

Friday, Feb 23, 2018

SMTD News, February 2018

This has been a tremendous year with many changes here at the School of Music, Theatre and Dance. Many of those changes happened in the administrative office, and we would like to acknowledge our admiration and gratitude of those that are coming and going.

Over the summer, Recruitment Coordinator **Deneen Stapleton** left OU after 15 years of service. If you were ever here for a workshop, honors ensemble or an audition day, chances are you met her! In September, SMTD Communications Associate **Gillian Ellis** announced her retirement. Gill was the founder of the Prism Newsletter and spent the past seven years faithfully and beautifully presenting the news from music, theatre and dance. In January, Administrative Secretary **Muriel Mader** retired after 27 years at Oakland University, four in the Department of Mathematics and Statistics and nearly 23 in SMTD. Muriel was given a surprise *Muriel at Noon* performance to celebrate her time at OU, featuring skits and performances by faculty and students. Please join us in wishing them all the best!

We also welcome new staff members this semester: **Sean Delaney** (public information assistant, SMTD writer); **Danny DeRose** (outreach, recruitment and ensemble manager); and **Cathy Garavaglia** (office assistant.) Please stop by and say hello!



Ali Woerner

Ali Woerner, associate professor of dance and co-founder of *Take Root*, a contemporary dance company-in-residence at Oakland University, presented information during Oakland University's Soundings Series about *Take Root's Dance for Parkinson's Disease Program*, why it's important and ways higher education can be used to improve the lives of others in the community. Woerner also highlighted her own community engagement efforts in Oakland County. "Community engagement is so important to what we're doing," she said. "It's the way we started, it's the way we've survived. We let people know what's going on. Not only that, but we get them to tell others about the program, or come to the class themselves. Sometimes the hardest part is just getting them in the door."

Another *Soundings Series* event on Jan. 10 featured **Mark Stone**, associate professor of music at Oakland University, and **Dwayne Anthony**, community relations specialist and arts commissioner for the city of Pontiac, sharing how they've been bringing their message of peace and unity through music to the Oakland County community through their popular Soul Food concert series. "That's what Soul Food is about; this idea of common humanity that centers around the oneness in humanity," Stone said. "We have all different languages and music, and there are different religions and cultural traditions, but if we dig deep enough to what we're really about, that's where we start making the connections." The third Soul Food concert took place on Jan. 27 in Varner Recital Hall and was followed by a post-concert reception and discussion led by OU Religious Studies faculty.

Renowned drummer **Chinelo Amen-Ra** also joined OU Music Professor **Mark Stone** and MTD graduate student **James Isabirye** during a taping of *FoxBeat* with Lee Thomas of Fox 2 Detroit. The trio previewed some of the music they would perform the next day at the World Music Festival.

Freshman saxophone performance major **Brant Ford** was named a 2018 National YoungArts Foundation Honorable Mention winner in Classical Saxophone. Throughout the entire country, only two saxophonists were named as prize winners, and Brant was one of them. In addition to a cash prize, he will have the opportunity to travel to New York City for a recital and masterclasses.

Ice dancer and Oakland University theatre major **Alex Benoit** and his partner, Elliana Pogrebinsky placed seventh in the 2018 U.S. Figure Skating Championships



The School of Music, Theatre and Dance bid a fond farewell to some familiar faces this year, including SMTD Communications Associate Gillian Ellis, who announced retirement; Administrative Secretary Muriel Mader, who retired after 27 years at OU; and Recruitment Coordinator Deneen Stapleton (not pictured), who left OU after years of service.

often get to skate off the ice without thinking 'I wish I could have done this or that better.' This was one of those rare times and regardless of final standings, it feels great!" Their performance was televised nationally by NBC.



Aeolus

The Chamber Music Society of Detroit introduced a new weekend-long chamber music festival, *WinterFest*, which took place from Jan. 19-21 at Varner Recital Hall on the Oakland University campus. Participating artists include **Trio Solisti**, the **Aeolus Quartet**, and three performers with ties to Michigan, including soprano and OU alumna **Ann Toomey**, pianist **Tian Tian** and violist **Yuri Gandelsman**. The artists appeared in different combinations across three concerts and performed several major works by Brahms as well as music of Haydn, Dvořák, Ives and Beethoven.

The **Oakland University Wind Symphony** gave two outstanding performances — one on Jan. 25 at the Michigan Music Conference and another on Feb. 22 at the College Band Directors National Association (CBDNA) North Central Division Conference at Western Michigan. Directed by Professor Gregory Cunningham, they presented a beautiful program, including Southern Harmony by Donald Grantham and Concerto for Alto Saxophone and Wind Ensemble by Marilyn Shrude, featuring Associate Professor Jeffrey Heisler. The February concert also featured Ceremonie by Ellen Taaffe Zwilich.



Brant Ford

Four of Oakland University's most promising music students performed with the Oakland Symphony Orchestra during the 21st Annual Daniels Young Artists Concert on Feb. 11: **Jamie Blair**, mezzo soprano; **Brant Ford**, alto saxophone; **Gillian Tackett**, soprano; and **Luke Halkey**, piano.



School for Scandal

Oakland University's **Department of Theatre** presented *The School for Scandal*, a comedic tale of gossip, deceit and the perils of social media, from Feb. 1-11 in the Varner Studio Theatre. "As with most satirical comedies, *The School for Scandal* ultimately reveals the true character of all involved and given our current climate, it offers a timely and much-needed ego check into our culture as well," wrote Sarah Hovis, a reviewer for [Rochester Media](http://RochesterMedia.com). "And that's the truth."

Three members of the OU flute studio performed Feb. 10 as part of the Detroit Symphony Orchestra French Festival at Orchestra Hall. **Cassandra Gunn**, **Kaitlin O'Connell** and **Natalie Rossi** were invited to perform in the post-concert Soirée that took place in Cube. The concert was free and open to the public. For more information, visit dso.org/frenchfest.

CBS-TV62 visited Oakland University to tape a segment for *Eye on Detroit* featuring OU Music Professor **Mark Stone** and MTD graduate student **James Isabirye**. The segment, which highlighted Isabirye's efforts to save traditional Ugandan music as well as the World Music Concert, aired on Dec. 18 and can be viewed on [YouTube](http://YouTube.com).



James Isabirye

Musical theatre majors **Alissa Beth Jane Morton** and **Claire Yonkus** represented OU on Feb. 3 at the Rockettes Summer Intensive Audition in Detroit. This audition was for acceptance into the RSI, one of the best programs for aspiring Rockettes. A current Rockette led the auditionees through high kicks and turns, jazz and tap combinations. The results will be revealed mid-March. The Rockettes Summer Intensive offers a comprehensive training program led by current Rockettes as well as a Rockettes Director/Choreographer in NYC.



Oakland University's **Department of Music** presented *Martha*, a romantic comedy opera by Friedrich von Flotow, on Jan. 9, 11, 13 and 14 in Varner Recital Hall. Filled with beautiful music, charming choruses and timeless operatic confusion, *Martha* tells the tale of Lady Harriet Durham, a maid-of-honor to Queen Anne, and her confidante, Nancy.

Lynnae Lehfelddt, associate professor of theatre, was invited to present in May during OUWB Medical Education Week at Beaumont Hospital in Royal Oak. Her expertise is in stage voice, which involved knowing/learning/teaching people how to use their voices properly and effectively. While she specializes in stage voice — teaching acting majors how to use their voices on stage — she has also become involved in teaching non-theatre people to use their voices effectively and regularly presents at workshops for OU's medical school faculty and

Martha

March of this year. "I consider it an honor to serve on the National Board of the American String Teachers Association," MacNair said. "Our goal is to bring quality string teaching to as many students as possible, and to assist those teachers in whatever way we can. I have been involved on a regional level for many years. and I look forward to taking the challenge to the national level."

Bret Hoag, a special lecturer of classical and jazz guitar at Oakland University, played the mandolin with the Michigan Opera Theatre pit orchestra for the American Ballet Theatre production of *Romeo and Juliet* on Feb. 10-11. "It was one of the most beautiful and artistic experiences of my life," Hoag said.



Fall Showcase

Oakland Dance Theatre and **OU Repertory Dance Company** presented their annual *Fall Showcase* from Nov. 30 through Dec. 2 in Varner Recital Hall at Oakland University. The concert featured original works choreographed by OU dance faculty, as well as guest artists Darby Wilde, Lauren Edson and Shaun Boyle D'Arcy, along with a combined Eisenhower Dance and Repertory Dance Company work by Stephanie Pizzo.

Students from Oakland University, University of Michigan, Wayne State University, Western Michigan University and Hope College — will perform from 8-10 p.m. on Saturday, March 17 as part of the Michigan Five showcase, which highlights the most outstanding and creative dance talent from colleges and universities throughout the state. The annual concert coordinated by OU Associate Professor of Dance **Gregory Patterson**, will be held at the Berman Center for the Performing Arts in West Bloomfield.

Theatre special lecturer **Milica Govich** will be appearing in *The Alamo* at the Ruskin Group Theatre in Santa Monica, Calif. Ian McCrae's *The Alamo* paints a funny and heartbreaking portrait of eight working class Bay Ridge Brooklyn natives who always seem to find themselves on the front lines of change in America. The play opens Feb. 24 and runs through March. For more information, visit <http://www.ruskingrouptheatre.com/>.

Report on the 2018 Region 3 Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival

By Karen Sheridan, Professor of Theatre

Last month, 92 Oakland University students attended the Region 3 Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival (KCACTF3) in Indianapolis. It was the largest group of OU students ever to attend. Along with a number of impressive student designs, seven students nominated for an acting competition and many others entered into exhibitions and taking workshops; our production of *Marcus; Or the Secret of Sweet* was one of seven invited to perform at the 50th anniversary festival. This added 42 students who had performed in, designed for, built or worked on the production. Their work paid off with two performances at the Marian University Theatre.

The KCACTF3 is always a tremendous opportunity for our design, acting and musical theatre students. Each year many of the students and their faculty make the trip. During years we don't have an invited production, we usually pile in cars to make the trip to Milwaukee, Saginaw or Carbondale — after digging out of the snow! With a show to d in January, buses were the safest bet. Junior Mannon McIntosh assisted in the organization and when not participating herself, acted as den-mother to the group. Along with a numbe other student leaders, like *Marcus* stage manager Rebecca Lister, Mannon stayed unflustered overseeing aspects of checking in/out, handing out tickets, counting heads, etc.

We arrived Tuesday, Jan. 9 in time to check in before designers zoomed off to set up their display boards in the design exhibit and actors began the Irene Ryan Acting Scholarship rou With a group as large as ours, OU was a striking presence at the festival.

On Wednesday, Jan. 10, workshops and performances began. Our timed load-in for *Marcus* at Marian was that afternoon. We had four hours from the moment the loading dock door opened to reassemble scenery, gel lights, set levels, etc. I'd driven down in December to see the theatre — to make the most of our story in their space. Meeting the house crew was t And as we were the first festival production ever to load-in at Marian, they were delighted to know us and our needs ahead of time. Our load-in respondent was the 2018 Innovative Teaching Awardee Kent Cyr from Michigan Tech. He was timing us; taking notes on our safety and efficiency. Load-ins are carefully orchestrated, rehearsed dances at the festival. At l



Alan MacNa



Milica Govic

director Christopher Winter and student designers Anita Holsey-Banks, Krystal Smoger, Leilas Kaakarni and Emily Stoddard. You can't practice for the quirks of a host theatre, and the student leaders did well making executive decisions as the clock ticked.

Seven productions were invited to the festival from University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point, Carthage College, Illinois State University, Hope College, Kalamazoo College, Marquette University and Oakland University. Alongside the headline productions were the competitions in design, stage management, dramaturgy, criticism, the Irene Ryan Acting Scholarship competition, readings of new plays, presentations of new short works directed at the festival, musical theatre competitions ... it was a full week!

Marcus; Or the Secret of Sweet had two beautiful performances. The audiences were rapt as the OU students told the story, onstage and off. Faculty and students from other schools stopping our students throughout the festival to compliment their work, tell them how the story moved them, and that they had "never seen anything like it."

Each of the OU student design, stage management and dramaturgy presentations was topnotch. We had students in both the regional and national competitions. After Leilas Kaakarn sound presentation, one national respondent kept asking "You are sure you're only a sophomore?" Leilas won the Stagecraft Institute of Las Vegas Award for Sound Design for *Marcus the Secret of Sweet*. She will go to Las Vegas this summer for the Sound Week at the Institute. Leilas also received Honorable Mention recognition in the national KCACTF Theatrical Design Excellence Competition for her sound design for *Marcus*.

Krystal Smoger's scenic design presentation for *Bullets over Broadway* was lauded by the national respondents. When he saw her model, one of them said, "Now, I love you." Krystal received Honorable Mention recognition in the national KCACTF Theatrical Design Excellence Competition for her scenic design for *Bullets over Broadway*.

In the Musical Theatre Intensive Scholarship competition, OU had six students in the final rounds. Kai Stidham was a finalist in the Singing competition. AlissaBeth Morton, Andrew M Tyler Bolda, Madeline Kaplan and Claire Yonkus were all finalists in the Dance competition. Maddie and Claire are both freshmen — go freshmen! High marks all.

Of our seven Irene Ryan Acting Scholarship hopefuls in a pool of almost 250 acting and musical theatre students, three made it into semifinals — the top 40 picked by the preliminary judges. Then all three of our semifinalists made it into the final round of 16! It was a great moment when the finalists were read after an evening performance — hearing "And from Oakland University..." three times. All of us were so proud of Brandon Santana, Tony Sharpé, Lily Talevski and their partners.

Oakland made an impression at the 50th KCACTF3. And the festival made an impression on our students — from playwright Regina Taylor's keynote address to the realities of a thriving capital city. We thank James Lentini and the Provost's Office for their support of these opportunities for our students. We thank Kevin Corcoran and the Dean's Office for being regular champions.

As the buses pulled away in the first minutes of Sunday, Jan. 14, the energy shifted from excitement to sleep — "well deserved, well deserved!"



