DEAR FRIENDS, FAMILIES AND COLLEAGUES,

This year, the College of Fine Arts and Communication (COFAC) embraced the college theme Arts without Boundaries. Through artistic explorations and commentaries outside the typical boundaries of a specific artform, this theme encourages us to find common threads that unite and connect, rather than divide and limit. From podcasts and art exhibitions to the movement of the Cuban ballet and the sounds of the symphonic band, each department played a role in a successful fall semester.

The Center for the Arts Gallery and the Asian Arts & Culture Center spent this semester focusing on themes related to sustainability and recycling, crossing boundaries between the arts and sciences. Sandy Winters’ exhibition, Creation and Destruction, explores nature, and humankind’s deep connection with the plant kingdom. Reclaimed Creations, an exhibition by Sayaka Kajuta Ganz, uses found plastic objects to create large sculptures of flying horses, birds and sea creatures. The spring semester will start off with Collected Watershed, an installation by eco-artist Stacy Levy that will bring students from TU sciences and the Department of Art + Design together to tell the ecological story of the watershed areas around Baltimore.

In addition to the incredible visiting artists and lectures, our students are out getting real-world experience, rubbing elbows with the stars. Music major Jeremiah Lloyd Harmon ’19, earned his spot in the top six performers on the reality series American Idol. Electronic Media & Film major Maria Olney ’20 landed an internship at Steven Spielberg’s LA production company, working with TU alumna and head of physical production Shelly Strong ’91.

Through collaborations near and far, the Department of Dance broke through boundaries both physical and cultural. In a summer seminar, TU hosted Maestra Ramona De Saa, director of the Cuban National Ballet School, for a workshop focused on cultural exchange and dialogue through the teaching of Cuban ballet methods. In addition, students from the TU Dance Company and the Community College of Baltimore County (CCBC) have come together in an unprecedented collaboration uniting students and artistic directors from both schools to create EMERGE.

Still others are pushing artistic boundaries through experimentation. Phil Davis, from the Department of Art + Design, curated the Sweaty Eyeballs Animation Film Festival, a three-day juried international film festival showcasing unique, experimental and cutting-edge animations. Along these same lines, David White, from the Department of Theatre Arts, shattered the perceptions of Shakespeare in this fall’s rendition of Hamlet, casting five different students to portray the title character.

We also reflect on the legacy of Arno Drucker and the impact of the Ruth and Arno Drucker Fund, which provides educational opportunities to music students. And in a profile of Music Professor Chris Cicconi, we learn how his student-centered approach to teaching empowers students to push their own boundaries, reaching potential they didn’t know was possible without his support.

To read more about our students and the wonderful projects and events happening in our college, please visit www.towson.edu/cofac.

Greg Faller, Interim Dean
College of Fine Arts and Communication
Christopher Cicconi has an open-door policy. Visit the assistant professor’s office in the music department and you’ll likely find a student or two hanging out, talking through a challenge they might be facing in school or just giving him a good-natured ribbing for being a Steelers fan.

It’s the type of environment and relationship Cicconi experienced with his college band director Stephen Gage as a music education student at Youngstown State in Ohio, and one that he works hard to create for his students at Towson University.

“After working with him for four years, I wanted to be a college band director [too],” Cicconi says. “I want to give my kids here what I got in undergrad. The way that I come across to people is a direct reflection of how he came across to me.”

In his fifth year as director of bands and orchestras and assistant professor of music education, Cicconi was drawn to the position for its combination of band conducting and teacher prep opportunities. But it was an interview with current students that made him take the job.

“The thing that really sold me on it was the culture of the kind of kid that was here,” Cicconi says. “It’s the Towson kid that really sank my energy for what I do. And I waited [for the right position to find] that. Because there have been jobs that weren’t that way.

And a music student deserves, in my opinion, to have someone fully vested in them. My kids have that with me.”

Cicconi’s student-centered approach to teaching and challenging performance repertoire has his students enrolling in symphonic band and symphony orchestra year after year, although only one term is required for graduation.

In his seventh semester of symphonic band, Joshua Fleming ’20 credits Cicconi’s passionate conducting for keeping him coming back. “Every semester I think, ‘Maybe I should take a break from ensembles?’ Then I see an email from him over the summer, see the amazing rep that we’re about to do, and just remember that familial aspect that the symphonic band gives me,” says the french horn player and senior music performance major. “I honestly wouldn’t trade it for anything.”

Students describe working in Cicconi’s ensembles and playing the music he selects as a “privilege.”

Colleen Michael ’20 says she likely won’t have the opportunity to play the type of music she performs as a clarinetist in the symphonic band much after graduation. “The repertoire he picks for us to play is like no other,” Michael says. “As a music educator, I’ll probably be teaching Hot Cross Buns to elementary schoolers, so the chance to play music like this is amazing.”

Cicconi pairs his supportive approach with high expectations. “The combination gives student musicians the confidence to do their best. “He’s definitely made me want to be a better musician, because his standards are really high for the group, but also [for] individuals, and that motivates me to meet him at the expectations he has for me,” says Leah Kwiatkowski ’22, a music education major and french horn player. “I think I can do the things that he thinks I can do because he believes in me.”

“The caliber of the ensemble is incredible, and it’s all really thanks to his direction,” Kwiatkowski adds. “His support and dedication to the group really motivates people to meet his expectations, because I think we in general try
to give back to him in rehearsals as much as he gives to us, [both] in rehearsals and outside of rehearsals.”

In his classes, Cicconi covers a wide range of topics, from teaching music education students strategies for success when leading their own bands or ensembles one day, to ensuring they have tools to cope with the stress that comes along with being a college student.

When he detected a heightened level of stress among the symphonic band during a mid-semester rehearsal, Cicconi devoted part of the class to an open discussion, inviting students to talk through what was bothering them and offering suggestions for managing their stress.

“He told us the reason that he comes to campus on the days he doesn’t have band or class is because he might run into one of us,” Kwiatkowski recalls of that day, “and that just really stuck with me.”

Cicconi does everything he can to support students inside and outside of the classroom. And they feel it.

“He’s the kind of teacher that pushes you to be better than you think that you can be, while making sure that you’re OK as a human being,” says Brennan Traube ’19, a computer science major and euphonium player in the symphonic band.

When asked how he gauges himself as a successful teacher, Cicconi looks to how well his students are doing.

“If it’s a great concert, I love the fact that my kids pulled off an amazing concert,” he says. “If things went poorly, I’m also highly reflective, and look back at myself, like, How could I have prepared them better? Did I give them music that was too hard? Was it appropriate? All of that.”

But for Cicconi, there’s more to teaching than student success. “The other thing that I’m maybe more passionate about is their experience on the way to that success. There’s going to be failures and successes along the way. But what did they gather, or what kind of life skills do they get?”

Part of Cicconi’s student-centered approach to teaching means he never stops learning. If a rehearsal doesn’t go well, he’ll record the next one to check his own behavior for potential problems. He asks students for their feedback, and invites outside professionals and colleagues to sit in on his classes and offer an evaluation. And he stays busy outside of the classroom, regularly visiting high school and elementary school band programs around the state, especially if one of his former students is involved.

“I’ve become highly reflective,” Cicconi says. “Because my kids, our kids, here at Towson deserve to have the best person in front of them. And you may be the best, but you won’t be the best forever if you don’t continue to grow with them. You can be the fastest runner, but if you stop practicing, eventually you’re not going to be anymore. And so it’s that. It’s that highly reflective nature about myself.”
Singer-songwriter Jeremiah Lloyd Harmon has been performing for most of his life—in church choirs, music festivals, national venues and Towson University’s Center for the Arts while working toward his degree in voice performance.


“I was able to audition with an original song, so that was a great opportunity for me to put my music out there,” says Harmon, 27, a Catonsville native who transferred to TU in 2017. “It was so exciting to be able to sing in front of the judges—it was a surreal experience.”

And it was just the beginning. On “Idol,” Harmon became known for his powerhouse vocals, original music and openness about his personal faith and his coming out story. His performances wowed the judges and the nation week after week, earning him a spot in the final six competitors.

Perry called him “a really important contribution from the universe to music,” while Grammy, Tony and Emmy award-winning singer Cynthia Erivo described his voice as “unstoppable.” Elton John said Harmon was an “amazing talent” whose rendition of “We All Fall In Love Sometimes” “took my breath away.”

Department of Music Chair Phillip Collister says Harmon is an example of how courage can lead to new opportunities. “I am thrilled to see one of our own music majors competing in such a high-profile and life-changing arena,” says Collister. “I am cheering him on with every note he sings and every new avenue of expression he opens as a result of this amazing experience.”

Harmon returned to Baltimore with a national fan base. Over the summer, he performed at the Hard Rock Cafe, Oriole Park at Camden Yards and TU radio station WTMD.

Back on campus for his final term, Harmon received a standing ovation from his peers after performing two songs off of his upcoming album, “Namesake,” during the Department of Music Convocation in September.

At TU, the singer says he’s found support and community when he needed it most. “My time at Towson has had a strong impact on me,” Harmon explains. “I never experienced such a welcoming community [as] at the school of music at Towson. [The faculty] have been really instrumental in all the change that has happened in my life. I have nothing but love for Towson.”

AN “AMERICAN IDOL” RETURNS TO TU

After earning a spot in the reality series’ top six performers, music major Jeremiah Lloyd Harmon is back on campus for his final semester

By Rebecca Kirkman
The Ruth and Arno Drucker Fund

By Rebecca Kirkman

Ruth Drucker sits perched on a chair in the living room of her mid-century home that’s tucked into a wooded lot just minutes from Towson University’s campus. As she recounts moments from her nearly 70-year relationship with her husband Arno, Drucker alternately laughs and wipes away tears.

An accomplished vocalist and Towson University music professor emeritus, Drucker taught in the Department of Music for nearly three decades beginning in 1967. Wherever Drucker was, Arno, an accomplished pianist and educator who died on July 15 at age 85, could often be found nearby. The couple built their successful careers as teachers and performers side by side.

"His passion was me," says Drucker with a smile, who met her husband while the two were studying at the Eastman School of Music in Rochester, N.Y. "Arno was such a good pianist, he made himself available to accompany me. That’s how the romance started!"

Their school day romance bloomed into a bond that would take them around the world. The Druckers earned dual Fulbright grants that would take them around the world.

"Towson has always been a great home for me, and giving back has always been a part of our lives," Ruth Drucker says, pointing to her family’s arrival in the U.S. from Austria in 1940 and their graduate degrees, then spent two years touring Europe while Arno played in the 7th Army Symphony Orchestra.

"Arno and his wife, Ruth, formed the ultimate duo, and their nuanced interpretations serve to inspire for years to come," writes executive director of the Baltimore Chamber Players, a summer program held on Towson University’s campus. As she recounts moments from her nearly 70-year relationship with her husband Arno, Drucker alternately laughs and wipes away tears.

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Each term in the TU Dance Company, students work with guest choreographers and prepare a concert complete with lighting and costume design.

It’s part of Dance Company Artistic Director Ruonqiao Du’s efforts to create a company curriculum that will prepare students for life after graduation.

“This is like a simulator, if you will,” says Du from a studio in the Center for the Arts where the company is rehearsing for its fall concert, Emerge. “We create an industry standard, as much as we can, of the concept of the company. So when students graduate and go into the industry, they will not be unfamiliar with the practice.”

But this fall, Du and his colleagues have come together to create something unprecedented: a 45-minute piece combining works from four choreographers at two institutions.

For Emerge, Du partnered with TU faculty Alison Seidenstricker and Vincent Thomas as well as Community College of Baltimore County Associate Professor Melinda Blomquist to piece together a half-evening length piece that will incorporate dancers from both institutions.

“A professor exchange allowed Du to work with CCBC students as a guest artist, while Blomquist came to campus to teach a section of choreography to TU’s Dance Company. "With this sort of collaboration, the dancers have the opportunity to work with new people in a short amount of time. In the real world, you don’t have a whole semester to [learn] something. We tried to mimic [that], to create a live industry speed for those dancers to absorb, to learn and to perfect.””

For students, Emerge has provided an opportunity to learn in new ways.

“It’s something I personally haven’t really done yet,” says TU Dance Company member Kaelen Gouveia ’21. “But it’s also very exciting because you get to see many different backgrounds and choreographic styles come together. And it’s really interesting to see how your stylistic voice can fit or go together with the new choreographer. It’s a very eye-opening experience.”

In November, students from the CCBC and TU dance companies first performed a section of Emerge at CCBC and later the full-length piece joined by Vincent Thomas’ Modern Repertory class in the Stephen’s Hall Theatre.

"Artistically, the opportunity to work with four different choreographers and have four different artistic challenges all within the same work is a really unique experience," Blomquist says. "And then also this opportunity to be in a full-length work, because most academic work is built around a 9- to 15-minute piece.”

In addition to preparing students for professional life, Du hopes to send a message with Emerge, which was inspired by a sunset he witnessed while teaching a summer dance intensive in South Africa and explores the idea of light emerging from darkness.

“With so many people from different schools, different backgrounds, [together] on stage, that is powerful,” he says. “It’s a sense of unity, sense of community, sense of togetherness, that to me is valuable as well.”

Senior dance major Kayla Clancy says Emerge has given her the opportunity to push herself physically and emotionally with a longer piece.

“I hope that [the audience is] inspired by our hard work, but also the message and the emotion that we bring, sharing ourselves and our stories on a stage and together,” Clancy says. “And I hope they’re surprised by this different thing that we’re bringing this semester that we’ve never done before.”
Five students embody the title role in a loud, bold interpretation of the Shakespeare classic from TU Theatre Arts Productions

By Briana Richetti ’20

Richetti is a senior majoring in English and Electronic Media and Film. She is a student writer for University Communications and Media Relations.

High school English has provided most of us with the basic knowledge of William Shakespeare’s Hamlet, but Towson University Theatre Arts Productions shattered those perceptions in its rendition in October at the Mainstage Theatre in the Center for the Arts.

Director and Theatre Arts Professor David White takes a new approach to the story with his unique take on the character as a whole. “One thing our director has talked about is that if you were under the circumstances, it’s hard to imagine that you wouldn’t do the things that Hamlet does. One of the things he wanted to achieve by all of these different Hamlets is to show that anyone could be Hamlet.”

The new rendition of a classic allows students to be closely involved in the creative process. “It’s a lot of good analysis, a lot of good Shakespeare experience. But also, our director has been very open to everything so he’s really let us be creative and think of things that can add to the production,” Scherini says.

BFA acting major Cherelle Matthews stars in her second Mainstage production as “Damned Hamlet,” who deals with the aftermath of all of the previous Hamlets’ decisions. Now, it’s up to “Damned Hamlet” to deal with the consequences. “He’s a prince, things just go his way naturally. And now he has murdered someone that was really important to someone who is really important to him, and it’s just a lot,” Matthews explains. “So ‘Damned Hamlet’ really has a lot going through his head.” With the show being so unique in style, Matthews has enjoyed seeing the production come together naturally throughout the rehearsal process. “We’re basically creating the show as we go instead of just doing what the script tells us to do. We’re molding things day by day and it’s really awesome to be in the process because I know the show is going to be amazing.”

BFA acting major Michael Odur opens the show with the first introduction to the main character, “Grieving Hamlet.” In his first Shakespeare production, Odour steps into the role of Hamlet as the character learns of his father’s death and feels wronged by his uncle. Grieving Hamlet feels the pain of loss and betrayal so strongly, and revenge seems to be a task too great to handle alone.

“I think that [Grieving Hamlet] realizes he won’t be able to right this wrong on his own, so he’s calling on other parts of himself,” says Oduro of the emergence of the many sides of the character’s personality. This iconic character is no small feat to take on, even with four other actors to help out. “It’s terrifying. Because, you know, it’s just Hamlet. No pressure,” he says with a laugh. “It’s a lot of fun. But I’ve never done any Shakespeare production before, so it’s interesting to get into this type of theater that everyone’s familiar with. But, there’s a whole lot more to it than the general public thinks.”

Gina Mattucci ’20, DAMNED HAMLET

With an emergency recasting, the final Hamlet, “Marauding Hamlet,” takes on an even larger sense of urgency. Now played by BFA acting major Gina Mattucci, this role encompasses all of the character’s unhinged impatience and desire for revenge to finally be carried out.

“I like to think of the last Hamlet as the ‘boiled over’ Hamlet. He has watched his other versions fail at their tasks, or he’s watched them do nothing at all, over and over again, and he’s frustrated with them, which also means he’s frustrated with himself,” Mattucci says. “So, he pops his lid off and the water comes boiling out, scalding hot and dangerous.” Stepping into the role just two weeks before opening has proved an important trial in the career of the veteran Mainstage actor. “The experience of this show will be one of the most important COFAC experiences that I will ever have. I threw myself willingly into this role two weeks before opening, which made me discipline myself and utilize my tools discovered in several semesters of acting, voice and movement classes to give this production the best that I could give.”

Michael Odur ’22, GRIEVING HAMLET

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Kerinne Walls ’21, DANGEROUS THEATRE HAMLET

In the role of “Dangerous Theater Hamlet,” Kerinne Walls plays the Hamlet who devises a plan of revenge. In her first Mainstage role, the BFA acting major describes the exhilaration of the experience and the impact she hopes it will have on the audience. “I hope that they are shocked,” Walls says. Along with the exhilarating experience for the audience, the actors also gain a valuable experience by working on the show. “It is an invaluable learning experience for me because I’m a junior now and I’m able to apply a lot of the skills I have learned in my classes up until now [to this production]. I have the chance to apply them here and that is very beneficial to me as an actor and as a professional out in the real world,” Walls adds.

Grant Scherini ’21, RIGHTEOUS HAMLET

The third Hamlet, “Righteous Hamlet,” is played by BFA acting major Grant Scherini. This Hamlet displays the character’s sense of entitlement and is the personality that drives the character into a downward spiral through the murder of Polonius, portrayed by Department of Theatre Arts Professor Peter Wray.

In his first Mainstage production experience, Scherini describes Director David White’s interesting take on the character as a whole. “One thing our director has talked about is that if you were under the circumstances, it’s hard to imagine that you wouldn’t do the things that Hamlet does. One of the things he wanted to achieve by all of these different Hamlets is to show that anyone could be Hamlet.”

The new rendition of a classic allows students to be closely involved in the creative process. “It’s a lot of good analysis, a lot of good Shakespeare experience. But also, our director has been very open to everything so he’s really let us be creative and think of things that can add to the production,” Scherini says. 
Stacy Levy describes herself as an eco-artist and environmentalist using the language of the landscape to tell the ecological story of a site, drawing on art and science. That’s exactly what she and students from TU’s Department of Art + Design, Art History, Art Education as well as students from the TU sciences and social sciences plan to create with the exhibition “Collected Watershed.”

Levy, a nationally recognized artist, studied at the Architectural Association School of Architecture. She graduated from Yale University with a B.A. in sculpture, studied at Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture, and graduated from the Tyler School of Art at Temple University with an M.F.A. in sculpture. She has numerous commissions, collections, solo and group exhibitions throughout the United States, Canada and Europe and has served as a visiting scholar and artist, lecturing throughout the country. She is the recipient of numerous awards, fellowships and honors. When not traveling and constructing installations, Levy lives on her 80-acre farm in central Pennsylvania. Her many projects can be viewed on her website: www.stacylevy.com

The exhibition and lecture are free and open to the public. The exhibition and lecture are free and open to the public. The exhibition, on view in the Center for the Arts Gallery from January 31 through April 25, will see a dendritic temporary exhibition will see a dendritic structure for freshwater across the planet. Levy, with the help of TU students, will be collecting water samples from the watershed areas around TU from the Gunpowder Falls to the Chesapeake Bay. I will begin collecting water with students one week before the show opens,” says Levy. “This pattern is how not only water is carried but how blood moves through our bodies, how nutrients move through trees, and how electricity moves as lightning in the sky. Part of my work as an eco-artist is to draw attention to this incredibly intricate, well-designed pattern of conveyance.”

“Collaborating with nature requires a multi-disciplined approach in order to find answers to the site’s issues,” says Levy. Her artwork interacts with the natural world and her projects reveal the hidden natural world in the urban environment. She seamlessly integrates the beauty of art with site design to create memorable installations.

As a sculptor making large-scale public installations in rivers, streets, parking lots, airports and nature centers, Levy frequently works as part of a collaborative team seamlessly merging sculpture into the architecture, the topography and the storm water requirements of the site. She works closely with building architects, landscape architects, engineers, horticulturalists and soil scientists to create artworks that allow natural systems like the infiltration of rainwater to function and thrive. Levy has worked with the Frick Environmental Center in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania (a Living Building Challenge Project), the Coast Guard on the Ohio River, the Army Corps of Engineers on the Schuylkill River, and city and state municipalities on the Hudson River to name a few.

Levy believes the watershed around TU is an interesting area because of the obvious relationship between the rain water running into the streams, on to the Chesapeake Bay and finally into the Atlantic ocean.

Students will collect water samples in jars without lids for the exhibition. Levy wants the work without lids because there’s a more visceral connection to the water. The containers will be open vessels and not sealed compartments. Visitors to the exhibition will visualize the work as a map on a rug. Her work and research give visual form to natural processes that would otherwise remain invisible. To build these visual metaphors, Levy meshes the clarity of diagrams, the beauty of natural forms and the visceral sense of the site.

Her art is motivated by imaging what is too small to be seen, too invisible to be considered or too vast to be understood. "I hope students will never drive their car across a little bridge and ignore the creek below," Levy says. "I want to give them a sense of how the water runs across the land like capillaries in our bodies, bringing life-giving force that sustains our drinking supplies, our landscapes, our farms and our fisheries." "People often think that nature ends where the city begins," Levy says. "My projects are designed to allow a site within the built environment to tell its ecological story to the people that inhabit it. As a sculptor, my interest in the natural world rests both in art and science. I use art as a vehicle for translating the patterns and processes of the natural world.

In addition to the exhibition, Levy will present a lecture Thursday, January 30, at 6:30 p.m. in the Center for the Arts Art Lecture Hall. The exhibition and lecture are free and open to the public.

According to Levy, “Without water we are literally nothing and these little, often unnamed and unnoticed streams are the conduits for freshwater across the planet.”

Sedonia Martin is the former Senior Communications Manager, University Marketing & Communications.
In Towson University’s Center for the Arts, about two dozen ballet students warm up at the barre in a sun-drenched dance studio. A spry, petite figure weaves between them, stopping to adjust the position of a hand here, a shoulder there.

The woman is 80-year-old Maestra Ramona De Saá, director of the internationally renowned Cuban National Ballet School since 1965. One of the most respected figures in the pedagogy of dance in the contemporary world, De Saá is here as part of TU’s Cuban National Ballet School Teaching Seminar. It’s the first time she’s taught such a seminar in the U.S.

The seminar’s 25 available spots were filled quickly, showing a keen interest from the dance community. Attendees include ballet instructors at public schools, private studios, pre-professional programs and in higher education from Maryland, Virginia, Pennsylvania and Georgia.

“It’s about embracing another culture, showing others how their efforts are valued and that we see the impact they have on dance across the world.”

—Catherine Horta-Hayden

Catherine Horta-Hayden, professor and chair of the Towson University Department of Dance, explains how the infusion of Cuban culture into the country’s ballet methodology makes it unique. “One of the many intriguing notions of the curriculum is how they make it distinctly Cuban. They have found a way to infuse the culture of the island, the warmth of the people, the aesthetics, into this ballet form.”

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“Just being in the room and having the opportunity to learn from Maestra de Saá was remarkable. She is a true gem in the dance world,” says Megan Logee ’03, owner and artistic director of the Carroll County Dance Center and Ballet Conservatory, and a graduate of TU’s B.F.A. in dance performance and choreography.

“Her generation is getting older and there is so much value in the history and knowledge that she has to share;” she adds. “I am so pleased that TU is committed to fostering all kinds of partnerships and collaborations across disciplines and cultures and that TU is still providing educational opportunities for me.”

The heart of the program is about more than just dance. It’s about cultural exchange and dialogue.

“It’s about embracing another culture,” Horta-Hayden says. “Showing others how their efforts are valued and that we see the impact they have on dance across the world.”

Despite teaching ballet for more than a half-century, De Saá sees the seminar as an opportunity to continue learning. “It’s been a beautiful experience to be here. The same way that I have taught, I have learned from everyone who has been here,” she says.

Horta-Hayden hopes to resume the program again next year, and one day expand it to include an educational exchange program where TU dance students could travel to Cuba to take classes at the Cuban National Ballet School.

“This idea of opening your doors, your heart, sharing this knowledge across cultures, is part of Towson University’s mission of inclusivity and diversity,” Horta-Hayden says.
EMF senior Maria Olney ‘20 lands an internship at Steven Spielberg’s LA production company

By Rebecca Kirkman

As the first physical production intern at Amblin Partners, Maria Olney’s summer was full of exciting moments, from the first time driving into a studio lot to early glimpses of not-yet-released films.

With one such moment—sitting in on a test screening of a film prior to its release—Olney saw similarities to her classes in Towson University’s Department of Electronic Media and Film.

“It was like here. When we make a film at Towson, we screen it to our class, and they give us feedback,” Olney explains. “And on this level, they screened it to an audience. They have everybody in the audience fill out this card, like, Did you like it? Did you know who all the characters were? Did you understand the plot? Were there any plot holes? And I was like, this is the same concept as screening one of my films to my class, but on a much bigger level. That was really cool.”

In fact, it was an event through the department that made Olney’s internship at the Steven Spielberg-led production company possible. During her sophomore year, Olney attended a talk by Shelly Strong ’81 as part of TU’s Women and Minorities in Media Fest, never expecting that less than two years later she would be stationed at a desk just outside Strong’s office in Los Angeles. A TU alumna, Strong is executive vice president and head of physical production at Amblin, which develops and produces film and television programming under the Amblin Entertainment, DreamWorks Pictures and Participant banners.

Some of its recent productions include The Post, Ready Player One, and Jurassic World: Fallen Kingdom.

“The cool thing about physical production is once a film makes it from creative to physical, they basically make it. They find all the heads of the departments. They create a budget, a schedule. They attach a director and a producer to the film,” Olney explains.

“So it was interesting to see an overhead view of how everything comes together. They call themselves the nervous system of the film. I felt like every day was like another learning experience.”

For the aspiring filmmaker, the internship was also an example of the importance of building relationships in the industry.

“When Shelly came [to speak at TU], she said that she wanted to help students get more opportunities, because it’s hard to get a job unless you know somebody already,” Olney adds. “I didn’t know anybody out there.”

With guidance from Visiting Instructor Jena Burchick, Olney reached out to Strong, asking for advice on finding an internship. “I figured the worst thing she could say is no, or just not email me back.”

Olney got much more than just an email response. After an informational phone interview and an in-person meeting while she was visiting Los Angeles over spring break, Olney was offered a paid summer internship at Amblin.

“The networking didn’t end once she got the job, either. ‘Shelly was really big on having me meet as many people as possible and get as much experience as possible,’ Olney says. ‘So she let me go and meet with the head of every department there, which was really nice. And then they let me take some time off to meet with some people outside of Amblin, too.’”

A post-production supervisor outside of Amblin who worked with the studio on A Dog’s Journey helped Olney set up a tour of Panavision’s headquarters in Woodland Hills.

Despite being more than 2,500 miles from her native Myersville, Olney says she was continually surprised by the connections to home she discovered in Los Angeles.

“Don’t be afraid to reach out,” Olney advises her peers. “When somebody is on this level, it’s a little intimidating to talk to them or reach out to them. But I remind myself they’re an adult in a job. One day, you’re going to have a job that you go to every day and probably younger people are going to want your help.”

Armed with her summer internship experience, Olney is eager to head back to L.A. after graduation in the spring.

“I’ve wanted to do film for the longest time, and I know L.A. is the place to be. But I didn’t want to just graduate, pack up all my stuff, and move out there without any experience—What if I hated it?” Olney says. “So this was a nice test to see if I liked it, which I do.”

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TU professor brings "Sweaty Eyeballs" to Baltimore

By Kyle Hobstetter

Towson University Associate Professor Phil Davis has a passion for animation. He loves drawing. And as a filmmaker, he was tired of dealing with actors and he loved the fact he could create a feature film without having to leave his desk.

"I want to have maximum control over the thing I make, and I want to make it in my bedroom," laughs Davis. "I just toiled away on pieces of paper to make a film. And I think that’s what’s so beautiful about it, too, is that you can make something with such limited means.

"And it can be really powerful, and really beautiful, and moving and interesting."

That passion for animation led Davis to create the Sweaty Eyeballs Animation Festival, which took place Oct. 4-6 at the Parkway Theater in the Station North neighborhood of Baltimore, thanks to funding from COFAC and TU – Partnerships at Work for Greater Baltimore initiative.

And while most equate animation with Disney and Pixar movies, Sweaty Eyeballs offers a more "adult" take on the art form.

The three-day juried international film festival showcased unique, experimental and diverse animation by artists that are on the cutting edge of the medium, experimenting, trying new things, both visually and with storytelling.

Davis has been presenting an iteration of Sweaty Eyeballs to Baltimore audiences since 2012, where he was asked to curate a one-off event at the Creative Alliance in Highlandtown’s Patterson Theater.

"It took eight years to really build the audience for it," Davis says. "And now the audience is there. And I think people are really excited about it."

Davis has been part of Towson University’s faculty for 18 years, first in the electronic media and film department, and then in the Department of Art + Design, Art History, Art Education.

He credits TU's supportive environment with helping him develop as both a teacher and artist.

"If I didn’t have this job," Davis says, "I don’t think I would be making as much work as I’m making. And I don’t think I would be curating a three-day international animation festival, because I wouldn’t have the infrastructure and stability to be able to pursue these kind of creative endeavors."

"TU has been great at providing me resources, space to develop these things, and also students to bounce ideas off of. Yeah, I got no complaints. I love it here."

The Art Gallery in Center for the Arts and the Asian Arts & Culture Center presented exhibitions during the fall semester based on Greek mythology and Japanese philosophy with a strong focus on sustainability, recycling and discarded materials.

Artist Sandy Winters presented “Creation and Destruction” in the Center for the Arts Gallery. Winters, an established painting, drawing and printmaking artist, has taught at Cornell University, Yale and the City College of NY, and has exhibited, written and published extensively. For the last 40 years, her art work has been exhibited widely in group and solo exhibitions through the United States. Her TU exhibition explored nature, and humankind’s deep connection with the plant kingdom which she perceives as an overwhelming force, perpetually giving birth to and at the same time continuously overcoming the world of order, artifact and fantasy. Her mediums include oil, acrylics, graphite, collage and block prints to extend the boundaries on canvas in every direction to create new, huge paintings. Winters translates stories into her art using narratives and clever titles. For over 30 years, Winters’ theme of discarded and found plastic objects. Ganz began her sculpting career by showing how beautiful these discarded materials can be and what can be done through the United States. Her TU exhibition focused on “Creation and Destruction” and “Reclaimed Creations”.

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The Asian Arts and Culture Center presented “Reclaimed Creations,” an exhibition by artist, Sayaka Kajita Ganz. Ganz, who was born in Yokahama and grew up in Japan, Brazil and Hong Kong, created fantastical organic sculptures of airy flying horses, birds and sea creatures for her exhibition composed from reclaimed and found plastic objects. Ganz began her sculpting career with metal. She began collecting, cleaning and welding sculptures from discarded pieces of metal from a courtyard as a student at Indiana University. Her Shinto-inspired sculptures urged viewers to consider their connection with the plant kingdom which she perceives as an overwhelming force, perpetually giving birth to and at the same time continuously overcoming the world of order, artifact and fantasy. Her mediums include oil, acrylics, graphite, collage and block prints to extend the boundaries on canvas in every direction to create new, huge paintings. Winters translates stories into her art using narratives and clever titles. For over 30 years, Winters’ theme of discarded and found plastic objects. Ganz began her sculpting career by showing how beautiful these discarded materials can be and what can be done through the United States. Her TU exhibition focused on “Creation and Destruction” and “Reclaimed Creations”.

The Glass is Half Full by Sandy Winters / Flash acrylic, graphite, newspaper collage on Arches paper / 2016

Emergence by Sayaka Ganz / 2013

GREEK MYTHOLOGY AND JAPANESE PHILOSOPHY

Fall Exhibitions Focused on “Creation and Destruction” and “Reclaimed Creations” by Sedonia Martin

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Emergence by Sayaka Ganz / 2013
Spring 2020 Event Highlights
Visit us online at towson.edu/cofac to find out more about these and other events.

TU Department of Art + Design, Art History, Art Education
Exhibition | Stacy Levy: Collected Watershed
January 31 – April 25
Center for the Arts Gallery

TU Department of Electronic Media & Film
12th Annual Bridges to the World International Film Festival
February 7 – March 6
Van Bokkelen Hall Auditorium

TU Asian Arts & Culture Center
Exhibition | Afarin Rahmanifar | The Women of Shahnameh, The Women of Afarin Rahmanifar
February 13 – May 16
TU Asian Arts Gallery

TU Department of Theatre Arts
Lasso of Truth by Carson Kreitzer
March 5 – 12
Studio Theatre

TU Department of Music
PRISM: A Musical Collage
March 7
Harold J. Kaplan Concert Hall

TU Community Art Center
Family Arts Day
March 28
Center for the Arts Atrium

TU Department of Music
Bill & Helen Murray Jazz Residency Concerts feat. Ellery Eskelin ’81
April 1 & April 3
Recital Hall

TU Department of Music
The Pirates of Penzance by Gilbert & Sullivan
April 17 – 19
Stephens Hall Theatre

TU Public Communication Center
Annual Public Speaking Competition
April 23
Recital Hall

TU Department of Mass Communication and TU PRSSA
Spring Networking Fair
April 8
West Village Ballroom C

TU Department of Theatre Arts
Mood
May 6 – 10
Stephens Hall Theatre

TU Department of Art + Design, Art History, Art Education
Spring Pottery & Art Sale
May 8 – 9
Ceramics Studio

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Programming, dates, times and locations subject to change or cancellation.
Galleries closed March 15 – 22