



**David Hoffman
and His Emu Are
Liberty Mutual's
Dynamic Duo**

Art That Explores
Blindness

Designing Space
Suits for TV and
Real Life





ON THE COVER: Photo of David Hoffman by Patrick Strattnner

Published by Boston University College of Fine Arts
Produced by Boston University Marketing & Communications

Dean
Harvey Young
Director of Communications
Laurel Homer (CAS'98)
Assistant Director of Communications
Emily Holmes
Communications Manager
Diana Hernandez Johnson
Development & Alumni Relations
Janna Schwartz,
Associate Dean
Beth Barclay,
Senior Major Gift Officer
Denise Savino (CAS'11),
Program Manager
Editor
Mara Sassoon (MET'22)
Art Director
Lee Caulfield
Photo Director
Janice Checchio ('07)
Contributing Writers
Molly Callahan
Marc Chalufour
Steve Holt
Sophie Yarin

 CFA ON INSTAGRAM



Adrienne Elise Tarver ('07), left, discussed her Public Art Fund project *She who sits*, with Jenée-Daria Strand, right, assistant curator at Public Art Fund, and CFA Dean Harvey Young at @wburcityspace in October. Tarver's paintings exploring the visibility and invisibility of Black women and the seats they can—or cannot—take within public and social spaces are visible on bus shelters and newsstands in New York City, Chicago, and Boston.

 @buarts



A NOTE FROM HARVEY

It was a sea of red. So many jerseys. I was in London. Outside, it was pouring and dark. Mark Arnold came to the rescue. Let's rewind.

I first met Mark six years ago. Whenever I visit a city, I try to connect with CFA alumni. I'll send an email. Introduce myself. Invite folks to join me for coffee.

Mark answered my initial email. We had coffee. He's soulful and incredibly inspiring. I've had several coffee chats with him since. Recently, I suggested that his story could be helpful to others—and shared that I've met lots of people who are struggling in the way that he once was. Mark reluctantly agreed. I am thankful to him for his generosity and trust in me and you.

The depth of talent, the creativity and passion for the arts, and the resilience of our community members always amaze me. One of my goals for the new year is to increase opportunities for alumni and friends to meet one another. Yes, it's good to read about events and people—but it's even more satisfying to encounter them in person.

I am increasing our outreach—exhibitions, public conversations, and more—in cities near you. You can learn about these activities via *CFA Snapshot*, our monthly e-newsletter. If you're not receiving it, please email me at cfadean@bu.edu.

Encounters with new people—and the making of new friends—can transform your life for the better. Reading this issue, I am reminded of the joy of spending time with fellow Terriers: S. Proski encouraging me to stand on and touch an original artwork; the sizzle of bacon in Clare Meeker's kitchen as we talked about music and travel; the flash of recognition followed by a smile when David Hoffman and I spotted each other in a café. And there's the race through rainy London. I was in search of a specific store that sold a particular Liverpool jersey. Mark Arnold looked me in the eye and said, "I know exactly where it is. I'll go with you."

Harvey Young, Dean of CFA

WRITE: Share your thoughts on this issue—and anything else CFA-related—at cfaalum@bu.edu.

ENGAGE:
 facebook.com/BUArts
 @BUArts
 Search "Boston University College of Fine Arts"

Michael Retiroti (Instagram and Dean Young)

Patrick Strattnner (Marquis), Chris McIntosh (Krasinski), Alun Callender (Arnold), Patrick Strattnner (Hoffman)

INSIDE

CFA Magazine
Winter
2025

2 SHOWCASE

"THE WORK I WANT TO MAKE"

S. Proski's ('23) art explores blindness and its complexities

8 COLLAGE

The World of CFA

24 PROCESS

CFA IN BLOOM

New on-campus color garden allows student-artists to sustainably grow their own pigments, dyes, and fibers

30 GIVING

Alum Clare Hodgson Meeker ('75) established a fellowship to help School of Music undergraduates pursue their dreams

38 CLASS NOTES

You're directing, producing, performing, painting, writing, teaching, sculpting, sketching, composing—creating a whole world of art

43 MUSE

How Nordic cow-calling traditions and her grandmother's upbringing inspired composer Lara Poe ('16, CAS'16)



OUT OF THIS WORLD DESIGNS

Esther Marquis ('91,'92) makes sci-fi space travel look realistic on TV—and also designs outfits for actual astronauts



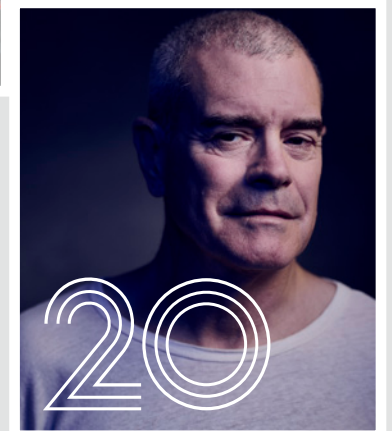
A COMMERCIAL STAR IS BORN

As Liberty Mutual's Doug, actor David Hoffman ('99) cuts up opposite an emu in a now-iconic ad campaign



THE PIPE ORGAN MASTER

Peter Krasinski ('80, STH'98) has taken his love for the instrument all over the world



A REDEMPTION ARC, IN THREE ACTS

Mark Arnold's ('79) acting career began with stardom. Then he hit rock bottom. Now he's ready to star again.



SHOWCASE

"THE WORK I WANT TO MAKE"

S. Proski's art
explores blindness
and its complexities

By Mara Sassoon

Photos by Jake Belcher



*Little Black Cloud:
for Buckley (2024)*
Acrylic, concrete,
ceramics, and cat toys
on panel
64 x 48 x 5 in.

S. PROSKI’S STUDIO IS A SMALL AND DIM

space in the basement of a former school building in Boston’s South End. On a recent visit, I immediately notice the breadth of techniques and materials they use in the works hanging on the walls: shards of concrete and ceramic, textural shapes made from acrylic poured into molds, painted canvas sewn together or glued in a mosaic of sorts—even cat toys.

Proski (’23), who is blind and uses they/them pronouns, says finding this studio—having a space of their own—has allowed them to “actually think about the work I want to make,” especially the kind of work they want to make as a blind artist. It wasn’t always that way: “I’ve made so many paintings that I’m ashamed of because they remind me of having assimilated to the standards of a sighted culture that doesn’t value me at all.”

Proski feels it is their responsibility as an artist to educate people about blindness. “When I was growing up, things that exist now in terms of literature and accessibility and accommodations didn’t exist for me,” they say, “and I certainly got a lot of pushback about my aspirations to be an artist.”

That pushback had to do, in part, with their desire to pursue painting. “Often, sculpture is what blind people get introduced to when art is an option,” Proski says. “That’s great, and I’m certainly engaged with that dialogue as well. But I also think that the art world and collectively we as people are so obsessed with vision, and vision kind of dominates all of our lives.”

There was a time, Proski says, when they grappled with insecurity over their blindness.

“There’s a lot of doubt that you have as a blind person struggling to exist in a sighted world,” they say. “I do have a little bit of sight left, and, for a long time, I convinced myself that I wasn’t blind because I could still see a little bit. But this is an ongoing thing that many blind people experience, because most blind people have sight left—93 percent of blind people still are able to see *something*. Being totally blind is actually incredibly rare. So that doubt consumes you. It really changes the way you interpret the world and your surroundings.”

Proski has overcome that insecurity. Now, they’re exploring the spectrum of blindness—and spreading awareness about it—through their artwork.

MULTISENSORY ENGAGEMENT

At their studio, Proski leads me to their painting *Reading Stones for M. Leona Godin*. It’s part of a



*Reading Stones for
M. Leona Godin (2024)*
Acrylic on canvas
60 x 60 in.

series of works in progress that honor blind people who have inspired them, including Godin, who wrote the book *There Plant Eyes: A Personal and Cultural History of Blindness* (Pantheon, 2021).

“It’s a pretty comprehensive cultural analysis of how blindness has been interpreted in literature throughout history, dating back to Homer,” Proski says. “I feel like reading that

book really helped me understand not only a lot about myself, but also about what kind of work I am responsible to be making as a blind artist, and what I can do as a blind person to create opportunities for other people in my community.”

For the piece, Proski affixed onto a canvas small squares of painted canvas in a mosaic pattern. (In September, they began a Fulbright

grant in Poland to study architectural mosaics and ceramics, subjects that have influenced some of their latest works.)

Two glossy blue orbs that protrude from the top of the canvas appear to stare back at me. These are the reading stones—the earliest kind of magnifiers used by visually impaired people—referenced in the title. Proski encourages me to touch the piece, to engage with these “tiles” of canvas, the smooth reading stones, and other shapes made of poured acrylic paint.

Allowing viewers to interact with their art is not something Proski always embraced. As a CFA student, they created *Untitled (disquiet)*, an eight-by-two-foot boxy structure coated in glossy black resin with braille protruding from its surface. “I was very much like, ‘This has to be pristine. Don’t touch it. I’m going to clean this with Windex every time,’” they recall. “Now, I want more of that evidence of human contact and engagement.”

Earlier this year, when Proski exhibited *Untitled (disquiet)* in a group show centered around disability at the Design Museum of Chicago, they encouraged people to touch it.

“I’m really interested in what the accumulation of people’s handprints and fingerprints will do to it,” they say.

Many of Proski’s pieces play with texture. Concrete and ceramic shards are arranged in mosaic-like patterns in *Little Black Cloud: for Buckley* and *Seven Curses for Andrew Potok*. The former is an homage to Proski’s late cat, Buckley. The painting includes an abstracted cat shape and some of Buckley’s toys scattered about.

The work was an opportunity to introduce another aspect of sensory engagement: smell. “If you get up close, some of [the toys] still smell like catnip,” Proski says. “I like being able to activate nonvisual sensory modalities. Moving forward, I’m thinking about how smell can be a part of a painting.”

Seven Curses for Andrew Potok—named for a painter and an author who gradually lost his sight from an eye disease—is composed entirely of shapes made from poured concrete and acrylic affixed to a panel. The bottom half of the painting is made of scraps of textured concrete covered in acrylic paint in muddy purples and pinks. The textured shards refer to tactile paving, used to assist visually



Seven Curses for Andrew Potok (2024)
Acrylic and concrete on panel
48 x 64 x 5 in.

impaired pedestrians. A bit of the bright yellow panel peeks through in spots. The top portion of the composition is made up of fragments of gray-white tactile paving.

“I was thinking about color field, and variations and nuance that could happen within the field,” they say.

The shards all came from a work Proski made at CFA, where they forced their classmates to walk on concrete shapes they created. The pieces blocked the entrance of the doorway to their critique space, so there was no way to enter the room without walking on—and breaking—the tiles. “I kept all these pieces because I knew I wanted to make paintings out of them,” they say. “I wanted to use the broken pieces of concrete as a prosthetic for a mark that you would make in painting. What I like about the concrete is how it handles and takes the paint. It really soaks it in as soon as it touches it, so you’re constantly having to mess with it to get it to do what you want.”

Along the top of the composition is a line of blue half spheres that Proski made by pouring acrylic into molds. Proski says those half spheres are meant to represent eyes, a recurring motif in their work.

“I feel like gazing eyes are constantly surveilling me, surveilling my existence,” they say. “This is a constant thing that is talked about in disability studies, because you always feel like an ‘other.’ And especially in the context of an art gallery or art museum, you end up feeling like you’re being portrayed as a spectacle to some degree.”

By placing eyes into their works, Proski is turning that sensation back onto the viewer. “These paintings are surveilling you now,” they say. “The blind gaze is also a thing that gets brought up too. People will rudely express, ‘I can’t tell if this blind person is looking at me or not,’ because of the ‘dead stare’ that they have in their eyes. So putting eyes in the work is a way of implicating you and your experience of engaging with these works.”

WELCOMING THE UNEXPECTED

Proski has also learned to embrace happenstance when it comes to their art. Once, they were working on a piece in which they affixed concrete tiles to an asymmetrical wood panel. When they lifted the structure to hang it on the wall, most of the tiles fell off.

“I think I was really upset for five minutes, but after I got over it, I quickly realized that this is better,” they say. “There are all these interesting textures that I wouldn’t have been able to get otherwise. That’s been how my practice has evolved a little bit—just letting go.”

Happenstance also led to one of Proski’s most hauntingly captivating pieces, *Stargate*.

Last winter, they undertook a large-scale commercial ceramic project, which left a lot of dust in the studio. It coated a piece of black canvas that was folded up on the floor. Proski unfurled the canvas, revealing a ghostly, abstract image that looks like a hooded figure.

“With a piece like this, I feel like the subject matter of blindness became tantamount,” they say. “I feel like this gets across, at least for me and my experience of my visual impairments, what is legible versus not legible and how it changes.

“My goal is to educate people about the complexities that exist around blindness, and the struggles that people deal with in terms of having their voices heard, specifically as it relates to artmaking. I think there are more blind people who are interested in art than people want to recognize.” ●

“I like being able to activate nonvisual sensory modalities.”

Stargate (2024)
Dust on canvas
48 x 60 in.



CAREERS

Inside the Industry

Graphic designer Jay Li fuses his love of art and food in the popular L.A. supper club he founded

By Steve Holt

JAY LI GREW UP WATCHING his parents run a small jewelry store in the Atlanta suburbs. The idea of becoming an artist and eventually creating, marketing, and selling his own work did not seem reachable to him.

But today Li ('21, COM'21) is doing just that—and infusing his art with the hospitality he witnessed every day in his parents' shop. In January 2023, Li—a foodie and home cook who shadowed Chef Kevin Finch at Salt Lake City pop-up restaurant Arthur—launched DOUBLES, a word-of-mouth supper club in Los Angeles featuring elevated cuisine, music, and design. Li calls DOUBLES, which he hosts at his apartment, a “proof-of-concept communal art project.”

“The food scene here is super diverse and robust,” Li says of L.A. “But I want to have these experiences where people can enjoy

themselves and not break the bank to spend time with one another.”

Li's day job since 2022 is working as a graphic designer at L.A.-based Fly By Jing, a startup chili crisp company. There, he designs packaging, ads, and emails and works on product launches. For a year after graduating, Li lived in Salt Lake City and was a graphic designer for the NBA's Utah Jazz. In each of these roles, Li says the brand had an established identity, requiring him to adjust his own design to fit within a larger strategy. “For early-career designers, that's a learning curve to not take it so personally,” he says. “If an idea gets shut down, it's not always a reflection on your style. Digest your manager's feedback and direction, and then within that have open dialogue to understand the strategic arm.”

Creatively, DOUBLES is where Li gets to play. A DOUBLES

supper starts with a menu, which comes from Li or one of his many collaborators. In December 2023, he hosted two seatings of a tennis-themed supper featuring five Korean-inspired courses (he called “sets,” of course). Li announced the dinners on Instagram, asking those interested in attending to message him for more information. Attendees paid a minimum sliding scale of \$55 to \$100, all of which was donated to humanitarian agencies assisting Palestinian families affected by war (after food costs). Li can comfortably seat up to a dozen or so around tables in his small

apartment. When folks walk in, they'll see elaborate table settings, flowers, and printed menus of the night's offerings. It all plays into an environment Li strives to make both experiential and collaborative. The DOUBLES name refers to Li's hope that both his vision and that of his guests and collaborators show up in every supper.

“I have a couple friends who do work as professional chefs, and I tell them, ‘This supper club is for you to have a low-stakes environment to test any crazy ideas you have,’” Li says. “Even if a workshop, lecture, or event doesn't center on food, how can food be in partnership with whatever vision you have—a communal experience?”

Graphic designer Jay Li hosts a supper club, DOUBLES, which combines elevated cuisine, music, and design.



Courtesy of Jay Li

SOUND BITES

“At times when the logic, beauty, and grace of science fail to convince minds, I can think of nothing more salient, more penetrating, more perfect than art.”

BU President **MELISSA L. GILLIAM** at her historic inauguration on September 27, 2024



Vision for the Arts

BU continues to make history. President Gilliam announced at inauguration that she has named CFA Dean Harvey Young to lead a President's Advisory Council on the Arts. She expressed an “ambitious vision” to put the arts “front and center across our campuses.”



AWARDS

Applauding the Best of BU

On September 28, 2024, the BU Alumni Association presented its highest honor, the Best of BU Alumni Awards, to five outstanding individuals, among them two CFA alums: Emmy-winning and Tony-nominated actor **Uzo Aduba ('05)** and lauded actor and activist **Michelle Hurd ('88)**.



FOR MORE NEWS AND EVENTS, VISIT [BU.EDU/CFA](https://bu.edu/cfa).



THE PIPER ORGAN MASTER

Peter Krasinski has taken his love for the behemoth instrument all over the world

or acclaimed pipe organist Peter Krasinski, sitting down at the console of an unfamiliar instrument is “almost like meeting someone new,” he says. He would know: Krasinski has played pipe organs all over the world, including Notre Dame in Paris. He’s taught master classes in Finland and entertained audiences with silent film accompaniments in seven cities in Japan.

“I think one of the most wonderful things about organs is that they’re all different,” says Krasinski (’80, STH’98), who can identify the year and maker of every pipe organ he’s played as easily as some people rattle off automotive models. “Every pipe organ is built for a specific place, room, people. You have theater organs, concert hall organs, church organs—to me, the attraction is the variety. If you were to ask me who my favorite pop singer is, I couldn’t tell you, because I love so many of them. I don’t even have a favorite color.”

If variety is the spice of life, then Krasinski’s life is abundantly seasoned. He travels to concert halls across North America, Europe, and Asia, playing alongside silent films to bring them to life. He is the house organist for four venues in Massachusetts and Rhode Island. He’s won a number of prizes, including the highly regarded First Prize in Improvisation in the American Guild of Organists National Competition. Krasinski is a conductor too—he’s led professional musicians both domestic and international. And recently, he’s taken those skills to the silver screen: Krasinski appears in the Oscar-nominated 2023 film *The Holdovers*, as a choir conductor and organist (for which he earned a Screen Actors Guild membership).

The throughline for all of Krasinski’s ventures is music. Music pervades his life; it’s the lens through which he views the world.

“So if you ask, ‘Why music?’ I think it’s impossible not to love it,” he says. “I think it’s always been a big part of my life, and I think the people who played the organ were just fascinating to me.”

THE CALL OF THE PIPE ORGAN

Growing up in Quincy, Mass., Krasinski heard music everywhere. “I used to tell my mother that I could hear the subway underneath our feet, and I would sing along with the vacuum cleaner—things like that,” he says with a warm smile. Perhaps it’s in his genes: Krasinski’s mother was an amateur cello player, and his father, he jokes, “played the radio really well.”

As soon as Krasinski could reach the keys on the piano, he started playing. He switched to violin when he was nine, and by junior high school he’d joined the Greater Boston

Youth Symphony Orchestra (known today as the Boston Youth Symphony Orchestras).

At the same time, he sang in the choir at his local church, Bethany Congregational Church in Quincy, where he was transfixed by its pipe organ. Once, before service, he asked the organist, Agnes Ruggles Allen, if he might try it out. She told him to come back at the end of the mass, and when he did, Allen let him play a single note.

“It was thrilling,” says Krasinski, who would go on to help restore, and eventually play, Bethany’s organ.

He followed that spark for the rest of his life. He earned a bachelor’s degree in music education and organ performance as well as a master’s degree in sacred music from BU. “The fun thing for me, as an organist, is that I never dislike any kind of organ music,” Krasinski says. “The



Peter Krasinski travels across North America, Europe, and Asia, playing the pipe organ alongside silent films. Here, in both images, he plays at Mechanics Hall in Worcester, Mass.

never really died out, Krasinski says, and in the 1970s and ’80s, when VHS tapes enabled audiences to watch movies from their living rooms, studios again hired musicians to play over silent film recordings for at-home viewers. This created another wave of popularity (and work) for silent film accompanists—one that likely crested with Italian composer Giorgio Moroder’s 1983 musical take on the science fiction silent film *Metropolis*, Krasinski says.

Krasinski’s approach to this accompaniment is “unique in that world,” he says. By that, he means it’s entirely improvisation. No two performances are exactly alike.

“I’ve played in venues where I played the same movie twice in a row—in fact, three times in a row—and the management has said that it was different every time,” he says. “Why is that? It’s because *we’re* different, not just every day, but every minute of the day. We’re changing. If we’re alive, we’re changing beings.”

Krasinski does have a consistent approach to each new film he accompanies, though. First, he memorizes the movie—the major plot points, the characters, any unexpected or important moments for sound (“like a gunshot going off, or something,” he says). Then he memorizes the instrument at hand. And since each pipe organ has its own quality and sound, this can sometimes lead to standout moments.

Here, it’s important to understand something about pipe organs. They’re wind instruments—they produce sound when wind is forced through the pipes. That wind, and the flow of it, is controlled by the musician at the helm. As the musician presses certain keys, valves open up underneath the corresponding pipes, allowing air through and creating a sound.

An organ can contain hundreds of pipes, which are grouped into specific sets. These sets have their own unique sounds designed to

pipe organ is very special because it’s so real. It’s an actual, physical thing that’s making the sound from many different places in a room.”

Krasinski plays in three settings: liturgies, concert halls, and theaters. There’s sometimes a fourth setting too: Krasinski plays the pipe organ in BU’s George Sherman Union during school and college convocation ceremonies each year.

But it’s in theaters where Krasinski’s musicality really shines. Theater organs, he says, were invented to accompany films before they had sound of their own. The term “silent film” is a misnomer in that way: Original audiences always experienced movies accompanied by live organ, piano, or orchestral music.

When movies with their own integrated sound were introduced in the 1920s, theaters across the country fired their in-house musicians in favor of the more fashionable talking pictures. Though it was shoved to the margins, the practice

mimic other instruments, like flutes, trumpets, or horns. The musician can control the sets by pulling specific knobs, known as stops.

So, ahead of a recent performance of the German horror film *Waxworks*, Krasinski was sitting at the console of the organ, methodically going through its various tones and capabilities. One particular stop, meant to sound like an English horn, was misfiring.

“It was making this awful sound,” he says. Tuners immediately jumped in to fix it, but Krasinski, thinking quickly, asked them to leave it be.

“And later on, I did this movie, and one of the characters [the pot-bellied Caliph Harun al-Rashid] was extremely unpleasant. During the entire movie, I avoided that stop and that [note].” When the character appeared, Krasinski let it rip. The audience went wild.

“My organist friends were like, ‘How the hell did you do that?’ It was magic.” He adds, after a hearty laugh, “I enjoy taking on those different roles as a storyteller, using the organ as an instrument to do that.”

FROM ACCOMPANYING FILMS TO BEING IN ONE

In 2021, Krasinski accepted a job as a long-term substitute music director at Saint Mark’s School in Southborough, Mass. Soon, he learned that a movie would be filmed on campus—did the school know anyone who could play a choir leader?

That film, *The Holdovers*, is set during winter break at a New England prep school in 1970. Krasinski’s job was to act as choral director, leading his students into “O Little Town of Bethlehem.” Ever the teacher, Krasinski asked director Alexander Payne for two minutes before the crew started filming, to warm up his young actors and learn the hymn. Afterward, they did a few takes.

Imagine Krasinski’s surprise, then, when he heard his own voice at the beginning of the film. That warm-up? Payne caught it and ran with it. What audiences hear is Krasinski, unfiltered, sharing his love of music.

“Can I hear the opening word, ‘O’?” Krasinski’s gentle voice emerges from the dark screen, followed immediately by the sound of a boys choir chiming in, elongating the vowel. “Ohhhhh,” they all sing. “Very good!” he congratulates them.

Krasinski, in his role as the choir director, instructs his students to breathe in, breathe out, sing the opening chord. He reminds them to pay attention to the words they’re singing. He fiddles with the balance of high, middle, and bass voices. After they run through the first verse, he congratulates them again: “Really great, especially that ‘t’ at the end—all together. Very, very good. Excellent.”

For most viewers, it’s an actor playing his character to a T. But it’s just Krasinski, delighting in his roles as a teacher and a lover of music, first and foremost. ●

By Marc Chalufour

Photos by Patrick Strattner

After making
sci-fi space
travel look
realistic on
TV, costume
designer **Esther**
Marquis designs
outfits for actual
astronauts

Apple TV+

Esther Marquis
leads the costume
design department
for the Apple TV+
science fiction
drama *For All
Mankind*.





N

the opening sequence of *For All Mankind*'s fourth season on Apple TV+, a Russian cosmonaut glides through space. He's monitored by a crew from Helios Aerospace, a private space exploration company, and mission control rooms in Houston and Star City, Russia. A boxy backpack holds his life-support systems. He gazes through his helmet's panoramic visor at his destination, an asteroid the crew hopes to mine. Then, he reaches out and drags a thickly gloved hand across the rocky surface, kicking up a puff of black dust. If not for the impeccable cinematography and dramatic music, a viewer just might believe they were watching the first human land on an asteroid.

The primary conceit of the science fiction drama *For All Mankind* is that Russia beat the US to the moon in 1969, triggering what *Paste* magazine has called "sprawling sociopolitical butterfly effects." Al Gore defeats

George H.W. Bush in the 2000 presidential election. Before that, a gay, Republican woman and ex-astronaut is president. John Lennon is alive. Michael Jordan eventually chooses baseball over basketball. In this timeline, space exploration surges, leading to colonies on the moon and Mars, private space travel, and US-Russian collaboration.

The show is sci-fi and historical fiction at the same time, an ambitious piece of storytelling that spans decades. "The biggest challenge is not sending people to Mars but making them look believable once they arrive," *New York Times* critic Alexis Soloski wrote about the show. The person responsible for those looks—from the cosmonaut's space suit to a NASA engineer's tweed blazer—is costume designer Esther Marquis.

Marquis ('91,'92) began her career as a costume designer in theater. Then she spent several years as a film and television textile artist, the person responsible for aging and dyeing clothing to make it look realistic. Her credits include the Denis Villeneuve-directed drama



Mike Yarish/Apple TV+

Courtesy of Esther Marquis

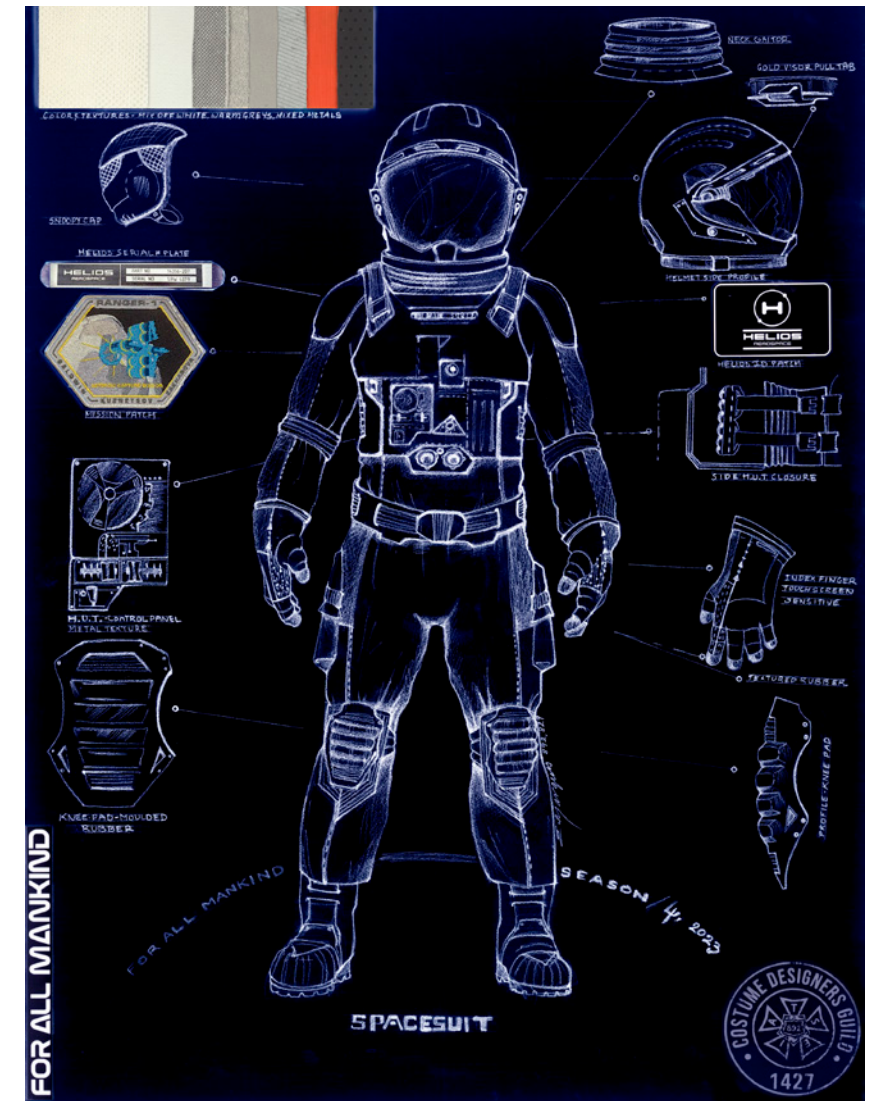
Prisoners and the Marvel superhero film *Shang-Chi and the Legend of the Ten Rings*. Accepting a role as a costume design assistant on season 3 of *For All Mankind* was a conscious decision to get back into design. When the head designer left in the middle of that season, Marquis was promoted to lead the department.

To prepare for season 4, Marquis says she was involved in more than 500 costume fittings with actors, and each fitting involved multiple costumes. And if that wasn't a big enough challenge, she had to design the most complicated piece of her career: a new space suit.

REWRITING HISTORY

Each season of *For All Mankind* leaps into a new decade. The show's first four seasons have spanned more than 30 years. What that means is a careful reimagining of creative details, across every department of the production, from set construction to makeup to costumes.

Several characters from season 1, which takes place mostly in the early 1970s, are still around for season 4, set in 2003. Ed Baldwin, played by Joel Kinnaman, is a hot-shot astronaut when the show begins. In the latest season, he's a grizzled grandfather who has put on a few pounds.



Left: Masha Mashkova and Joel Kinnaman in season 4 of *For All Mankind*. Right: Marquis sketched this design for the season's space suit.

"We're thinking about where he's come from, what he's been up to, and where he's going," Marquis says. Baldwin's style goes from beige plaid button-up, to a Members Only-style jacket, to a microfiber vest. When we meet him in season 4—which focuses on themes of socioeconomic tensions between factions in a Mars settlement—he's in a fleece button-up uniform that contrasts with the drab work clothes of the base's laboring class.

Marquis and her team, which grows to about 40 people during their busiest times, track each character and discuss how their personal styles would've evolved over the course of the show's storyline. "It's a really comprehensive look at character development. You begin to ask yourself very interesting questions about their physicality and their mental state," she says.

"I want to be part of that evolution as much as the actor is. I'm a caretaker of that character."



Seeing the Axiom crew on the ISS, clad in her flight suit design, “was one of the highlights of my life,” Marquis says.



Left: Krys Marshall (top), and Joel Kinnaman and Tyner Rushing (bottom) in season 4 of *For All Mankind*, set on Mars. Middle: Axiom Space, a real-life space exploration company, asked Marquis to design an outer layer for their (AxEMU) space suit. Right: Marquis also designed flight suits for their Ax-3 Mission.

FASHION VS FUNCTION

Garrett Reisman, a former NASA astronaut, has been an advisor on the show since the beginning. “My job is trying to make it as technically accurate as possible,” he says. “The great thing about this production is that they really care.” Not all of the projects he’s advised have paid attention to the details, he says—a point that his astronautical engineering students at the University of Southern California sometimes raise in class.

The first three seasons of *For All Mankind* were focused on reaching and exploring the moon. That meant costume designers could rely on historical examples of space suits used for the same purposes. But for season 4, which opens on Mars, that wasn’t possible. So it was up to Marquis to design a suit that was both futuristic and retro, technologically believable and aesthetically pleasing.

A space suit is complex. NASA describes it as a “miniature spaceship shaped like the human body.” That ship is constructed with up to 16 layers, each with a specific function, like heating, cooling, rip prevention, and waterproofing. Space suits must carry water, oxygen, filters, and a

communication system. And they can keep astronauts alive in temperatures from -250 to 250 degrees Fahrenheit.

Marquis didn’t have to create a fully functional space suit, but it had to look realistic and be comfortable enough for the actors to perform in it. One actor suffers from claustrophobia, she says, making an already complex assignment even tougher.

For inspiration, Marquis studied historical and fictional space suits. She found the real space suits to be the most helpful. “History is a wonderful kind of anchor,” she says. “It’s like, ‘OK—this is my starting point. Where do we want to go from here?’”

Apple TV+, Axiom Space



As Marquis sketched early drafts, she shared them with Reisman. The two bounced ideas back and forth as she refined her design. “My concern was making them as technically accurate as possible,” Reisman says. “For example, you need a cooling system—and that has to be different for Mars than it is in space. She was great—she was very hungry for the technical stuff.”

The process took five months. Marquis’ design had to be rendered by a 3-D artist so a special effects studio could fabricate the final suits. And in an unexpected way, her sci-fi suit also opened a door into real-world space exploration.

FROM FICTION TO FACT

During production of season 4, a representative from Axiom Space, a space exploration company based in Houston, Tex., reached out to Reisman. The company needed help designing a new space suit and they knew Reisman had Hollywood connections. “They were going to reveal it to the public and they were really concerned with the aesthetics,” he says. “I said, ‘Oh! I’ve got just the person for you.’” He gave them Marquis’ name.

Why did a company capable of sending people to space need the help of a Hollywood costume designer? Inspiration. “Aesthetics offers an opportunity to connect with people on a challenging feat like human spaceflight,” says John Hunt, Axiom Space’s vice president, deputy program

manager of extravehicular activity. “[It] captures the imagination of the public.”

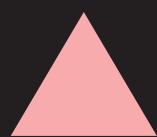
Marquis’ first project for Axiom was designing an outer layer for their Axiom Extravehicular Mobility Unit (AxEMU) space suit. Her cover would hide proprietary technology and improve the appearance of the suit during promotional appearances, although it wouldn’t be used in space. She came up with a sporty black-and-red design.

Though the AxEMU suit is still going through NASA testing, one crew member *has* worn it in space: Gigi, a teddy bear used to indicate when astronauts have reached a zero-gravity environment.

After unveiling their AxEMU, Axiom Space hired Marquis to adapt her design to flight suits (worn by astronauts inside a spacecraft) for their Ax-3 Mission crew, which spent 18 days on the International Space Station (ISS) in January and February 2024. Seeing the Axiom crew on the ISS, clad in her design, “was one of the highlights of my life,” Marquis says.

This career pivot into space travel was unexpected, but she is embracing the work—and the novelty of it. “Our profession is not just about designing costumes for theater or TV and film. It can reach out farther afield.” She’s tight-lipped about season 5 of *For All Mankind*, due out in 2025, but she offers one promise: “It’s going to be our biggest season yet. There are some lovely challenges.” ●

Michael Lopez-Alegria/Axiom Space



REDEMPTION

Mark Arnold's acting career began with stardom. Then he hit rock bottom. Now he's ready to star again.

ARC,

IN THREE

ACTS

By Marc Chalufour
Photo by Alun Callender



MARK ARNOLD HAS READ THOUSANDS OF SCRIPTS,

auditioned for more roles than he can count, and acted in hundreds of plays, shows, and films. He knows a good story and doesn't flinch when telling his own. Success, stardom, failure, rock bottom, and redemption—his story has it all.

Arnold's introduction to acting came in a first-grade play at Friends' Central, a Quaker school in suburban Philadelphia. He acted through his 12 years there. As a senior, he played Iago in Shakespeare's *Othello*. But Stanley Kubrick was his biggest influence. "Watching *A Clockwork Orange* and *2001: A Space Odyssey* is probably what made me want to be an actor," he says. "It was because of the richness of the storytelling and the beauty and depth of those two films."

He landed his first professional role, in the television movie *My Old Man*, the week of his BU graduation. A four-year run on the soap opera *The Edge of Night* began about a year later, followed by a season on another soap, *Santa Barbara*. Arnold recalls fans mobbing him on the sidewalk in New York. In 1982, *LIFE* magazine included him in a feature called "Studs of the Suds."

Arnold ('79) might be best known for one of his first film roles—the bully, Mick, in the 1985 comedy *Teen Wolf*. The film was a success, riding the momentum of Michael J. Fox's rising stardom. But it didn't vault Arnold into the sort of career he'd envisioned. New roles were few and far between. He battled alcoholism and faced family tragedy. But at the far side of those struggles, he gave acting one more chance. More than two decades later, he's searching for the next great role.

[Mark Arnold, pictured here in 1981, starred in the 1985 comedy *Teen Wolf* as the bully, Mick. A battle with alcoholism and family tragedy derailed his acting career.](#)



ACT I

Arnold didn't love the grind of soap operas, filming four or five days a week, but they gave him a crash course in acting. "Doing soap operas is about memorization and time management," he says. From 1980 to 1983, he shot nearly 500 episodes of *The Edge of Night*. It was hard to do great work in those conditions. He wanted to act in films.

When Arnold got the audition for *Teen Wolf*, Fox was a young television actor from *Family Ties* and the story—about a teenage boy who discovers he's a werewolf—wasn't an obvious hit. But Arnold saw something in the script. "And then I think we made a better movie than anybody expected," he says.

His take on Mick, the bully from a rival high school, became an iconic 1980s character, complete with a jean jacket and a handful of catchy one-liners. Arnold embodied the role, scowling through his scenes and delivering his lines—"Forget it, *dork*"—with spot-on aggression.

In anticipation of his pending movie stardom, Arnold left *Santa Barbara*. "That didn't work," he says. "One of the things you do as a young actor is you try to plan your career. For some people that works; for most people it doesn't. You're trying to control something you can't control."

ZUMA Press, Inc. / Alamy Stock Photo

ACT II

Over the next decade, roles were scarce—a short stint on *One Life to Live*, a supporting role in the rom-com *Threesome*, an episode of *Wings*. Then work vanished entirely, and Arnold began drinking heavily. A six-year gap on his IMDb page reminds him of this low point.

Arnold's mother and father died within six months of each other in 2001. He returned to Los Angeles after his father's death and, he says, "I was just unmoored." One morning, he and his wife got into a loud argument. Arnold recalls slumping to their kitchen floor and howling. "It was a deep, deep moaning of loss," he says. Police knocked at the door to make sure everyone was okay.

Arnold had two clarifying thoughts that morning: He wanted to give acting one more chance. But he knew he was unemployable. "I needed divine intervention."

The intervention came, he says, when he hit rock bottom several months later, on August 10, 2002. As Arnold was served with divorce papers, his wife called him an alcoholic. He'd been in denial until that moment. "That's what I needed because that night I went to [an Alcoholics Anonymous] meeting," he says. "I've been sober ever since."

Sobriety didn't guarantee work, however. Arnold's agency had dropped him. His last job had been working at a post-production company. He vowed to take any role he could get, regardless of quality or pay. What he found were online casting calls posted by film schools, a field that had one benefit: "There's a ton of them," he says. "I used them to relearn how to act." He booked up to six gigs at a time.

He also got more involved with theater—including playing the man whom Arnold credits with saving his life: Alcoholics Anonymous cofounder Bill Wilson, in *Bill W. & Dr. Bob*. And some of his other acting opportunities had come at The Blank Theatre, a nonprofit in Los Angeles. There, he'd performed in the Young Playwrights Festival, which produces plays from young writers each summer using professional directors and casts.

In 2003, Dan Henning, the theater's founder, asked Arnold if he'd take over the mentorship program, which involved helping the writers, who ranged in age from 9 to 19, through the process from script revisions to the performance. Arnold was able to help them through a formative moment in their careers, while imparting some of the lessons he'd learned in his own work. He recently resigned from the role after 20 years—he'd moved to London in 2012 and could no longer manage the time difference.

ACT III

As Arnold rebuilt his acting career, his personal life also took an unexpected turn. One of the few film roles he'd landed in the 1990s was on a pair of science fiction sequels, *Trancers 4: Jack of Swords* and *Trancers 5: Sudden Deth*. While he

was on location in Romania, Arnold had a relationship with a woman working on the film, but he broke it off, thinking a long-distance relationship wouldn't work. He later searched for her online, hoping to make amends, but couldn't find her. Then, in 2010, she emailed him. "My heart went boom," he says. "I wrote back to her and said, 'There you are!'"

The two married in 2011. At the same time, Arnold was starting to get small parts in television shows and films once again. Then, in 2016, he landed the role that fulfilled the childhood dreams sparked by Kubrick: He was cast in *Blade Runner 2049*, a sequel to the classic 1982 sci-fi film, *Blade Runner*. The role was small, but rewarding. "I learned more in a day and a half than I'd ever learned in my career, because of the depth of storytelling," he says.

In the *Blade Runner* universe, replicants—bioengineered beings, considered inferior to humans—perform the most dangerous jobs. In *Blade Runner 2049*, Ryan Gosling plays Officer K, a replicant who hunts and kills rogue replicants

He wanted to give acting one more chance. But he knew he was unemployable. "I needed divine intervention."

for the Los Angeles police department. Arnold plays the Interviewer, who interrogates Gosling to make sure he isn't developing feelings. He never appears onscreen, his voice coming through a speaker on the wall, not unlike HAL, the computer in Kubrick's *2001*.

Denis Villeneuve, the director, had been shooting for several days before Arnold and Gosling's scene. Arnold recalls Villeneuve coming up to him during a lunch break and telling him, "I was sitting with the producers and we all agreed that *today*, with what you're doing, we feel like we're doing *Blade Runner*," Arnold says. "It was very humbling."

Today, Arnold is a busy working actor. He's doing commercials, voice-overs, and audiobooks in addition to acting on stage and screen. Over the past four years, he has appeared in more than a dozen films, including *Wrath of Man* with Jason Statham and Raúl Castillo ('99) and *Zack Snyder's Justice League*. He admits that the constant hustle needed to keep up with auditions is draining. But he's thankful for the opportunity.

Early fame, personal tragedy, and an inspiring comeback anchored in a commitment to sobriety neatly splice his career into three parts—but Arnold refuses to view it that way. Shakespeare wrote in five acts. Now 67, Arnold is interested in producing. He's doing a little writing. And he's looking for the next great role. ●

CFA IN BLOOM

A new color garden on campus allows student-artists to sustainably grow their own pigments, dyes, and fibers

By Sophie Yarin

Photos by Chris McIntosh
and Dave Green

Previous page: Students Arielle Shultz ('25, CAS'25) (left) and Natalie Seitz are part of a team that created a color garden near the CFA building with plants that provide pigments and dyes.

This page: Nerissa Cooney, programming and media manager for the School of Visual Arts, mentored the group.



The process of making dye with flower petals has been around for centuries, dating back to ancient Rome and Egypt. It's sustainable: it uses no harmful chemicals and creates minimal waste. It's cost-friendly and accessible, requiring only seeds, soil, water, and sunlight. And it's a practice that CFA students can now try for themselves, at a color garden recently planted on campus.

Over the summer and fall of 2024, a team of School of Visual Arts (SVA) students-turned-gardeners took on the challenge of growing, planting, monitoring, and harvesting a host of vibrant plants—coreopsis, indigo, aster, and chamomile—at a sunny, 92-by-45-foot plot just east of the CFA building.

“We really wanted to emphasize native plants, because they help to re-enliven the natural environment and natural ecosystem,” says Natalie Seitz (’25, CAS’28). “We wanted to bring native pollinators to the garden, like bees and moths and butterflies, and we’re seeing a lot of them as well.”

Seitz is the initiative’s outreach coordinator and flora and fauna researcher. She’s part of a five-person team of seniors who met weekly in the summer and fall to discuss signage installation, upcoming events, and coordination between the garden and the various parties who sought to use it. Each team member has a role to play, and all were expected to take



How to grow a seedling

- 1: Select a small container with adequate depth and drainage. Fill with seed-starting soil that has been moistened until crumbly.
- 2: Follow seed packet instructions for planting depth. Sow seeds, recovering with a thin layer of soil.
- 3: Position somewhere warm with strong sunlight, like on the sill of a south-facing window.
- 4: Keep moist with a spray bottle, allowing soil to completely dry between mistings.

turns visiting the garden for daily watering and upkeep. They had one setback—some hungry bunnies, which they’ve managed to keep out with rabbit-proof fencing. Otherwise, their oversight was quick to pay off—in the form of ochre, magenta, violet, and crimson blooms.

The garden grows mainly native, drought-resistant perennials—plus a few annuals that will be replanted seasonally—and is meant to achieve multiple goals at once. It’s designed to introduce homegrown, natural dyes to the school’s curriculum; to create more serene green space on campus; to educate passersby about the plants and their uses; and, perhaps most important, to serve as a model of sustainability and self-sufficiency. While the project is still in its early phases, the color garden team will research and experiment with the dyes and hold community workshops where all are invited to share in the bounty. The garden has also been used by SVA classes for drawing exercises.

“The ethos is to slow down, and I think the natural dye process emulates that,” says Lauren Boysa (’25, CAS’27), the color garden team’s communications representative. “The reason we’re choosing to create dyes this way is to slow down the process of buying materials, to learn that there’s an origin to everything. It starts here.”

BREAKING GROUND

Before the students began germinating their seeds, before they got a location approved, before they began fundraising, there was an idea.

Dana Clancy (’99), an associate professor of painting, was faculty mentor for a 2021–2022 Campus Climate Lab (CCL) grant proposal from graduate students Emily Manning-Mingle (’09,’22) and Sohyoung Park (’23). The grant didn’t pan out that year, but after Manning-Mingle graduated, she and Clancy held on to the notion that the color garden could one day be a reality. In fall of 2023, they approached Boysa and Anthony Venturi (’25, CAS’25), the group’s primary groundskeeper and landscape planner, because of their shared interest in “environmentally oriented” art. “We jumped at it, and slowly we recruited our friends,” Boysa says with a laugh, “because that’s what you do.”

Clancy mentored the students throughout the year, helping secure the site, and submitted another proposal to CCL that linked its mission statement to the BU Climate Action



Plan’s pledge to add more campus green space. Students also received lots of faculty support, from E. Tubergen, an assistant professor of sculpture; Rebecca Bourgault, an associate professor of art education; Richard Ryan, an associate professor of painting; Nathan Phillips, a College of Arts & Sciences professor of Earth and environment; and Nerissa Cooney (’08), SVA’s programming and media manager.

The student team was responsible for outlining an ecologically conscious mission to underscore the garden’s artistic aims, which

CFA’s color garden features mainly native, drought-resistant perennials, as well as a few annuals that will be replanted seasonally. Part of its purpose is to introduce homegrown, natural dyes to the school’s curriculum. Pictured in the photo directly above, from left to right, are students Lauren Boysa, Anthony Venturi, and Julia Cheung (’25).

PROCESS



How to keep a plant alive

- 1: Water at least once a week, taking care not to over- or under-water the plants.
- 2: Check for signs of pests and rot. Weed your garden frequently. Prune and deadhead as necessary.
- 3: Feed your soil with mulch, compost, worm castings, or other nutritious fertilizers.
- 4: Support your garden by protecting it from animals, staking plants, and planting companion plants to encourage more growth.

netted them a Campus Climate Lab grant in the spring of 2024. They got a big assist from Greg Limerick, the University's trucking and grounds manager, who helped them prepare the garden's home between CFA and the foot of the BU Bridge and advised them on which native plants were likely to thrive in the area. They also consulted with Emmanuel Didier, a Colorado-based landscape architect and an acquaintance of Clancy's, to vet the designs.

"When he met with us, we talked through all these things we had no idea about, like drip lines and tree canopies," says Boysa. "We became cognizant that we'd have to understand the sun's pattern and know where it hits at certain times in the day. There was a lot of preplanning."

In early April, a crew led by Limerick helped prepare the garden bed and secured its first plantings. Later in the month, on Earth Day, students, faculty, and a number of project supporters completed their first planting: sunny marigolds, a symbol of new beginnings.

PERENNIAL FAVORITE

After the growing season comes the harvest. Next to the marigolds went sunny asters, purple black-eyed Susans, and a riot of other

[In October 2024, the garden team held a DIY dyeing workshop. Participants dyed fabric squares with flowers from the garden and made small paintings using flower ink. The event was also an opportunity to educate attendees about the garden and its goals.](#)

colors; when the plants were ready, the garden team organized a program of fall and winter events for the BU community, including do-it-yourself dyeing workshops. Each event began by dyeing fabric squares in vats of plant pigment, a roughly 45-minute process. In the intervening time, the team facilitated activities like flower ink painting and community education sessions. When 45 minutes was up, the dyed fabric was collected.

"Our idea was to turn these dyed fabric squares into a book, which will be a record of

"OUR IDEA WAS TO TURN THESE DYED FABRIC SQUARES INTO A BOOK, WHICH WILL BE A RECORD OF THE CERTAIN SPECIES WE USED AT A COMMUNITY EVENT, THE PROCESS WE DID."

LAUREN BOYSA ('25, CAS '27)

the certain species we used at a community event, the process we did," says Boysa. "The [fabric from] community events will be in the pages alongside our own group research, and as this garden grows older, we'll see the progression of our skills and methodology."

The School of Theatre costume department has also expressed interest in using the plants for fabric dyeing and potentially growing their own fibers. "So this will truly be a CFA garden," Clancy says.

Although the five seniors who make up the garden team will graduate in the spring, they want the space's oversight and upkeep to be as sustainable as the garden itself. Seitz says that they're looking for rising juniors and

first-semester MFA students to take over; that would give the newcomers two full years to get their hands dirty.

One of the most important things for future gardeners to keep in mind, says Boysa, is that while the color garden is designed to be used by BU artists, it's meant for anyone to enjoy.

The founding team considers the garden an outdoor community classroom. "That means two things," says Boysa. "The first is a literal classroom for students to sit, observe, and draw," she explains. "The second is a more abstract, community classroom, where anyone passing by can go in and learn something. Our garden is a piece of art, and everyone is contributing to it, whether they know it or not." ●

How to make dye with flower petals

- 1: Gather a large handful of colorful flowers, discarding stems and leaves, in a coffee mug or other small, heat-resistant container.
- 2: Pour boiling water over petals, until just covered. Using a stick, mash petals to release pigments.
- 3: Acids and bases, such as lemon juice and baking soda, will lighten or darken the color, respectively. Add if desired.
- 4: Steep for at least half an hour; the longer you steep, the more vivid the color will be.

ALUM CLARE HODGSON MEEKER ESTABLISHED A FELLOWSHIP TO HELP SCHOOL OF MUSIC STUDENTS PURSUE THEIR DREAMS

By Mara Sassoon

Illustration by Silke Werzinger

Clare Hodgson Meeker will never forget studying abroad during her junior year at BU. The music major was encouraged by her voice instructor to travel to Paris and take lessons with the renowned singer Pierre Bernac. “My teacher had himself been a student of Bernac’s,” says Meeker (’75), “and he thought that because I have a fairly high, very clear voice—not a big vibrato, not an opera singer—that studying with Bernac would be a wonderful experience for me.”

By then, Bernac was retired (he died in 1979), but he took Meeker under his wing. “He treated me like his granddaughter,” she says. “He was just lovely.” To this day, Meeker, who lives in Friday Harbor, Wash., and is a children’s book author and longtime member of the feminist folk band The Righteous Mothers, still has the two sheets filled with vocal exercises Bernac gave her. “They’re behind laminated plastic, and I still use them.”

While studying with Bernac was a highlight of her time abroad, Meeker also fondly remembers becoming immersed in Paris’ culture and becoming fluent in French. “By the end of my studies there, I could speak like a taxi driver,” she says. “I studied French in school, but there’s nothing like being there in person, speaking with people.”

In 2019, Meeker was reflecting on her time in Paris when she decided to support similar opportunities for current School of Music students. She established the Clare Hodgson Meeker Endowed Fellowship, which helps fund summer travel for students to further their education. Meeker says each year the fellowship has supported around 40 students,

whose pursuits have included attending and performing in the Musa Hellenica Festival in Chios, Greece, traveling across the US to compete in the Drum Corps International, and taking part in the Berlin Opera Academy.

“I wanted to focus on undergraduates because they’re still trying to figure out what it is they want to do,” Meeker says. “They’re so full of hope and promise.”

Many students have used the fellowship funding to learn valuable new skills. Meeker recalls a student from the first year of the fellowship who wanted to attend piano tuner school. “He was thinking very practically and saw it as a way to make money while in school and during the summers,” she says. “And it’s helped support him beautifully.”

Another student used funding he received to brush up on his live performance skills and travel around New England presenting his research on disability inclusion in music education. Another spent time in Kyoto, Japan, to learn about the Japanese theater forms Kabuki and Noh.

“There was a bass player that went to see a jazz musician in the Midwest, and that person taught them a whole different method for playing bass. They came back really changed by the experience,” says Meeker, who enjoys hearing from all of the fellowship students.

Meeker is grateful to have helped more than one hundred School of Music students since establishing the fellowship. “These kids are getting out there, seeing other places, having that experience of personal growth and going out of their comfort zone,” she says. “That was huge for me. I had such a sheltered life, and it just made a huge difference.” ●

Colagene Creative Clinic



“I wanted to focus on undergraduates because they’re still trying to figure out what it is they want to do. They’re so full of hope and promise.”

ADVERTISING

FEATURE

STAR IS BORN

As Liberty Mutual's Doug, comedic actor **David Hoffman** cuts up opposite an emu in a now-iconic ad campaign

By **Steve Holt**

Photos by Patrick Strattnr

D

avid Hoffman was eating lunch by himself on the set of his new ad campaign when it sunk in that his life would never be the same again. Over the past two decades, the comedic actor had been a lead in a short-lived British television series, played a few major roles in television shows and some minor roles in blockbuster films, and appeared in a couple of Super Bowl commercials—but he’d never broken through as a star. Until now. He had just landed a promising role as Doug, a sometimes hapless, always funny insurance salesman with an emu as a sidekick, in a series of commercials for insurance giant Liberty Mutual. As Hoffman ate, a marketing executive for Liberty approached, her smile wide.

“I’ve just got to tell you we are loving everything you’re doing. We’re so happy,” she told Hoffman (’99). “You’re going to be an icon, like Tony the Tiger.”

That was December 2018, and the executive wasn’t wrong. Six years later, Hoffman’s Doug is ubiquitous. You almost can’t turn on a game or stream an episode without hearing the commercials’ earworm jingle. Open your mailbox, and there’s probably a Liberty Mutual mailing with Doug and his emu. The insurance guy’s yellow shirt, trademark mustache, and aviator sunglasses are plastered across billboards and web ads—always with pointy-beaked LiMu Emu, of course.

The sudden success was a whirlwind for Hoffman, who Googled “LiMu Emu and Doug” shortly after shooting the first spots and snapped a screenshot of the results. (There were none at the time, but that would change.) The actor who’d once played Launcelot Gobbo in *The Merchant of*

“When I would do spots with the emu, I was really improvising. You can’t predict what those things are going to do.”



Venice at CFA was now the face of a Fortune 100 insurance company, his comedic performances responsible for millions of daily brand impressions. More important for Hoffman, the role brought financial security and creative independence. But like many actors, Hoffman’s path here was dotted with plenty of starts, stops, and rejection.

“I never expected to be in the exact position I’m in right now,” Hoffman says. “I had so many different visions of what would happen, and there were so many valleys where what I wanted and expected didn’t happen. And yet, in the end, I’m in a sweet spot as an actor, and I wouldn’t trade it for anything.”

MAKING OF AN ACTOR

Hoffman, who is married and has a young son, says he mapped out his entire career while he was an undergraduate theater major at CFA: “I was going to do four years at BU, was going to kill it at the [School of Theatre] Showcase, get the best agent in the business, be on a show within

[The sudden success of the Liberty Mutual ad campaign featuring Doug and his emu sidekick was a shock for actor David Hoffman, the actor who plays Doug.](#)

Courtesy of Liberty Mutual



six months that would go for about five years, transition to movies, win an Oscar.”

Hoffman was so excited to move to New York City and start that journey that he skipped his graduation ceremony.

“You’re always in a play, always rehearsing, always training, and it was very intensive and time-consuming, in a good way,” he says of CFA. “I was consumed by it, which is why I think so many actors come out of programs like that obsessed with their career.”

Then reality hit. After almost a year without a single acting job in the Big Apple, Hoffman followed a friend and cheaper rents out to Los Angeles. He started taking sketch comedy classes with the Groundlings, the improv-based theater troupe where stars like Jon Lovitz, Will Ferrell,

and *Quick Draw*, Hoffman says he was burned out on the commercial grind. “I wrote it down: Within two years, I’m not auditioning for commercials anymore,” he says. Sure enough, two years later, in 2014, he was cast as the lead in the UK sitcom *I Live with Models*—which aired on Comedy Central—allowing him to comfortably leave behind his pursuit of commercial success. Or so he thought.

EMBODYING DOUG

It was Thanksgiving week 2018, and Hoffman was moping around. *I Live with Models* ended after two seasons in 2017, so he’d been unemployed for more than a year. With his savings running low and no new gigs lined up leading into the holidays, he knew it would be January or February

before he could hope to be working again. At the recommendation of his new girlfriend (and now wife), Jaime, Hoffman reached out to his commercial agent. He asked him to keep an eye out for something that suits him, perhaps a funny Super Bowl commercial or a new campaign. “Call me after Thanksgiving,” the agent told Hoffman.

The two men met for lunch the next week, where Hoffman laid out his conditions for an ad campaign: He wanted it to be funny, obviously. To not look like himself. To be able to improvise. To work with a director he respects. “He just started laughing,” Hoffman recalls, “and he pushed me his phone. ‘What do you think of this?’”

It was a casting agency’s description of Doug, a likable and funny insurance guy who does all of the talking for

his partner, a live emu. Doug could feasibly be the face of the brand for years to come, so that face would need to be memorable, and the actor would need to possess comedy chops and a strong presence onscreen.

Hoffman loved it. The concept of partnering with an emu, who is really the brains of the operation, fit his comedic style, which he calls “absurd realism.” The agent landed Hoffman an audition that evening—the last day the director was meeting actors. “I looked at him before I left and said, ‘I’m getting this. I guarantee it,’” he says.

Soon, Hoffman found himself in the Universal Studios lot standing opposite a live emu and shooting the first several spots of what would become Liberty’s longest-running ad campaign in the company’s 112-year history. Liberty executives knew they had a hit on their hands and made a historically large ad buy of those first spots. They started writing and shooting additional commercials for their new flagship campaign.

The LiMu Emu & Doug campaign has everything Hoffman was looking for, including the opportunity to stretch his sketch and improv muscles. The actor regularly punches up scripts with his own ideas and humor, and he rarely completes two takes the same way. “It really is about being able to snap into a new reality as quickly as possible and commit to it 100 percent,” Hoffman says. “I mean, when I would do spots with the emu, I was really improvising. You can’t predict what those things are going to do.”

Three emus on set play the part of LiMu, but their unpredictability in the 2018 shoot led to the decision to film nearly all the emu’s scenes separate from Hoffman’s using a green screen.

Despite having achieved Tony the Tiger-esque prominence, the clean-shaven Hoffman is almost never recognized in public as his Liberty character—one of his original conditions, so he can play roles where he’s not seen as Doug (unlike, perhaps, Flo from Progressive). Still, the role has given Hoffman the financial and creative freedom to write for himself. He’s preparing to shoot his first feature-length screenplay—“the funniest thing I’ve ever written”—and directs an annual charity improv show with other comics each June at The Groundlings Theater in L.A. Performers at the 2024 show, which has raised more than \$235,000 for the Hollywood Food Coalition over its three years, included Oscar Nuñez (“Oscar” from *The Office*), *SNL* alumnus Will Forte, and Flo herself, Stephanie Courtney. He’s also returned to Boston as Doug twice in 2024 for Liberty Mutual employees at their national headquarters.

“[This campaign] has completely changed my life,” Hoffman says. “I have a one-year-old son, and he’s having a much better start to life than I did. I can spend a lot of time with him, which I know a lot of parents don’t get a chance to do—especially actor parents. It’s changed my family life, it’s changed my career, it’s changed everything. I’m in a sweet spot.”

“I never expected to be in the exact position I’m in right now. I’m in a sweet spot as an actor, and I wouldn’t trade it for anything.”

Kristen Wiig, and Melissa McCarthy earned their comedic stripes. Hoffman spent four years in the training program before he made the Groundlings’ Sunday Company. “It’s like [*Saturday Night Live*],” he says. “You write a new show every single week, and we had no weeks off. I did it for two years. It was 104 weeks in a row writing new shows and material, and you really learn to write for yourself.” After two years of grinding it out in the Sunday Company, Hoffman made the Main Company—an achievement he was told just one in 10,000 students enjoy.

In 2008, Hoffman’s fellow Groundling Stephanie Courtney appeared as Flo in a single ad for Progressive Insurance. His interest was piqued. “It was not a campaign, it was one spot,” Hoffman recalls. “She was like, ‘I think they want to do a bunch more of them.’ And then she said they were negotiating an actual deal. And it was so exciting. These were numbers I had never fathomed.” While Hoffman’s prior commercial work had included individual spots for Bud Light, Nicorette, and Phillips’ Milk of Magnesia, he says “Steph’s role as Flo was my first exposure to how big a deal a campaign can be.” (Courtney is in her 16th year playing Flo in the Progressive ads.)

Hoffman’s commercial agent started getting the actor campaign auditions. Success was fleeting at first. Campaigns he shot for Taco Bell and Virgin Mobile never aired. By 2012, as he experienced some noncommercial success playing a guest role in the film *Bridesmaids* and recurring roles in the television series *2 Broke Girls*, *New Girl*,



CLASS NOTES

1960s

Barbara Hong ('63) has studied abroad in three countries, once with a Fulbright grant. She is a musicologist specializing in Finnish music and has been a church organist and chamber music pianist.

Judy Bergman Hochberg ('67,'69) makes pieces that combine photography and printmaking. She is a longtime member and past president of Full Tilt Print Studio in Dedham, Mass. For the past 20 years, she has created photogravure etchings from her photographs using photopolymer plates. The California Society of Printmakers included an article that she wrote about her process in their annual journal, *Focus on Black and White*.

Carolyn Michel ('68) has enjoyed a career in professional theater. In March 2024, she directed *Better Late* at the Sarasota Jewish Theatre.

Steve Robinson (CGS'66, CFA'69) produced two audio podcast series in 2024: *No Regrets: The Music and Spirit of Billie Holiday*, with 13 one-hour episodes, and *Valentin Silvestrov: A Composer's Journey*, with five one-hour episodes. In September, he also completed a two-hour radio documentary on cellist David Soyer, founder of the Guarneri string quartet, which aired on classical radio stations. Robinson is also the executive producer of *The Architects of Music*, a series of movies available on YouTube.

1970s

Deborah Weintraub Perlman ('72) creates 3-D collages by transforming flat images into raised architectural forms that add depth, texture, and shadows. Each piece invites the viewer to travel through doorways, walkways, ramps, and passages, leading them to spaces of mystery, questions, and the unknown, she writes. She is a member of national and regional professional artist organizations, and her work is held in several private collections. From April 2023 to May 2024, she showed her work in three solo exhibitions, at the Morean Art Center in St. Petersburg, Fla., the Frank Gallery in Pembroke Pines, Fla., and the Pompano Beach Cultural Center, in Pompano Beach, Fla.

Judith Feins ('73) continues to paint and show her work in a few galleries in northern California and online. Feins was primarily a plein air landscape painter for many years but now is creating larger studio work.

Katherine Austin ('75,'78) continues to paint, focusing on scenes of life around classic car shows and the people who love them. She exhibited her work in a curated show in Bend, Ore. Austin, who pursued a career in architecture after graduation, serves on the Oregon State Board of Architect Examiners as well as leadership in the American Institute of Architects locally. She also was mayor of Sebastopol, Calif., and, over the last nine years, has served on mul-

tiple boards and committees for the city of Bend. She now designs homes for Habitat for Humanity in central Oregon.

Carol Barsha ('75,'77) returned to gallery neptune & brown in Washington, D.C., for her spring 2024 solo exhibition *Carol Barsha: A Piece of Magic*, which was inspired by her surroundings, personal experiences, and the teachings of her mentor, Philip Guston. The show featured multimedia works that delved into the intricate complexities of Barsha's imagination. Barsha's work was also on view at Salon Zürcher in spring 2024 in the group show *11 Women of Spirit, Part 9*.

Joanna Kao ('75) loves experimenting with media and has made several translucent works. She writes that the pieces can be hung away from walls, in the space of an exhibition hall or in front of windows—with a varying light source, the work takes on a temporal dimension. Kao often incorporates painting, collage, and found objects into her work.

Margaret Cording Petty ('75) taught music theory, composed music for choirs, and directed choirs at a college near Paris, France, for 30 years. Petty received her doctorate at the Université Paris-Sorbonne in musicology, contributed articles to French publications, served on a French-language hymnal committee, and taught church music and hymnology for many years at a seminary in Aix-en-Provence. Since her return to the United

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, and we'll share the highlights here.

States, Petty has been freelancing as a cellist, playing with several orchestras and various solo venues. She's also an adjunct cello instructor at High Point University, leading a chamber string ensemble, composing for groups, and playing in faculty ensembles. She met her husband in France and they recently celebrated their 45th wedding anniversary.

Robert Stuart ('77) had a retrospective solo exhibition of paintings and collages, *Progression: Work by Robert Stuart*, at Principia College in Elsah, Ill., in fall 2024. He has had more than 40 solo exhibits in his career.

Tracy Burtz ('78) had a solo show, *Voices*, at The Painting Center in New York, N.Y., in January 2024. Burtz was also featured in the group exhibition *Solitude* at Edgewater Gallery in Middlebury, Vt., in spring 2024.

Susan Nichter ('78,'84) is a professor at Suffolk University. She spearheaded a collaborative four-channel video installation, *Living Images*, for the Downtown Boston Business Improvement District, which was on view from fall 2023 through spring 2024 in an empty Downtown Crossing storefront. The project involved 60 students and 3 faculty members from Suffolk, including Suffolk faculty member **Kristen Mallia's ('18)** graduate students. For the installation, students collected stories, images, and film footage that reference how both indigenous people and immigrants created flourishing businesses in Boston. Nichter and other Suffolk

faculty and students also showed their work in *Square Donuts and the Missing Camera* at Boston's Kingston Gallery in November 2023. Nichter will be an artist-in-residence at Chateau d'Orquevaux in France.

1980s

Cindy Gold ('80) appeared in various productions in Chicago, Ill., including *Wipeout* at Rivedell Theatre Ensemble, *The Most Spectacularly Lamentable Trial of Miz Martha Washington* at Step-penwolf Theatre, and *A Christmas Carol* at Goodman Theatre. She also performed in *Idomeneo* at the Aspen Music Festival. Gold was a tenured professor at Northwestern University for 27 years and retired from teaching in June 2024.

Susan Hoaglund (BUTI'78, CFA'80) retired from teaching music and German in June 2024. Her career began at the Clara Schumann Music School in Germany, where she taught violin and viola and coached chamber music and the youth orchestra. She returned to the US and taught strings for a decade at St. Paul's School in Concord, N.H. During this time, she was also the director of scheduling for BUTI. Hoaglund moved to the Philadelphia, Pa., area in 1994. She received her second master's degree at the University of Pennsylvania and became the head of the music department at the Shipley School, where she founded the school's strings program. Hoaglund ended her career at a charter school in Rhode Island. Her retirement plans include part-time teaching, travel, and writing.

Traci Marmon ('80) has been an executive assistant at Maddalena Productions for more than 10 years. She is also a partner at First Source Talent Management Agency in Los Angeles, Calif., which manages actors, writers, directors, and artists.

Jason Alexander ('81, Hon.'95) made his Chicago stage debut



LORRAINE SHEMESH ('71) had a solo show, *On Balance*, at Gerald Peters Gallery in Manhattan in spring 2024. The hardcover book, *Lorraine Shemesh: On Balance*, which documents 30 years of her work in paint, paper, and clay, accompanied the exhibition. Shemesh was one of the featured artists for another recent book, *Nerikomi: The Art of Colored Clay* by Thomas Hoadley (Bloomsbury Press, 2024). The National Academy of Design in Manhattan exhibited her painting *Chrysalis* (above) in a group show that ran from June to September 2024.

in the play *Judgment Day*, which ran in spring 2024 at the Chicago Shakespeare Theater.

George Hagerty ('82,'84) is the director of facilities at Yale University Art Gallery.

Wynn Harmon ('82) played Doc in *West Side Story* at Teatro Lirico di Cagliari in Sardinia, Italy, and Francis Fuller on *Law & Order: SVU*. He also appeared in the world premiere of Anna Deavere Smith's *Love All*, a play about the life of Billie Jean King, at La Jolla Playhouse.

Thomas Riccio ('82) published *Sophia Robot: Post Human Being* (Routledge, 2024), which is based on his 20 years working with the world's leader in humanoid social robots, Hanson Robotics. He was Hanson Robotics' creative director from 2018 to 2019, and created characters and personalities for several robots. Riccio works extensively in indigenous performance, ritual, and shamanism, conducting creative projects and research worldwide. He recently concluded a seven-year research project with the Miao people of southern China. He also created a 10-channel video

immersion for SP/N Gallery in Dallas, Tex., in March 2024.

John Near ('85) published his fourth book, *Autobiographical Recollections of Charles-Marie Widor* (University of Rochester Press, 2024).

Dianne Betkowski ('86) joined forces with renowned flamenco guitarist and composer Miguel Espinoza to form Miguel Espinoza Fusion, a world music, flamenco, and jazz fusion ensemble. They completed a one-week residency at the University of Texas-Austin's Butler School of Music. They have also been to Casper College, the University of Denver, Washington University, the University of Missouri St. Louis, East Central College, St. Olaf College, Duquesne University, and the University of Illinois.

Xanda McCagg ('86) had an installation of her paintings at the Two E Lounge at the Pierre Hotel in NYC in April 2024.

Lucia Giannetta ('88) starred in *Our Love Is Here to Stay*, a journey through the unexpected twists of love, in March 2024 at the Hunt and Fish Club in New York, N.Y.

Carole Rabe ('88) retired from her role as an assistant professor of visual arts at Pine Manor College in Chestnut Hill, Mass., where she was also director of the Hess Gallery. Rabe showed her work in the exhibition *Chasing Color: Christiane Corcelle and Carole Rabe* in spring 2024 at Concord Art Association in Concord, Mass.

Michelle Lougee ('89,'94) had a solo exhibit, *reVisions*, at the McCoy Art Gallery at Merrimack College in North Andover, Mass., in spring 2024.

Catherine Sheridan ('89) was inducted into the Moles, a heavy construction industry organization, in May 2023. Sheridan was awarded the Outstanding Achievement Award by the South Asian American Association, Inc., in September 2023 and was named Woman of the Year by WTS International's Greater New York chapter in October 2023.

1990s

Emery Stephens ('93) was granted tenure and promoted to associate professor of music at St. Olaf College in fall 2024. Stephens completed three teaching artist residencies, at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, Luther College, and Concordia College.

Jonathan Newman (BUTI'90, CFA'94) is the composer of a large-scale new work, which is the title piece on soprano Fotina Naumenko's album *Bespoke Songs*, available on the New Focus Recordings Label and streaming on all music platforms. *Bespoke Songs* is a cycle of love songs. It features 12 poems in 6 languages by women writers spanning two millennia, set for soprano and chamber music. In spring 2024 he was a resident artist at the Kimmel Harding Nelson Center for the Arts. Newman lives with his family in Virginia, where he serves as director of composition and coordinator of new music at Shenandoah Conservatory.

Georgia Jarman (BUTI'92,'93, CFA'97) debuted with the Boston Symphony Orchestra as a soprano soloist in *Peer Gynt* in March 2024. Jarman has been in roles spanning lyric and bel canto repertoire as well as 20th-century works and new commissions. The landmark compositions of Sir George Benjamin—*Written on Skin* and *Lessons in Love and Violence*—hold special significance for her. Jarman has debuted the pieces at the Venice Biennale Musica, Staatsoper Hamburg, Gran Teatre del Liceu, Opera National de Lyon, and at the Beijing Music Festival with Mahler Chamber Orchestra under Lawrence Renes. She recently returned to the role of Isabel (*Lessons in Love and Violence*), again joining Mahler Chamber Orchestra on a European tour. During the 2023–24 season, she joined the Orchestre de Paris under the baton of Benjamin himself. In January and February 2024, she sang Agnes (*Written on Skin*) in her debut at Deutsche Oper Berlin under Marc Albrecht.



SUSAN ROME ('87) (right) has been nominated for nine Helen Hayes Awards and won one. She finished a run of the world premiere of *Becoming a Man* (pictured) at the American Repertory Theater in spring 2024. Rome teaches at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County, and at Johns Hopkins University.

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

Jennifer Buzzell ('98) was elected to the board of directors of the Tessitura Network, a nonprofit organization that powers the success of arts and culture around the globe via its Tessitura CRM software.

2000s

Marc Beaupre ('00) celebrated his 20th year as the sole proprietor of MB Graphics and Beagle Printing. The company prides itself in being a one-stop shop for all visual projects, working with anyone from small family-owned businesses to colleges and Fortune 500 corporations.

Christopher Scanlon (BUTI'98, CFA'01) is an assistant professor of trumpet at the University of Florida, following four years on the faculty of Northern Illinois University. He is a member of the Axiom Brass, Palisade Trumpet Collective, and Silver Spruce Trio,

and has been co-principal trumpet of the Verbier Festival Chamber Orchestra since 2008.

Arturo Chacón-Cruz ('03) performed in the lead tenor role in Verdi's *Un ballo in maschera* at Barcelona's Liceu Opera House. He sang the lead tenor (Rodolfo) in *La bohème* in Spain's Las Palmas de Gran Canaria Opera, as well as in Bordeaux, France, and also performed in the role of Don Jose in *Carmen* at the Opéra Royal de Wallonie-Liège in Belgium.

Laura Metcalf ('04) performed in the world premiere of *Anahata*, a cello and guitar double concerto by Grammy-nominated Brazilian American composer Clarice Assad and the Hartford Symphony Orchestra, in Hartford, Conn., in February 2024.

Greg Hildreth ('05) starred in *Queen of Versailles* at Boston's Emerson Colonial Theatre in summer 2024 with Kirsten Chenoweth and F. Murray Abraham. The musical is based on the 2012 documentary of the same name that tells the story of a wealthy Orlando family that sets out to

build the largest private home in America, modeled after the Palace of Versailles in France. *Queen of Versailles* will transfer to Broadway in the 2025–2026 season.

Gregory K. Williams (BUTI'01, CFA'06) released his debut album, *Shadows: The Unaccompanied Viola Sonatas of Günter Raphael*, on February 2, 2024, via Affetto Records. It's the first US release to feature all three unaccompanied viola sonatas by German-Jewish composer Günter Raphael (1903–1960), whose works were banned during the Nazi regime.

Steve Eulberg ('07) completed a one-year interim director of music position for Covenant Presbyterian Church in Boise, Idaho, in September 2023. In October 2023, he became director of music for King of Glory Lutheran Church, also in Boise. Eulberg continues to teach preschool music for Music Together Boise North End.

Justin Casinghino ('09) premiered *From Either Side of the Table*, a new work for a dual wind ensemble, as part of the 2024 Washington D.C. International Music Festival at the Kennedy Center.

Chaerin Kim ('09) was elected an

associate of the Royal Academy of Music in London in 2024. She is a multi-instrumentalist and one of the few people in the world whom you can see performing as a soloist with two instruments on the same stage as an orchestra. She is an internationally acclaimed harpist, pianist, composer, conductor, and educator. She is the winner of 13 international competitions and has been a judge 100 times at 40 international competitions. Kim teaches both piano and harp at the University of Massachusetts Boston and was invited to conduct a festival orchestra in Estonia.

Clare Longendyke ('09) released her first album, *...of dreams unveiled*, in March 2024. **Anthony R. Green ('06)** composed two new works for the album. Longendyke also performed at the Palladium in Worcester, Mass., in January 2024. She works on curating programs

that expand the classical concert stage to be more inclusive and imaginative.

2010s

Brian August ('10) is a stage manager at various opera houses across the country. He is in his 5th season at Houston Grand Opera, and 14th summer season at Des Moines Metro Opera. August is the revival director of Tomer Zvulun's *Maria de Buenos Aires*. He has directed it at Opera San Antonio and the Florentine Opera Company in Milwaukee. In 2023, August was invited to speak on a panel called Creating a Humane and Sustainable Environment for Stage Managers, at the United States Institute of Theatrical Technology. He was elected one of the national vice presidents for the American Guild of Musical Artists (AGMA), where he also cochairs the Staging Staff Caucus, serves on the Work Rules and Contracts Committee, and has participated in numerous negotiation committees. He was also one of the AGMA representatives in collaboration with Opera America and the Office of Federal Mediation and Conciliation Services working to develop a nationwide anti-harassment training program for the arts.

Lucy Chen ('11,'15) was named one of the Women of Influence by the *Jacksonville Business Journal*. She is the vice president of advocacy and community engagement for the Cathedral Arts Project.

Stephen Marotto ('11,'18) released his new recording featuring the complete works for cello and piano by Morton Feldman on Mode Records. This recording was made in collaboration with pianist Marilyn Nonken. This project includes music from each stage of Feldman's career. It was produced by Jeff Means and Brian Brandt and was recorded at the Experimental Media and Performing Arts Center (EMPAC) at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in Troy, N.Y.

Sydney Lemmon ('12) appeared in the hit show *Succession* and starred in the psychologi-

cal thriller play *Job*, which had performances at Broadway's Hayes Theatre through October 27. *Job* transferred to Broadway after two sold-out runs off-Broadway at Soho Playhouse and the Connelly Theater. The play follows Jane (Lemmon), who was placed on leave at her big tech company following a viral incident. She would do anything to return to her job, but Loyd (Peter Friedman), the therapist who needs to authorize her return, suspects her work might be doing more harm than good.

John Bian ('14) was appointed second violin in the Philadelphia Orchestra.

Evan Kent ('14) is an active performer-scholar teaching research methods and community music and activism at the Levinsky-Wingate Academic Center in Tel Aviv, Israel. His one-person autoethnographic performance, *Shards*, has appeared throughout Europe, the Middle East, and the United States. It was voted Best Solo Musical Performance by the Marsh Theater in San Francisco and has been turned into a book published by Routledge.

Carolyn Regula (BUTI'11, CFA'15,'18) is based in Las Vegas and performs with the Pop Strings Orchestra and multiple electric string quartets. Regula has played at prestigious events such as the F1 Las Vegas Grand Prix and the Life Is Beautiful festival, and has appeared in the trailer for Super Bowl LVIII. In addition to live performance and teaching, she has a virtual career where she is known as The Cello Doll. She has been managing a growing social media and YouTube community that exceeds 29,000 followers. In fall 2022, Regula released her debut album as The Cello Doll, *Escaping Darkness*.

Megan Wimberley ('15) started Cowgirl Artists of America (CGA), an organization working to increase opportunities for and representation of female western artists and makers, in 2021. CGA has since grown to more than 300

members, established important partnerships with industry leaders, and helped female western artists and makers learn skills to grow their art business and reputation. CGA partnered with the A.R. Mitchell Museum of Western Art in Trinidad, Colo., on the exhibition *Women's Work*, which showcases and celebrates the contributions of women in the American West. Additionally, OETA, Oklahoma's PBS station, featured Wimberley's work, CGA, and *Women's Work* in an episode of its series *Gallery America* in April 2024. She exhibited work at the Mountain Oyster Club in 2023 and was invited to participate in a second year at the *Cowgirl Up!* exhibition at the Desert Caballeros Western Museum in Wickenburg, Ariz.

Daniel Beilman ('16) was a quarter-finalist for the 2025 Grammy Music Educator Award.

Bryn Boice ('16) is the Commonwealth Shakespeare Company's (CSC) associate artistic director. She worked with **Mackenzie Adamick ('24)** on CSC's production of *The Winter's Tale*, which ran in summer 2024 at the Boston Common. Boice was the show's director and Adamick was the sound director.

Ben Salus ('16) performed in another episode of *The Food That Built America* on the History Channel, playing Wendy's founder Dave Thomas. The episode aired in spring 2024. Salus was also on the producing team of the 2023 *New York Times* DealBook summit. He worked with some of the world's most impactful CEOs and leaders to deliver a newsworthy and memorable event.

Edward (Ted) Messerschmidt ('17) writes that his second child was born in February 2022. Messerschmidt participated in the 2023 Inside Outside Songwriting Collaboration Project, which pairs songwriters with incarcerated musicians. He also published an article on instrumental music in prisons in the *International Journal of Community Music* in February 2024.

MaryRuth Miller ('17) went on tour as a member of the ensemble Lyyra, the only professional six-voice women's a cappella group in the US. Lyyra was created by the VOCES8 Foundation to build support and visibility for upper voices and their potential.

Daphne Panageas-Britton ('17) teaches English and provides art therapy out of her studio in upstate New York.

Brantly Sheffield ('17) is preparing for his second solo show with Ro2 Art Gallery in Dallas, Tex., in spring 2025. Ro2 Art is preparing to ship two of his paintings to Louisiana for a juried group exhibition at the Masur Museum of Art. Sheffield had his first solo show at Ro2 Art in summer 2023.

Alex Delano ('18) began freelancing full-time, leading her to the digital agency oakpool, which was featured in *Forbes* magazine in fall 2023. Delano recently became a partner at the firm. She is also releasing a documentary called *Meko*, backed by Larry Weinberg, a lecturer in BU's Los Angeles Study Abroad Program. The documentary focuses on a climate change refugee in the Bahamas.

Desiré Graham ('18) received a 2024 Princess Grace Award. The awards program recognizes creative generators and performance-based creatives. Graham works with Double Edge Theatre, VLA Dance, and Wender Collective as a recurring collaborator. She also curates the Black Residency and hosts the workshop series Somewhere in Between for BIPOC and ALAANA (African, Latinx, Asian, Arab, Native American) peoples to discover the use of communal singing.

Yoon Jung Huh ('18), a flutist, and **Choah Kim ('19)**, a pianist, perform as the Flano Duo. They have had recitals in New York, New Jersey, and Seoul, and have released two albums, which are available online.

Krista Bruschini ('19) cofounded a business in multicultural music education, offering trips to different

global destinations to learn music from different cultures. The first trip took place in Bali, Indonesia, in summer 2024. Bruschini also has a private lesson studio, Kreate Music, offering in-home and virtual lessons in piano and voice. Pursuing the private lesson studio full-time has allowed her the opportunity to structure her schedule as she chooses, while doing what she loves. Learn more about her work at www.kreatemusic.com.

Suah Kim ('19) is an adjunct cello faculty member at Changwon National University in Changwon, South Korea.

2020s

José Martínez ('20) is the artistic director of FAN Chelva (Festival of Arts and Nature), held in Chelva, his hometown in Valencia, Spain. At the 2024 festival, he performed on tuba while **Adam Gautille ('13)** performed on trumpet. In addition, Martínez was the guest principal tuba with Utopia Orchestra and its founding conductor Teodor Currentzis in its Germany and Greece tour in October and November 2024. In August 2024 he performed in Bogotá, Colombia, with the National Orchestra of Spain, and completed a master class at Bogotá's Universidad Nacional de Colombia.

Devin Wilson ('20) presented his MFA thesis exhibition, *The Pigeon Has Landed*, at UC Irvine's Claire Trevor School of the Arts in spring 2024. The project explored the pigeon as the symbolic nexus of capitalism. Serving as both a reflection on obsolete technology in delivery services and an exploration of pigeons as agents of militarized spying, the project confronts the whimsical yet unsettling conspiracy theory that posits "birds aren't real." The work in the exhibition explored the satirical nature of internet meme culture.

Mai-Han Nguyen ('21) is a visual development artist in Nickelodeon Animation's Artist Program.

Xuerong (Kyra) Zhao ('21) released



NINA YOSHIDA NELSEN ('01,'03) was named Boston Lyric Opera's artistic director. She began the role on February 1, 2024. She is a cofounder of the Asian Opera Alliance and has a career as a singer. Nelsen finished a run as Suzuki in *Madama Butterfly* at Opera Carolina and has also performed with companies such as the Washington National Opera, Lincoln Center, Lyric Opera of Chicago, Houston Grand Opera, and Seattle Opera. She will continue her performing career while serving as the Boston Lyric Opera's artistic director.

her first solo album, which includes music by Rachmaninoff, Scriabin, and Schumann. The recording is available on all platforms.

Emma Cavage ('22) received the 11th Annual Stage Directors and Choreographers Foundation's Charles Abbott Fellowship. Cavage is the youngest person to receive this fellowship.

Devon Russo ('22) won the 2023 American Prize in Vocal Performance—Friedrich and Virginia Schorr Memorial Award. North Star Music published his first piece, *Three Songs for Bass Voice by Henry Purcell*, arranged in the Britten tradition. Russo also took part in the Internationale Sommerakademie Mozarteum Salzburg in the Lied and Oratorio course in 2023, performed with Trinity Repertory Company, the Metropolitan Opera Chorus, Boston Baroque, and Handel & Haydn Society Choruses, and took on the following roles: artist-teacher in classical voice and opera theater director at the University of Rhode

Island; director of choral activities at Bryant University; assistant conductor for the Handel & Haydn Society Youth Choruses: Chorus of Soprano and Altos; and choral fellow at Marsh University.

Fady Demian ('23) received SpeakEasy Stage Company's Thomas Derrah Emerging Artist Award, presented at SpeakEasy's 2024 Spring Gala. Demian is an actor and a writer currently working on Amazon Prime's *The Terminal List: Dark Wolf*. He was recently in SpeakEasy and the Huntington's coproduction of *The Band's Visit* alongside **Andrew Mayer ('11)** and **Jesse Garlick ('14)**, and he has performed with numerous theaters in the area, including Actors' Shakespeare Project and Moonbox Productions.

Sarah Wang ('23) was cast as Violetta in the national tour of *Pretty Woman*. In the 1990 movie on which the musical is based, Violetta is the opera singer who performs a segment from Giuseppe Verdi's *La traviata* in the

scene where the character Edward Lewis (Richard Gere) takes Vivian Ward (Julia Roberts) on a date to the opera.

Téa Chai Beer, Cody Robert Hook Bluett, Sarai Bustos, Huakai Chen, Natalie Conway, James Gold, Abbi Kenny, Yingxue (Daisy) Li, Julia McGehean, Sayak Mitra, Stephanie Petet, Jacob Salzer, Sidharth Shah, Sophie Thervil, and **Ellen Weitkamp** are all 2024 CFA graduates who were featured in the School of Visual Arts alumni exhibition *This Time Tomorrow* at New York City's Morgan Lehman Gallery in summer 2024.

Natalie Darst Xia ('24) received the Fulbright-Harriet Hale Woolley Scholarship to study in Paris for the 2024-2025 academic year. In addition to pursuing violin studies at the École Normale de Musique de Paris, she will participate in the Franco-American cultural program as a resident at the Fondation des États-Unis.

Tommy Vines ('24) had a four-show off-Broadway run of their play, *i love you and i always will or charlie's play*, in July 2024. It is an experimental, movement-based memorial play Vines wrote for their good friend Charlie Foster, who passed away from terminal brain cancer in 2022. The play was first performed at BU's Joan & Edgar Booth Theatre in September 2023. Vines is the project's playwright, director, producer, and lead actor. The play also features **Jojo Leiato ('24), Trev Turnbow ('24, Pardee'24), Emma Weller ('24),** and **Nicolas Zuluaga ('24)** in the cast. **Katelyn Thompson ('24)** is the play's stage and production manager and **Madeline Riddick-Seals ('24)** is its scenic designer and codirector.

Mengyin Wang ('24) and **Mengxi You ('24)** had their presentations featured at the Tcherepnin Society's conference in April 2024 in New York. The presentations were titled *Cultural Integration in Alexander Tcherepnin's Cycle of Seven Chinese Folk Songs Op. 95* and *Seven Songs on Chinese Poems Op. 71*.

Rosetta Greek

Arne F. Kapke/ Riksarkivet/ Bildedagbladet NÅ, Courtesy of Lara Poe

HOW NORDIC COW-CALLING TRADITIONS AND HER GRANDMOTHER'S UPBRINGING INSPIRED COMPOSER LARA POE

By Mara Sassoon

COMPOSER LARA POE was caught by surprise just before the start of a 2022 performance of Sibelius' *Luonnotar* by the Finnish soprano Anu Komsí. As Komsí entered the stage at London's Barbican Hall, she was singing a traditional Nordic cow-calling tune. Poe ('16, CAS'16), whose grandmother was raised on a farm in Finland, recognized the sound immediately. "This was not on the program," she says. "I didn't realize she was familiar with this tradition as well. And it was a really interesting sound to hear in this space." That performance got Poe thinking about incorporating Nordic cow-calling into a composition. The centuries-old tradition of cow-calling is typically performed by women. The calls sound different depending on the region where they originated, but feature drawn-out melodic chants meant to capture the attention of cattle and pull them back from their pastures. "In Sweden, for instance, you tend to get more of this kind of singsong, high-register thing," Poe says. "In Finland, you tend to get something that kind of jumps between

registers a lot more. It's more of a belting chest voice, and it's meant to carry long distances, to call cows back from across however many fields they've wandered. It has to carry." In fall 2023, Poe began work on a song cycle, *Laulut maaseudulta (Songs from the Countryside)*, which features Finnish cow-calling and is inspired by her grandmother's upbringing in Kauklahti, Espoo, Finland, during World War II. "They had cows, so that was a nice way of tying everything together." The piece had its premiere at the renowned BBC Proms classical music festival on August 25, 2024, and was performed by Komsí. On September 1, it was performed at the Helsinki Festival, where Poe's grandmother was able to watch the performance live. Poe had interviewed her grandmother about her upbringing and used the transcript to create the text for the song cycle. "When my grandmother was a child, for example, Russia was trying to invade the area," she says. "There's this big, tempestuous storm section [in the piece], which is in some ways a metaphor for that." ●



A woman calling livestock in Norway in 1952. Inset: Lara Poe.





Boston University College of Fine Arts

855 Commonwealth Avenue
Boston, Massachusetts 02215
bu.edu/cfa

Nonprofit
US Postage
PAID
Boston MA
Permit No. 1839



BE INSPIRED

*Experience the arts
at Boston University*



bu.edu/cfa/bu-arts-central