

Monday, Nov 20, 2017

## Working in the Arts: SMTD Alumni News, November 2017

Dance alum **Matt Wagner** (BFA '15) and his **DIAVOLO** dance company colleagues performed an acrobatic routine with an abstract dome structure to Harry Styles' "Sign of the Times" on the finale of [America's Got Talent](#) and finished in the top 10. Under the artistic direction of Jacques Heim, the company's diverse team of dancers, designers, choreographers and engineers "create visceral and awe-inspiring works that reveal how we are affected emotionally, physically and socially by the spaces we inhabit," according to [diavolo.org](#).

While advancing through the audition, judge cut, quarterfinal and semifinal and final rounds of the competition, DIAVOLO consistently received standing ovations from the audience and judges, with Simon Cowell commenting that their final performance was "like looking into a watch." "It's so precise," Cowell said. "Every one of you deserves to be standing there (on stage). Anyone who owns a casino or something in Vegas should book these guys because they will bring an audience."

OU alumni **Ashley Maria Bahri**, **Lindsay Terrell**, **Lauren Lenz**, **Jacob Surzyn**, **Molly Bruhner**, and **Leslie Ann Naeve** were busy lighting up the stage in various local opera productions over the past month. Bahri played Mrs. Jessell in the recent Opera Modo production of *Turn of the Screw*, while Terrell played the Governess. Lenz was the stage manager in the Main Street Opera production of *The Pirates of Penzance*, while Surzyn played the Pirate King, Bruhner played Edith and Naeve performed as Ruth. In addition, alumna **Cheyenne Coss** was recognized with an encouragement award by the Detroit district of the Metropolitan Opera National Council.

**Alexandra Plaskey** (BFA '13), who was working a part of the special events team of Madison Square Gardens

Entertainment, recently took on a new role as manager of event production at Radio City Music Hall in New York City. "Everyt that happens inside Radio City starts with the production team," Plaskey said. "We work with the bookings team to manage t staffing and execution of all concerts, special events, graduations and private parties that happen in the venue from start to fi Currently, we're in the middle of the Christmas Spectacular, where you'll find me backstage admiring the Rockettes from afar

Theatre alum **Lauren Knox** (BFA '12) is directing *God of Carnage*, the season opener for [Purple Rose Theatre Company](#), (Sep Dec. 16). Company founder Jeff Daniels was nominated for a Tony Award for the play's 2009 Broadway production. "Jeff gav the original script with all the notes, the motivations, the rhythms," Knox said. "He also reminded me that we were going to rr it our own. We're not trying to replicate the original Broadway production; this is going to be a Purple Rose show." The produ has received positive reviews, with Daniel Skora of *It's All Theatre* noting that "If you've encountered the show before, the Puir Rose offers its own unique take on what's already become a minor classic. If you haven't, you will find this [production](#) an entertaining treat."

Oakland University's artist-in-residence, renowned jazz violinist **Regina Carter** (BA '85) appeared on FOX 2 Detroit on Nov. 1 Thornetta Davis, Sean Dobbins, Marion Hayden and Corey Kendrick to promote "[A Tribute to Ella Fitzgerald and Stuff Smith](#)," OU Jazz Band concert held Nov. 2 in Varner Recital Hall. You can view their appearance [here](#).

**Vanessa Sawson** (BA '03) and John Lepard headlined the Oct. 28 performance of IChabod at the [Michigan Shakespeare Festival](#) in Lansing, Mich. Sawson appeared most recently at the MSF as Calphurnia in *Julius Caesar* and as the heartbreakin Polina in the world premier translation of *The Seagull* after being a MisFIT (tour company member) for the 2015/16 seasons. S was also an ensemble member at the Cincinnati Shakespeare Company, appearing in *The Flecked Man* and *Much Ado About*



*Dance alum Matt Wagner (BFA '15) and his DIAVOLO dance company colleagues finished in the top 10 on the finale of America's Got Talent. (Photo courtesy Matt Wagner/Facebook)*



Lauren Knox (BFA '12), left, is directing *God of Carnage* at the Purple Rose Theatre. (Photo courtesy the Purple Rose Theatre Company/Facebook)

toured with Montana Shakespeare in the Parks (Summer 2014) where she had the ultimate tour-life experience traveling out v

**Constantine Novotny** sang *The Telephone*, Menotti's one act opera, with Katrina Van Maanen at the [Live@First Concert Series](#) Preview Concert on Oct. 14 in Birmingham, Mich. The concert also included a special appearance by Oakland University Chorale's the Oakordz.

**Colleen Miner** (BFA '14) played Roz in The Snug Theatre's production of *Moon Over Buffalo*. The fast-paced screwball comedy played through Nov. 11 and received rave reviews, with David Kiley of [Encore Michigan](#) calling Miner's performance one of the "comic highlights of the show."

**Olivia Griffin** (BFA '16) played the role of Magenta in *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* at the [Bucks County Playhouse](#) through 29. Her previous credits include regional productions of *Hair*, *Violet the Musical*, *The Life*, and *Matt & Ben*.

**Maggie Hinckley** (BFA '17) landed the role of Cordelia in The Pigeon Creek Shakespeare Company's production of *King Lear*. PCSC is Michigan's only year-round, touring, professional Shakespeare company, and *King Lear* is playing on Dec. 3 at Seven Steps Up in Spring Lake; and on Dec. 9 at Jenison Center for the Arts. For more information, visit [pcshakespeare.com](#).

OU theatre alumna **Anetria Cole's** short film *Street Numbers & Street Sweepers* won the People's Choice Award in the [WDIV Local 4 / ClickOnDetroit](#) Film Challenge Detroit. The film received over 3,000 votes from all over the United States as well as Egypt and South Africa. Anetria said, "I'm so excited about the future and so excited that I gained a wealth of experience from my 'home school' [Oakland University!](#) And especially from **Kitty Dubin's** playwriting and advanced playwriting classes! I will forever love OU. Being a student there was one of the best experiences of my life! Go Grizzly's!" You can read more about the award winners at [ClickOnDetroit](#).

**Jocelyn Fekel Zelasko** (BM '03 and PhD in progress) performed in September with [Juxtatonal](#) — a contemporary music ensemble founded by Zelasko (voice) and Bryan Hayslett (cello) at Strange Beautiful Music 10, a three-day marathon contemporary music festival.

Oakland University alumna **Ann Toomey** and **Krysty Swann** are in productions at [Chicago Lyric Opera](#). Swann is currently understudying the roles of Maddelena in their production of *Rigoletto* and Grimmerde in their production of *Die Walküre*. She made her lyric debut in March in their production of *Yarbird*. Toomey is currently understudying Countess Ceprano in *Rigoletto* and Ortlinda in *Die Walküre*. She will also be performing at OU in January during Oakland Winterfest with the Chamber Music Society of Detroit. The program will feature artists appearing in different combinations over a single weekend, with each program anchored by a major work of Brahms. Tickets are available at [StarTickets.com](#).



Anetria Cole and the People's Choice Award (Photo courtesy Anetria Cole)

Musical theatre alum **Sam Rohloff** (BFA '13) said he was "beyond thrilled" to ha



Music alum and drummer **Gayelynn Mckinney** (BM '89), who played the [Detroit Festival](#) in September, was interviewed by the [Detroit Free Press](#) and offered some advice to aspiring musicians: "My father told me, 'Don't put yourself in a box.' I'm a jazz drummer, but I can also play rock and R&B. Music is a language, and I learn many styles of music, so you have to know the language of each style in order for it to sound correct and feel good."

*Sam Rohloff (BFA '13), center,  
at New York Fashion Week.  
(Photo courtesy Sam  
Rohloff/Facebook)*