A Note from the Chair

Each year, UA Theatre and Dance faculty, staff and students work in and out of the classroom to hone their crafts. This year is no exception: the Department welcomes a new professor and a new instructor; UA Theatre and Dance work has been presented in New York City and abroad; our alumni continue to thrive; and we are making a special announcement about our future departmental leadership.

You’ll read about all of these exciting developments in this Stages. Furthermore, in this issue we celebrate asking important and profound questions through our art. Be forwarned: we don’t always supply answers. Yet, as famed French-Romanian playwright Eugene Ionesco once said:

*It’s not the answer that enlightens, but the question.*

Of course we simply cannot ask such questions without the help of our supporters. With your generous support, our students arrive in the professional world as mature, conscientious, prepared artists and practitioners. We thank you, and we hope you enjoy Stages.

William Teague, Department Chair
Dr. Justin P. Cowan

Dr. Justin P. Cowan joins the UA Theatre and Dance faculty this year as Assistant Professor of Musical Theatre, teaching Musicianship for Musical Theatre, Musical Theatre History, Musical Theatre Performance, Audition Techniques/Vocal Coaching for Musical Theatre, as well as serving as the departmental Conductor/Musical Director. Dr. Cowan holds a DMA in Conducting with a cognate in Directing from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, as well as undergraduate and masters degrees in Voice and Conducting, both from UNC Greensboro. Dr. Cowan looks forward to joining the UA Theatre and Dance family, and hopes to motivate students in and out of the classroom to grow in their craft and go on to great work after graduation.

*Dr. Cowan’s work can be seen by visiting: ConductorCowan.com and DirectorCowan.com.*

Dr. Luvada Harrison

Dr. Luvada Harrison joins the UA Theatre and Dance faculty this year as Assistant Professor of Musical Theatre, after having served last year as a Musical Theatre Instructor. Dr. Harrison holds a Bachelor of Science in Vocal Music Education from Towson University, a Masters of Music in Opera Performance from Binghamton University and a Doctorate of Music in Voice/Opera Performance from Florida State University, where she was the recipient of a University Fellowship. In fall of 2008, she joined the faculty of Stillman College where she served as Associate Professor of Music. During her tenure at Stillman, she received the Joseph A. Gore Faculty Merit Award, for excellence in teaching, and the President’s Golden Shovel Award for community service.
This summer, Yonder Contemporary Dance Company embarked on another successful tour to the world’s largest arts festival, Edinburgh Festival Fringe in Edinburgh, Scotland.

The company was created in 2016 by Artistic Director Sarah M. Barry and her husband, Creative Director Mark Barry. Composed of UA Theatre and Dance students, as well as UA students, faculty, and staff from a variety of other disciplines, Yonder enables students to work more deeply on a project than they otherwise might during a traditional dance concert. Additionally, Yonder provides students experiences in marketing, fundraising, touring and teaching artistry. These educational experiences are not typically offered to members of college dance companies.

“We began our journey with the concept of ‘brain pollution’ in mind,” said Artistic Director Barry. The company, which collectively crafted the piece, subsequently focused on the use of phones and social media. Barry explains: “We created an interaction between the audience and the performers with technology.” Performers utilized their phones throughout the piece. At one point, audience members collectively play the music for the piece on their mobile devices, and audience members could even Tweet questions and receive answers from performers during the show.

Barry was careful to note that the work did not intend to pass judgement. “We probably raised more questions than we answered,” she said. Where some choreographers emphasized the negative aspects of technology, others focused on the ways technology has brought us together.

For Barry, the most rewarding part of the experience was watching the production fully realized at Edinburgh Festival Fringe. “I could see the experience click with the dancers.”

For more information about Yonder Contemporary Dance Company, visit yonderdance.com.
Professor Seth Panitch, Head of the MFA and BFA Acting programs at The University of Alabama, has had a busy semester. Prior to directing UA Theatre and Dance’s production of William Shakespeare’s *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, Panitch also wrote and directed the new play *Separate and Equal*. Years in the making, the production offered preview performances in Tuscaloosa prior to playing at 59E59 Theatres in New York City throughout September.

*Separate and Equal* explores a forbidden basketball game between black and white teens in 1950’s Jim Crow Alabama. The story is told through a hybrid of modern dance and basketball, and it is performed to an original jazz soundtrack composed specifically for the production. UA Professors Lawrence Jackson and Tom Wolfe provided the choreography and score, respectively.

The genesis of *Separate and Equal* came from a visit to the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute. “I was incredibly moved by the opening video,” said Panitch. “It really brought ‘Jim Crow’ alive for me.” He noted in particular a historic code that lists which games kids of different races could not play together. He was struck by the amount of effort invested in keeping individuals separate.

“We’re not trying to answer any questions,” emphasized Panitch. “We’re trying to ask them in a different way.”

Throughout the rehearsal process, it was particularly rewarding for Panitch to watch current and recently-graduated students flourish alongside renowned professional actors. “They fit seamlessly with the cast,” said Panitch.

Panitch fiercely supports the production of new plays. “We make a stronger statement when it’s a new statement.”

*Separate and Equal* featured Production Design by Matt Reynolds, Costume Design by Tiffany M. Yeager and Media Design by Maya Champion.
I am currently living in New York City, after spending nearly four years in Los Angeles, CA. While I was in Los Angeles I became a full-time professional artist. Creating custom masterpieces for high profile clients, and celebrities. I was a regular on a webseries in L.A., and had the privilege of playing Diana in Next to Normal.

I have most recently been cast in a movie musical film that is set to shoot in early 2019. I’ve relocated to NYC to continue pursuing a life in musical theatre and art.

How do you feel the University prepared you for what you are doing now? It didn’t baby us, so it taught me that no matter how much talent and training you have… if you don’t put the work in when no one is looking, then you’re doing yourself a disservice. You have to outwork and outlast if you want a career. Enjoy the process. Do not be afraid to fail, especially in front of the people you’re working for and with. It prepared me to be comfortable with failure. Failure is just a byproduct of growth.

What advice do you have for current students? You don’t need permission to create.

Do you have a favorite production during your time at UA? Showboat, my final show at UA in 2013.

Do you have a favorite story from your time at UA? In 2011 I worked tech for Fefu and Her Friends. We had to move 2,000+ pieces of sets, scenery and props every night. Though it was a lot of work, I met my best friend during the furniture-moving process. We are still best friends to this day!

For more information about Bridget, visit her website bridgetwinder.com. There you can find information about her artwork, as well as highlighted performances.
Where are you now? I’m the Director of Development at Mosaic Theater Company in Washington, DC.

How do you feel the University prepared you for what you are doing now? One of the best values UA instilled was discipline. As theater students, we study hard, train hard, rehearse hard and laugh hard. We keep busy, so through a crazy schedule of classes and performance, we learn discipline in our craft. If you take the work ethic of a theater student and translate it to a resume, you see high-functioning time management, keen prioritization, strategic thinking, and a wealth of interpersonal skills. These are all honed through discipline.

What advice do you have for current students? I will echo the advice of Carol Burnett. To a similar question, she responds, “Keep the dream.” As a student, you’re swarmed with school, personal life, and the daunting future. If you’re anything like me (and so many other artists) you get distracted by the comparison-game, failures, and the need to just make it through one of Cornelius’s classes (mad respect). At the end of the day, keep the dream. Remind yourself why you love it. Remind yourself why theater is important. You play an integral role in the ongoing growth of our culture. You’re part of a massive tapestry, not without its knots and frays, but full of beauty. Remind yourself you have important stories to tell. If you don’t, who will?

Did you have a favorite production during your time at UA? Ah, one of my favorite experiences was being a part of the late Matthew Burkholder’s *The Bourgeois Gentleman*. Matthew casted an incredibly versatile group of artists, and because the production was a newly adapted work by Raphe (more mad respect), we spent hours playing. Matthew gave us free reign to experiment, fail, succeed, redo, rework, retime. It was one of the most creative experience I’ve had.

Are you an alumnus of UA Theatre and Dance? We want to hear from you! Visit theatre.ua.edu and join our Alumni Database.
Associate Professor of Acting and Voice Allison Hetzel traveled to the Edinburgh Festival Fringe this summer with her solo show, *Step Mama Drama*. Hetzel says she never imagined being a stepmother. Once she experienced it herself, she began talking with other stepmothers. She spoke with a variety of individuals – people who recently became stepmothers, stepmothers reflecting on their experiences, stepchildren, and more. Not only did this variety of characters provide different perspectives for the show; it also allowed Hetzel to play a range of characters. Hetzel even played herself in the production.

“That was harder than I thought it would be,” she said. Hetzel also sang in the show. “I haven’t sung in a show in a long time.” Former UA Theatre and Dance Professor Raphael Crystal wrote music for the show. Hetzel enjoyed that collaboration.

Hetzel was thrilled with the reception of visitors from the United States. “Americans responded really well to it,” said Hetzel. “There were so many people from the South!”

**UA Theatre and Dance Welcomes A New Department Chair**

UA Theatre and Dance is pleased to announce that, beginning in Fall 2019, Associate Professor of Dance Sarah M. Barry will lead the Department of Theatre and Dance. Barry has received UA’s prestigious Outstanding Commitment to Teaching Award, she has been awarded numerous grants, and her choreography has been performed internationally.

She assumes the position held by Professor William Teague. Teague joined the Department of Theatre and Dance in 1981. Look out for our Spring issue of *Stages*, in which we’ll celebrate Teague’s legacy with UA Theatre and Dance.
We invite you to play a role in the performance of a lifetime by naming a seat in either the Drama Theatre or Dance Theatre in the new Performing Arts Academic Center. Your donation in support of the Campaign for the Performing Arts will help create a venue worthy of our students’ legendary talent.

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