

STAGES

A woman with a long ponytail, wearing a grey jumpsuit, is captured mid-jump in a dark, industrial-looking space. She is barefoot and her head is tilted back. The word "STAGES" is overlaid in large white letters across the top of the image. The background is dark with some structural elements visible, and a warm light source is on the left.

Fall 2014



A Note from the Chair

The success of our students has made the reputation our Department has earned over the years. The dedication of the staff to mold the minds and develop the tools of these young professionals is unparalleled. Throughout this publication you will find many examples of the successes our alumni continue to earn in the ultra-competitive environment that is the performing arts.

From endowed scholarship funds to the bright lights of Broadway, this newsletter celebrates the many successes our family has shared over the past year. We hope you find these stories of kindness and success as heart warming as we have.

William Teague

—William Teague, *Department Chair*



UA Theatre & Dance Welcomes New Faculty



Jacki Armit

Costume Production Specialist

Jacki joined UA Theatre & Dance this fall as an Assistant Clinical/Lecture-Track Faculty and Costume Production Specialist. In this role, she is responsible for draping and building costumes for each production as well as instructing classes in costume technology. She previously served as a costume technician at Tulane University Theatre and Dance. Jacki received her MFA in Costume Technology from The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill and worked professionally for The Utah Shakespeare Festival and The Alley Theatre.



Lawrence Jackson

Assistant Professor, Dance

Lawrence received a BFA in Dance from the University of Southern Mississippi and an MFA in Dance from Florida State University. Professionally, he devoted several years with the internationally acclaimed modern dance company, Cleo Parker Robinson Dance Ensemble. Additionally, he has performed as a guest artist in a variety of venues; on the concert stage, PBS television programs, dinner theatres, and summer dance intensives. Jackson has choreographed over 75 original works for the concert stage.



Rebecca Salzer

Assistant Professor, Dance

Rebecca Salzer is a dancemaker whose work transcends disciplinary labels. Her varied collaborative projects and her work for Rebecca Salzer Dance Theater have been supported by several arts councils and various private and corporate donors. Her recent work has been seen at Links Hall Chicago, Highways Performance Space & Gallery in Los Angeles and at The La Jolla Playhouse. She holds a BA in Humanities from Yale University and an MFA in Dance Theatre from the University of California, San Diego.

The John Ross Theatrical Design Scholarship

Above the doors to the lobby entrance of the Marian Gallaway Theatre, there is a sign that was hand-painted over 30 years ago by John Ross.

This summer, something wonderful occurred. UA graduate John Chenault contributed funds to start an endowment fund honoring his mentor Professor Emeritus John Ross. The John Ross Theatrical Design Scholarship is intended to award scholarships to current UA theatre majors pursuing careers in theatrical design based on artistic excellence and potential.

About John Ross

John was born and raised in Birmingham and attended Indian Springs High School. He graduated from The University of Alabama in 1960 and shortly after received his master of fine arts from the Yale University School of Drama. After completing his studies, Ross worked for the Hartt Opera Theatre at The University of Hartford in Connecticut before returning to UA in 1965 as the scenic designer and technical director where he served on the faculty until retiring in 1996. Throughout his tenure, Ross worked professionally as a designer, technical director, consultant and master electrician regionally and served as a board member for five arts organizations. He held leadership positions in the Southeastern Theatre Conference (SETC), Alabama Theatre League and League of Historic American Theatres. He still teaches in the College of Continuing Studies and is an avid supporter of UA Theatre & Dance.

About John Chenault

John Chenault pursued a bachelor of arts degree during Ross's tenure as the UA scenic designer and technical director. Following graduation in 1971, Chenault completed a master of fine arts at Florida State University and went on to an extraordinary career. Chenault worked as a technical director and salesman for Kliegel Brothers Lighting, and software engineer for CitiGroup, ImNet, Telecalc, Networx and Amazon.com. In addition, he is a freelance lighting designer and board member for the Tacoma Musical Playhouse.



“A wonderful designer, painter and storyteller,” says Bill Teague.

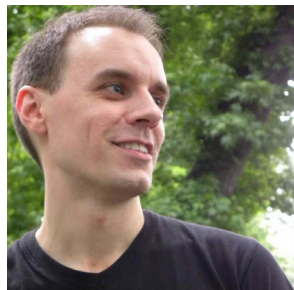
Current UA Theatre & Dance Chair Bill Teague says this endowment is one of the kindest things he seen since he began his tenure at The University of Alabama. Ross was on the committee that hired Teague in 1981 and it was Ross who showed him around Tuscaloosa.

Teague remembers traveling with Ross and recalls one trip to USITT where the two had to drive through Nashville and Ross insisted they stop at Tootsies Orchid Lounge behind the Ryman Auditorium. “With John, you always ended up in some kind of crazy adventure,” says Teague.

Teague also recalls some of Ross's designs at UA. For *The Gospel According to Esther*, Ross's scenic design included 10 live-streaming televisions on set. “That may not seem too flashy now,” says Teague, “but in the 1980s, TVs were much heavier and technology had not advanced to where it is today. It was astonishing.” He also talked about *The Seagull* in which Ross used over five miles of rope. Teague said, “John is such a wonderful designer, painter and storyteller. Everything he does is beautiful.”

Teague believes the endowment will ensure a lasting legacy for Professor Emeritus, John Ross.

Alumni Focus



Kyle C. Norris

What year did you graduate? 2002

What degree did you receive? BA Theatre and BS Music Education (Vocal/Choral)

What have you been up to since you graduated?

I am currently a sub pianist for the Broadway production of *Pippin* and working to publish an educational course I've developed. Last fall, I

wrote the music and lyrics for *The Oedipus Project*, which was awarded "Best Music" at the Sound Bites Festival in NYC.

Some of my other performance credits include the Broadway productions of *Rocky*, *First Date* and *Cat On A Hot Tin Roof*; the First National tours of *Legally Blonde* and *West Side Story*; and many Las Vegas productions.

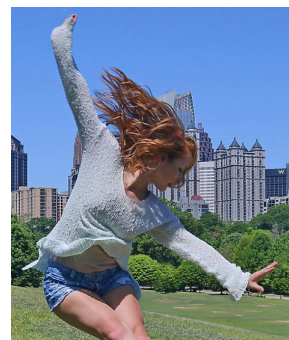
How do you think UA prepared you for what you are doing now? Learning the different aspects of production in Theatre Practicum has proven invaluable. Practicum taught me how to communicate effectively with individuals in all areas of theatre.

What advice would you offer for current students about to enter the field?

Networking is a vital aspect of any career and you never know where someone's path may lead them. Treat everyone with respect, whether they are the CEO or the custodian. The most random of connections can have the biggest impact in your life, whether it is immediate or ten years down the road. People want to know two things when hiring: "Are you good at what you do?" and "Are you someone we want to have around?"

Did you have a favorite production during your time at UA? *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* with Ed Williams. He gave me his trust and the freedom to explore what I could do with the vocal arrangements.

Do you have a favorite story from your time at UA? I loved Guerilla Theatre. There was no pressure to perform to the grade you wanted, only the honest reaction you get from a live audience. My peers were incredibly talented and we all pushed and encouraged each other to bring out our best performance.



Hannah King

What year did you graduate? 2013

What degree did you receive? BA Dance

What have you been up to since you graduated? I currently work with Project 7, a contemporary dance company in Atlanta under the direction of Cherrise Wakeham.

How do you think UA prepared you for what you are doing now? UA prepared me in so many ways for my work in Atlanta. UA Theatre & Dance's renowned faculty encouraged positivity through dance. I am so fortunate to now be a part of Project 7; a company that not only fosters the further development of our dance careers but also promotes a positive environment filled with encouraging people.

What advice would you offer for current students about to enter the field?

The best advice I could offer for current students about to enter ANY field, is to simply be yourself. Sometimes, being yourself isn't so simple and we struggle to find ourselves in the crazy dance world after graduation. Once you find that silver lining and stumble upon the company, show or colleagues that support you throughout the hardest days of blood, sweat and tears, there is nothing more satisfying.

Did you have a favorite production during your time at UA? I have two favorites: First, the 2012 Spring Alabama Repertory Dance Theatre concert featuring the longer, creatively choreographed piece to a slew of Radiohead tracks. My other favorite was the 2012 Fall *Alabama Repertory Dance Theatre* concert where I was able to perform two entirely different roles. I was in "Crossing," an athletic, emotionally driven work by Sarah Barry and an upbeat, creepy work by John Virciglio, titled "Don't Fall Asleep."

Do you have a favorite story from your time at UA? I have so many wonderful memories from my time at UA, but the most important and significant story I have is from my final performance in Morgan Auditorium. I choreographed a piece called "The Wind That Moves Us" for the 2013 *Dance Collection* in which I danced alongside the women with whom I began my college dance career. It was a really special work, highlighting some of the people who were my biggest influences during my time at UA.



Jessica May

What year did you graduate? 2013

What degree did you receive? BA Musical Theatre

What have you been up to since you graduated? I am in Istanbul, Turkey, at the Zorlu Center where we are teching and preparing to open and tour *Beauty and the Beast*.

How do you think UA prepared you for what you are doing now? I moved to New York last August, and spent the majority of the year auditioning. Auditions are such a huge part of this career, and I rarely had to go into one without the confidence to showcase myself to the best of my ability. I believe the training I received at UA prepared my repertoire, audition etiquette, dance and vocal techniques and everything in between. So much of the audition process is confidence and knowing that you have something special to offer (even with 300-400 girls in the holding room with you!). My UA professors gave me the tools to approach an audition with confidence and skills needed to stand out in the crowd.

What advice would you offer for current students about to enter the field? I would tell current students to audition for anything and everything; it's an opportunity to perform in front of people. Whether you get the part or not, you have another "performance" under your belt. Also, never "type" yourself out of an audition simply because you think you might not fit the role perfectly. I never thought I'd be cast in a dancing role; but I gave it a shot, and it paid off!

Did you have a favorite production during your time at UA? One of my favorite roles at UA was Rhoda in *A New Brain*. It's such a quirky show and the role was completely new for me. I had never seen the show or heard the music, so it was a great opportunity to create the character from scratch.

Do you have a favorite story from your time at UA? One of my favorite stories from UA is from the 2012 production of *Rose Tattoo* during which we had a live goat in the cast. One night, Sylvia (our goat) pooped while she crossed the stage. Seeing the fear and laughs on everyone's faces as we went into the next scene – a fight where one actress is thrown to the floor – still kills me to this day!

Alumni Highlights



Laura Douciere

UA Theatre & Dance, 2013
Bachelor of Arts (Musical Theatre)

Laura Douciere graduated from Alabama in May 2013, but spent her senior year touring alongside UA Theatre & Dance Assistant Professor, Bill Martin in *Beauty and the Beast*. While on tour at the Pantages Theatre in L.A., Laura drove to Vista, California, to audition for the 2013 production of *The Wizard of Oz* at the Moonlight Amphitheatre following the tour. After playing Glinda in *The Wizard of Oz*, the

director invited Laura to audition for another production and Laura was cast in one of her dream roles: Janet Van de Graaff in *The Drowsy Chaperone*.

Now Laura is finishing a two-month contract as Vivienne in Performance Riverside's production of *Legally Blonde: The Musical*. Though she has enjoyed the experience, Laura is looking forward to getting back to New York.

Laura believes she learned many invaluable lessons and had so many opportunities for growth at the University. She wasn't focused on one thing like many of her peers at other schools. Laura had the opportunity to join campus organizations, attend football games and meet people in her classes outside of UA Theatre & Dance. Laura says she is very thankful for the supportive environment.

Laura shared one story about an audition for the *Dirty Dancing* tour. She did not know she had to prepare a song for the audition, so when the director gave her the piece and 30 minutes to prepare it, she was thankful that Raphael Crystal provided her with the ability to play the piano and quickly work through a song. She says she still uses the techniques from Seth Panitch's Acting Two class and is thankful for the way Stacy Alley and Cornelius Carter had a way of supporting her and being hard on her at the same time.

When asked what advice she would give to current UA Theatre & Dance students, Laura offers one valuable piece of wisdom: "Relish the classes you're taking now because once you get out of college, classes are expensive and time is rare. Don't rush to finish school; savor every moment."



Michael Luwoye

UA Theatre & Dance, 2013
Bachelor of Arts (Acting)

A few months after graduation, Michael Luwoye moved to New York. His first week in the “Big Apple,” Michael received an audition for *Witness Uganda* and was cast just as he was moving to North Carolina to work on *Three Musketeers* with Flatrock Playhouse. Michael returned to New York in January and began rehearsals

for *Witness Uganda* and the show premiered the following month at the American Repertory Theatre. After a successful run, Michael is thrilled to participate in an upcoming workshop to prepare for the Broadway premier.

Life in New York

As an introvert, Michael said getting used to the pace was stressful until he found scenic locations that matched his pace. “The industry and city has the potential to make you grab onto someone else’s speed before you’re ready.”

Looking back on his time at UA, Michael says it’s like day and night. He reminisces about how casting seemed to mean so much at UA: “Now, most of the things I audition for I don’t get.” It may be glamorous to be cast, but Michael believes continuously refining and improving your process is the most important thing you can do. He encourages fellow actors to pick up any scene or monologue, put it on its feet with some friends, and then move on to the next piece simply for the sake of doing it.

“Every [*Witness Uganda*] rehearsal we were given a new re-write - all the way up until opening night,” says Michael. “It was so valuable because it was training me to be flexible, quick and refine the process.” Michael says your process and adaptability must be second nature.

About the Show

Based on the playwright’s experiences, *Witness Uganda* is the story of Griffin Matthew’s escape from a homophobic environment in New York to an even more tumultuous Uganda. While there, Griffin befriended several orphaned teenagers and was inspired to help them. When he returned to New York, Griffin started the Uganda Project which grew continuously until the recession. In collaboration with Matt Gould, *Witness Uganda* was born and serves as a channel through which to communicate Griffin’s story and raise money for the project.



Rebecca Kling

UA Theatre & Dance, 2013
Master of Fine Arts (Acting)

Prior to graduating, Rebecca Kling attended the New York Showcase with Professor Seth Panitch. There Rebecca met her acting manager, who has proven to be a fantastic partner in her career. Since moving to New York last May, Rebecca has auditioned for several theatre, film and television roles; everything from *Orange is the New Black*

and *Law & Order* to *Boardwalk Empire* and a Steven Spielberg movie. She has been cast in *Outliving Emily* with Olympia Dukakis, *God’s Pocket* with Philip Seymour Hoffman, ABC’s *Manhattan Love Story* and a short film called *Actor Seeks Role* with Dylan Baker. Rebecca says, “It’s such a fast-paced experience.” She often spends a couple days living with a character, but then the character is gone as soon as the audition is over.

Rebecca offers this piece of advice to actors before they move to a big city like New York: “Know what you want and what kind of actor you are. Know who you are, establish specific goals and master time management... it’s easy to lose focus in the city.” She also encourages actors to find a sense of community no matter where they go because working in New York can be overwhelming.

Rebecca says her time in graduate school taught her to be a better teacher. In the future, Rebecca intends to coach actors (specifically college students and adults) in scenes and monologues. She says she continuously uses the tools and vocabulary she learned at UA to explain and develop others.





Nick Rashad Burroughs

UA Theatre & Dance, May 2014

Bachelor Arts (Musical Theatre)

Recent graduate Nick Rashad Burroughs has had a whirlwind adventure in his journey to the Broadway stage. This March, he participated in the UA Theatre & Dance New York Showcase and was signed by an agent the following day. A week later, the agent told him about the *Kinky Boots* National Tour and Nick sent in a video

audition. Another week later, he was asked to return to New York for an ensemble callback. Nick hopped on several flights to New York over the next month as he participated in multiple callbacks.

On the way home from the seventh call back, he was bummed to find the National Tour cast list on Playbill.com without his name on it. A week later Nick received a call with exciting news; Nick was asked to be the Lola understudy and a featured angel in the ensemble for the Broadway production of *Kinky Boots*. "I was working double-shifts at Cheddar's to pay for all of my flights, but it was totally worth it!" says Nick.

Nick shared a few of his unforgettable highlights since his move to New York. The first time he walked on the Broadway stage and having the opportunity to be an understudy for his idol came to mind. "Seeing Billy Porter's process and rehearsing with him... it was incredible to see him work."

Nick says that all the things he did at UA have prepared him for his adventure. The most important thing Nick has learned through this process is to be who you are and not abandon where you come from. "They loved that I was from Alabama and that I was a southern boy," says Nick. "That was something that helped me in my audition."

Despite what he calls a "hilarious transition" and a continuous state of being lost in New York, Nick says, "this experience has been such a blast. I've never had so much fun."

UA Theatre & Dance Alumnus Caitlin Brunell Crowned Miss Alabama

Caitlin Brunell graduated from UA in 2014 with a degree in dance and a minor in computing technology and applications. A month after she donned her cap and gown, she received her crown as Miss Alabama. But when deciding where to go to college, Florida-native Caitlin Brunell did not have UA on her radar. Her mom said she'd heard UA had a strong dance program, so Caitlin went to audition with one of her friends. "I was on campus for three seconds and was in love," says Caitlin.

In addition to participating in *Dance Alabama!* and *ARDT* concerts during her studies, Caitlin began working with the Miss Alabama pageant her sophomore year. Since then, Caitlin has received over \$86,000 in scholarship money and now represents the entire organization. Caitlin says her role is a "24/7, full-time job" in which she makes appearances across the state, promoting the program and her platform organization.

Leveraging the skills she learned in her UA minor, Caitlin designed an interactive website for her platform organization *Caitlin's Closet*. She began this organization at 15 years old and it has grown dramatically over the last seven years. Caitlin's Closet has donated over 10,000 formal wear items to individuals in 40 states.

Reflecting on her four years at UA, Caitlin believes she grew as a dancer and performer because of the professors. Caitlin says, "The professors truly invest in you... Cornelius not only influenced me as a dancer, but helped me to grasp my full potential on and off the stage." Caitlin said her four years at UA flew by and offered this piece of advice to current students: "Take in every moment and learn everything you can. Take extra classes, seek out feedback from your professors and invest all of your time."



Faculty Highlights

Ping Guo

Newly tenured Associate Professor, Qianping Guo traveled to China this summer with his colleague Cornelius Carter. Ping acted as translator and “connector” for Cornelius while visiting and teaching modern dance classes with students at the Beijing Dance Academy and the Liaoning Ballet School.



Ping has choreographed and taught ballet for both schools and was proud to share these experiences with his colleague. Cornelius and Ping intend to develop a dance exchange program between The University of Alabama and Chinese students. Next summer, Ping will return to China to work with the Shanghai Ballet Company where he will teach ballet to several students. Ping believes in teaching through a cultural exchange and strives to combine Russian, American and Chinese techniques.



F. Randy deCelle

This summer, Randy deCelle completed a year-long collaboration with artist, choreographer and designer Ralph Lemon. Randy served as the technical director and engineer for “Scaffold Room,” Ralph’s newest commissioned piece. “The biggest challenge was balancing technology with Ralph’s artistic ideas; the piece required both a machine and piece of art,” says Randy. The end result was an easy-to-assemble, tour-ready piece with automation and projection capabilities. “Scaffold Room” debuted at the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis and is to tour across the country.

Beyond the classroom and scene shop, Randy is actively involved in the planning process for the new UA Theatre & Dance facilities, working to ensure technical spaces and designs are functional and conducive to the students’ learning. He regularly works with USITT and SETC, serving as an adjudicator, committee member, conference presenter and publication editor.

Raphael Crystal

Raphael Crystal is an active member of the Birmingham Art Music Alliance, a consortium of Alabama composers and performers. This summer, the Alliance sponsored a New Music Festival consisting of six concerts at three locations. Raphe composed a new song cycle for the event, “Robert Burns Songs”, which was set to texts by the Scottish poet. UA Theatre & Dance Assistant Professor, Emily Herring, soprano, premiered the work with the composer at the piano. “Emily was the ideal person to introduce these songs,” says Raphe, “and they were very well received.”



Earlier in the summer, Raphe partnered with filmmaker Billy Fields (another UA colleague) to work with a group of high school students at the American Legion Alabama Boys State Convention. There they created a new musical theatre piece about veterans and their stories. Raphe also continued work dating the letters in a long-term correspondence between conductor, composer and teacher Lehman Engel and poet Eudora Welty.



Rita Snyder

In addition to teaching ballet tech, modern tech, and anatomy and kinesiology for dance, Rita Snyder regularly choreographs work for the Alabama Repertory Dance Theatre. She also serves as the faculty advisor for the “Collegiate Ballroom Competition Team,” a new student group on campus.

Rita and her husband, Richard, also compete professionally in ballroom dance. The two qualified to compete at the USA Dance National Competition where they received multiple first and second place awards in their categories. Over the summer, Richard and Rita successfully competed at a national qualifying event and plan to compete in the 2015 Nationals at the Gold level.

Rita recently completed an online text with video supplementation for McGraw-Hill called the “Introduction to Social Dance.” She is currently researching and working on a book about dance anatomy and kinesiology.



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Seven Guitars, Fall 2013 Photo by Porfirio Solórzano
Cover photo: ARDT, Fall 2014 Photo by Porfirio Solórzano

UA Theatre & Dance