fringe.

Why should you donate to UMassGives in support of UMassTheater’s Fringe ’23? We’ll let a current Fringe theater-maker Claudia Maurino tell you why:
“Working on this show for the Fringe Festival has been the highlight of my year. Collaborating with my friends; figuring out how to be a producer, director, and designer all in one; and really getting the chance to learn by doing has been incredibly fulfilling—as well as truly fun! It has also really been an honor to know that the project I’m working on lives alongside at least five or six other projects—some of which share half a cast!—because the spirit of camaraderie is so strong, and I really feel like I’m part of a living, creating artistic community. Fringe has brought the best parts of theater—of UMass theater specifically—to the forefront: collaboration, bold choices, meaningful stories, community, and wild, raucous fun.”
Claudia and her collaborators are putting on *Midsummer Night’s Dream* April 29 & 30.
Thank you to everyone who was part of our UMass Theater community in 2021–2022. See you next year!

Photo courtesy of Fringe Fest '22’s Midsummer Night’s Dream team.