

Friday, Apr 27, 2018

Working in the Arts: Alumni News, April 2018

Luciana Piazza (BFA '15) and **Amanda Rae Evans** (BFA '14) recently completed a successful run in *Seussical the Musical* at the Riverbank Theatre in Marine City. Piazza was one of The Bird Girls and Amanda, "who commands such energy and grace throughout the show" (Encore Michigan) was Mayzie LaBird. Next up — Piazza is starting rehearsals for *Big Fish* at The Encore Musical Theatre Company in Dexter. The show runs from April 26-May 20.

Renowned jazz violinist **Regina Carter**, Oakland University's artist-in-residence, performed with with the all-female jazz band Straight Ahead for several evenings in February at the Dirty Dog Jazz Cafe in Grosse Pointe Farms. Carter, one of the group's original members, performed with Marion Hayden, Eileen Oor and Gayelynn McKinney, along with newcomer Elden Kelly. "We had a rehearsal and started going over material, and it was funny how some of these tunes we haven't played together in 25 years were so ingrained, like I played them yesterday," Carter said. "I found that kind of shocking — but a lot of fun, too."

In addition, **Carter** was chair of the five-member music jury that just awarded rapper Kendrick Lamar the Pulitzer Prize in music. It's the first time in the prize's history that it has been given to an artist outside of the classical or jazz community. "It's part of the American art form. We felt that his delivery of the work, his writing, was really powerful in the messages he had," Carter said. "You have to really sit with them, and they have heavier meaning than when you hear them the first time."

Marina Kondo, a former Music Preparatory Division student at Oakland University, is an understudy for Tuptim and Lady Tiang in the national tour of *The King and I*, and a member of the ensemble.



Musical theatre senior **AlissaBeth Jane Morton** and alum **Jake Wood** (BFA '13) recently paid a visit to their former high schools, Ma and Brother Rice. They were invited by alum **Amy Blevins** to discuss the business of theatre and what it's like to be an artist, including to handle headshots, resumes, cover letters and agents. Both Morton and Wood have acted professionally at Meadow Brook Theatre they were able to share those experiences, as well. Wood recently returned from a nine-month commitment performing in *Grease* on the Royal Caribbean Harmony cruise line.

Jason Ikeler, an Oakland University alum (BA '10) and a Kelly Clarkson superfan, recently had the opportunity to interview Ms. Clarkson for a video spot for Cosmopolitan Magazine. Ikeler, who studied voice and communications while at OU, is currently senior video producer at cosmopolitan.com in New York City. You can see the interview on [Facebook](#).

Joe Santoni, who earned a BA in music from Oakland University, said he's "loving life" while rehearsing for Disney's *D Cappella*, a new Pentatonix-style touring performance experience from Deke Sharon, the arranger for all three Pitch Perfect movies and creative director Jim Milan. "I'm surrounded by some of the most talented musicians who elevated this last week to be one for the books," Santoni said "Not only do I have a new family of whom each member brings so much love into my life, but I have people who are behind the scenes running this project called *D Cappella* in such a way that makes this process a beautiful, seamless adventure." Built around seven vocal ranges — soprano, mezzo, alto, tenor, baritone, bass and vocal percussion — the *D Cappella* concerts will feature new arrangements of Disney favorites.

Award-winning piano duo The Mack Sisters, **Yuki Mack** (OU alumna) and Tomoko Mack, performed March 16 at the Max M. & Marjorie



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Maggie Hinckley (BFA '17, musical theatre) landed the role of Ophelia in [The Pigeon Creek Shakespeare Company's](#) production of *Hamlet*. This is her third role at Pigeon Creek; she was in the *Knight of the Burning Pestle* and played Cordelia in *King Lear*. PCSC is Michigan's year-round, touring, professional Shakespeare company, and *Hamlet* is playing at the following: Beardsley Theatre at the Frauenthal Center in Muskegon on March 30; Dog Story Theater in Grand Rapids on April 6-8 and 13-15; Seven Steps Up in Spring Lake on April 22; and Jenison Center for the Arts on May 5. For more information, visit pcshakespeare.com.

Oakland University alumni **Alex Sellers** (MM saxophone '15) and **Rhys Burgess** (BM piano '17) performed the premiere of David Werfelmann's *Fractals in the Afterglow* for soprano saxophone and piano at the North American Saxophone Alliance Biennial Conference which took place March 8-11. Sellers and **Garret Klauss** (BM saxophone '18) also performed the premiere of David Remnick's *Walking After Midnight* for singing alto and baritone saxophones. Also at the conference, OU Professor **Jeffrey Heisler** performed Marc Mellits' *Tight Sweater* for baritone saxophone, piano and marimba featuring **I-Chen Yeh** on piano and **Jonathan Ovalle** on marimba. At the Assembly Quartet, which features Heisler on soprano saxophone, played Alfred Schnittke's *Quintet* with I-Chen Yeh on piano.

Mark Chandler (BM '13, classical guitar performance and music theory) is currently instructing guitar, bass, and music theory lessons at the Clarkston Conservatory of Music and Oxford School of Music. "My hope has always been to bring my love, passion, and knowledge of music to students of all ages," Chandler said. His primary focus has been on his musical group, The Native Howl, since completing collegiate studies. They are pursuing a genre they have coined as thrash grass, combining the melodicism and precision of bluegrass with the intensity and aggression of thrash metal. Their most recent effort, aptly titled *Thrash Grass*, reached No. 4 on the U.S. Bluegrass Billboard charts and also charted in Austria. That, in conjunction with their music video for *Thunderhead*, has allowed them to gain a much wider following, even reaching to many parts of Europe and Australia. Chandler looks back very fondly on his time at [Oakland University](#), and misses the sense of unity and community that it allowed for, while honing in the musical sensibilities and knowledge that it allows for today. "Whatever you do, soak it in as much as you can, because though it is certainly a challenge and can be overwhelming at times, most importantly it is a place you can go and be around others with similar dreams and goals with a truly caring staff and faculty," Chandler said.



Oakland University alumna **Dana Lentini** was recently named as a recipient of the 2018 Joan Frey Boytim Award for Independent Teachers, which is presented by the National Association of Teachers of Singing (NATS) to 14 voice teachers nationally. A \$1,000 award will be granted to reimburse each recipient for eligible expenses associated with their attendance at the 55th National Conference, which will be held June 22-26 in Las Vegas. "Attending national conferences is not something that is easy for private teachers, who maintain their own studios, to achieve," said Lentini, who earned a Master's Degree in Vocal Pedagogy from Oakland University. "The cost of attendance, travel and accommodation at a national event like this is not usually in a private teacher's budget. The experience of attending, I have no doubt, will be a wonderful opportunity for me to learn and collaborate with many of my most respected peers."



A lyric soprano, **Lentini** has performed a number of leading roles with opera companies that include the Great Lakes Lyric Opera, Michigan Opera Theatre, Toledo Opera, Opera Theatre at Wildwood, and the Shreveport Opera. She has also appeared as a featured soloist with the Rochester Symphony Orchestra, Livonia Symphony, and the Dearborn Symphony. In addition, she regularly performs chamber music with her husband, guitarist and composer James Lentini, OU's provost and senior vice president of Academic Affairs. Lentini is also the founder of Born 2 Sing Kids LLC, a voice program designed to meet the needs of children ages 6-13 in the development of beginning singing and performing techniques. She maintains an active private voice studio in Rochester Hills, where she teaches a range of students from children to adults.

On March 3, OUMTD alumna **Cheyenne Coss** was awarded first prize at the William C. Byrd Young Artist Competition in Flint. The international music competition allows young artists from throughout the world to compete for a grant prize of \$6,000, plus an opportunity to perform with the Flint Symphony Orchestra and Enrique Diemecke, conductor and music director. "I am so beyond thrilled," Coss said. "Summer of 1915 is a piece very close to my heart and I was honored to have been given the opportunity to share it with the audience, and of course with my wonderful family who came to support me."

It was especially lovely spending the day with Joey Leppek, who was awarded second prize. Also, Carol Vaness heard me sing and did not run for the hills so it's safe to say I won't be leaving this bubble of happiness for a very long time."

Musical theatre alum **Billy Eric Robinson** was recently cast as Will Bloom in The Encore Musical Theatre Company's production of the hit musical, *Big*

wife Sandra. But their son Will, about to have a child of his own, is determined to find the truth behind his father's epic tales. In addition to his role in *Big Fish*, you may also recognize Robinson as Toby from Encore's recent production of *Sweeney Todd*, from the ensembles of *Anything Goes*, *9 to 5* and *Camelot*, or from Encore's 11th Season Announcement Concert.

Oakland University offering two summer camps for young musicians this June. **Piano Camp**(June 18-22) is for pianists 12-17 years of age. Activities include: daily lessons, duet classes, composition classes, masterclasses, special guest presentations and performance opportunities. **Golden Grizzlies Jazz Camp** (June 18-22) will give young jazz students (9th-12th grade) the opportunity to rehearse and perform in jazz combos and to attend workshops in composing/arranging, jazz concepts and styles, improvisation, jazz ensemble techniques, entrepreneurship and leadership. Students will learn a variety of genres including straight-ahead jazz, Latin, funk and more. Information about both camps is available at <https://www.oakland.edu/mtd/workshops/>.



CONGRATULATIONS GRADUATES!