



**A Hollywood  
Legacy on the  
Broadway Stage**

**Chamber Music  
is for  
Everyone**

**Designing  
the NFL**





**ON THE COVER:** Photo of Sydney Lemmon by Chris Sorensen

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Published by Boston  
University College  
of Fine Arts  
Produced by Boston  
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## A NOTE FROM HARVEY

**This too shall pass.** Widely attributed to 13th-century Sufi poets, the proverb was popularized by Abraham Lincoln. At a state fair in Wisconsin in 1859, the future president declared, “How much it expresses! How chastening in the hour of pride; how consoling in the depths of affliction!”

Despite its long history, the adage increasingly reminds me of actor-producer Tom Hanks who shared these words at a recent roundtable. An excerpt of Hanks relaying this advice went viral across social media platforms.

We live in an age in which information (and disinformation) arrives so quickly that it can be difficult to identify sources. How many times have you told someone about something that you saw or read and then quickly realized that you can’t remember its origin? Attributing it to “online” or “Insta” is incredibly imprecise. Similarly caught in the blur, a lot of people think Tom Hanks is the author of *This too shall pass*.

As the president and the multi-Oscar winner observed, the proverb can be helpful in enabling a person to reconnect with their core sense of self regardless of the situation. It applies equally to the artist on the margins trying to break into the industry and the person who has reached the summit of their chosen profession.

Folklorist Amy Shuman, in writing about the adage, has noted that people tend to place emphasis on the impermanence of the extremely negative and often fail to acknowledge the equally transitory state of the extremely positive. Abraham Lincoln and his distant relative (via the president’s mother Nancy Hanks Lincoln) got it right.

An acknowledgment of the transitory nature of circumstances can and should serve as a prompt to be proactively helpful to others. When the rain cloud hovers Charlie Brown-like over someone, lend them your umbrella. They just might return the favor.

In reading this issue, I am inspired by the resilience of our CFA community and the various ways they provide steadfast support and encouragement to others.

**Harvey Young, Dean of CFA**

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# FELT, WITH FEELING

Elizabeth Stubbs uses wool to bring magical scenes—and an occasional political bogeyman—to life

By Marc Chalufour

Photos by Simon Simard



Felted wool artist Elizabeth Stubbs ('74) in her Nahant, Mass., studio.





Left: *This Land is YOUR Land?* (2024)  
18 x 24 in.  
Left below: *Self Portrait* (2021)  
8 x 10 in.  
Below: *Birches by the Water* (2021) 9 x 10 in.

**“It’s amazing to touch. That tactile quality is extremely appealing. It’s very earthy and has a distant connection with other cultures and other times.”**



**FELT WAS ONE OF HUMANKIND’S FIRST** textiles. The nonwoven fabric, typically made from wool, is so durable it’s been used for millennia to make shoes, yurts, and even armor. The oldest known example, however, was decorative: a wall hanging from 6500 BC Turkey.

Elizabeth Stubbs has been creating art with felt since 1997, when she was training as a Waldorf early childhood educator. Waldorf philosophy prioritizes art and the use of natural materials. “The whole idea is that the children take substances and transform them into other things—and wool is an excellent substance to transform into other things,” she says. Stubbs (’74), who had worked as a painter and an illustrator for more than two decades, has worked with wool ever since, creating landscape “paintings,” sculptures, and vessels.

“It’s amazing to touch,” she says. “That tactile quality is extremely appealing. It’s very earthy and has a distant connection with other cultures and other times.”

Stubbs typically uses a wet felting technique. Working on a granite counter in her basement studio, she lays different shades of wool in layers, building an image from background to foreground. To turn wool into felt, she sprays it with a shower of soapy water. That opens the scales along each fiber, which then entwine and lock the wool together as she agitates it by rolling it vigorously with a piece of foam pipe insulation.

“All these little wisps of wool melt into one another so they are suddenly on one plane,” she says. “You never know exactly how that’s going to go. I love that element of surprise.”





Below: *Allegory: Garden of Good and Evil* (2022) 33 x 31 in.  
Opposite: *Patriarchy* (2024) 68 x 37 in.



Once the wet felting is complete, Stubbs often does needle felting—repeated stabs with a barbed needle that bonds the fibers—to add details to her work.

Stubbs guesses that she has 50 pounds of wool in her studio but only needs 3 to 4 ounces to create an image. She prefers working with merino wool, from humanely raised sheep, because it felts more easily than coarser varieties.

Many of Stubbs' pieces are inspired by nature, and she uses dozens of colors to create them, from deep blues and purples to earthy oranges and browns. Some of her most striking works are landscapes.

"Wool is sort of blurry and doesn't lend itself to a lot of small details," she says. And

yet, she expertly uses the tiniest splashes of yellow to capture autumn leaves falling to the ground and dark greens to create crisp shadows across a field. The use of different wool fibers, laid out in layers and felted together, creates the sense of an image constructed from a group of distinct objects, part sculpture, part painting. Stubbs often combines several prefelts—small pieces of partial felt—into larger scenes. She compares this process to that of Eric Carle, the late children's book author and illustrator, who created characters like Very Hungry Caterpillar and Brown Bear with vivid tissue paper collages.

In a landscape she completed during the COVID-19 pandemic, Stubbs used a blend of blue, purple, and white to create a sky.

A creamy yellow wool gives a warm glow to sun rays reflecting off a river. Orange and brown reeds, which she needled on after finishing the wet felting, define the foreground. Birch trees with white bark crisscrossed by delicately needled black lenticels split the right side of the frame.

Another inspiration for Stubbs' work has taken on more and more prominence lately: politics. "Every day there's some new outrage," she says. "It makes me sick. I have to get it out somehow."

One of Stubbs' largest pieces, completed in April 2024 after two years of work, features a series of individually felted figures stitched to an American flag backdrop. The 68-by-37-inch *Patriarchy* includes images of a dozen ghoulish men, each with an image on his chest that represents what Stubbs calls "a window into his soul." One profits from war, one covets women. One of the men "wants all the pie," she says. "I have been constantly shocked at the behavior of those who seek to be in power. The selfish pursuit of money and power—at the expense of the environment and all human rights—is really beyond my comprehension."

Though therapeutic, she says, such work takes her to a dark place. And what she returns to over and over is the world. "The places I like the most are the intersection of the human world and the natural world," she says.

Stubbs explored that intersection in *This Land is YOUR Land?*, which she created for *Ribbon of Highway*, a November 2024 exhibition by the Northeast Feltmakers Guild in Basking Ridge, N.J. Artists were given a strip of gray gauze and instructed to use it as the highway from Woody Guthrie's folk song "This Land is Your Land." Stubbs' 18-by-24-inch piece shows a group of animals, from a tiny turtle to a bull moose, locked in a standoff with a truck. She created each animal separately and sewed them to a wet-felted background. She needle felted details to the truck and used locks from a blue-faced Leicester sheep—known for their fine, curly hair—to create the foliage on a copse of trees in the center of the image.

The finished piece is bright and cheerful, despite the tension of the human-animal conflict. "I think the world needs beautiful pictures," she says. ●





## RISING STAR

## Play's the Thing

By Sophie Yarin

## FADY DEMIAN STARTED

acting as a teenager, inspired by the movies he watched in middle and high school. The future theater star moved a lot during that time, and in his isolation from his peers, he found company in the likes of *Fight Club* (1999), *The Imitation Game* (2014), and the films of Christopher Nolan. “I started to re-create the scenes I saw in the films or improvise my own characters. I’d start by prepping a scene by myself, without knowing that’s what I was doing, and I noticed that hours would pass by,” says Demian (’23). “It allowed me to channel a lot of things that I felt I couldn’t express in real life.”

Later in high school, as he took more roles in school plays, Demian became inspired by the therapeutic aspects of acting—how energizing it felt to step into another life. He honed his craft at CFA, later landing roles in

*The Band’s Visit* at the Huntington Theatre and *English* at the Cincinnati Playhouse. This year, he’ll tackle his biggest project yet, in Amazon Studios’ *The Terminal List: Dark Wolf*. Like its predecessor series, *The Terminal List*, based on military thriller novels by Jack Carr, *Dark Wolf* is a gritty depiction of modern espionage, and the choices made behind enemy lines.

CFA spoke with Demian, who plays Sargeant Daran Amiri, about his acting career—past, present, and future.

## How do you usually break into a new role?

I start with the body. I love finding the physicality of the person, because once I get into the way

they move, it starts to affect the thought patterns. Once I find thought patterns, I’m able to get underneath everything else.

## What are some differences between acting for the stage and acting for the screen?

I find theater to be about discovering what’s new within repetition, experiencing it for the first time every time, and getting to live the whole journey of a life, whereas film is about immediate instinct and first impulse—you don’t get to live that particular moment in your character’s life ever again.

## How did it feel to film an Amazon Studios production?

It was definitely a huge jump.

I’ve done a lot of indie films, but I have never done something of that scale. At some point, I realized this is the same stuff I was doing in acting class. At the end of the day, from action to cut, that moment of play is the same.

## What do you want to say to your younger self, who created those characters in his bedroom?

I’d tell him to not lose the unshakable, fervent belief in what he’s doing. When I first started, I had no experience or training, but I had so much more courage than I sometimes find now. I would tell him to never lose that. In a way, I hope he’d tell me that.

Before breaking onto the small screen, Fady Demian (’23) (right) appeared in *The Band’s Visit*, an award-winning coproduction of the Huntington Theatre and SpeakEasy Stage.



Stanislav Callas

## SOUND BITES

“These are the remains of a gilded crusader who stood sentinel on my bookshelf these past nineteen years. A motivational writing partner... A reminder of the beautiful film I had the honor to be a part of. A memory of one most excellent day when I was young, and all my small-town theatre kid dreams were coming true.”

In 2006, producer **CORINNE MARRINAN** (’95) won an Academy Award for Best Documentary, Short Subject, for *A Note of Triumph: The Golden Age of Norman Corwin*. In January 2025, after the Altadena fire ravaged her home, Marrinan posted a “Eulogy for Oscar #3295 (2006–2025)” on her Instagram alongside a photo of the statuette’s melted remnants. Marrinan, who later accepted a replacement Oscar, courtesy of the Academy, noted that the loss paled in comparison “to the colossal devastation of our home, our town, the fatalities...to wildlife, and our environment. All of these things I mourn.”



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## FACULTY

## JOHN WILSON'S LEGACY LIVES ON

A spring exhibition highlighted the artist and BU professor's commitment to depicting Black lives

*Witnessing Humanity: The Art of John Wilson*, the largest-ever exhibition of work by the late painter, sculptor, and Boston University professor of more than 20 years, was on view at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, this spring, before traveling to New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art in September. The show comprises about 110 works, most pointing to Wilson's artistic exploration of Black lives, which underscore an insistence that Black people be fully seen in all their humanity.

Wilson had a lasting impact on the Black communities of Roxbury and Mattapan, and generations of BU students. While at BU from 1964 to 1986, he primarily taught undergraduate foundation drawing, which remains an essential part of the curriculum.

Accompanying its run at the MFA were two projects by groups of CFA students. An exhibition at BU, *Foundation Drawing: The Legacy of John Wilson*, featured works by students in first-year drawing classes in response

to *Witnessing Humanity*. The show also featured archival materials related to Wilson from BU's Howard Gottlieb Archival Research Center. SVA visual narrative students produced *In Dialogue with Wilson: Comics Reflections on a Boston Visionary*,



John Wilson and a student in one of the University's art studios, circa 1966.

a comic book companion handed out at the exhibition.

“The very act of being an artist who makes work that celebrates the lives of Black and brown people, no matter the context, is a political act,” says Joel Christian Gill (CFA’04), associate professor and chair of MFA visual narrative. “Making this work and celebrating it, especially in the times that we are living in, is an important thing.”



# CONNECTION THROUGH MUSIC

Grammy-nominated ensemble Palaver Strings, founded by two alums, is on a mission to address social injustice, expand music education, and build community

By Steve Holt

Members of Palaver Strings include founders Brianna Fischler (BUTI'09, '10, CFA'15) and Maya French ('15) (sixth and seventh from left), along with Nate Taylor (BUTI'10) (fifth from left), Nate Martin ('11) (fourth from right), and Elizabeth Moore ('14) (third from right).



Titilayo Ayangade



# IT'S

low season in Portland, Maine, in January—a chilly Tuesday night besides—but the line forming outside the heavy wooden door of Scales, a cavernous upscale restaurant on the waterfront, tells a summer story. The crowd is here for a sold-out fundraising event to benefit Palaver Strings, a 13-member, Portland-based chamber music collective and nonprofit organization with a mission to integrate social justice with music. The ensemble, made up of an assortment of stylish 20- and 30-somethings, will play a short set before a three-course dinner to raise money for their tour season and for their Palaver Music Center (PMC), which offers community music and group strings classes and one-on-one lessons to students in grades K through 5 on a sliding scale. On this January night, four third through fifth grade PMC students—some who were involved with Palaver Strings before they were born through the group’s Lullaby Project, which pairs expecting and new parents with professional musicians to write and record original lullabies—will join the professional ensemble for the first time in a public performance. Their parents are here too.

Violinist Maya French (’15) and violist Brianna Fischler (BUTT’09,’10, CFA’15) founded Palaver Strings as first-year students at CFA’s School of Music. Both were unsure they wanted to take the traditional symphony orchestra path; both desired more connection than they felt they were getting, spending hours, often alone, in practice rooms.

“We liked the idea of using chamber music and our instruments as tools to connect with other people,” French says. The group grew and changed during its early years, took time off to focus on studies, and officially relaunched in 2014. Among those they recruited was violist Elizabeth Moore (’14), who’d grown up in some of the same mid-coast Maine music circles as French. Five of the current ensemble have connections to CFA; in addition to French, Fischler, and Moore, there’s bassist Nate Martin (’11) and cellist Nate Taylor (BUTT’10).

Today, the ensemble performs in storied venues like Carnegie Hall and the Kennedy Center, has released four albums, and was nominated for a 2025 Grammy Award in the category of Best Classical Solo Vocal Album for their most recent release, *A Change Is Gonna Come* (Azica Records, 2024).

Brianna Fischler (BUTT’09,’10, CFA’15) (from left) and Maya French (’15) founded Palaver Strings while first-year students at CFA. A few years later, they recruited Elizabeth Moore (’14) and others.



Titilayo Ayangade

**“We liked the idea of using chamber music and our instruments as tools to connect with other people.”**

MAYA FRENCH (’15)

### FINDING CONSENSUS

In its earliest days in Boston, Palaver focused on fundraising concerts for causes and organizations they cared about: mental health, climate change, homelessness, and education.

Early efforts also benefited the Liberian Education Fund, a nonprofit that French had been involved with in high school and from which Palaver derived its name. In West Africa, a palaver hut is a place where people, often from very different backgrounds, meet to find consensus. From the start, the idea for Palaver Strings was to be led by musicians, with an eye toward diversity in music selection



and in programming, and to use music to strengthen and inspire community and connection—especially for the underserved.

But the group quickly learned that fundraising concerts didn’t make much of an impact, says French. “So we shifted to doing concerts that were reflective tools for conversation, and that’s the model that we’ve stayed with,” she says. That meant residencies at Boston Center for the Arts; the Longy School of Music, where they also taught a graduate course in community engagement; and Boston Medical Center, BU’s primary teaching hospital, where their chapter of the Lullaby Project originated. Fischler, French, and Moore received training in music learning theory and began teaching at daycares and coaching chamber music programs for children in underserved communities. These partnerships, says French, helped cement the group’s mission and expand its reach, while also helping the group foment relationships within social service organizations throughout New England.

In 2015, Palaver became a nonprofit and began to search for a new home to launch an instructional program. After an extensive feasibility study and dozens of outreach calls to existing social service organizations to determine a location with the greatest amount of need, they moved to Portland in 2018. “I’m not going to say it was easy, but





Portland is such a welcoming community,” says Fischler, who also is Palaver’s education coordinator. “Most of the nonprofits we reached out to were so ready to hear about what we wanted to do. And one of the big reasons we chose Portland was because of the new Mainer population here.” US census records showed that, between 2020 and 2022, foreign-born residents accounted for more than 10 percent of all new residents. Not all ensemble members are Palaver Music Center faculty, or based in Portland; the collective allows for flexibility to pursue individual projects, anywhere, and to come together for performances, residencies, rehearsals, and twice-a-year group retreats.

#### COMMUNITY MUSIC

Chamber music relies on group dynamics and group decisions. There’s no conductor; musicians need to be highly tuned to the group. Palaver’s model, as an organization, works in a similar way. Each of the 13 members of the performance ensemble is a coartistic director. Artistic decisions are made, as in the huts in West Africa, by consensus.

“It’s quite the process, but we’ve decided that even though it’s slow going and often difficult, it’s worth it,” says Moore, who also is programming director. She works with management and venue organizers to secure performance opportunities, which she then pitches to the full group. “It makes us have difficult conversations, which has been really good for our growth.” It’s a skill they aim to teach their students, who are often chosen for performing opportunities based on their ability to both lead and listen.

Since 2022, PMC has had a permanent teaching and rehearsal space in Portland’s downtown Arts District. The school day here begins at 2 pm, when kids pile in, shed their backpacks, grab a snack, and disperse for private and group lessons. An instrument room full of tiny instruments is well stocked, thanks in part to grants received

**“So many organizations pick either education or performance, for good reason. It’s a lot. We just really care about both of those things.”**

BRIANNA FISCHLER (BUTI’09,’10, CFA’15)

**Top: Palaver Strings performs at Scales in Portland in January 2025. Right: The group’s Palaver Music Center, also in Portland, offers music lessons to early learners.**

over the years from the Classics for Kids Foundation founded by Michael Reynolds, director of CFA’s School of Music and professor of cello.

“What they’re doing is the perfect global approach to developing a career that’s a little out of the box,” says Reynolds. “The community music model—where very fine players work with at-risk kids—can create more long-term job satisfaction. If you’re just educating, you’re going to miss the stage. Meanwhile, performing brings momentary pleasure, but one might start to wonder, am I changing lives?” A new generation of strings players, meanwhile, “gets to see cool, young people playing,” says Reynolds. “They come to understand that not all violin music is fuddy-duddy.”

French, Fischler, Moore, and cellist Matt Smith are the only members of the ensemble currently on the PMC faculty, which is bolstered by part-time faculty from the Portland area. “So many organizations pick either education or performance, for good reason,” says Fischler. “It’s a



Yoon S. Byun

lot. We just really care about both of those things. We also understand that a lot of the systemic racist issues that are happening in classical culture stem from the beginning [of music education]. So if we’re trying to make a difference in the classical culture, we feel strongly that that has to come through education first.”

Late last year, Palaver Strings received a big surprise in the form of its first Grammy nod, for *A Change Is Gonna Come*, a collection of rearranged American protest songs made in collaboration with tenor Nicholas Phan and jazz vocalist Farayi Malek. Moore attended the Grammy ceremony in February and came home to tell her students about it. The ensemble didn’t win. But the musicians point to other rewards. “Our college experience taught us that it can be possible to make something big from music,” says French. “It taught us how to make connections, in more ways than one.”

Adds Fischler, “It made us dreamers.” ●





Actor Sydney Lemmon was struggling to find work in early 2022. Then she auditioned to play an unhinged tech worker in therapy, and rediscovered her identity on the stage.

PROFILE

THE  
ROLE  
OF  
HER  
LIFE

By Steve Holt  
Photos by  
Chris Sorensen

((SO FAR))



# THERE ARE MOMENTS WHEN

New York City shrinks from a metropolis of eight million humans to “a tiny little town,” Sydney Lemmon says. The actor experienced one such moment early last summer in the city she calls home. She’d recently learned that the play she was starring in off Broadway, *JOB*, was moving from the 200-seat Connelly Theater to the 600-seat Helen Hayes Theater on 44th Street for its Broadway debut. The role would be the biggest yet for Lemmon (‘12), who says she was in the middle of an acting dry spell when she read for the part of Jane, a woman seeing a therapist for a mental health crisis after losing her job as an online content moderator. Before rehearsals began for the Broadway show, which premiered in July 2024, Lemmon took a walk to the Hayes Theater.

Sydney Lemmon and Peter Friedman in a 2023 production of *JOB* at New York’s SoHo Playhouse, where the show premiered. Lemmon at the SoHo Playhouse in New York (opposite).



As she stood across from the Hayes thinking about the beautiful chaos that was about to consume her life, a memory came to her: Her late grandfather—Oscar-winning actor Jack Lemmon—had performed on a stage nearby in the 1986 Eugene O’Neill revival of *Long Day’s Journey Into Night*, a role for which he earned a Tony nomination. Lemmon looked the show up in the *Playbill* archives and discovered that the Broadhurst Theatre, where her grandfather had starred, was directly across the street from the Hayes.

“In that moment, I felt like my grandpa was right there with me,” Lemmon says. “I’d be across the street doing my show, and I know that would have made him so very proud.” *JOB* wrapped at the end of October 2024. “When an actor gets an opportunity like this, it can feel like, oh, God, I’ve been fighting for this for so long. It can be overwhelming. To have a special moment like that, to feel my grandfather’s presence, it was like a little gift from him, saying, I’ve got your back. I did it; you can at least try.”

## “EDUCATION IS THE THROUGH LINE”

Jack Lemmon may have been a Hollywood icon, but his granddaughter has made her own way into the entertainment business. Born in Los Angeles into an acting family—her parents, Chris and Gina, and brother Jon have played a number of roles on stage and screen—Lemmon was raised in Connecticut from the age of eight.

“If I felt any pressure, it was probably to stay out of the business,” Lemmon says, acknowledging the difficulty of breaking through amid a culture of constant rejection. She adds that her parents and grandfather, who died in 2001 at 76, “would have encouraged me to do just about anything other than this.”

But participating in plays in high school convinced Lemmon she didn’t *want* to do anything else. As a senior at CFA, she played Lala Levy in Alfred Uhry’s comedy *The Last Night of Ballyhoo* and found out what it was like to make an audience laugh. “It was the first time all the elements of my training were really working together,” Lemmon says. “And when you feel that magic onstage, and feel that what you are doing is connecting with an audience, you never want to stop.”

Lemmon says CFA taught her how to be an artist, find her confidence and voice, collaborate, and feel at home on stage in her five-foot-ten frame. After graduation, Lemmon toured for nine months with National Players, a non-Equity company that performs classic works by writers like Shakespeare, Sophocles, and Kafka. But she knew

Sara Krulwich/the New York Times/Redux





she wasn't finished learning the craft. She entered Yale's lauded MFA acting program, graduating in 2017.

"It was education that has been the through line for me with acting, more so than any pressure that I would have felt from my family," she says.

THE JOB OF HER LIFE

By the time she read the script for *JOB*, Lemmon had hit a roadblock in her acting career. She'd acted in an independent film or two, and played a few television roles and a handful of higher-profile characters—notably, the title role of Ana Helstrom in Hulu's single-season Marvel adaptation of *Helstrom*. She appeared in two episodes of HBO's *Succession* in a short-lived fling with Jeremy Strong's character, Kendall Roy. By early 2022, though, the new work was drying up. Then she read the script for *JOB*, a winding and at times dark story by first-time playwright Max Wolf Friedlich, with a directing and production team full of Broadway newcomers. Lemmon was immediately drawn to Jane, a character who'd had a breakdown at work and who confronts her therapist, Loyd.

"I read *JOB*," she says, "and I didn't know any of the people producing it. There was no actor attached to play the role of Loyd. And honestly, the way my luck was going, I knew I had to fight tooth and nail to get the part, but I felt I could bring a real truth to this character. I felt a strong, strong connection with the role, and I knew that if I got the opportunity to take it on, I would be lucky—even if nobody saw the play—it would be an enormous workout as an actor, and that was just what I needed."

Lemmon got the part. Then she learned Loyd would be played by Broadway legend Peter Friedman, who picked up a Tony for best actor in 1998 for his part in the revival of *Ragtime*. More recently, he memorably portrayed Frank Vernon in *Succession*.

"I thought, if an actor of Peter's caliber is willing to come on board with this, people might actually come," Lemmon says.

That they did. And they loved it. Lemmon and Friedman's bizarre therapy sessions helped sell out all 170 seats at the SoHo Playhouse, which led to the theater extending *JOB*'s run (for another sellout). In early 2024, the play moved to the 200-seat Connelly Theater, where available tickets were again scarce during the play's eight shows per week. That's when Lemmon got the news that *JOB* was headed to the Hayes Theater, a 600-seat Broadway playhouse.

"Because lightning had struck so many times, I can't say I was completely taken by surprise," Lemmon admits. "But if you had told me that when I first read the script in March 2022, I would have said there's no chance. That it was an impossibility."

Lemmon poured everything into *JOB*—a *New York Times* critic's pick—and says that for months, it was



**"I felt a strong, strong connection with the role, and I knew that if I got the opportunity to take it on, I would be lucky."**

nothing but Epsom salt baths, steam for her vocal cords, tea with honey, and the social life of a monk. It was a sacrifice that Lemmon, who considers herself a stage actress first and foremost, is willing to make.

"The heights are just as high, especially when you get to talk to somebody at the stage door who says, 'You made me feel seen,'" Lemmon says.

What's next for Lemmon? She plays a struggling designer in *The Philosophy of Dress*, an independent film about the underbelly of New York's fashion scene, which she shot between *JOB*'s first and second runs off-Broadway. The film, which she produced as well, is set for 2026. In the meantime, she continues to read scripts for new acting work. She says playing Jane on Broadway has made her a bit more discriminating in the roles she considers.

"I just took the ride of my life with *JOB*," she says. "If a character speaks to me, whether it's on stage, in a TV show, or a movie, that's the thing I really care about." ●

ALUMS  
ABOUND ON  
BROADWAY'S  
STAGES

Get to know these other  
CFA theater stars

Sara Chase ('05)

THE GREAT GATSBY

In July 2024, Sara Chase made what she calls one of the hardest decisions of her life: stepping away from her originating role as Myrtle Wilson in the musical adaptation of F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* in order to undergo the final rounds of chemotherapy for fallopian tube cancer. After a nearly three-month medical leave, Chase returned to the Broadway Theatre stage in October 2024. "Working toward getting back to such a challenging role is something I am so grateful for," she says. "It really helped keep me focused."

Previously, Chase was perhaps best known for her memorable portrayal of Cyndee Pokorny—a young woman acclimating to modern life after being held captive in a bunker—in the Netflix comedy series *Unbreakable Kimmy Schmidt*.

"It is very hard and often unglamorous, but it is an absolute honor to get to step on that stage every night and get to perform," she says. "It is also wild to

know that something you had a hand in creating will now go on to have a life of its own throughout the world in different languages with different companies."

John Zdrojeski ('12)

THE GREAT GATSBY

Like many Americans, John Zdrojeski first read F. Scott Fitzgerald's tragic novel *The Great Gatsby* in high school—just to "pass a test." The second time Zdrojeski read *Gatsby*, he had just moved to New York City after graduating from BU and would read to calm himself down before auditions. That time, he says, he fell in love with the story. A decade later, Zdrojeski plays Tom Buchanan—the infamous foil to the title character—in the musical theater version of the story on Broadway, the actor's first stage adaptation. Zdrojeski says he avoids dwelling too long on the gravity of playing such a recognizable villain in the iconic story. He says he has reread *Gatsby* twice more since he began working on the musical: "Having the book as a touchstone keeps me grounded."



Sara Chase (center) and John Zdrojeski (right) in *The Great Gatsby*.

Sara Krulewicz/the New York Times/Redux





Tala Ashe (left)  
in *English*.

“Even in my wildest dreams I don’t think I could have fathomed getting to do a play like this as my Broadway debut.”

TALA ASHE

Tala Ashe (’06)

ENGLISH

Landing the Tony-nominated role of Elham in *English*—the 2023 Pulitzer Prize-winning play about four Iranian adults who meet in a Tehran language school—was much more than a dream come true for Tala Ashe. “Even in my wildest dreams I don’t think I could have fathomed getting to do a play like this as my Broadway debut,” she says. “It has been incredibly meaningful to be part of something that represents Iranians as relatable, nuanced human beings. That shouldn’t be a rarity—but unfortunately it is.”

Ashe (formerly Ashrafi), who is Iranian-American, says the play grapples with identity, language, and assimilation in a powerful and hilarious way. “I feel my lived history and my ancestors with me every night on stage,” she adds. Among Ashe’s many credits was a recurring role as television’s first Muslim-American superhero Zari Tomaz on the DC series *Legends of Tomorrow*, which aired for five seasons on the CW. Ashe says despite the clear impact *English* made off Broadway, she was thrilled the play would live on as a Broadway show. “It truly has been the most surreal, incredible gift to get to share it with more people,” she says.

Joan Marcus

Amber Gray (’04) and Chelsea Yakura-Kurtz (BUTI’05, CFA’11)

EUREKA DAY

Two alums are leaving their mark on the Broadway comedy *Eureka Day*. Tony Award-nominated Amber Gray, whose stage credits include *Hadestown*, *Oklahoma!*, and *Here We Are*, stars as Carina, a new parent at the private Eureka Day School in Berkeley, Calif., trying to navigate a mumps outbreak and the ensuing vaccination debate. (Jonathan Spector wrote the seemingly ripped-from-the-headlines script before the COVID-19 pandemic, and it premiered in Berkeley in 2018.) Yakura-Kurtz—with her long list of television and West Coast theater credits—makes her Broadway debut in *Eureka Day* as Meiko, a single mom at the school. *Eureka Day* wrapped up its first Broadway run in February 2025 after stints in Berkeley, off Broadway, and London.



Amber Gray (left)  
and Chelsea Yakura-Kurtz (third from left) in *Eureka Day*.



Jordan Matthew Brown (center)  
in *The Book of Mormon*.

Jordan Matthew Brown (’16)

THE BOOK OF MORMON

Jordan Matthew Brown was such a fan of *The Book of Mormon* when he was in high school he had to give up listening to the cast recording for fear he’d get too attached to the show—and then never get to do it. He was a senior at BU, having a slice of pizza on Newbury Street, when he got the invitation to join the touring cast of the comedic musical, originally as a standby. He finished his latest run with *The Book of Mormon* in the coleading role of Elder Cunningham on Broadway in January 2025. “I’ve been lucky enough to be a part of the *Mormon* family for many years on and off now,” Brown says. “I’ve traveled with the show across the US, Canada, and Mexico. Playing Elder Cunningham full-time on Broadway just feels like something special. I think I cried all through the curtain call of my first performance of this run.”

CFA is where Brown first sang “Man Up,” his future character’s act-one finale. It’s also where he says he filled his toolbox with techniques he still uses as a professional actor, including the voice warm-ups he did before every performance of *The Book of Mormon*. “CFA pushed me to go beyond my comfort zone and the box that I had put myself in,” says Brown, who followed his run on *Mormon* with an understudy role in *As Time Goes By* at Theater 154 off Broadway. “I was able to expand who I was and the work that I thought I could do.”

“CFA pushed me to go beyond my comfort zone and the box that I had put myself in.”

JORDAN MATTHEW BROWN

Sara Krulwich/the New York Times/Redux (Eureka Day); Bruce Gilks/Getty Images (The Book of Mormon)



# TUNES FOR TOTS

Milos Bjelica's **Artysh Lab** brings classical concerts for babies—designed to promote early childhood development—to the Boston area

By Mara Sassoon

Illustration by

Celyn Brazier

**W**hen clarinetist Milos Bjelica was living in his native Serbia in 2013, he formed a chamber orchestra dedicated to performing classical music for children. Since then, he's been exploring the positive impact of music on child development. In 2024, after he and his wife welcomed their first child, he was inspired to create a classical music concert series in the Boston area for babies up to three years of age. "I want him to grow up with classical music," he says of his son.

Bjelica ('23) turned to his friend Neda Aleksic, a pianist and researcher who lives in Serbia and is completing a PhD in early childhood development at the University of Zagreb. Aleksic and her sister, a physician, are cofounders of Artysh Lab, an interactive concert concept that uses music and movement to help develop children's cognitive, social, emotional, and motor skills.

Aleksic helped Bjelica establish Artysh Lab USA, which launched in October 2024 and hosts monthly interactive concerts for babies and children at The Foundry, a nonprofit that fosters creative collaborations, in Cambridge, Mass.

CFA spoke with Bjelica about how the concerts are structured, their impact on early childhood development, and his goals for growing Artysh Lab.

## How are the concerts you are producing important to early childhood development?

Kids can develop rhythm from an early age, even when they're a few months old. Our concerts are interactive. Children and parents, they play together. The concerts are also really beneficial for parents, because they can socialize. When you have a kid, it's very hard to socialize, so you meet other parents. Also, for kids, it's beneficial because there are a lot of sensory moments and a big emphasis on movement in the concert.

## How are the concerts organized?

At each concert, a maximum of about 30 people can attend. We have musicians. It's usually a duo of some sort—violin and piano, clarinet and piano, flute and piano. It's specifically those combinations because kids zero to three hear high pitches better than the low ones—so instruments like cello, viola, and bassoon don't work for us. The concerts are around 50 minutes, and we have someone guiding parents and kids through the concert. It's very interactive. Each song has its own prop—it could be a shaker, a colorful scarf, or some kind of interaction, like dancing.

## Do you perform in the concerts?

If there is clarinet featured, I play the clarinet. So far, we've had the same [roster of] musicians, but my plan is to vary musicians. I'd like to give students a chance to play concerts. That would be a very beneficial experience for them.

## What does the guide do during the concerts?

The guide, who is my friend Andres, explains the activities to parents, introducing the props that we have. He's doing the activity itself with parents and kids. Sometimes we have a crowd that is very shy, so he works to get them and their parents comfortable. We often give kids these egg shakers, and sometimes they'll put them in their mouths, which we reassure them is totally fine. This is their first instinct, and he's just going around and helping them experience the best concert.

Usually, we have both a simpler rhythm and a little bit more complicated rhythm. He's also showing the rhythms before the concerts so parents can mimic them. Babies who



**“Kids can develop rhythm from an early age, even when they’re a few months old.”**

are less than one year can't really do those rhythms, but together with their parents, they can participate. They can hear and sense, which is the most important part. They're still learning and absorbing.

## How did you develop the concerts?

Neda came here in November 2024, and she

helped me. These concerts are based on her research. She has very carefully chosen the songs and the activities that take place during the concert. There is something called the Dalcroze method, which combines music and movement. That's a big part of the concert, this belief that music needs to come with movement in order to help children learn rhythm, for example.

## What kind of feedback have you received from parents who have attended concerts?

So far, parents and kids are very happy. Around 60 percent of people have returned to a second concert. I think that's the best feedback. Every concert, we see maybe 10 to 15 familiar faces along with maybe 10 new faces. We have a lot of people with European roots coming to our concerts, because this is something that is already somewhat common

in Europe, in places like Germany and France. I haven't really seen programs like this in the US. In Europe, usually these music programs for babies and children are “play-alongs,” which means someone is playing guitar and singing, and kids are singing along or playing some instruments, like percussion.

## What's next for Artysh Lab USA?

We recently organized our first workshops for kids ages three to six. With that, parents are really hands off in the back, just observing, and kids are doing the music workshop with us. The bigger goal for Artysh is to organize free concerts for foster kids, kids with special needs, and children without parents. They also need to hear music, and I think they will enjoy these concerts greatly. We are fundraising for that purpose. ●





# DIRECTING

By Mara Sassoon

Photos by Stella Kalinina

**Nikki DiLoreto**  
is a director,  
coach, mentor,  
and cofounder  
of an inclusive  
program for  
female and  
nonbinary  
directors



**It's early February,** and Nikki DiLoreto is just coming off the adrenaline rush of opening night of *Noises Off* at Gefen Playhouse in Los Angeles. As associate director, DiLoreto ('12) was in charge of directing the entire understudy company and had been through countless rehearsals and previews before the play opened on February 6.

"Opening night is this wonderful, magical, theater-specific tradition, where you just want to tell everybody how much you loved working with them—you write opening night cards and you give gifts. It feels like the last day of summer camp," she says. "In adult life, there's nowhere else that happens. It's really one of the most sacred traditions that keeps us going in this field."

The tradition also conjures the joy DiLoreto experienced as a child in Lexington, Ky., where she was an actor and a stage manager in school plays.

"It was the only thing I ever really wanted to do, the thing I was the most committed to," she says. "I think a lot of people have this first show they ever saw that drew them into it. But for me, I fell in love with the craft of it and making it. It was the most fun thing."

Today, DiLoreto, a director and creative producer whose credits include associate director of the West End hit *SIX: The Musical*, has made it a goal to spread the joy and camaraderie of theater and build an artistic community.

"I want to be a part of providing opportunity and resources to emerging artists," says DiLoreto, who has cofounded an LA-based inclusive directors program for women and nonbinary theater professionals. "Growing up in Kentucky and not having a ton of access to theater or to resources to build a career, I started to get really invested in supporting the storytellers of the next generation. More than ever, that's going to be so important."

**THE ROAD TO DIRECTING**

DiLoreto chose to study stage management at CFA, but says she was soon nudged in another direction: "All of the directors that I worked with as a stage manager were like, 'You're not a stage manager.' I'd be giving them notes for the actors."

She stuck with it, but planned to pursue directing after graduation. She says her time at CFA and the professional theater experience she had as a student—including an internship at the Huntington Theatre—prepared her to create her own opportunities.

"I really knew how shows were produced," DiLoreto says. "I knew all these designers because I was in the design and production program, and my friends were actors and writers." She started producing and directing their work.

Shortly after graduating from BU, she also began working for the Roundabout Theatre Company in New York, first as an apprentice in the artistic department and later as an assistant director on some of its



**Nikki DiLoreto ('12), a theater director and creative producer, was inspired to take up coaching and mentorship after receiving her master's in 2023.**

shows, including *Kiss Me, Kate*, *On the Exhale*, and *Too Much, Too Much, Too Many*, and other Broadway productions.

DiLoreto says her directing style depends on the show. With a new play, the script often isn't finished. "That means, in terms of casting, maybe you want people who are more familiar with new work, who can be more flexible," she says. "You also work really closely with designers to build the world. You're sort of experimenting all along the way."

But no matter the show, DiLoreto says, she takes a collaborative approach. "For me, the best idea in the room wins," she says. "And I'm always going to cast people who I feel like, yes, they're right for the role, but also they're really excited to collaborate and want to bring good energy into the room."

One of her favorite projects was the 2019 West End run of *SIX: The Musical*, which won a 2022 Tony Award for Best Original Score. DiLoreto was an associate director on the show, a modern, pop concert-style retelling of the lives of Henry VIII's six wives.

"The nature of the show is, you have to cast talented people, but no one person can be more famous than the other," she says. "They're not super well known, not stars, but then in four weeks you have to turn them into Beyoncé."

Part of her job was empowering the actresses playing the six wives to become a girl band of sorts. "It's a transformational process for the actors involved," she says. "These performers need a space where they can learn a really, really hard show, execute it at a high level in a short amount of time, and feel like they're superstars. I think creating that atmosphere and supporting those performers through that journey has been some of the most rewarding directing I've done."



**"Growing up in Kentucky and not having a ton of access to theater or to resources to build a career, I started to get really invested in supporting the storytellers of the next generation."**

**COACHING AND MENTORSHIP**

In 2023, DiLoreto received a master's degree from the University of Southern California. "Post-COVID, there were a lot of conversations around the resiliency of arts organizations and I wanted to be a part of that conversation," she says. "How can the arts continue to thrive, and what shape is that going to take?"

During the program, she got a taste for coaching and mentorship, particularly during a class she was taking with MBA students that involved making presentations in front of a group.

"I found myself giving them notes and helping them prepare by doing some vocal exercises and asking questions," she says. "Who's our audience? What are the stakes for this moment? What's the story we're trying to tell? And it really helped. It made me realize my background in the arts and my career is really useful outside of the theater world."

Now, she's using those skills as a freelance performance coach for companies and executives through the communication coaching company Strictly Speaking Group, which was cofounded by Alex Schneps (CGS'10, COM'12, CFA'19).



"Other industries don't necessarily focus on communication, even though that's one of the most important parts of life," says DiLoreto. "We work with big tech executives and all different kinds of businesses, and a lot of our work is really grounded in theater performance."

Her grad school experience sparked another idea. She remembers getting an assignment to create a program that drew on the leadership skills she was learning. She wanted to build a community—and to hang out with other directors.

DiLoreto joined forces with her friend, collaborator, and mentor Jessica Hanna to establish a program for LA-area women and nonbinary directors to see theater by other women and nonbinary directors.

The program had its first gathering in April 2023; since then, the program has taken off. The groups of directors, ranging from 5 to 10, have seen productions all around Los Angeles, from The Hollywood Fringe to the Center Theatre Group.

The idea is to get the message out about the breadth of talented directors in LA. "It's showing there are tons of people to hire, and if you program female and nonbinary directors, people will come," DiLoreto says. "We will come. We will support them, and we will buy tickets."

The group has created opportunities for cross-generational mentorship, as participants are at every stage of their career: "We have people who just moved to LA or who just got out of grad school, people who have been in Los Angeles and in the business for more than 20 years."

DiLoreto says theater companies now reach out to her and Hanna, offering discount codes to the group. They envision adding meetings to discuss the shows they've seen recently and the craft.

"I think that there is a need for this kind of in-person community-building to be happening, not just in LA, not just in New York, but everywhere," she says. "Something I think I was really stuck on initially was, I don't have a grant or funding, so I can't accomplish everything I want this program to be. But that's still in the future. We're doing the work that we can do right now. You have to start somewhere." ●



FEATURE

THE

ART

OF

SPORTS

As a creative director for the NFL, Alex Mount has a hand in designing the logos, decor, and gear for the Super Bowl and other league initiatives

Alex Mount's NFL designs have appeared everywhere, from the League's official website to stadiums and apparel.

By Molly Callahan  
Photo by Laura Barisonzi





the time NFL quarterbacks Patrick Mahomes and Jalen Hurts led their teams onto the field for Super Bowl LIX this year, Alex Mount and *her* team were thinking about next year's National Football League season—and the one after that. Mount ('07), a creative director for the NFL, is part of the group responsible, essentially, for the look and feel of the league. The big, televised, brand-defining events, such as the Super Bowl, the Draft, and various international games? All of them eventually pass through Mount's desk.

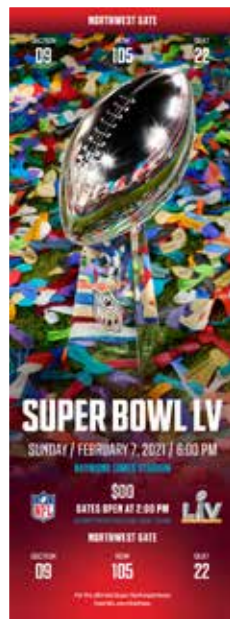
Beyond that, Mount oversees quality control and trademark compliance for the NFL. Every single shirt, hat, pin, banner, poster, foam finger, jersey, lanyard, sock, mug, car decal, pencil—every pair of sandals and sunglasses and underwear (yes, even that)—is carefully inspected by Mount and her colleagues to ensure the colors are correct, the proportions are accurate, and that everything is as it should be.

"My boss said to me at one point, 'I always said that when this gets boring, maybe I'll look for something else,'" she recalls. "Well, I've been here almost 11 years, and he's been here even longer. It's never been boring. There's always somebody pushing us to be more creative, and that's what makes it really cool."

#### READING THE PLAY

In some ways, Mount's career started on the field, albeit a different one. A graphic design major and a BU lacrosse defensive player, Mount often headed to class in athletic wear and to practice in paint-splattered gear.

As graduation loomed, she fretted about her future. She loved



sports—and loved art. And yet, society has long pitted the two as polar opposites (consider the wildly different characters in *The Breakfast Club* and their inability, at first, to find common ground with one another).

"I found myself getting lost, thinking, what is this next step going to be? How do I find a career? What am I going to do? When, really, it was right there in front of me," Mount says. "The whole reason that I went to BU was because I could do these two things that I loved. So why not make that into a career? And once I realized that, it was full steam ahead."

During her senior year, Mount got an internship at SME Sports Branding, a New York-based sports branding agency. Every day over winter break, she commuted into the city from her home on Long Island and spent her days "doing the basics," she says. She searched for specific fonts, made sketches, and came up with monogram design ideas for the Knicks City Dancers, the organization's official dance team.

It wasn't glamorous work by any stretch of the imagination. "But I just loved it," Mount says. "I knew I had found what I wanted to do."

#### GOING LONG

The following summer, after graduation, SME Sports Branding hired Mount as a junior graphic designer. It was 2007, and the entire city, it seemed, was talking about Yankee Stadium. Construction on a state-of-the-art facility in the Bronx had begun a year before, while "the house that Ruth built" was set to be demolished. It was an exciting time to be in the sports business.

"All the brochures, all the pamphlets to ticket-holders, the websites—all the information about the amenities and the facility—it was a



great environment to be in," Mount says.

She had other projects at the time too. Mount designed the athletic mascot for Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh, Pa.: Scotty, a Scottish terrier sporting a smart plaid scarf, which is in use today.

Then, during the 2008 financial crisis, Mount was laid off, along with all the junior staff at her agency and agencies around the country. She found work at a new public relations agency and spent the next couple of years honing her skills, teaching herself as much as she could, and staying on top of the latest trends. She also had her eye on her next move: Madison Square Garden.

In 2010, an opportunity at the Garden opened up: art director for the Knicks and the Rangers. Mount was ready. And she got it.

In some ways, the role was familiar. Much like Yankee Stadium before, Madison Square Garden was undergoing a major renovation, so Mount helped with the communications about all the upcoming changes. There were some familiar faces too. One of the Rangers players, Matt Gilroy (MET'16), overlapped with Mount at BU. His fiancée at the time, Jenny (Taft) Gilroy (CGS'08, COM'10) played lacrosse with Mount.

In other ways, it was completely unique. The summer Mount started working for Madison Square Garden, rumors flew that LeBron James might join the Knicks. He'd made a big decision to leave Cleveland, and the Knicks were making pointed overtures.

"At one point they thought he was going to come to New York," she recalls. "So we were photoshopping him into Knicks uniforms and hoping." James didn't join the New York squad, "but it was still such a fun time to be there," she says.

In January 2014, Mount read a story about Jaime Weston, vice



In designing the logo for Super Bowl LIX in New Orleans, Mount's team made use of colors like "Crawfish Red" and "Humid Teal."

president for brand and creative at the NFL, in the *New York Times*. Suddenly, she could see herself in the upper echelons of sports marketing and branding: "I thought, huh, the NFL. That's interesting."

By June, she had a new job.

#### TOUCHDOWN

Now, more than a decade into her NFL career, Mount has traveled to historic Lambeau Field in Green Bay, Wisc., for a photo shoot with some of the Packers. She's rented out big, luxurious houses to stage all sorts of in-home apparel and decor spreads. She's taken over some of the NFL's signature events, creating branding style guides for NFL Kickoff and the Pro Bowl.

Mount's first Super Bowl as creative director, during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, was a true test of her skills.

"We had to get really creative for that one," she says dryly.

To pull off some sense of normalcy, Mount had to improvise. She met with designers on her team in a commuter lot off the New Jersey Turnpike to look at color swatches for team staff jackets. When travel restrictions made it impossible to get to Raymond James Stadium, in Tampa, Fla., for a photo shoot, Mount and her colleagues had a local photographer take a 360-degree image of the inside of the stadium, had sod from the field shipped up to New York, and staged a photo with the real Vince Lombardi Trophy. You'd never know the difference.

Since then, the events have gone back to normal, but each one is different from the last.

Mount starts planning for the Super Bowl two years in advance, doing research on the character of each new host city, coming up with the colors and motifs that will tell the right story. The logo for the 2025 championship, in New Orleans, featured colors such as "Crawfish Red" and "Humid Teal." The logo for Super Bowl LX, to take place in Santa Clara, Calif., in 2026, is a colorful celebration of the vibrant history of the Bay Area.

Mount sees fresh opportunities on the horizon for the NFL. The league's international footprint is growing, and its domestic games continue to capture some of the biggest audiences in live television. It's a juggernaut that Mount is sticking with for the foreseeable future.

After all, her job requires attention to the smallest details *and* the big picture. She must rely on her teammates to carry out the plan and trust them to improvise when things go sideways. It's notching small victories, absorbing setbacks, and still moving toward the goal.

Sound familiar? ●

NFL/Ann Sullivan

Courtesy of the NFL



One of Mai-Han Nguyen's personal story concepts imagines World War II in a sci-fi fantasy universe filled with airships shaped like giant fish.



# GETTING

# ANIMATED

Mai-Han Nguyen turned her love of drawing and printmaking into a career at Nickelodeon



# AS

a printmaking major at CFA, Mai-Han Nguyen began every new project the same way—with a handwritten checklist outlining every step of the process. Not exactly glamorous, but precision was critical when it came to mixing pigments or concocting an acid bath to properly etch a metal plate.

It's a routine Nguyen ('21) brought with her to Nickelodeon Animation Studio, where she is a full-time visual development artist. These days, instead of ink and acid baths, she's keeping track of file dimensions and organizing her layers in Photoshop. "A lot of the habits that I have in my work now come from printmaking," she says.

At first glance, printmaking and animation might not appear to have much in common. Printmaking goes back centuries, with some of the earliest examples of woodblock prints dating to Japan, circa 700. Animation, depending on who you ask, got its start in 1892 with Émile Reynaud's film *Pauvre Pierrot* or 1908 with Émile Cohl's *Fantasmagorie*. Printmaking is a physical, tactile process that can be done by a single artist, while 21st-century animation happens primarily in the digital realm and is almost always a team effort.

But for Ngyuen, printmaking was key to unlocking the skills that she uses daily at Nickelodeon.

"There's an exactness to both," she says. "That's the throughline that I really like."

## THE DRAW OF ART

Growing up, Nguyen was made to understand that art was a hobby, not a career. "I always remembered my grandparents and everyone in my family talking about how there's this artistic inclination that runs in the family, in every generation," she says. "My grandfather had it before he came to the US—even back when he was in Vietnam. But because we weren't wealthy, he couldn't give art much of his attention."

Nguyen didn't take her first art class—introduction to drawing—until high school. Her work drew the attention of the head of the department, Michelle Cobb, who asked her whether she'd considered pursuing art professionally.



As a printmaking major at CFA, Nguyen experimented with wood cut prints (top), watercolor monotype (bottom right), lithography, etching, and other disciplines.

Courtesy of Mai-Han Nguyen

Courtesy of Mai-Han Nguyen



When Nguyen told her she planned on majoring in environmental science, Cobb urged her to think about it. "You can go down this path that you think is right, or you can take a chance," Nguyen recalls her saying.

And suddenly, Nguyen was crying. "I broke down in the middle of the art studios," she says. "Anyone could have walked in, and I'd be sobbing hysterically. That almost emotional breakdown solidified that there was this lingering regret inside me that I was trying not to acknowledge."

She made up her mind: she would study art in college, a choice her family greeted with some resistance. "I just bulldozed ahead through that," she says. "I made the decision that there will always be time to redirect my path if I need to. But at least in this moment, this is what I wanted to do."

As a compromise, she enrolled in a dual degree program in painting and environmental science at BU. Sophomore year, she studied abroad in Venice, where she took her first printmaking course, at the local Academy of Fine Arts. "It blew me away," she says. "The studio equipment is too expensive not to be shared, creating an extremely collaborative environment. Everyone's constantly sharing knowledge about how to use certain tools or certain chemicals. I really fell for that atmosphere."

**"A lot of the habits that I have in my work now come from printmaking."**

For most people, freedom means fewer rules. But for Ngyuen, the strict guidelines around the printmaking process unlocked her creativity in ways that a more open-ended artistic practice wasn't able to do. "I loved learning about the restrictions within certain materials," she says. "Having these limitations made me feel like I was more able to come up with my own ideas and concepts. It really suited me really well. I found a lot of freedom in that guidance."

Upon her return to campus, she officially switched from painting to printmaking—and dropped environmental science. She likely would have sought an internship at a printmaking studio after graduation, if it hadn't been for the pandemic. The lockdown gave her time to consider





what she wanted to do next. “The printmaking studio itself was collaborative,” she says, “and that was great. But I kept thinking that I wanted to work with more people—not just from the US, but from around the world—on projects that were bigger than just what was in front of me.”

She explored other artistic disciplines and found the Creative Talent Network (CTN), an animation organization that hosts an annual expo. In 2021, the event offered online-only tickets, allowing her a convenient way to dip her toe into the world of animation. And what she discovered fascinated her.

#### THE ANIMATION PIPELINE

Animation is a hugely complex undertaking, with dozens or even hundreds of artists working on a single project—from character design to color palettes to storyboarding. Visual development artists (also referred to as “concept artists”) are one link in that chain. Their job is typically to bring the world to life based on the animatics—a storyboard in motion, essentially—by filling in the details.

“You’re helping someone else visualize that idea in their head that they can’t really see yet,” Nguyen explains. “So it’s all these abstract ideas, and it’s your job to take those ideas

**“It’s your job to take those ideas and make them into a tangible reality. You have to convince an audience that this is something that can exist.”**

and make them into a tangible reality. You have to convince an audience that this is something that can exist.”

That’s where research comes in. References are critical to understand how everything works, even the more fantastical elements. “It’s very easy to draw a car, but in order to make that car look specific to the world, you have to know which parts you can manipulate and which you can take out,” says Nguyen. “And that theory is applied to everything in the world—you have to know how it works in

Courtesy of Mai-Han Nguyen

order to take it apart and make it into something that fits.”

Through CTN, she found out about a real-world production pipeline class run by James Lopez, a veteran animator at Disney. The project the class would be working on was *Cowabunga*, a four-minute short chronicling an alien ship’s madcap attempt to abduct a feisty bovine. Nguyen applied for the production stage, and spent six months filling in the details of the world that had already been storyboarded by the previous cohort—from the shape of the grass to the style of fencing used on the farm.

*Cowabunga* “has a special place in my heart,” Nguyen says. “All of us were so new to the industry at that point. It was the first time I got to work with other people on anything similar to an animation pipeline. I realized how much effort it took. It was definitely stressful, but seeing it come together was kind of like my test. Being a part of that

role. “It’s always been the timing for me,” she says, of landing the gig. “A lot of it is being able to have your skills up to where they need to be at the time that that job needs them.”

#### THE NICKELODEON EXPERIENCE

The six-month artist program at Nickelodeon is more than an internship. Everyone accepted is embedded with an existing team of full-time staff, working on a real-life animation project. In Nguyen’s case, that was *Avatar: Seven Havens*, a highly-anticipated sequel series to the beloved 2000s cult classic *Avatar: The Last Airbender*, helmed by the original creators, Michael DiMartino and Bryan Konietzko. When the program ended in June 2024, Nguyen was offered a full-time job as a background design artist with the team, working remotely from her hometown of Washington, D.C.



production was trying to see if this was something that I wanted to do as a career.”

The answer was clear. Now, she just needed to find a job.

After completing *Cowabunga*, she freelanced on two more projects—one with a studio in Singapore, on a film set in 1941 during Japanese occupation; another with a studio based in Germany, about a baby Loch Ness monster—and participated in a mentorship program through the nonprofit Women in Animation with an animator from Dreamworks. She worked on her own concepts too, like an alternate version of World War II, where humankind has bioengineered airships out of gigantic fish.

In late 2023, she learned that she’d been accepted into the visual development track of Nickelodeon’s 2024 artist program for emerging talent—a highly competitive

She works long days, often close to eight hours of uninterrupted drawing. “There are a bunch of people that have to review that shot and make sure it aligns with what they’re imagining for it,” she says. “It’s a lot of back and forth.”

The process doesn’t faze Nguyen, though. “I come from a fine arts background, and so we get a lot of critiques—really, really hard critiques,” she says. “You have to be able to take any notes that you’re given and translate it into what you think they want, which is tricky, but also it’s my favorite part about the job. I think the back-and-forth is what makes it so interesting. It feels like a challenge.”

For Nguyen, it’s a dream job. “I have everything I want,” she says. “I get to work in art and make a living at it. High-school me would not have thought this would be possible.” ●

[As a visual development artist, Nguyen creates detailed reference works that help bring the story concepts to life.](#)

Courtesy of Mai-Han Nguyen



# CLASS NOTES

## 1950s

**Mark Mobius ('58, COM'59)** is an American-born German emerging markets fund manager and founder of Mobius Capital Partners LLP. Mobius recently released *The Book of Wealth: A Young Investor's Guide to Wealth and Happiness* (Penguin Random House India, 2024), in which he shares what true happiness means while explaining how to create and preserve wealth.

## 1960s

**Cynthia Close ('67,'69)** has completed *Carnal Conversations*, a memoir. Through intimate observations laced with ironic humor, Close recounts the story of how she finds herself at 40 living on Friedrichshof—a radical artists commune near the Austria-Hungary border—where the nuclear family has been banned.

**Steve Robinson (CGS'66, CFA'69)** offered all classical radio stations in the United States his recently completed five-part series, *Valentin Silvestrov: A Composer's Journey*. Robinson's 13-part radio documentary *No Regrets: The Music and Spirit of Billie Holiday*, was also made available to all US jazz stations.

## 1970s

**Will Lyman ('71)** portrayed Ebenezer Scrooge in Commonwealth Shakespeare Company's production of *A Christmas Carol*, at the Emerson Cutler Majestic Theatre in Boston, Mass.

**Grant Drumheller ('76,'78)** hosted *What Living Is*, his fourth show at Prince Street Gallery in New York, N.Y., which included his paintings "Street Salsa" and "Saturday Morning at Fort Greene Park." Both works invite the viewer to experience the magic and mythic possibility in everyday work and play, he writes. Drumheller is also represented by Greenhut Galleries, in Portland, Maine, and the Elder Gallery of Contemporary Art in Charlotte, N.C.

**Jane Murray ('78)** performed a work for oboe and chorus with the Chorus of Westerly, R.I., at a remembrance and wreath-laying ceremony held at the Normandy American Cemetery and Memorial in Colleville-sur-Mer, France. Murray began her 46th season as solo English horn for the Rhode Island Philharmonic Orchestra. She is also a licensed body mapping educator who helps musicians of all ages learn how awareness of the body's role in music making can improve stamina, breathing, and tone, and can prevent pain and injury.

**Jane O'Hara ('78)** completed and exhibited the 51-painting series *State of the Union—Animals Across America* at the New Bedford Art Museum in New Bedford, Mass. The series examines the topic of animal rights in the US. Gathering inspiration from disparate sources such as nostalgic postcard iconography and pop culture, O'Hara depicts animal living conditions—from the sobering to the lighthearted—in all 50 states. Upcoming plans for the artist include touring the series, speaking engagements, and producing a *State of the Union* book.

O'Hara is represented by the William Scott Gallery in Provincetown, Mass., which recently showed her series *A Humane Dilemma: When Animals Speak*.

**Patricia Steiner ('78)** started an international consulting firm, received her MBA and doctorate in leadership and innovation, and now teaches for National University, Tufts, and Metropolitan College.

**Patricia Randell ('79)** was part of an ensemble of NYC actors that read playwright and Pulitzer Prize finalist Jon Marans' latest play, with David Hyde Pierce reading the lead role, in December 2024. Additionally, Ensemble Studio Theatre featured Randell in their new Member Spotlight series.

## 1980s

**Julia Shepley ('80)** hosted *Transmissible*, a solo show at Boston Sculptors Gallery. Shepley's featured works comprise an enigmatic mix of sculptural black ink drawings backed by reflective copper and a shadowbox that she used to take vibrant and atmospheric abstract photography.

**David Lawton ('82)** and fellow poets Aimee Herman and Eric Alter released *Pixie Dust*, their debut album as the group Hydrogen Junkbox. The tracks are full of the group's poems repurposed into lyrics and accompanied by vocal harmonies, ukuleles, and a rhythm section provided by cookie tins and kitchen utensils. The album is available on most streaming services.

### SHARE YOUR STORY!

We want to hear what you've been up to. Send us your news and photos at [bu.edu/cfa/share-your-story](https://bu.edu/cfa/share-your-story), and we'll share the highlights here.

**Julianne Moore ('83)** starred in the Netflix limited series *Sirens*, created by Molly Smith Metzler (GRS'02). Moore played the charismatic Michaela Kell, a philanthropist, an animal activist, and the wife of a billionaire. She is also set to play Dianne Modestini, an art restorer, in an upcoming TV series about Leonardo da Vinci's painting *Salvator Mundi*. Moore is also taking a stand with thousands of other Hollywood creatives who signed an open letter calling artificial intelligence a major threat to their work.

**Michael Chiklis ('85)** stars in *Hotel Cocaine*, a thriller-drama series from MGM+. Chiklis plays Dominic Zulio, a Drug Enforcement Administration agent, and stars alongside Danny Pino (*Law & Order: Special Victims Unit*) and Mark Feuerstein (*Royal Pains*). The show's creator, Chris Brancato, was co-showrunner for Netflix's *Narcos*, winner of eight Emmy Awards.

**Arthur Levering ('88)** released a new album, *OceanRiverLake*, on the label New Focus. The tracks feature works for orchestra, string quartet, mixed trio, and solo piano and are performed by members of the Boston Modern Orchestra Project and the Lydian String Quartet, as well as pianist Donald Berman, guitarist Maarten Stragier, and flutist Sarah Brady.

## 1990s

**Richard Width ('91)** works as a hospice RN while he completes a book on his healthcare experiences with end-of-life patients and continues to balance an active career in the



Nile Scott Studios

arts. Maintaining his Equity and Dramatist Guild memberships, he was cast in TheatreSquared's 2024 season and filmed a supporting role for an independent feature film in Columbus, Ohio. Working with New Jersey's First Flight Theatre Company, which he helped found in 2018, he adapted Bram Stoker's *Dracula* into *Mina*, a one-woman play available on Amazon along with his adaptation of Jules Verne's *A Journey to the Centre of the Earth*.

After winning the 2023 Elliot Norton Award for Outstanding Music Direction, **David Coleman (BUTI'86, CFA'93)** became a full-time associate professor of Afri-

cana studies at Berklee College of Music. Most recently, Coleman served as music director for Boston Conservatory's 2024 production of *Jesus Christ Superstar*, conducting a 30-piece orchestra. Additionally, one of Coleman's new compositions was the centerpiece of Boston Pops' 2024 Holiday Pops program. The work, "Carol of the Brown King," was based on the Ashley Bryan book of the same name, which includes original illustrations accompanying the poetry of Langston Hughes. The performance featured the Tanglewood Festival Chorus, as well as projections of Bryan's artwork. This was Coleman's second commission for the Boston Pops.

**MORRIS ROBINSON ('01) (FROM LEFT), BRIAN MAJOR ('08,'10), AND MICHELLE JOHNSON ('07)** starred in a one-night Boston Lyric Opera production of *Aida* in November 2024. The show was a specially staged concert featuring dramatic duets and some of Giuseppe Verdi's most thrilling choral works.

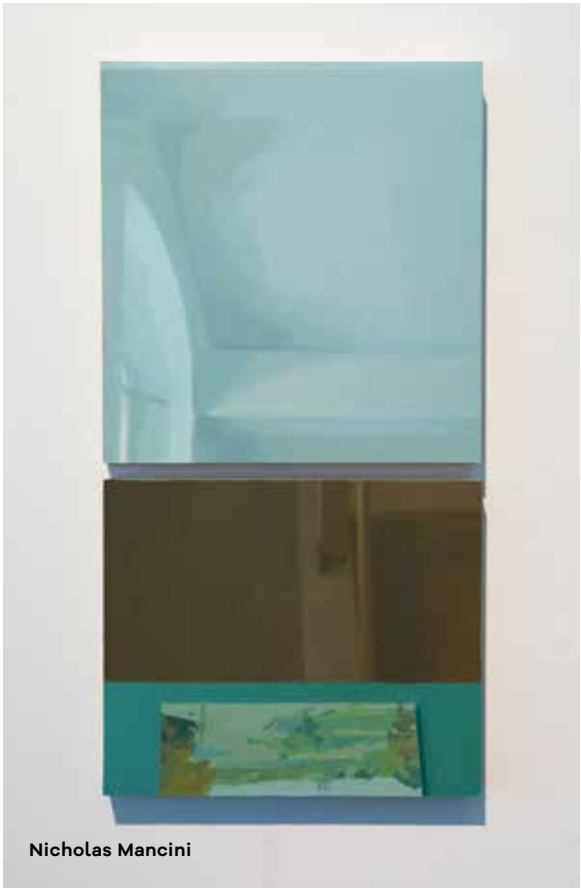
"Revelry", composed by **Valerie Coleman (BUTI'89, CFA'95)** and recorded by Decoda Ensemble, was nominated for a Grammy award in the category of Best Contemporary Classical Composition. This is Coleman's second Grammy nomination.

**Grace Julian-Murthy ('96)** had her artwork selected for WGBH Boston's Community Canvas ini-

tiative. Julian-Murthy's piece was displayed on WGBH's Digital Mural above the Massachusetts Turnpike in Brighton. Additionally, Julian-Murthy's artwork was showcased at WGBH's studio, located within the Boston Public Library in Copley Square, during a live taping of *The Culture Show*.

**Dave Shalansky ('96)** recently had a supporting role in *Rosemead*, a





Nicholas Mancini

*Constituent Parts*, a 2025 spring semester exhibition at BU’s 808 Gallery, showcased works by **CATHY DELLA LUCIA** (’17) and **NICHOLAS MANCINI** (’17), highlighting the decade-long conversation between the artists who met as MFA students at CFA in 2015. In dialog with each other, their works invite viewers to rethink how they make sense of the world around them.



Cathy Della Lucia

feature film starring Lucy Liu. He also had a supporting role in *The Missing Peace*, a short film written, directed, and produced by Michael Raymond-James and executive produced by Jason Momoa (*Aquaman*, *Dune*). *The Missing Peace* received several awards, including Best Short Film and Best Acting Ensemble at the 2024 Indie Short Fest in Los Angeles, Calif., and was accepted into the New York Short Film Festival. Shalansky continues to audition for series regular and guest star roles, plays, and films.

He is a proud husband and father.

**Crystal J. Leotaud-Ramos** (’97, BUTI’91) was named Music Educator of the Year by the Long Island Arts Council of Freeport, N.Y.

## 2000s

**Noah Bean** (’00) directed *What It’s Like to Be Okay*, a short film written by and starring **Dennis Staroselsky** (’00). Filmed just outside Boston, the story follows a struggling actor

who prioritizes his career over his family, and must ultimately find a way to make amends with his heartbroken daughter. The film soundtrack features original songs by **Fay Wolf** (’00).

**David Foley Jr.** (’00) played Tom Keeney in the musical production of *Funny Girl* at the Citizens Opera House in Boston, Mass, for a two-week run in February of 2025.

*Blue Jade*, a 2024 oil painting by **Kayla Mohammadi** (’02), was

purchased by The Farnsworth Art Museum in Rockland, Maine, for their permanent collection.

**Arturo Chacón-Cruz** (’03), an operatic tenor, performed at the Arena di Verona Festival in Italy, as well as South Korea’s Olympic Arena, for more than 100,000 people. He also won the Readers’ Award for Best Singer at the 2024 International Opera Awards. The award was presented live at the Bavarian State Opera in Munich, Germany, during a concert where Chacón-

Mel Taling

Cruz sang under the conducting baton of Vladimir Jurowski.

**Bonnie Discepolo** (’03) directed *Neo Dome*, an independent pilot starring Anna Camp. It won the Audience Award at the 2024 South by Southwest film festival, the Audience and Best Ensemble Awards at SeriesFest, and the Grand Jury Prize and Audience Award at the Nashville Film Festival. Discepolo is a recurring actor on Jordan Peele’s *Scare Tactics*, airing on USA Network.

**Uzo Aduba** (’05) starred in *The Supremes at Earl’s All-You-Can-Eat*, a Searchlight Pictures dramedy released on Hulu, alongside Sanaa Lathan and Aunjanue Ellis-Taylor. Aduba also appeared in *The Residence*, a murder mystery revolving around the most deadly state dinner in United States history. In February, Aduba received the *Hollywood Reporter’s* Trailblazer Award at SCAD TVfest, Savannah College of Art and Design’s annual celebration of television.

**Greg Hildreth** (’05) starred in the *Queen of Versailles*, a musical running from July to August 2024 at the Emerson Colonial Theatre in Boston, Mass.

**Resa Blatman** (’06) had a solo exhibition, *Little Green*, at the McCoy Gallery at Merrimack College in Andover, Mass. This new body of work, on view from September to November 2024, consisted of 27 moss paintings; a live, 30-inch moss terrarium; a wall-mounted installation; and a collaborative sound-based piece. *Little Green’s* next stop was the Multicultural Arts Center in Cambridge, Mass, where it was shown from December 2024 to January 2025.

**Ishan Johnson** (’06), a member of the BU Alumni Council, was promoted to chief philanthropy advisor for the Boston Lyric Opera. Johnson has been featured on panels with the National Alliance for Musical Theatre, AFP Chicago, BU, the Philanthropy Club of Chicago, University Club of Chicago, Easterseals, Chicago Opera

Theater, Grantmakers Association of America, and the Arts Club of Chicago. Most recently, he served as an inaugural mentor in Opera America’s Mentorship Program for Opera Leaders of Color.

**Janice Checchio** (’07) is associate creative director of photography at BU. In fall 2024, she exhibited her work alongside her colleagues, photojournalists Jacqueline Ricciardi and Cydney Scott, in *Moments in Photography*, an exhibition held at the University’s 808 Gallery. Her work is inspired by surrealism, mythology, and nature.

**Rachelle Reichert** (’07) exhibited her artwork at the Autry Museum of the American West in Los Angeles. The show, *Out of Site: Survey Science and the American West*, was part of the Getty Museum and Foundation’s PST: Art & Science Collide initiative and focused on surveillance technologies in the remote western United States. Rachelle also showed her work in a solo exhibition at Sarah Shepard Gallery in Marin County from November to January. Friends and classmates can email her at studio@rachellereichert.com.

**John Beder** (BUTI’03, CFA’08) collaborated with noted civil rights attorney Ben Crump on the documentary *How to Sue the Klan*. The film toured the country as an official selection at 38 festivals and qualified for the 2025 Academy Awards in the Best Documentary Short Category.

**James Thompson** (’08) is a professor and chair of the music department at Des Moines Area Community College. He writes that he is focused on his academic work and teaching, but that he remains active as a soloist, a clinician, and an adjudicator throughout the Midwest.

**Cynthia Galvin-Kamp** (’09) is the music director for the Amagansett School, where she has been teaching since September 2005. In 2023, Galvin-Kamp completed her graduate certificate in the music education and autism program at Berklee College of Music and is a

National Board–certified teacher in early and middle childhood instrumental music. Galvin-Kamp was a participant in the National Art Education Association’s Connected Arts Networks Program for the 2024–2025 school year.

**Erika B. Hess** (’09) was named artistic director of Chautauqua Visual Arts, part of the Chautauqua Institution of upstate New York, where she oversees the organization’s visual arts residency and lecture series.

## 2010s

**Natessa Amin** (’10) is an assistant professor of art at Moravian University, where she teaches all levels of studio art and leads courses abroad in Italy. Amin has a studio practice based in Philadelphia, Pa., and is codirector of FJORD Gallery, a not-for-profit, artist-led gallery. She lives with her husband, Gordon, and dog, Cosmo, in Philadelphia’s Fishtown neighborhood.

**Jason King Jones** (’12) is an Acting Company alumnus and a proud member of the Pennsylvania Shakespeare Foundation leadership board, the Shakespeare Theatre Association’s IDEAA Committee, and the Lehigh Valley Chamber of Commerce’s Non-profit & Business Partners Council. The Pennsylvania Shakespeare Festival produces the state’s official Shakespeare festival and features acclaimed actors from Broadway, television, and film.

**Kenneth Moore** (’12) retired after 32 years as a secondary music educator in Michigan. In fall 2024, Moore accepted appointments as assistant professor of music education and director of the Master of Music Education, Teaching Artistry program, at Bowling Green State University.

**Stephanie Sherman** (’12) participated in the business accelerator EforAll on the South Coast of Massachusetts. Sherman also opened her own pottery business, where she sells her work and teaches.

**Ford Curran** (’14) completed a painting in CFA’s studios during the 2024 summer term, under the guidance of Wilhelm Neusser, a lecturer in art, painting, and drawing. The painting, a still life of a ceramic Boston terrier with colors and symbols included to capture the essence of the University, was presented as a gift to BU President Melissa Gilliam in recognition of her commitment to further elevating fine arts at BU.

**Tricia O’Toole** (’15) is manager of professional theater licensing at Concord Theatricals, working with the Samuel French catalog, which includes titles over 100 years old and those currently on Broadway. She works with professional theaters throughout the country to help develop their seasonal programming and pitch the work of living playwrights.

**Aija Reke** (’15,’28) performed a solo recital at BU’s Frederick S. Pardee School of Global Studies, which included her own composition for violin. Reke also performed pieces by Fanny Mendelssohn-Hensel and Gabriel Fauré at a concert at Hancock United Church of Christ in Lexington, Mass., in a program with readings by Natalie Dykstra, author of the biography *Chasing Beauty: The Life of Isabella Stewart Gardner* (HarperCollins, 2025).

**Bryn Boice** (’16), an Elliot Norton award winner, directed Hub Theatre Company’s production of Molière’s celebrated comedy *Tartuffe*. The show ran from November 9, through November 24, 2024, at The Boston Center for the Arts Plaza Theatre, 539 Tremont St. in Boston’s Back Bay.

**Shelly Magno** (’17) teaches fourth grade in Charlotte, N.C., and volunteers with the city’s police department’s animal care and control team. Magno created a project for her students to raise awareness of animal rescue issues by featuring 70 animals in foster care. Eighteen of the portraits were selected by Charlotte’s Discovery Place Science Museum to be viewed in their exhibition, *Dogs: A Science Tail*.





Working as The Gutter Studios, FRANCIS BORDELEAU (’25), ELLA SCHEUERELL (’24), DAJIA ZHOU (’24), SANDEEP BADAL (’24), and JOEL CHRISTIAN GILL (’04), associate professor of art and chair of BU School of Visual Arts’ Department of Visual Narrative, illustrated the history of the busing crisis in Boston for the *Boston Globe*. The work illustrates in detail the hardships Black students and families in the 1970s faced in Boston Public Schools, and the struggles that persist today.

**Padmini Chandrasekaran (’17), Joshua Duttweiler (’17), Molly Haig (’18) Vaishnavi Kumar (’18), Kristen Mallia (’18), Sarah Cadigan-Fried (’19),** and Christopher Field, a former CFA lecturer in art, are members of Radius Collective, along with Massimiliano Cerioni. Radius Collective is an international body of artists, designers, and educators creating work that engages in discourses around identity, place, and connection. Each year they decide on a theme, produce work individually, and then develop a group exhibition. The collective has exhibited across the US and as far as Rome, Italy, in 2024.

**Rachel Orth (’17,’28),** a violinist, was named a recipient of the Boston Symphony Orchestra Resident Fellowship for Early-Career Musicians.

**Alexandra Delano (’18)** founded the agency Alex Delano Design in 2023. She has worked with clients such as GORE-TEX, Asics, CBS, Kindbody, Goslings Rum, and other well-known companies. She also has a partnership with 1% For the Planet, a worldwide initiative that encourages businesses to donate one percent of their annual sales to environmental causes.

**Trevor Kowalski (’18)** released *The Twilight Glow*, a classical piano album he produced, conducted, wrote, arranged, and performed. The album was released through the label Neue Meister. Kowalski recently scored Cherokee filmmaker Loren Waters’ film *Tiger*, which premiered during the 2024–2025 festival circuit. He also scored her previous film, *1h#B O’Wd (Meet Me at the Creek)*, which received international praise. Additionally, a PBS affiliate flew Kowalski to Alaska to record live sounds for a soundtrack with Alaskan director Alex Sallee.

**Christopher Moretti (’19,’21)** was nominated for a Grammy Award in the Best Engineered Album, Classical, category for his recording work on A Far Cry’s *A Gentleman of Istanbul*, featuring musician-composers Mehmet Sanlikol and George Lennis.

## 2020s

**Celia Daggy (BUTI’16, CFA’20)** has been principal viola for the Virginia Symphony Orchestra since 2022. Based in Norfolk, the orchestra performs concerts across the Chesapeake Bay region.

**Sophonria Vowels (’20)** teaches pre-K through fifth grade theater classes at public schools around the Bay Area. She recently married **Sébastien Garbe (’20, CAS’20)**, who is substitute teaching while applying for his single-subject English teaching credential.

**Phil O’Neal (’21)** is in his eighth year as head choral director at Woodcreek Middle School in Humble, Tex. He is also contemporary worship leader at the Atascocita Methodist Church in Atascocita, and the minister of music at the True Worship Cathedral in Houston. Additionally, O’Neal is keyboardist for Bayou City Brass Band, and a 10-year military veteran, having served in the US Army Reserve National Guard from 1992 through 2002.

**Aidan Close (’23)** played Scorpius Malfoy in *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child* at the Hollywood Pantages Theatre from February through June 2025.

**Alexis Peart (’23, MET’24),** a mezzo-soprano, was selected to perform with the Ryan Opera Center at Chicago Lyric Opera for its 2025–2026 season. At the close of the event, she was presented with the Audience Favorite award. She is an emerging artist at Boston Lyric Opera and continues to study with Penelope Bitzas, a CFA associate professor of voice.

**Yolanda Yang (MET’21, CFA’24)** completed her latest project, *Behind VA Shadows*, where she highlights the creative expression of museum workers while reimagining how they engage with urban spaces. Yang is the arts engagement manager at Pao Arts Center in Boston, Mass., where she advocates for programs that honor the history and identity of residents of Boston’s Chinatown.

The Gutter Studios: Joel Christian Gill, Francis Borgeleau, Dajia Zhou, Sandeep Badal, Ella Scheuerell



## A LITTLE ROCK, A LITTLE CLASSICAL

By Steve Holt

**FAMILY LORE HOLDS THAT** when Carolyn Regula was 18 months old, she found her older sister’s violin, held it upright rather than on her shoulder, and began to play it like a cello. You could say Regula (BUTI’11, CFA’15,’18) has been defying convention ever since.

Regula, who performs under the name The Cello Doll, has built a sizable following on social media and through live performances around Las Vegas, where she lives. She fuses her standard and electric cello with harder rock and emo sounds and posts cello covers of songs by some of her favorite rock artists on her YouTube channel, which has more than 8,000 subscribers. In one video, Regula plays a mash-up of System of a Down’s “Toxicity” and Britney Spears’ “Toxic”—with a little Vivaldi thrown in for good measure.

Regula had her first cello lesson at eight years old. By age 15, she’d won her first concerto competition. Around this time, her musical



tastes began to expand beyond her beloved Yo-Yo Ma CD to bands like Evanescence and My Chemical Romance. She says she was drawn to their “raw and unapologetic” lyrics and to the attitude they projected.

“Also, their stage presence was so powerful to me,” she says. “I said, ‘I want to do that, but with a cello in my hand.’”

While studying cello performance and music theory and composition at CFA, Regula learned about major symphonies around the world going bankrupt.

“That started the conversation of why people aren’t coming to orchestra concerts or classical music concerts,” she says. “I realized we need to somehow translate this to the masses.”

She saw hope in groups like Vitamin String Quartet that were putting their unique spin on popular music and seeing their songs go viral online. In 2019, Regula had her first major hit on YouTube: a brooding mash-up of Ramin Djawadi’s theme from *Game of Thrones* and Johannes Brahms’ Cello Sonata in E Minor, op. 38, no. 1. “I had friends saying, ‘You have 10,000 followers!’ I’m like, ‘Is that good?’” she recalls. Now, with nearly 18,000 Instagram followers, Regula says most of her paid cello work comes from her social media presence.

In 2022, she released *Escaping Darkness*, her first full-length album of covers and original compositions. In Vegas, she played at the 2023 Formula One Grand Prix and performed at events during Super Bowl LVIII. Regula performed with pop fiddler Lindsey Stirling in 2023 (“one of my greatest accomplishments from being on social media”), but she adds that she’s working on creating a unique solo live show for The Cello Doll.

“The next step is to get more on the radar with some of these bands and people who have inspired me so much,” she says. “I want to make it virtuosic, to really showcase the training I have had and what I know the cello is capable of doing.” ●

John Christopher Warner





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