

COLLETTE



Gazette

VOLUME 01 | 2024-2025

Bridging The Distance

Jean Collette

UI Theatre Arts Chair
1937-1967

A Western Ranch Lady and An
Elegant, Sophisticated Lady

Going the Distance

15 Years of the Distance MFA
at the University of Idaho

From a Distance, In Depth

The Powers Praxis



University of Idaho
Department of Theatre Arts

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Cover Design by Clint Saunders, MFA Student
Cover Image – Jean Collette (1944), courtesy of UI Special Collections.



Alex Drinnen's (MFA'24) adaptation of *Beowulf* at Knoxville Children's Theatre.
Photo by Katherine Birkbeck.

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UI students and alumni celebrate Kelly Quinnett, Jeff Davis, and David Lee-Painter in the Idaho Repertory Theatre production of *What the Constitution Means to Me* in Chicago.



FROM THE EDITOR

It is a distinct honor to launch this magazine for the University of Idaho Department of Theatre Arts. When I started teaching at UI in fall 2019, I had hopes of creating an annual publication detailing the wonderful work happening at UI Theatre. The COVID-19 pandemic and many other setbacks occurred between then and now, delaying such a launch.

When I arrived in Moscow in August 2019, I was contacted by an alumna, dramaturg, archivist, and scholar, Ariana “Ari” Burns (BFA’91) who eagerly shared the rich and beautiful history of the department with me. This publication would not be possible without the work of Ari Burns and Palouse Anthropology in preserving the legacy of the department.

As an historian, I think a lot about the past and how best to engage with it. When discussing the magazine’s title with Ari and my colleagues, one name continued to surface over and over: Jean

Collette. Indeed, the legacy of Jean Collette is particularly suited for celebration: a female department chair who started teaching at the University of Idaho in 1933, whose career spanned three decades, and, who, for a ten-year stretch, was the only faculty member in the department. What an amazing legacy to celebrate! And thus, *The Jean Collette Gazette* was born.

An article on Jean Collette, written by Ari, is reprinted as our cover story. We would like to acknowledge the initial place of publication, *The Latah Legacy*, and we thank them for letting us reprint it, with minor changes, here.

Over the last few months, 36 students in the Institutional Dramaturgy course I teach have worked on the material that you hold now in your hands. We are so thrilled to share the fantastic work that our students, staff, faculty, and alumni are doing.

This issue marks a few milestones – the retirement of beloved

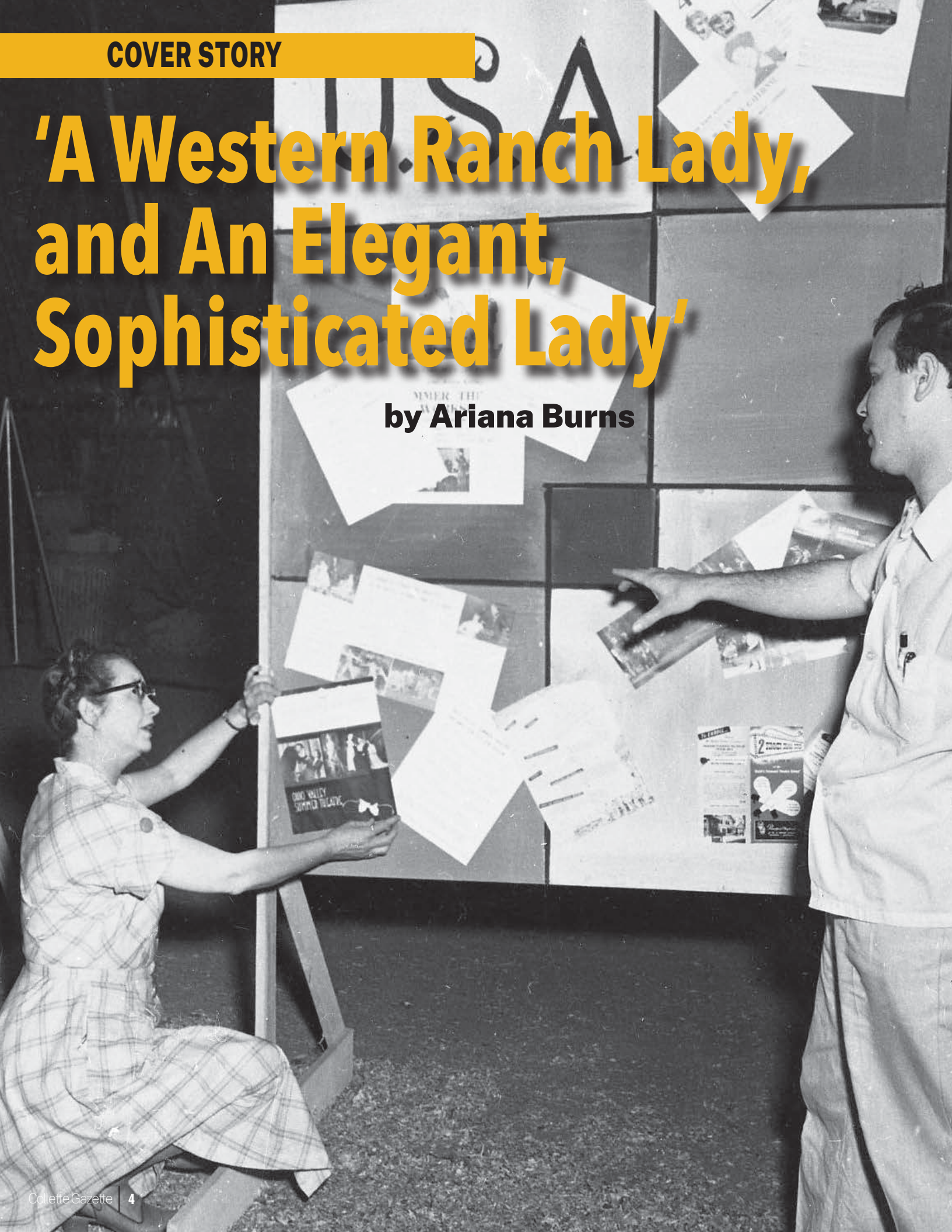
faculty member David Lee-Painter and Marketing Director Kelly O’Neill and the celebration of 15 years of our distance program – and celebrates the beginning of something new – a cohort of new faculty and staff who recently joined our department.

The Jean Collette Gazette is our way of honoring the contributions of all who have come before us and celebrating all that is to come. Thank you for your support of the University of Idaho Department of Theatre Arts past, present, and future. We hope you enjoy!

Sarah Alice Campbell , PhD
Editor, *The Jean Collette Gazette*
Assistant Professor of Theatre History,
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'A Western Ranch Lady, and An Elegant, Sophisticated Lady'

by Ariana Burns



The Legacy of UI of Theatre Arts Department Chair, Jean Collette

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When I was an undergraduate at the University of Idaho in the late 1980s, the University Hut (U-Hut) was the hub for the Department of Theatre Arts. The much-maligned 1919 building sat in the campus core, olive drab paint peeling away. Despite its rundown appearance, it held a treasure within: the Jean Collette Theatre.

An 80-seat black box space, the Collette was where students learned the art and business of theatre. It was a place of ideas and risks and new approaches. A place where it was okay to face the peril of failure and learn from the experience.

The theatre's namesake, Jean Collette, was theatre head for thirty years. Upon her retirement, the *Idaho State Journal* published a piece honoring her:

"She has lost track of the changes in organizational programs which have governed her department, but does know that drama has always been a part of the whole university picture, with actors, stagehands and popcorn sellers being drawn from not only the entire student body, but also the faculty and residents of several Idaho communities."¹

Collette never limited herself to the students taking her classes, she networked beyond campus and left a lasting impression on many. Her legacy of community building through theatre has become a core value of the department.

"She influenced theatre at the University of Idaho as perhaps no other professor has,"² Forrest Sears, late professor emeritus of theatre, reflected. From his fledg-

ling years at the University of Idaho, he remembered Collette "as a great mentor for a young professor." She would invite him to her office to "have a talk with the boss lady."³

Sears recalled that Collette directly and vibrantly influenced dramatic education: "...she had dozens of [students]. She was known throughout the state as a trainer."⁴

Judy Chavez, alumna and wife of professor emeritus Ed Chavez, spoke to Collette's "charisma with students and passion for her craft."⁵

Jean Collette set the course for dramatics education at the university, which was then focused on training secondary education teachers. She extended the department's reach through high school drama workshops and staging of new works. With Ed Chavez, she created the summer theatre program which would go on to become Idaho Repertory Theatre.

Collette as a Student

Jean Collette came to the university as a student from Burley, Idaho, where her father was a groceryman.⁶ She arrived in 1924 to study English sporting a flapper bob haircut, much to the consternation of then dramatics head John Cushman. Only the year before he had made *The Argonaut* front page complaining about modern hairstyles:⁷

"'Actresses are simply impossible with bobbed hair,' says Mr. Cushman, authority and professor of dramatics, and now the department can't produce anything but Fiji Island plays and F. Scott Fitzgerald."⁸

No evidence remains of any negative effects of Collette's objectionable hairstyle on her time at

UI, though we know she completed four busy years of study while engaged in the campus community.

She joined the Delta Delta Delta sorority, served on the Pan-Hellenic Council, was an officer of two scholastic organizations, president of the English Club, a member of The Curtain (a dramatics club), vice-president of the YWCA, and participated in Debate. In her junior year, she was hired to grade papers for one of the literature classes. She and four fellow classmates were paid forty cents an hour for their efforts.⁹

She learned about drama in the tiny U-Hut, a repurposed YMCA building constructed for the military students during the first World War. The Y turned the building over to the University and in 1922 the multi-purpose room was remodeled as an experimental theatre laboratory.¹⁰

Collette's Early Career

After graduating with her bachelor's in 1928, Collette began her career as a high school teacher like many graduates before her. She lived in her parents' Burley home and taught at Burley High. Twice she took her students to state drama competitions at the University, winning the first year. Sadly, *The Argonaut* didn't report how she fared the second time around.¹¹ *The Burley Bulletin* listed her annual wage at \$75 in 1930.¹² This low wage may be one reason she returned to the University of Idaho to earn a master's in English. The advanced degree helped her secure a teaching position at Denver Women's College in 1933.¹³

Her position there didn't last long. The Great Depression had yet to break its hold on the economy and in July 1933, she was laid



Belle, The Typewriter Girl, directed by Jean Collette, was produced at the Field House during the first season of UI Summer Theatre in 1954. Photo courtesy of UI Special Collections.

off. She penned a letter to UI President Mervin G. Neale and UI English Department head George M. Miller for work opportunities. Miller advocated for his former student, writing to President Neale: "Without question she is one of the best all round English teachers we have turned out."¹⁴ She also found a teaching position at Moscow High School and Miller sent a letter of recommendation on her behalf.¹⁵

Collette Returns to Moscow

Before she could officially accept the position at Moscow High, there was a shift in the English Department's staffing and Miller wanted to hire Collette. Writing from her residence in Denver, Collette accepted the university offer.

"Received your wire. Accept University position gladly. I think it

is grand.....I am simply thrilled to death.....Jean Collette."¹⁶

Thus she returned to her alma mater in 1933. Besides teaching duties, she directed one-act plays and oversaw productions in the U-Hut experimental theatre. In 1936, when theatre head John Cushman left to study at New York University, Collette was promoted to his position.¹⁷

In her first year leading Dramatics, as the theatre area – not yet a department – was then known, she drew complaints from the Moscow Ministerial Association for having rehearsal on Sunday. President Neale interceded with a letter and a promise that it would not happen again.¹⁸ *The Argonaut* came to her defense against her critics in 1939, in a piece about the hardships several people on campus were facing:

"....[Miss Jean Collette] tries to pick the right plays, mould (sic) competent casts. The job is not easy. ...Miss Collette's trying.... Many people in these parts are trying. Why not keep that mind before criticizing too severely?"¹⁹

Indeed, the challenges she encountered were varied. By way of example, Forrest Sears recalled a story told to him by Collette of one of her more memorable challenges. In the mid-20th century, it was still common for renowned stage performers to take shows on the road. In January 1940, the multi-talented Eva Le Gallienne brought her production of *Hedda Gabler* to the University of Idaho.

"Ms. Le Gallienne was coming in on a train in a snowstorm...

that got stalled on the day of the *Hedda Gabler* performance here. And she arrived about four o'clock in the afternoon but not with her scenery or with her costumes. So, Jean Collette pulled the furniture out of her house! And got it trucked down to the stage and that was *Hedda Gabler* with Le Gallienne that night in Moscow."²⁰

Transporting the bulk of her living room furnishings across town in the middle of winter seems quite tame compared to the greater challenges that awaited. Two years later, the country entered World War II which, amongst other things, brought the scarcities of wartime.

Collette remembered using wallpaper for stage flats. She had students starching and dyeing cheesecloth for costumes. They straightened nails to reuse them.²¹ Then the technical director departed, leaving Jean Collette as the only regular faculty member in dramatics for a decade.²²

In 1951, a new technical director came to campus. Like the faculty who preceded him, Ed Chavez anticipated his stay at the University of Idaho would be short. He was unaware of what the future held.

"The next day [after arriving on campus] I met Jean Collette. This was the start of a very long and wonderful friendship with a delightful person, a wonderful teacher and an excellent director."²³

Ed Chavez found that he and Collette were well-matched in teaching and producing theatre.

"There were just the two of us in Dramatics. We taught the classes and presented the plays. Jean directed and I did the tech for the shows. The presentation of the plays were in addition to our teaching assignments. This was done with the help of those stu-

dents who were majoring in Dramatics or were taking classes that required lab work."²⁴

The duo also produced children's theatre to tour the local schools. One of Collette's projects was the Idaho Drama Workshops for high schoolers "teaching all aspects of production."²⁵

The Birth of UI Summer Theatre

In 1952, Chavez and Collette were asked to produce a single summer show which they did. The request was repeated the following year. Chavez remembered that in fall of 1953, "we began to talk about the possibility of a full summer program."²⁶

And in the summer of 1954, the University of Idaho Summer Theatre opened in the Field House which used to stand west of the Physical Education Building. The Field House was promoted as "Idaho's biggest 'barn'."²⁷

Forrest Sears remembered it being a rousing success:

"...it was a great triumph!I'd seen a lot of summer theatres and worked in a few and never saw any that had a larger turn out... The summer theatre facility was uncomfortable... People didn't seem to [mind]. This was sawdust allure."²⁸

The UI Summer Theatre began as summer stock, rehearsing a show for two weeks, opening it, then going into rehearsal for the following show. In later years, it switched to a repertory format with several shows running concurrently and its name was changed to Idaho Repertory Theatre. At one point, it was one of the longest running professional repertories in the Northwest.

The End of a Long Career

The same year the summer theatre opened, the university promoted Collette to full professor.²⁹ She con-

tinued to direct in the summer theatre for ten years, until 1964, when she went on sabbatical.³⁰ Upon her return, she left the summer theatre in Chavez's capable hands but continued to teach and conduct drama workshops.

Forrest Sears was hired as teaching faculty anticipating Collette's early retirement in 1965. She was experiencing health problems, including emphysema.³¹ Sears recalled:

"[Jean] was an utterly charming and funny woman.... I always thought of her as a combination of a Western ranch lady and [an] elegant, sophisticated lady,"³²

"I think that [summer theatre] was her greatest triumph... And her dedication to high school education in theatre. She really did a big job in those areas."³³

Collette saw the Hartung Theatre built (then called the Performing Arts Centre) but didn't get to direct on its stage. She passed away in 1976.³⁴

Philip Hanson wrote to *The Idahonian* "Letters to the Editor" that summer. He was not a student of Collette's but had attended Washington State University (then Washington State College) and had spoken to her on many occasions.

"Jean Collette's secret was that she really taught others by *being*, and she was a friend not by what she 'did' for them, by simple 'being' what she was – totally....She was never possessive, she made no claims on anyone, for she understood too well the importance of freedom, yet not freedom without discipline. ... Someone once said, 'To teach is to inspire.' Ah, yes! There you have it! And that was Jean Collette. And yes, she did inspire me, without remuneration as being my teacher or my friend – her remuneration was in

doing and being Jean Collette. What better teaching can there be than that? What better living? What better education? ...All hail, Jean Collette.”³⁵

In 1979, three years after her death, the U-Hut Experimental Theatre where she had dedicated so many hours was renovated and reopened as the Jean Collette Theatre. Its inaugural production was *From To To From* directed by Vicki Blake and written by Blake and the company members. A Jean Collette Scholarship was also created in her memory.³⁶

The U-Hut and the Collette Theatre have since been demolished, but her scholarship is still awarded to theatre students ensuring the future of Jean Collette’s legacy.

–Ariana Burns

About the Author

Ariana Burns is an alumna of UI Theatre Arts (BFA’91) and the Department of Society, Culture, and Justice (MA’12). She is co-founder of **Palouse Anthropology**, with Dusty Fleener. Palouse Anthropology is a group of researchers interested in preserving the micro-history of the Palouse through the collection and compilation of oral histories for the benefit of researchers and future generations. palouseanthro@gmail.com.



Ariana Burns

Acknowledgements

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STUDENT UPDATES

Section Editors: Laura Carbonneau (Layout), Rachel DuPree, Amanda Flageolle, Jamie O'Reilly, Alana Rader, Kellie Stonebrook, and Alease Timbers.

Laura Carbonneau currently serves as Artistic Director for Theatre and C.A.K.E., a multi-arts summer camp, at MoCo Arts, a performing arts non-profit in Keene, New Hampshire. This fall, she co-directed *A Christmas Story* with middle and high school students and *Twelfth Night* with high school students as part of her MFA Off-Campus Studio project. Laura has also been busy expanding the theatre program with new tech workshops, college audition prep with Keene State College, and a dance and theatre outreach initiative with a local charter school.

Alissa Doyle is an actress and theatre artist based in Sacramento, California. She performed in the 2019 Pulitzer Prize-winning play, *Fairview*, by Jackie Sibblies Drury, at Capital Stage in Sacramento in September 2024. This was the Sacramento premiere of the play. Doyle is also a teaching artist for Capital Stage and B Street Theatre, where she teaches acting.

Rachel DuPree, a second-semester theatre pedagogy MFA student, di-



Rachel DuPree

rected *Elephant’s Graveyard* (abridged version) by George Brant at her school in Texas, where her students recently placed first at the TAPPS One Act Play District Championship, advanced to the State Championship, and earned an impressive third place. She has been drawing on the insightful lessons from her Studies in Dramaturgy class and the thought-provoking discussions during the Theatre for Social Change class. This blend of academic insights and practical application enriches her approach, helping her bring the play’s historical and cultural themes to life in meaningful ways for her students.

Cyndi Feinman is a New York-based playwright, director, lighting designer, intimacy director, fight choreographer, and college audition coach. Her new play, *The Bee vs. The People* was accepted into the Dream Up Festival at Theatre for the New City in New York City, where it received a reading on September 14, 2024. It has recently been accepted into the New York City Theatre Festival. The play takes a farcical look at what happens when a bee makes a surprise visit to an unsuspecting family on a summer day. You can keep up with her work at www.cyndifeinman.com

Ethan Franks is currently the Senior Technical Director of Norton Auditorium and the George S. Lindsey Theatre at the University of North Alabama. Ethan and his students completed a run of *Dirty Rotten Scoundrels* in November 2024 and are gearing up for the spring semester and a trip to KCACTF. Franks manages a student staff of nine that run over 180 events and four theatre productions

per year. Franks is also the lighting designer for *Something Rotten* at the Ritz Theatre in Sheffield, Alabama.

LaCretia Gelley is the Executive Artistic Director at Audience of One Youth Theater in Highlands Ranch, Colorado, where she directs, music directs, and choreographs for the company. Gelley recently finished a production of *A Christmas Carol*, the musical. LaCretia works for Ben Franklin Academy in the Middle School Performing Arts Department teaching performing arts electives and is working on *Mary Poppins Jr.* In the spring, Gelley will work on *Lightning Thief*, the *Percy Jackson Musical* at One Youth Theater. Gelley owns a voice and acting studio and enjoys teaching students of all ages.

Anne Kessler directed *Pippin* at the University of Pennsylvania for her MFA Off-Campus Studio course this fall. The production featured fourteen undergraduate performers, along with another dozen students who designed sets, props, costumes, sound, and lighting. All are members of Penn Singers, a student-run theatre organization. Performances were Nov. 22 and 23, 2024, at the Prince Theater, part of Penn Live Arts at the Annenberg Center.

Jaese Lecuyer is a theatre arts educator in southern Oregon. He is currently working with Teen Musical Theatre of Oregon as their director for *Alice in Wonderland Jr.* and *Hadestown*. He was recently part of an initiative led by Arts for Learning Northwest based in Portland Oregon to bring arts education into Oregon public schools statewide.

Tim D. O'Donnell is the Director of Theatrical Production and an instructor for the Theatre, Dance, and Performance Studies at the New College of Florida. He has been hard at work teaching classes in arts management, technical theatre, and musical theatre. This spring, he's excited to be directing and costume designing a production of *Spring Awakening* at the college.

Nathan Oesterle began working at Northern Oklahoma College after theatre was removed from his previous institution. He now has full classes and engaged students, along with appreciation from fellow faculty. This fall he opened *Misery* for a local playhouse where he works as a lighting and technical director. He's also been busy working as the technical director for the university's production of *Pride & Prejudice* at the Kinzer Performing Arts Center in Tonkawa. After a slow summer, this represents a significant swing in the right direction.

Andrew Okerson is the Technical Director at Carmel High School in Carmel, Indiana. The Carmel High School Theatre Department recently performed Noel Coward's *Blithe Spirit* at the Indy Fringe Festival and just closed a well-received produc-

tion of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, both with scenic design by Okerson. The Carmel Performing Arts Department produced the Holiday Spectacular, a holiday concert that features a 60-piece orchestra, and nearly 500 student performers. Okerson designed the sound and staging for this show as well. Outside of Carmel, he provides freelance design and consulting services around central Indiana as well as scenic design and construction for events and local organizations. The rest of the Carmel theatre season includes a student-devised piece called *Brain Storm* and *Big Fish*, the musical.

Gina Priano-Keyser is working in three design areas for two shows. She's been busy production managing *Peter and the Starcatcher* at Chatham High School and designing lights and costumes for *Beetlejuice, Jr.* at Chatham Middle School, both located in Chatham, New Jersey. This year marks her 27th year teaching theatre in the district.

Kassidy Phelps is a second-semester MFA student studying Theatre Pedagogy. For her fall MFA Off-Campus Studio project, she led educational outreach initiatives, like performances for school groups, at Lindsey Wilson College. Phelps performed in

Alice in Wonderland and has created study guide materials for both *Alice in Wonderland* and *Othello*. These resources aim to supplement classroom learning, reaching over 2,000 students for *Alice in Wonderland* and more than 600 for *Othello*.

Alease Timbers is currently a theatre arts teacher in North Carolina. She and her students competed in the North Carolina Theatre Conference in November 2024. Timbers also freelances and recently directed *It's a Wonderful Life* for Artists Village in Hope Mills, North Carolina. She is also piloting a Theatre for Young Audiences (TYA) piece called *The Sound That Jazz Makes*, which will premiere at Fayetteville State University.

Christopher Zinger is Scenic Designer and Technical Director for the Hillsdale College Department of Theatre and Dance. He just completed Lauren Gunderson's *Silent Sky* and Sophocles' *Ajax* in his first semester at Hillsdale College. He is looking forward to designing and building Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in the spring. As the manager of the scene shop, he looks forward to further challenging his employees in their understanding of theatre.

FACULTY UPDATES

Michael Brandt (Clinical Associate Professor & Technical Director) was Scenic Designer and Technical Director for Idaho Repertory Theatre's productions of *Master Harold and the Boys* and *Love and Baseball*. For Coeur d'Alene Summer Theatre, he designed and built puppets for *Little Shop of Horrors*.

Robert Caisley's (Professor & Department Chair) *Snow Fever* (originally commissioned and produced by B Street Theatre in Sacramento, CA) is currently enjoying a National New Play Network Rolling World premiere, running at Oregon Contemporary Theatre and Phoenix Theatre in Indianapolis. *Happy* recently closed after a two month run at El Teatro Piccolini in Buenos Aires, Argentina. Caisley recently workshopped his new comedy *Big Baby* at B Street Theatre, and *Front* will open in February at the Finborough Theatre in Suffolk, England.

Sarah Alice Campbell (Assistant Professor of Theatre History, Literature, and Criticism) celebrated pride month by marrying her partner, Porter Fogarty-Morrison (Sarah's last name is also officially Fogarty-Morrison, but she's keeping Campbell for UI-related activities!). In July, they bought their first house in Colfax. She taught two sections of the course Foundations of the American Theatre, continued training with the Aerial Arts Club and Gem State Flyers aerial performance troupe. Last April, she performed as part of the Gem State Flyers aerial showcase and her chapter, "Resisting 'Bad Scripts' in Atabal Creación Artística's *Yo no quiero ser Desdémona*," was published in *Bodies on the Front Lines: Performance, Sexuality, and Gender in Latin America and the Caribbean*, edited by Brenda Werth and Katie Zien. She is working on her monograph on Maya cultural

production in the Yucatán Peninsula of Mexico.

Campbell and project co-director Devin Becker from the University of Idaho Library's Center for Digital Inquiry and Learning (CDIL) were recently awarded a National Endowment for the Humanities Digital Humanities Advancement Grant to develop their web tool, Digital Dramaturgy. Digital Dramaturgy project personnel also includes Kate Powers and Aileen Zeigler. Digital Dramaturgy is an open-source software designed for scholars and students to analyze and annotate dramatic texts. For more information on their project, visit: <https://cdil.lib.uidaho.edu/projects/dramaturgy.html>.

Abigail Mansfield Coleman (Clinical Assistant Professor & Costume Designer) spent her summer surrounded by costumes! She worked at the University of Iowa's costume shop helping them purge and organize their costume storage space. The 1960s and 1970s were her favorite sec-

tions to go through, but her favorite task was color coding and sizing the scarves. Very satisfying! She moved to Pullman with her husband, Kyle, at the end of July and has been working on settling in and exploring the surrounding area, and putting holes all over her new apartment walls to hang her collection of wall art.

Jesse Dreikosen (Professor of Scenic Design, Associate Chair, & Director of Graduate Studies) spent his summer teaching and enjoying time in Florida. He is currently serving as scenic designer for Virterbo University's production of *The SpongeBob Musical* which opens in April.

While **Jess Hirsh** (Assistant Professor of Musical Theatre) spent a large portion of her summer getting ready to move to the Palouse, that didn't stop her from travelling the country! She visited relatives in Ohio and went to Disneyland with a fantastic group of friends. She also had the pleasure of supporting her former student at the

Sarah Campbell performs a lyra routine during the Aerial Arts Showcase, Vandals Take Flight, in April 2024. Lighting Design by Michael Brandt. Photo by Cameron Nielsen.



KENNEDY CENTER AMERICAN COLLEGE THEATRE FESTIVAL

Region 7 Award Winners, Spokane, WA, February 2024

Advocacy and Innovation Award
Inaugural Thornton Wilder Award for Theatrical Innovation
Inaugural Jay Duckworth Proptologist Meritorious Achievement
Student Choice Award
1st Place for Excellence in Scenic Design, Region 7
Lighting Hang and Focus, Tech Olympics
George R. Caldwell Graduate Scholarly Paper Award

Stephanie Lutz
Stephanie Lutz*
Daisy Erskine, *Amelie*
Daisy Erskine, *Amelie*
Lou Perrotta, *Measure for Measure*
Raven Bouvier
James Martin, "Authorship of *Arden of Faversham*: A Historiography."

* for more information on the awards won by Stephanie Lutz, visit: <https://www.uidaho.edu/news/feature-stories/stephanie-lutz>



Associate Professor Michael Brandt sits with the puppets he designed and built for the Coeur d'Alene Summer Theatre Production of *Little Shop of Horrors*.

Jimmy Awards in New York City and cheering her on as she was awarded Best Ensemble Performer.

Craig A. Miller (Associate Professor & Head of Directing) successfully received tenure and promotion to Associate Professor in spring of 2024 and continues to serve as the head of the MFA directing program at the University of Idaho. Miller continues his work with the Office of the Dean of Students, presenting Duncan MacMillan's play, *Every Brilliant Thing*, every fall as part of Suicide Awareness Week.

For the UI Theatre Arts Department, Professor Miller directed the musicals *Amelie* in fall 2023 and

The Addams Family in the fall of 2024.

In the spring of 2024, Miller was hired to guest direct Friedrich Dürrenmatt's *The Visit* for the University of South Carolina Department of Theatre and Dance, which was a nostalgic experience as it marked the 20-year anniversary of receiving his MFA in Directing at U of SC. While there, he developed and presented a movement styles intensive entitled, *Gestus: Movement & Gesture of the Epic Theatre*; a Brechtian acting style which was incorporated into the production.

Kate Powers (Instructor of Theatre Pedagogy and Directing) directed

a production of *A Winter's Tale* at Shakespeare in Delaware Park and continues working with incarcerated men at Collins Correctional Facility in New York.

Kelly Quinnett (Professor & Head of Performance) spent the summer touring with Idaho Repertory Theatre's production of *What the Constitution Means to Me* by Heidi Schreck in Chicago, IL (Center on Halstead) and in Huntsville, AL (Renegade Theatre).

In her free time, Quinnett serves as an end-of-life doula for patients at Gritman Medical in Moscow. She reflects:

"Being an end of life Doula has transformed my life in the most profound way. I was always on a quest for the most meaningful experiences to weave a life of awe, beauty, and appreciation. Supporting someone who has a terminal diagnosis and helping them through it as well as their family and friends has certainly graced me with those experiences. There is such a stigma around death; being with death, holding that space for others, is such a beautiful way to honor this life!"

Ginger K. Sorensen (Clinical Associate Professor & Costume Director) returned to Idaho Shakespeare Festival for the 10th summer season there as Cutter/Draper for their production of *Into the Woods*.

AWARD WINNER

PROFESSOR QUINNETT NAMED
ATHENA WOMAN OF THE YEAR

Professor Kelly Quinnett was honored last spring by the Athena organization on University of Idaho's Moscow campus. "Athena is a University of Idaho association of staff and faculty committed to promoting an inclusive and equitable climate for women." Athena awards two Women of the Year awards each year, one for faculty and one for staff. According to the press release, Quinnett was honored as "a tireless advocate for women and diversity on campus in her service to the institution, and her creative work also fosters meaningful conversations about women's rights and feminism." For more information, visit: <https://www.uidaho.edu/human-resources/athena>.



Professor Kelly Quinnett
Photo by Chian-ann Lu

© Chian-a

Abigail Mansfield Coleman

Abigail Mansfield Coleman has a passionate vision for the costume department and is a force to move things forward both on campus and for distance learners. “One of my main goals is body positivity and positive body language, especially in academia, and how to give student designers the vocabulary to talk to actors.”

She appreciates that students at UI learn about all areas of design so they are not pigeon-holed into a specific area. Because of this well-rounded education, her costume design students can talk color theory with a lighting designer, for example.

Coleman is also dedicated to collaboration with fellow faculty to give students more design opportunities. This fall, she teamed up with Craig Miller and his directing class and arranged for her students to design costumes for the directing students’ final projects.

She notes, “the most vital part of my costume education was having people trust me enough - like throw me in- PUT ME IN COACH!-I want to give students that opportunity. I want them to build a portfolio here.”

–Written by Miller James, MFA Student



Jess Hirsh



In describing how she found herself at UI, Jess Hirsh shared, “my campus interview was when I really knew I needed to be here. I loved that the students were sponges who craved feedback, and I was excited about the fact that everyone I met on faculty was cool. That’s, unfortunately, very rare in a theatre department.” Further, she described what she loves about the curriculum offered by UI, “the focus on holistic training for theatre artists is something about our curriculum that I really love...” as well as offering so many “well-rounded opportunities.”

Additionally, Hirsh shared her belief “that young women need to have more examples in their education of women in leadership roles -and that is extremely important to me. I also love working with students who truly want to do theatre for their job. They have a level of curiosity that is unmatched.” It proves a difficult task to evaluate student progress in theatre at times to align with academia, but Hirsh shares that her method in doing so is, “to evaluate students based on the goals that they set for themselves at the beginning of the semester.”

When asked what she would like to implement in her new position, she shared “a focus on developing new works, where there is no existing material, [that] will give students the opportunity to see what it feels like to really create without those tools at their disposal.”

–Written by Kassidy Phelps, MFA Student

Lindsey Hardy



Costume Shop Assistant, Lindsey Hardy (she/they), joins us through what they describe as a “perfect confluence of events” that allowed her and her spouse to make the move to Moscow and immediately leap into action when the job was offered to her. Lindsey notes that she “always had a love for theatre and has engaged in costuming as a hobby for years, so this position could not have been more suited for my interests.” Lindsey is considering pursuing a master’s degree in the field so she can be a more effective mentor, and maybe one day, an instructor.

Lindsey aids the costume shop director, Ginger Sorensen, in giving direction and problem solving. She also helps manage and create costumes for the productions and various projects of the costume department. You might find Lindsey helping assist with taking measurements, pattern drafting, creating mock-ups and pulling costumes from storage. Lindsey says that “the best part is being able to see our work on the stage in the productions we make them for. Seeing everyone’s efforts come together in one cohesive show is a feeling unlike any other.”

–Written by Kelsey Koga, MFA Student

Alisa Volz is the new Communications Specialist for the University of Idaho’s Theatre Department. She attended Washington State University where she received her BA in Communications, with an emphasis in Multimedia Journalism and later found her way here to UI. When talking about what inspired her to pursue a career in communications, she explained, “I have always loved to write, and Communications was a way to express this interest and develop my journalistic writing skills. Additionally, I found a love for graphic design and social media management, so Communications became a natural fit for me. I love getting to work with theatre folks every day and helping to enhance the performing arts in the area. It is so rewarding to see my marketing ideas come to life and make a real difference. I have a blast every day!”

Coming into this new position, she mentioned how the faculty were “super helpful” especially with her new social media project. She said, “Other faculty members have been super helpful as well about sending me pictures and telling me the context to post it on our social media. It feels like such a close knit, nice team of people, which has been super awesome.”

–Written by Gillian Rispoli, MFA Student

Alisa Volz



LEE-PAINTER



By Ariana Burns

Congratulations to David Lee-Painter (aka, “Papa Wolf” and “DLP”) on his well-deserved retirement and his new status as professor emeritus! Almost thirty years after coming to the UI and 52 directed shows later, his final directing project was *What the Constitution Means to Me*. After the opening night, alumnus Daniel Haley led an honoring for DLP and his impending retirement with the audience.

Constitution was invited to the Region 7 Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival as a showcase piece and has been performing across the country including Chicago, IL and Huntsville, AL. It features cast members Kelly Quinnett and UI alumnus and Rex Rabold Fellow, Jeff Davis. It’s safe to say that this production has legs!

I could mention the Gold Medallion and other awards he has received but Sarah suggested I keep this short.

His dedication to his students, the arts, and all things human are well known. As is his ability to reach others where they are and share his heart. How he could make a few suggestions on a solid scene and allow the actors to find the way to take it to the next level.

He and Nancy (aka, “Achali”) are still in town and busily spoiling their grandkids.

He will, of course, be missed on campus but he has laid the groundwork for the next cohort of teaching faculty to guide the department to new heights. Happy retirement, DLP. Thank you for every fine mess you got me into — and those yet to come!

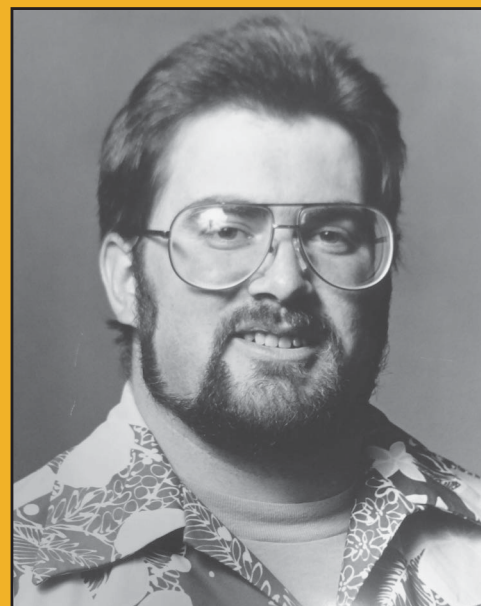
By Laura Carbonneau, MFA Student

After four decades as part of the theatre program and administration, Dean Panttaja is retiring from the University of Idaho. Panttaja came to UI in 1984 after spending time as a technical director who had a passion for teaching. He has served as a faculty member and department chair, and then, after receiving his PhD from UI in 1992, served in a variety of administrative roles including the Director of General Education & Assessment and Vice Provost of Academic Initiatives. Panttaja’s career with UI has been one of leadership and creativity.

When asked about his proudest achievements at UI, he uplifted his students and colleagues. He noted the pride in his students who were finalists in the Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival for lighting design. He reflected on the many shows where he collaborated with students and colleagues, sharing that what he enjoyed most was that no matter what their background and skill level, everyone’s skill level was challenged. “Everyone supported each other,” said Panttaja. “And that’s what makes for a really great experience; hard work but a positive outcome.”

Panttaja’s achievements at UI extend far beyond his artistic endeavors as a scenic and lighting designer. His administrative contributions have left an indelible impact on UI—from implementing the Common Read to building community and recogni-

DEAN



PANTTAJA

tion among the general education program to pushing UI to meet the 7-year accreditation standards—his vision was to always leave the school better than when he found it.

Panttaja wants to be remembered, like former colleagues Forrest Sears and Jean Collete, as someone who contributed to the growth of the theatre department. “That I helped the arts become recognized at UI,” said Panttaja, “and ‘did my job to the best of abilities.’” Ginger Sorensen, Costume Director, can vouch that he did just that. Ginger, who was hired by Panttaja while he was in his role as Department Chair, looks at him as the “founding father of tech” at UI. When he first started at the University, he was only one of two design professors—teaching scenic and lighting design to costume design, and everything in between.

To this day, Panttaja stays connected with former students to see where their professional journeys have taken them. “As a mentor,” he said, “it is always fun to see that learning mattered to them and to see them pursue their craft.”

“As a BFA student under Dean’s care I was at first wildly intimidated by his seemingly gruff exterior,” says Sara Menssen (BFA’07), “but I grew to love the wisdom and sarcasm with which I was mentored. I learned so much from Dean, and I know I am a better designer, theatre maker, and educator because I had the privilege of learning from Dean.”

After retirement Panttaja plans to work on his travel bucket list, first starting with a cruise from Rome to Barcelona and hopes to visit many old temples across the globe. We are so grateful to him for his dedication and service to UI and wish him the best and safe travels in his next chapter.

And his final piece of advice to UI theatre students? “Keep expanding, keep expanding your knowledge, and keep growing your opportunities, don’t be afraid to take a risk.”



KELLY

O'NEILL

By Robert Caisley, Department Chair

After a decade of service to the Department of Theatre, we want to take a moment to reflect on the profound impact Kelly O’Neill had on our program. Her unwavering dedication, unmatched work ethic, and exceptional ability to juggle multiple roles and a very heavy workload, made Kelly an outstanding part of our administrative team.

When O’Neill first joined us a decade ago as the Communication Specialist in the Department of Theatre, she quickly became the backbone of our communications efforts. From crafting compelling feature stories about our productions and faculty/student successes to overseeing the design and distribution of promotional materials, she handled it all with remarkable aplomb. She managed our weekly eNewsletter, kept our web content up-to-date, and maintained many of the critical systems that kept the front office running smoothly.

When O’Neill’s role expanded in Fall 2020 to include the responsibilities of the Lionel Hampton School of Music (LHSOM), the demands only increased. She eagerly took on the responsibility of managing LHSOM’s public events, coordinating concert programs, handling hundreds

of student recitals, and maintaining complex schedules for both schools—often under the pressure of ever-shifting circumstances. And she did all of this with a calm demeanor, a warm smile, and an energy that never seemed to falter, even amidst the chaos of the COVID-19 pandemic and the transition back to in-person work.

It’s hard to express in words the depth of gratitude we feel. O’Neill managed two full-time positions, shifting between two departments, two different workspaces, two faculties and two distinct sets of needs. Through it all, she not only survived but thrived—with grace and competence.

Kelly O’Neill truly made an impact that will be felt for years to come. Her contributions have been indispensable to both departments, and we are grateful for everything she’s done. As she enters this new chapter of retired life, she leaves behind a legacy of professionalism, kindness, and dedication that will be remembered by all of us who have had the privilege of working with her.

We wish her all the best in her well-deserved retirement. Congratulations!

ONSTAGE

UI Theatre Arts 2024-2025 Season

Section Editors: Blake Watson (Layout), Alexa Aquino, Sarah Chambers, Alissa Doyle, Jason Francey, Lisa Gonsalves, and Jim Hy.

The Art of Choreography in *The Addams Family*

By Sarah S. Chambers, MFA Student

As the stage lights dim and the ominous strains of the iconic theme music fill the air, audiences at the University of Idaho were whisked away into the whimsical world of *The Addams Family*. This beloved musical not only captured the hearts of many but has also provided a unique platform for Theatre Arts Department students to showcase their talents. At the heart

of this captivating production is the choreographer Jess Hirsh who was instrumental in bringing the characters and story to life through movement.

Hirsh began dancing long before she entered the world of musical theatre. She went on to earn her BFA in Musical Theatre from Youngstown State University in Ohio and continued on to earn her

MFA in Acting at University of North Carolina, Greensboro. She serves as an Assistant Professor in Musical Theatre at UI.

As choreographer, Hirsh has taken on the challenge of creating dynamic and engaging dance numbers that complement the show's dark humor and quirky characters. One thing that makes *The Addams Family* a great show to choreograph

is, "every single [dance] number parodies another number in musical theatre, or a very famous style." Hirsh describes *The Addams Family* as a "ransom note" (as opposed to the more familiar "love letter") to the canon of musical theatre—there are numbers that are reminiscent of *Rent*, *Hello, Dolly!*, *Sweet Charity*, and many other classics.

The choreography must not only entertain but also enhance the narrative. Balancing these elements requires creativity and collaboration. Hirsh spent hours working closely with the cast, ensuring that

each dance sequence captured the essence of the characters while remaining true to the story.

"Dance is often seen as this thing that happens in between the singing and the speaking, but the challenge is making sure the dance serves the story telling... and to not have movement that is arbitrary."

For Hirsh, being part of *The Addams Family* at the University of Idaho has been an invaluable experience. The collaborative effort and ded-

ication demonstrated by the cast and crew speak volumes about the community spirit within the department. "I was shocked at how quickly I was able to teach this cast," Hirsh recalls.

With Hirsh's choreographic vision, Craig Miller's direction, and the cast's talent, audiences witnessed a production that left them laughing, clapping, and marveling at the extraordinary world of *The Addams Family*—a true testament to the power of teamwork and imagination in the realm of performing arts.



Lauren Grove's Love, Liz

By Lisa Gonsalves, MFA Student

Love, Liz, a play written by University of Idaho alumna Lauren Grove, came to life on the Fagerbakke stage at the Hartung Theatre in January of this year. I had an opportunity to sit down with Grove, a self-proclaimed "giant nerd," to talk about her hopes for this production.

Grove's play is a smart and witty take on Queen Elizabeth's early reign. The audience is invited to see Queen Elizabeth I as "Liz," a real person who struggles with the balance between what she wants and what is expected of her. Liz, like many of us, doesn't get to have her cake and eat it too.

Grove's play is not just a reinvention of the dusty past. She includes casting notes in the script that welcomes casting of women who don't fit the stereotype of Queen Elizabeth I and her ladies of the privy chamber. She further emphasizes the relatability of these characters by bringing together the Tudor setting with an early 1990s sleepover, where we meet Liz's many suitors. In true sleepover fashion, boy talk mixes with sharing of hopes and dreams as Liz's friends help her to make a difficult decision of who (or whether) to marry.

Grove remarks that "this story is not a tragic one, but rather an uplifting story about how women can make their own choices."

This was Grove's first experience participating in a production as just a playwright. As a theatre educator, she usually wears the hat of at least the director as well. She teaches at Lower Dauphin High School and she serves as co-director of the school's Thespian Society. To follow Grove's work as a playwright, visit her profile on New Play Exchange: <https://newplayexchange.org/users/73703/lauren-grove>.



Lauren Grove

On Slumber Parties and Royal Proposals



The cast of *The Addams Family* at the University of Idaho.

The Addams Family was directed by Craig A. Miller as the 2024-2025 season opener.

Photo by Cameron Nielsen.

Blake Watson Directs a Play for the Moment

By Alissa Doyle, MFA Student

“There are a lot of ways in which I think I’m not the right person to direct this,” he said, after referencing Charlie XCX, Sabrina Carpenter, and Chappell Roan as his musical inspiration for his current director gig. Blake Watson, a second-year MFA student and the director assigned to this season’s production of *Love Liz*, leads with humility and self-awareness.

Love, Liz, written by Lauren Grove, is a play that follows Queen Elizabeth I and her internal struggle to decide whether to marry or not. It moves from the 1500s to a 1990s sleepover and is all at once timeless and of the moment.

As Watson pumps his ears full of the musical moment we are in, he recognizes that as a director of a women-led story, it’s his job to lift up the voices around him. “I want people to be excited to come into the rehearsal room every day. Ultimately, the product is fun and important, but especially in an educational environment the process is so much more important. We have

to make it something that they want to do.”

Watson says that *Love, Liz* is “... mostly a play about women getting together and having a slumber party and having a great time. Yet I think it’s inevitable that people will think about the choices that women have or don’t have.”

As we are in a moment when everyone is asking what kind of choices women will have going forward, Watson recognizes that the post-election vibe around this production could vary wildly. But no matter if we watch *Love, Liz* with joy or grief, it is good to know that this show was guided by the steady eye of someone who recognizes his own perspective as only a small piece of a greater whole and who treasures the contributions of women. In this shaky time in the history of women’s agency, it’s nice to know there are Blake Watsons in the world.

Love, Liz opened on January 30th and ran through February 9th, 2025.



Blake Watson, director of *Love, Liz*.

“I want people to be excited to come into the rehearsal room every day. Ultimately, the product is fun and important, but especially in an educational environment the process is so much more important. We have to make it something that they want to do.”

Pinocchio Hits the Stage This Spring

By Jim Hy, MFA Student

Jeremiah Price will direct the upcoming production *Pinocchio* by Greg Banks with music by Victor Zupanc, based on the story by Carlo Collodi. Price is an MFA Directing student in the Theatre Arts Department. Before coming to UI, he worked as a Public Speaking Tutor at Western Oregon University and an Adjunct Director at Corban Theatre in Salem, Oregon.

When asked about his directing philosophy, Price spoke passionately on the work of interpreting a script to honor the playwright’s intention while still providing the audience with a fresh, original con-

cept. While discussing a recent production of *Jekyll & Hyde* he directed, he emphasized ensuring “a clear throughline of the playwright’s intentions; [rather than] creating something that’s tricky or a concept that’s going to draw attention to itself. . . .”

Regarding *Pinocchio*, Price looks forward to collaborating on the department’s mission to create an educational and family-friendly theatre experience. For Price, the heart of the story is “a father’s love for his son.” Within the play’s fun and spectacle, there is an overarching theme of family, reunited through

a wild journey of self-exploration. He theorizes, “we are living in a time where friends and family can be separated or turn their backs on one another and don’t have that continued desire to be together.” A story about a family coming together could be very impactful for an audience member aching for familial reconnection.

Price assures the audience can expect a unique re-telling of a classic story with the same excellent quality that the UI Theatre brings to the stage. Performances run April 24 through May 4, 2025 in the Hartung Theatre.

The First Bite New Play Series

... goes for a second bite!

By Kellie Stonebrook, MFA’24

Dr. Sarah Campbell’s fall Institutional Dramaturgy class began work on a proposal to expand the current First Bite series, the development opportunity given to each MFA playwriting student culminating in a staged reading of an original play over Zoom.

First Bite is a great opportunity for playwrights and audiences alike: hearing the play read aloud is incredibly clarifying and anyone with an internet connection can log on and participate.

The downside of a Zoom reading is that actors and playwrights have no direct access to the audience, which means they can’t see, hear, or feel how an audience is responding to the work. This can make it chal-

lenging to determine where revisions are needed, particularly with comedies.

Our goal with expanding the current First Bite series is twofold. The first goal is to help mitigate the problem of audience connection in service of the playwright’s work. The second goal is to increase theatre-making opportunities and collaboration within U of I’s global community.

With the help of current students and alumni of the Department of Theatre Arts, the hope is to give each MFA playwright not just one, but two development opportunities. The first opportunity will be the traditional First Bite reading over Zoom with a talk-back hosted

by the assigned dramaturg. After a revision process, the second opportunity, or Second Bite, will be a staged reading of the same play in a live theatrical setting so the playwright can see, hear, and feel the play with a live audience. Campbell’s future Institutional Dramaturgy classes will work with Caisley directly in choosing the plays, casting them, pairing playwrights with a dramaturg, and reaching out to current students and alumni who may be interested in participating in a Second Bite.

Are you a theatremaker interested in taking part in the Second Bite initiative? Reach out to Rob Caisley and/or Sarah Campbell for more information.

ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT Princess Kannah, BFA’22



Princess Kannah, BFA’22, in “The Test; or the Modern Horror of Self-Identification.” Kannah co-created the play during her residency at the Portland Art Museum in spring 2024

After completing my BFA in 2022, I had the honor of directing *Every Brilliant Thing* for the relaunch of the Idaho Repertory Theatre. Following that, I earned my Master’s degree from the University of California, Santa Cruz (Go Banana Slugs!). After graduation, I stage-managed *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* with Cabrillo Stage in Aptos, California. I then served as the spring 2024 Artist in Residence at the Portland Art Museum.

During my residency, I debuted an original play that I co-wrote with my dear friend Carl Erez, titled “The Test; or the Modern Horror of Self-Identification.” This multi-disciplinary project explores a connected series of issues, including the role of the U.S. Citizenship test, biases in its implementation, and the implications of data collection and surveillance related to these systems. Our work culminated in a theatrical script that not only examines these questions but also invites

the audience to engage by taking the test themselves, concluding with a forum to discuss what the test might look like instead.

After premiering “The Test” in Portland, I had the opportunity to tour and perform it at the Playground-SF Free Play Festival and at 2727 in San Francisco. I then joined the ensemble for *Sweeney Todd* at Portland Center Stage, a prominent regional theater in the Pacific Northwest.

Looking ahead, the future of theatre is bright, with exciting productions on the horizon, including *Rocky Horror*. As I reflect on my journey, I am grateful for the invaluable tools I gained at the University of Idaho, which have been instrumental in my growth. Above all, I treasure the friendships I formed during my time at U of I; they have become lifelong companions who continue to inspire me every day.

–Princess Kannah



GOING THE DISTANCE

A LOOK BACK ON THE FIRST 15 YEARS OF THE DISTANCE-BASED
MFA THEATRE ARTS PROGRAM AT THE UNIVERSITY OF IDAHO



15 YEARS OF INNOVATION IN GRADUATE THEATRE EDUCATION

Since 2009, the distance-delivered MFA in Theatre Arts at the University of Idaho has challenged the confines of traditional, on-campus MFA programs and created a network of theatre artists across the globe. Fifteen years in, the program is stronger than ever and is celebrating the milestone of a decade and a half of delivering quality education in an accessible, flexible format.

In early 2019, I saw an advertisement for a three-year position in the Theatre Department at the University of Idaho. The position would help to develop the distance-delivered curriculum within the MFA program. I was a bit confused as to how exactly this program could work given my understanding of how most MFA programs in theatre are structured.

I was skeptical but, as I was feeling the need to transition to a different environment where I could teach courses that more directly aligned with my specialty, I applied. After the first phone interview, I was hooked. My confusion around how it was possible transformed into disbelief: “Why hadn’t anyone else thought of this yet?!”

The program has grown substantially since 2009 relying almost entirely on word-of-mouth advertising from alumni.

Our story begins with the seed of the program, an unorthodox idea imagined by Professor and current Theatre Arts Department Chair, Robert Caisley.

Caisley had been traveling to recruit playwrights for the on campus MFA program but found that it was increasingly difficult to attract playwrights to the Palouse region due to its lack of professional theatre companies. In one conversation, a potential recruit mentioned she had a family and was unable to relocate to attend school in Moscow. Caisley offered the unconventional idea of attending classes via a conference call system rather than attending in person.

Perhaps to everyone’s surprise this idea worked. Beyond the impact on the individual students who could receive their MFA without being present on campus, the program has enriched the lives of countless theatre artists, edu-

cators, and the students, faculty, and staff of the UI Theatre Arts Department.

To get a better sense of the program in its early days I knew I had to start at the beginning, with the first distance student Lojo Simon. I sat down to chat with Simon via Zoom during the first week of classes in the fall 2024 semester. I had heard many stories about this trailblazing student but hadn’t yet had the opportunity to meet her – virtually or otherwise. I was excited to hear about her experience in her own words.

Simon is grateful for the opportunities provided by the program, which allowed her to pursue a career change and explore her passion for playwriting. Prior to writing for the theatre, Simon had a successful career as a journalist, contributing to a wide array of publications as a writer and editor.

Simon recounted that the early days of the program were chal-

lenging logistically but faculty were inspired to find a way to bring coursework to students who couldn’t otherwise leave their job, community, or family to attend graduate school. As the first official distance student, Simon participated in classes via a conference call system, which, with audio only, didn’t offer the most efficient way to listen and participate in class sessions. She recalls that it required some extra check-in time with Caisley, her major professor, to ensure that she was on the same page with what was happening in the classroom in Moscow.

Today, students in the program benefit from an accessible video conference platform, file sharing services, and a robust learning management system that makes the experience of a distance degree significantly more engaging.

Innovation and imagination were hallmarks of the program from the beginning. When Simon needed to take coursework that was unavailable for distance students at the University of Idaho, she worked with faculty at San Diego State University to attend classes closer to home. She then transferred that coursework to her degree program at UI.

Transferring credits continues to be a strategy for many MFA distance students who come into the program with previous graduate coursework. The Department now offers an MA to MFA conversion, where students can automatically transfer up to 20 credits from a MA in Theatre toward their MFA.

With lower numbers in the first years of its existence, students had unique opportunities to spend longer stretches of time on campus in Moscow, as Simon did in her final year of the program. She came to campus for the fall 2011 semester for the production of her new



Distance students often come to Moscow to celebrate their graduation, see the campus for the first time, and visit with their cohort and faculty and staff. From left to right: Beth Glover, May Cardoso, Sarah Campbell, Bryan Stanton, and Lauren Ray at the spring 2024 graduation in Moscow.

play *Adoration of Dora*, directed by Caisley. She liked Moscow so much, she reflects, that she opted to stay another semester.

As the program has grown larger, the ability to invite students to stay for an entire semester in Moscow has become more difficult, but that hasn’t stopped some students from taking part in our production season. In spring 2022, Chris Thorn (MFA’22), played the Duke in a production of *Measure for Measure* at the Hartung Theatre directed and adapted by Kate Powers (MFA’21) alumna and current faculty in Theatre Arts.

Finishing the story of the first 15 years of the MFA distance program requires the help of our students and alumni. The rest of this article travels through time, featuring the stories of three alumni written by current students. I now turn the story over to them.

–Sarah Campbell,
Assistant Professor

Section Editors & Contributors:
Clint Saunders (Layout), LaCretia Gelly, Jaese Lecuyer, Carole Ann Miller, Asal Moravi, and Tim O’Donnell.



CERNE

JUSTIN

Interview and Story by Tim O'Donnell, MFA Student

In his 12th year as Artistic Director at the Theatre Workshop of Nantucket, University of Idaho MFA graduate **Justin Cerne** continues to innovate in theatre, seamlessly applying his dramatic writing studies to his role. Cerne, who completed his MFA in Dramatic Writing in 2020, initially found the program while searching for a technical director. "The program found me," he recalls, noting the flexibility it offered in balancing his career and studies.

Reflecting on the challenge of balancing both, Cerne mentions, "It was tough, but my real-world experience made school feel like an extension of my career." He credits the MFA program for sharpening his perspective as an artistic director. "The program allowed me to approach theatre from a writer's viewpoint," he explains, enriching his understanding of scripts and season planning.

"The flexibility of the distance program is invaluable"



Photo by Laurie Richards @pixelperfect

For example, he's bringing a fresh approach to A. R. Gurney's *Sylvia*, viewing it from the writer's perspective to better connect with audiences.

The flexibility of the distance program allowed Cerne to maintain his career without uprooting his life, an option unavailable at more traditional programs. This support extended through in-person visits to Idaho and continued networking, which Cerne says, "is invaluable."

Cerne's professional life directly benefits from his MFA, notably in his adaptation of Elin Hilderbrand's *Winter Street* series. "Adapting it while in school was a game-changer," he says, reflecting on the production's success as a sellout, with plans to stage it again.

To those considering the program, he advises, "Make sure this is among your top priorities for the next few years." As Cerne divides his time between Nantucket and New York, he's excited about applying his refined skills and bringing fresh stories to life.

Program coordinator and middle school drama teacher at Eastside Preparatory School in Kirkland, Washington, **Lisa Frystak**, joined the Distance MFA program in 2020, shortly before the pandemic. The program provided a dynamic virtual space to engage in dialogue with theatre practitioners on the future of theatre. These exchanges became a highlight of her graduate experience, offering opportunities for collaboration and growth. The conversations and connections within her cohort were perhaps the most impactful part of her graduate journey.

Frystak's decision to apply was influenced by an "immediate connection" with faculty member Dr. Sarah Campbell, whose *Queer Theatre* class inspired her to create a seminar on queer culture for her students—a timely and impactful addition to her school's curriculum. She graduated in fall 2022, focusing her studies on Theatre Pedagogy. Frystak found the program not only enhanced her confidence as an educator but also allowed her to integrate school productions as academic credits. This process required her to articulate the value of her work, helping her develop a deeper understanding of her goals as an educator and validate her contributions.

Additionally, Frystak obtained an academic certificate in Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and Culturally Responsive Pedagogy (CRP), which have influenced her teaching by making her more intentional in recognizing and addressing bias. These tools encourage her to ask whose voices are being uplifted in her work and why, guiding her in creating an inclusive and thoughtful educational environment.

LISA



FRYSTAK

Interview and Story by Jaese Lecuyer and Asal Morvari, MFA Students

Advocating for the benefits of the distance MFA program, Frystak emphasizes the flexibility it provided, enabling her to work while studying and to apply her teaching experience directly to her graduate work. She values the program's support and also acknowledges the need for educational institutions to continually address systemic oppression. Frystak is committed to fostering a learning space where her students engage in empathetic dialogue, active listening, and constructive disagreement, underscoring her dedication to a responsive and inclusive approach to theatre education.

At right, above, Frystak works with students in her classroom at Eastside Preparatory School in Seattle.

At right, below, Frystak poses with fellow cohort member, Jeffery Miller III, at graduation in Moscow, Idaho in fall 2022.



Christopher Vergara is a queer Latino freelance costume designer, educator, and social activist. His design work spans theatre, musicals, opera, dance, and live events and is rooted in culturally responsive design, storytelling, education, and social justice. The son of immigrant parents, he was born and raised in New York City, where he is currently based.

Vergara's career began in Panama with his paternal grandmother, María Teresa Pacheco Rodríguez. Her grandchildren called her Nana. She wanted to be a nurse, but her parents told her that nurses were spinsters and that she needed to learn a trade she could use at home, so she studied to become a seamstress. He grew up learning to sew by peering over Nana's shoulder as she worked on an old but mighty Singer. His sewing lessons were a covert operation between him and his Nana because this type of "feminine" work was highly discouraged for boys.

Two weeks into his classical vocal studies at Valparaiso University, he found his way to the costume shop in the Center for the Arts basement, searching for a job.

The shop manager asked him if he could sew on an industrial machine.



He said yes, which was not entirely true. Nevertheless, he booked his first job in the costume industry.

After graduating, he completed the Professional Internship Program of the Juilliard School in costumes. Vergara was the Resident Costume Designer at the Brevard Music Festival, designing productions such as *La Traviata*, *Kiss Me Kate*, *Pirates of Penzance*, and *Madame Butterfly*. He then became the Director of Costumes for Les Ballet Trockadero de Monte Carlo, where he designed new ballets, oversaw remounts, and toured throughout the Americas, Europe, Asia, and Australia.

Vergara has guest lectured at many schools including, NYU, Princeton, and Rutgers. A friend recommended UI when he was the inaugural Designer-in-Residence and guest lecturer in the Department of Theatre and Drama at the University of Michigan.

While he already had a vast working knowledge of theatre as a professional, he wanted a broader theatre background to fill in some

gaps. He also knew the MFA would be beneficial if he decided to pursue a full time teaching position.

As a busy working professional, and a designer-in-residence, he needed an online program that could provide flexibility around his already full schedule. This was perfect timing and a perfect match to meet his educational goals while continuing to work.

Vergara offers advice to new students "if you're going to do the program, figure out a plan. Here you can tailor your program to what you need, so be clear about what you want, figure out how it fits into your life, and figure out a routine."

"My sewing lessons were a covert operation between me and my Nana"

CHRISTOPHER



VERGARA

Interview and Story by Clint Saunders, MFA Student

FROM A DISTANCE, IN DEPTH >>>

The MFA Distance Program at the University of Idaho has created the platform for incredible collaborations and connections across modalities, geographies, and cultures. With so many untold stories of these collaborations, we created the series "From a Distance, In Depth," as a way to share them. If you know of a story involving distance students and/or alumni that you would like to contribute to the recurring series in *The Jean Collette Gazette*, please contact Editor Sarah Campbell.

For students in the UI Theatre Arts Department, Kate Powers is more than just a faculty member — she is a mentor, a guide, a friend, and an advocate for justice. I have gone from having Kate Powers in the classroom during my first year of teaching at the University of Idaho to being her colleague, collaborator, and friend.

I am honored to share reflections on Kate Powers as the first installment of the "From a Distance, In Depth" series for *The Jean Collette Gazette*. I have asked MFA distance students Jaese Lecuyer and Jason Francey to share their experiences with Powers in and out of the classroom.

In 2016, Kate Powers founded the Redeeming Time Project in Minnesota after spending many years studying Shakespeare and directing for the theatre. She began her work with incarcerated populations in 2009 at Sing Sing and Fishkill prisons, both located in New York state, with Rehabilitation Through the Arts. Powers graduated from the Shakespeare Institute with an M.A. in Shakespeare and she received an M.F.A. in Theatre Arts from the University of Idaho. She has been teaching for the department since fall 2021.

—Sarah Campbell,
Assistant Professor

THE POWERS PRAXIS:

MFA STUDENTS REFLECT ON WORKING WITH KATE POWERS IN THE CLASSROOM, REHEARSAL ROOM, & PRISON

by Jaese Lecuyer and Jason Francey, with Sarah Campbell

Jaese Lecuyer, an MFA distance student based in Medford, Oregon, who will graduate in spring 2025, shares his experience of traveling to visit Powers, and watch her facilitate a session with incarcerated men in the theatre workshop she runs at Collins Prison in New York.

During a particularly challenging assignment in spring 2024, I decided to visit Powers' office hours. What began as a simple course-related question evolved into a life-changing experience. Powers mentioned, "If you're ever nearby, maybe you'd like to come to the prison and shadow one of our sessions." The invitation was both unexpected and deeply moving. I got emotional. It was a real honor.

I joined with my fellow student Alexa Scott-Flaherty in planning the June 2024 visit to Buffalo, New York, where Powers works and lives. As part of our time there we were also able to attend a production she directed, *The Winter's Tale* at Shakespeare in Delaware Park (SDP). This was the first production in the organization's 50-year history to feature a predominantly Black cast. MFA student Jason Francey reflects on his experience as an actor in that production below.

Before we arrived at the facility, Powers' careful preparation and thoughtfulness were evident – she

gave us a clear rundown of the protocol and ensured we felt comfortable and informed. Once inside, the environment shifted from an institutional setting to a shared creative zone. We were holding space, participating, and witnessing. It was incredible how quickly I felt part of the group. We didn't talk about why anyone was there, it didn't – and doesn't – matter. In that moment, we were all humans, laughing, sharing, being vulnerable and accountable to one another.

The experience reaffirmed for me the humanizing power of theatre. The space was something like a playground where trust and empathy flourished alongside a healthy dose of fun. This kind of work requires a good facilitator – someone like Powers – who leads with care, integrity, and vulnerability.

Powers' praxis is rooted in courage and a willingness to take risks. She's constantly learning but doesn't negate her lived experience, which counts for something. Unfortunately, there's no playbook for this work. You have to be okay with being uncomfortable, with making mistakes, and with asking for help. The key is showing up – figuring out how you can contribute and then doing it. Powers taught me to acknowledge my privilege and leverage it rather than be ashamed of it. It's about asking, "How do

we show up? How do we translate what we've learned into meaningful action?"

Powers' approach is a unique combination of generosity and critical engagement – a willingness to share and be vulnerable. She constantly reminds us that while the work is personal, it's not solely about us. It's about contributing to something bigger. In school, the focus can often feel self-centered, but she asks that we don't just take our degrees and repeat old forms and ways of doing things. She encourages us to tear down the form, reimagine it, and create something new.

The experience of seeing Powers facilitate the session with incarcerated men reinforced for me that theatre for social change is not something to be taken lightly – it must be an ongoing and continual engagement. It takes time to build trust and in working with the incarcerated this is even more important – as they don't always have people who show up for them or who want to engage with them beyond a surface level, if at all.

During the visit, I shared that I live in Oregon and the men were surprised that I had come all this way. I realized that once you open the door to this connection you must see it through – it is a huge responsibility but also incredibly worth-



Powers directs Spider and Robbie for a production of Tracey Letts' *Superior Donuts* at Sing Sing.

while for everyone involved. I really admire Powers for her dedication to the communities she works with.

The MFA program exposes us to the practical applications of theatre and shows us that change isn't just theoretical – it's real. It's about living the work, about being changed by it. Seeing Powers in action confirmed that theatre can be a radical tool for empathy and social change, an untapped resource for community building and healing.

For me, learning from and with Powers in class is like brewing something together. Working alongside her felt like we could finally pour a pint, cheer, and drink it down. Though the work requires much more brewing, there was something about being in the physical space together – about feeling the work in the body – that was and is transformative.



The cast of Thornton Wilder's *Our Town* at Sing Sing takes their bows.

CLASS NOTES

Do you have an update to share in our next issue?
Send an email with your update to theatre@uidaho.edu
with the subject line “Class Notes.”

Jason Francey, an MFA Theatre student, had the privilege of spending his summer working on *The Winter's Tale* with Shakespeare in Delaware Park (SDP) directed by Kate Powers. In this section, Francey shares his experience of working with Powers as director.

Shakespeare in Delaware Park was founded in 1976, making it the second oldest free outdoor Shakespeare festival in the country. Every summer people from all over come to “the hill” to see one of two Shakespeare productions the festival puts on. According to their site, Shakespeare in Delaware Park has been seen by an estimated 1.8 million audience members.

I was incredibly proud, excited, and nervous to be joining SDP's storied history. I was even more nervous to be working directly with a faculty member I truly admire as an artist and mentor. What I experienced was nothing short of one of the most profound and artistically fulfilling theatre experiences I've ever had. Many of us enrolled in the distance program in the last several years have had the joy of having Powers in the classroom, I had the absolute privilege of seeing her put the theory she teaches in the classroom to practice.

For the first rehearsal we did not do a formal read through. Instead, we spent three hours with each other in community; setting our group agreements, discussing our hopes and fears, and just having some fun playing some theatre games. What resulted from this was a tight-knit group of theatre artists that I am glad to call a part of my chosen family.

We also took the time to learn about Powers' perspective on “why this piece now?” Buffalo has had a tough couple of years from deadly snowstorms to the shooting at Tops. For Powers, *The Winter's Tale* answers the question, “what do you do after the terrible thing has hap-

pened?” with this in mind we set forth on creating the story of Buffalo in the form of William Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale*.

Powers teaches us in the classroom to be trauma-informed and anti-racist. It is truly inspiring to watch her lead from those positions. We started every rehearsal with an access check-in and we made sure we always made space for those who were having a hard time. When she tells her actors anyone can call a five [minute break] if they need to at any time, she means it. One tech rehearsal an actor got overheated and was struggling with their lines. They called for five and, without judgement or argument Powers said, “ok.” Her trauma-informed approach was infectious, even when she was not around, the cast continued to care of one another as she would have wanted us to.

Powers also encouraged us to bring our entire selves to the production. Under her leadership, SDP saw the most diverse cast in its history, with all three female leads being portrayed by women of color. To Powers, it was crucial that the show reflected the Buffalo community. The three women portraying the leads were invited to bring every aspect of themselves into their roles. They were not asked to conform to a standard presentation or to be their characters through a

white lens, but to embody their true authentic selves as their character, which is the core of what she calls on us to do as theatre artists in her classes.

As students, we often watch and listen to our professors with a certain level of healthy skepticism. Do they really practice what they preach? Or is this more of a “do as I say, not as I do” situation? With Kate Powers, I can say with 100% certainty that she is all the things she teaches us in her class. After spending a summer with her working on *The Winter's Tale*, I am reminded of how lucky we are to have faculty like her teaching us at the University of Idaho.

**

Powers' dedication to social justice and her ability to inspire others to take meaningful action are what make her a beloved figure among her students and colleagues. She doesn't just teach about change—she facilitates it, both in students and in the communities she serves. In honoring Powers, we celebrate not only her remarkable achievements but also her unwavering commitment to creating a more just and compassionate world. Thank you, Kate, for your example.

For more on Kate Powers' work, visit www.plainkate.com or read her recent publications.

Shepherd-Bates, Frannie and Kate Powers. “Mind the Gap: Working Across Lines of Difference in Carceral Shakespeare.” In *Shakespeare and Social Engagement*, edited by Rowan Mackenzie and Robert Shaughnessy. New York: Berghahn Books, 2023.

Powers, Kate. “Like Bright Metal on Sullen Ground.” In *Shakespeare in the Age of Mass Incarceration*, edited by Gina Hausknecht and Liz Fox. London: Routledge, 2025.

Section Editors: Laura Carbonneau (Layout), Shauna Fahad, Stephen Hendorf, Crystal Lovvorn, and Samantha Smith.



Grechen Lynne Wingerter

2000s

Grechen Lynne Wingerter (MFA'07) was recently promoted to full professor of theatre at Pellissippi State Community College in Knoxville, TN, where she is about to begin her 10th year of teaching.

2020s

Emma Blonda (BFA'24) is now based in Chicago where she is pursuing performance along with other avenues to keep theatre active and centered



Anna Marie Brendel

in her life (teaching, intimacy coordination, and props design). She's learning to enjoy the ride!

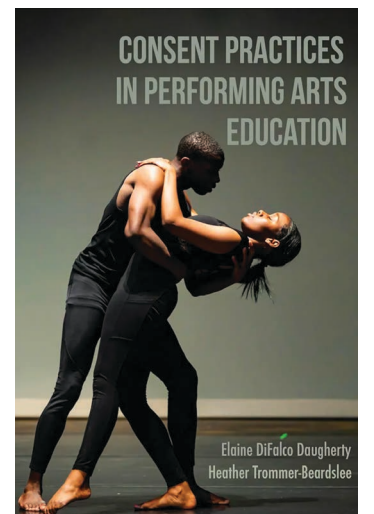
Anna Marie Brendel (MFA'23) is now as an assistant professor of theatre at Lee University in Cleveland, TN. In the spring of 2025, fellow University of Idaho alumna **Bethany Paulsen (MFA'22)** will join Professor Brendel as they present Paulsen's original play *Castlewood* on Lee University campus. Brendel and Paulsen will collaborate on this play for a second time, having first worked on it together at the University of Idaho in the spring of 2022. Brendel and Paulsen will reprise their roles on the creative team as director and playwright respectively. They are thrilled to be representing their alma mater by engaging in the academic arena and uplifting new works.

Laura Couvaut (MFA'23) will attend the American College Theatre Festival in Arizona with nine of her theatre students in February. She is directing a one-person show that opens at the end of February.

Valerie DeMeerleer (BFA'23) served as a draper and costume design assistant for two UI productions and was a stitcher at Creede Repertory Theatre in Creede, CO last summer. Valerie now resides in Colorado and plans to go back to CRT as a first hand and designer for their 2025 season. They miss their UI theatre family dearly and are excited to embark on more of the costuming scene in Denver.

Consent Practices in Performing Arts Education by **Elaine DiFalco**

Daugherty (MFA'20) and Heather Trommer-Beardslee was published by Intellect/University of Chicago Press as part of their fall 2024 book catalog. The book examines consent as a foundational principle in higher education across the performing arts disciplines and offers actionable suggestions for how to integrate consent practices into existing pedagogical structures. It includes contributions from interviews conducted with performing arts and consent educators and professionals across the country including Professor Kelly Quinnett and alumna Deborah Hertzberg (MFA, 2020).



The cover for Elaine DiFalco Daugherty's new book from Intellect/University of Chicago Press.

Since completing his MFA, a lot has changed for **Alex Drinnen (MFA'24)**. He started a new role as Education Associate at the Tennessee Theatre, where he applies nearly all he learned in his University of Idaho coursework daily. Drinnen builds curriculum for educational programs and collaborates

orates with local organizations to integrate arts education. He's also leading three new pilot programs: the Mentor Program, Student Ambassador Program, and Digital Theatre+ teaching artist initiatives, while being the main point of contact and liaison with Knox County and area teachers. Additionally, his exit project play *Beowulf: The First Avenger* had its world premiere at the Knoxville Children's Theatre. Directed by Artistic Director Dennis E. Perkins and featuring the talents of many young artists, the opportunity to work with a company dedicated to young artists' education was deeply meaningful. Using puppetry, Total Theatre techniques, and Norse language, the production was a fantastic way to cap his education at the University of Idaho.



Kara Eggers

Kara Eggers (MFA'23) is currently stationed in the Midwest with their partner, two dogs, and a cat. They find joy in family hikes, exploring state parks, and hosting backyard bonfires. They are the Technical Director and Lighting Designer for the Minnesota Conservatory for the Arts and the Resident Intimacy Director at The Rochester Rep in Minnesota. They also serve as the Season Manager for Theatre du Mississippi, Production Manager for Frozen River Film Festival, and co-chair for the Advocacy Center of Winona. With a passion for both freelance and educational theatre work, Eggers is deeply engaged with the local theatre scene, balancing fun and professionalism in the vibrant world of Midwest arts and culture.



Beth Glover

Before graduating, **Beth Glover (MFA'24)** was hired to program and run the 2024 summer stock season of The Depot Theatre in Westport, NY, the theatre's 46th season. Glover's goals for this season were: program joy (the world is too tough at present for many); hire the most talented, most diverse, inclusive casts, creatives, crew, and staff. She is happy to report that they have achieved all of their goals! Glover reflects:

"The first production, *Analog & Vinyl* by Paul Gordon, was received as the fantastic piece it is. For theatremakers, we all dream of creating work that fulfills artistic goals for ourselves, those we employ, and those we serve. When it all works (there's always a hiccup—it's theatre), it is indeed magic. It's my privilege to have this opportunity to create a space that is supportive and nurturing for everyone. Let's hope I'm still successful come September."

Lauren Grove's (MFA'23) play *Silver Belles* was published by Stage Partners. In addition, her new historical comedy, *Love, Liz*, is being produced by several schools this season, including the University of Idaho.

Lisa Henderson (MFA'23) was recently hired as new Education Professions and Leadership Pathway Teacher at Akron Public Schools in Akron, Ohio.

Ash Lord (MFA'23) jumped right back into teaching K-8 theatre and continues to perform professionally. She hopes to find more opportunities to adjunct at the college level.

Earlier this year, **Noah Lucé (MFA'22)** accepted a tenure-track position as Theatre Professor and Director of the Arts Center at Lake Superior State University in Michigan. He will continue his role as an Associate Artistic Director at New Canon Theatre Company where he is set to direct *An Illiad* and Aaron Posner's *Life Sucks* in summer 2025.

Carly McMinn (MFA'22) has been teaching at Central Piedmont Community College in Charlotte, NC for two and a half years, where she directs, serves as intimacy coordinator, and advises the Pride Alliance student group. They are Vice Chair of the Directing committee for the Southeastern Theatre Conference (SETC), will present a workshop at SETC in March 2025.

Jeffery Miller, III (MFA'22) and his wife welcomed their first son, Jeffery Miller the fourth in March 2024.



UI alum Jeffery Miller III's son, Jeffery Miller IV, was born in March 2024.

Kalyssa Montoya (BFA'22) has been living and working in Chicago for a year. She was an audio engineer at Teatro ZinZanni and then started as sound designer for Mudlark Theatre in Evanston, Illinois. She has been designing puppets for folks around the country as well.

Walker Scott (MFA'24) has just begun a new teaching position in the theatre department at Buford High School in Georgia. He will direct the acting program and two mainstage productions. Walker is excited to collaborate with his new arts colleagues on designs for an exciting show season. He received his MFA from the University of Idaho in December 2024. Recently, he recreated a scale model of *The Brady Bunch* film set for his final project in Scenographic Techniques.

D.B. Schroeder (MFA'23) was recently elected to the Board for the Michigan Presenters Network, he will serve a two-year term as member at large.

Will Snyder (MFA'23) hosted the second Scenic City Slam in Chattanooga, TN in October and taught stage combat at the Tennessee Thespian Conference in January. Scenic City Slam is a stage combat workshop focused on accessible education in stage combat, stunt work, theatrical movement and more. Snyder will host the third Scenic City Slam in October 2025, for more information, visit: bat-tlekatcombat.com.

Bryan Stanton (MFA'24) has been commissioned to write an open educational resource textbook that marries theatre production and design with universal design for learning. The resource will be available in late 2025 and free for any professor and their students to use. They have just surpassed 115 episodes of *Teaching While Queer* (teachingwhilequeer.org) a podcast-turned-nonprofit supporting queer educators at a time when they are actively being silenced. *Teaching While Queer* will have their first Virtual Conference on October 11, 2025.

Kellie Stonebrook (MFA'24) is a Chicago-based actor, playwright, puppeteer, and ventriloquist. After working as a producer and actor in the 2023 New Comedies Festival at B Street Theatre in Sacramento, Stonebrook returned to B Street this



Kellie Stonebrook

October for a reading of her new play, *Hyde & Jekyll* (Top Billing at Last), which was presented as part of the theatre's New Play Brunch series and was very well received. She graduated with her MFA in December of 2024 and is working on a new play, *The Tenants*, which closely examines poverty in Chicago.

Greg Thorn (MFA'22) started a new job as the Assistant Teaching Professor of Lighting and Sound Design for the Department of Communications at Mississippi State University.

KT Turner (MFA'22) is completing her PhD in History at the University of Idaho. Her dissertation focuses on theatre and the performance of race during Reconstruction.

Feature film *3* written by alum **Michael K Ward (MFA'20)** is out of post and has entered festivals around the world including Sundance, Toronto, and South by Southwest. It was filmed in summer 2024 in Las Cruces New Mexico and produced by Tiburon Films. The film is a dark romantic comedy about an art teacher that suddenly finds out he only has 3 days to live. It stars Anna Grace Barlow (*Jesus Revolution*) Caleb Ruminier (*Finding Carter*) and Eric Roberts (*The Dark Knight*). Ward also makes a cameo in the film and was the acting coach and teacher on set for children in the film. Screening will be happening in L.A., Austin, and Las Cruces.

Stacey Willis (MFA'22) is completing her PhD in Education (Curriculum and Instruction) at the University of Idaho. Her dissertation focuses on director-educators in the U.S. In fall 2024, she taught Play Analysis for the UI Theatre Department.

After completing her MFA in Theatre Arts with a directing emphasis, **Jennifer Wilson (MFA'22)** was promoted to Artistic Director of Theatre at Chattanooga State Community College. She is in her third year in that position. She is grateful to UI for the opportunity to pursue education that advanced her career in this way. Most recently, she was awarded a grant by the Tennessee Arts Commission to produce a production of an American Sign Language Shadow Interpreted musical next summer at her institution.

Her first son, now three, was born while she was in the program. Wilson and her husband welcomed their second son in November.

Aileen Zeigler (MFA'23) relocated to Washington D.C./ Northern Virginia. Zeigler will serve as Educational Standards consultant for the National Endowment for the Humanities Digital Humanities Advancement grant project, Digital Dramaturgy with Sarah Campbell and Kate Powers.



Poster for *3* the feature film with screenplay by Michael Ward.



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