

Working in the Arts

SMTD Alumni News, September 2018

📅 September 28, 2018

SHARE THIS STORY

Theatre alums **Gabrielle Minchella** and **Lester Finley**, who are living and working in New York City, ran into actresses Kate Flannery, best known for playing Meredith Palmer on the NBC series *The Office*, and Jane Lynch, best known for her role as Sue Sylvester in the musical television series *Glee*, while riding the subway.



Krystal Smoger (BFA '18, theatre tech and design) recently landed a highly-coveted internship at [David Korins Design](#) in New York City. David Korins is a scenic designer whose recent work includes the Broadway productions of *War Paint*, *Dear Evan Hansen*, *Passing Strange* and *Hamilton*. "I'm incredibly grateful to my professors and the alumni that have provided me with opportunities to gain professional experience while I was at Oakland," Smoger said. "Working with them on their individual projects has allowed me to develop the insight and

skills needed to succeed in this internship.” Smoger’s internship ran from the end of August to the end of January.



Dance alum **Bianca Brengman** (BFA '16) has submitted a dance piece for [ArtPrize](#) in Grand Rapids entitled The Tides of Tied Ties. This piece, which is being performed three weekends during the festival (Sept. 19-Oct. 7), captures the sense of losing creativity and self-affluence in a structured setting. If you're in the Grand Rapids area, the piece will be performed Fridays (6 and 8 p.m.), Saturdays (4, 5, 6, 7 and 8 p.m.) and Sundays (2, 3:30 and 5 p.m.) Attendees can vote for Bianca at www.artprize.org/vote. For more information, follow

Tides of Tied Ties on Twitter and Facebook (@tidesoftiedties) and read more about the piece at <http://www.artprize.org/67859>.

OU graduate student, vocal coach and music director **Jamie Reed** was recently appointed as an assistant professor of practice at the University of Arizona, where she will specialize in Music Theatre. “I’ve never been more certain about such a huge decision,” Reed said. “I’m already in love with Tucson and U of A, and can’t wait for my family to fall in love, as well.” Reed said she will always treasure the memories she’s made in the state and at Oakland University. “I have truly enjoyed the opportunity to coach amazing students, as well as collaborate with wonderful faculty,” Reed said. “Mike Mitchell is the best!”

Musical theatre alum **Amanda Downey (Tong)** recently appeared as Gloria in the Patchogue Theatre’s production of Flashdance the Musical, which ran from Aug. 29-Sept. 15 in New York. Based on the Paramount Pictures film, Flashdance features phenomenal choreography set to an iconic score, including the smash hits “Maniac,” “Manhunt”, “Gloria,” “I Love Rock & Roll” and the

sensational title track, “Flashdance!”

Joe Santoni, who earned a BA in music from Oakland University, recently performed a live cover of the Moana classic “[How Far I’ll Go](#)” with his castmates in Disney’s DCapella, a new Pentatonix-style touring performance experience. “I had such a blast recording this with the folks I love,” Santoni said. The OU alum was also invited to participate in the Game of Thrones Live Concert Experience on on Sept. 9 at The Forum in Los Angeles, Calif., and asked to sing as part of the chorus on the soundtrack for the gothic supernatural horror film, The Nun. “I’ve been a dedicated follower of both The Conjuring universe and James Wan’s body of work, and to be asked to be a part of one of his films had the horror fanatic in me screaming,” Santoni said. “Grateful is an understatement. The musicians I worked with during the recording session were some of the most talented in the business and it felt so special to be a part of something as great as this.”



Soprano **Jocelyn Zelasko** (BM ‘03 and PhD in progress) celebrated her first season with Juxtatonal (JUX) — a voice and cello duo she co-founded — with a full-length concert program in Chicago, Cleveland, Cincinnati, Atlanta, San Antonio and Detroit. In their second season, the duo plans to commission 14 composers to explore the theme of “relevance.” For more information, visit juxtatonal.com.

Zelasko is also the co-founder of Whoopknox, a voice and percussion duo which just performed its second concert at the Strange Beautiful Music marathon in Detroit. Whoopknox is performing a similar program in Windsor in mid-October. For more information, visit whoopknox.com.

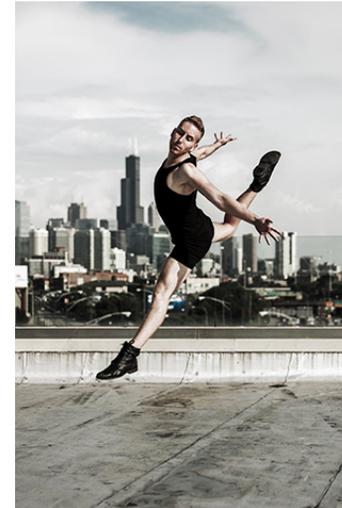
In addition to her work with Juxtatonal and Whoopknox, Zelasko is also touring as part of an empowerment concert called “I Will Learn To ” with three women from the west coast. Each

piece they perform will complete the sentence, "I will learn to..." (e.g. laugh, grieve, empower, love). They are performing the concert in San Francisco and Los Angeles in November before bringing it to Oakland University on Feb. 3, 2019.

The Meadow Brooke Theatre's production of *Arsenic & Old Lace* will feature several OU alumni, including Travis W. Walter (director), Sarah Lin Warren (production manager), Corey T. Collins (costume designer) and Olivia Urso, who will be playing the role of Elaine. Also involved in the production are Thomas D. Mahard, a special lecturer in theatre who is playing the roles of Mr. Gibbs and Mr. Witherspoon, and Kerro Knox, an associate professor of theatre and assistant director of the School of Music, Theatre and Dance who will serve as lighting designer. The comedic production, which involves two spinster sisters who have taken to murdering lonely old men by poisoning them with elderberry wine laced with arsenic, runs Oct. 3-28. For more information, visit www.mbtheatre.com/arsenic-old-lace.

Dance alumnus **Steven Eatmon** is one of eight finalists competing for the Maggie Allesee Choreography Award Competition. His piece will be performed at the Michigan Dance Festival on Saturday, Oct. 13.

Ian Lester's (BM - Euphonium Performance '18) award winning Tuba Sonata, *Hades God of the Underworld* was recorded in 2017 on Steve Darling's CD, *Dualities*. The recording was recently reviewed the summer issue of the *International Tuba Euphonium Journal* with Ian's piece receiving special mention. The reviewer writes: "In particular, Ian Lester's *Hades God of the Underworld* demonstrates an excellent mix of tonal vocabulary that works very well on the bass tuba. This work was the winner of the 2017 U.S. Army Band Tuba-Euphonium Workshop composition contest and features four movements — I. *Hades Rising*, II. *The Unseen One*, III. *Dance of the Dead* and IV. *Wrath of Hades*. A stylistic change characterizes each movement that both Darling and pianist Tanaka capture distinctly, and the adaption for bass tuba (original for contrabass tuba) comes across as very thoughtful and concise."





The Michigan Opera Theatre recently announced the appointment of Oakland University alumna **Andrea Scobie** (BA '05) as director of education. Scobie was promoted from her role as MOT's manager of education and community programs, which she had held since 2015. She was previously the director of education of Matrix Theatre Company, as well as the director of the Matrix Teen Company. She has also been an active arts educator, leading training and classes for youth and adults in performance, playwriting, vocal music and pedagogy. “I

have held a lifelong passion for arts education, and I am excited to take my role to the next level leading Michigan Opera Theatre’s expanding educational programming,” Scobie said. “I look forward to working with partners and communities across the state to ensure as many people as possible have access to quality arts education.” As director of education, Scobie will lead MOT's growing education programs, including MOT's expanded partnership with the Detroit Public Schools Community District's Cultural Passport program bringing all district fourth-graders to an opera or dance performance at the Detroit Opera House.