Boston University College of Fine Arts Magazine

Fall 2020

CFA

Anna Valdez Paints Her World

Black Lives Matter: Artists Making an Impact

Michael Chiklis Talks New Show, *Coyote*

BOSTON UNIVERSITY

ON THE COVER: Anna Valdez in her studio. Photo by Shaun Roberts.

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@buarts Here's to a blank canvas and the possibilities that a new semester brings! Good luck this year, Terriers! May your art-making inspire those around you #myCFA #ProudtoBU

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A NOTE FROM HARVEY

I have been thinking about Emmett Till, the 14-year-old Black boy who was murdered in 1955 by two white men in Money, Miss. If he were alive today, Emmett would be fast approaching his 80th birthday. He would be a few years older than Donald Trump and Joe Biden. Even at an advanced age, Emmett would have swagger.

When his mother made the bold decision to allow the world to see his bloated dead body, she sought to render visible the violence that often targets African Americans. If people could see the effects of bias, prejudice, and racist hate on the most innocent among us—a child—then a campaign for justice to safeguard future generations might occur.

Rosa Parks remembered Emmett Till when she chose not to give up her seat on a bus in Montgomery, Ala. Muhammad Ali, who was almost the same age as Emmett, found lifelong inspiration to fight for equality and justice. Countless others were awakened to action.

Today, the spectacle of dead or injured African Americans is distressingly common. Videos are pushed to our handheld devices: Eric Garner and George Floyd gasping for air; Walter Scott and Jacob Blake getting shot in the back. A social media campaign, #SayHerName, has helped spotlight the similarly horrific experiences of Black women, including Breonna Taylor and Michelle Cusseaux.

It is a sobering fact that our newest undergraduate students were nine years old when Trayvon Martin was killed. They were the same age as Tamir Rice, who was twelve years old when he was shot to death on a playground in 2014. Much of their tween and teenage years have been spent witnessing death.

Our current students are rejecting the inheritance of systemic racism. They have taken to the streets to call for justice. They have organized within CFA to make very reasonable demands, including antiracist training, more staff and faculty of color, and more inclusive syllabi.

I am proud of CFA students and alumni who have chosen to stand up and speak out as part of efforts to end racism everywhere and create actively inclusive communities. I am impressed by CFA staff and faculty who, in the midst of a global pandemic, have organized workshops, overhauled syllabi, and begun to revise conceptions of core and canon across disciplines.

There is more work ahead. If you would like to support efforts toward active inclusion or share your thoughts on why it matters, please email me at **cfadean@bu.edu**.

Harvey Young, Dean of CFA

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Natasha Moustache

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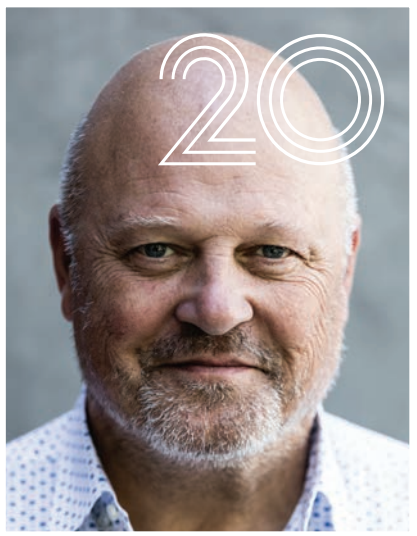

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SHOWCASE

OBJECTS OF HER AFFECTION

Anna Valdez layers personal stories into lush, plant-filled paintings

By Andrew Thurston

Photos by Shaun Roberts

Anna Valdez ('13) has filled her California studio with plants. "Plants remind me of home and they just bring life to a space," she says.


CITGO

ARTIST ANNA VALDEZ'S California studio is full of plants. Vines tumble from shelves stacked with art books, and succulent green leaves frame oversized canvases. Her childhood home bloomed with flora, too: her dad grew up on a farm and worked in a nursery.

"Plants remind me of home and they just bring life to a space," says Valdez ('13). "And they provide form in my paintings. They grow into the space and create lines. They really help me in navigating my compositions."

Plants are everywhere in Valdez's recent creations: in 2019's *Self-Portrait in Studio*, the artist's face is hidden by fiddle-leaf figs; 2018's *Landscape in Studio* is a painting *of a painting* of palms, snake plants, and more.

Valdez's work—primarily oil on canvas, but also monotypes, ceramics, and wallpaper—has been shown at galleries and museums across the United States and Canada. In 2018, Facebook commissioned her to paint a mural in one of its Menlo Park, Calif., buildings.

In its review of her 2019 New York exhibition *Natural Curiosity*, art and culture magazine *Juxtapoz* complimented Valdez's "signature palette of rich reds, bright yellows and sumptuous surfaces," calling the show "visual poetry at work, at once rooted in art-historical practices while also remaining faithful to the present moment." *Vice* has said her "houseplant paintings have seriously chill vibes."

Valdez has painted sparse deserts, rocky bays, even old beer cans, but for the past couple of years, her botanical studio has been the star of her work. It's not just crowded with plants. The space is filled with canvases and painting supplies, books, fabric wall hangings (her mom is a quilter), sculptures, pottery, shells, an upturned milk crate.

"The paintings I'm making right now are very much about the studio," she says. "It's an environment that I have complete control over and have curated over time. I suppose I end up loving the space that I am creating as it becomes reflective of a personal landscape or as a self-portrait."

In 2020's *Objects of Affection*, the canvas brims with details from Valdez's studio. A skull, a Venus de Milo statue, and an amphora of the goddess Diana fight for space on the desk; a cow pelvis leans against a stack of

Opposite page: ***Boston View with Taxidermy Butterflies*** **(2019) Oil and acrylic on canvas, 52 x 42 in.**

Left: ***Landscape in Studio*** **(2018) Oil and acrylic on canvas, 66 x 84 in.**

Above: ***Self-Portrait in Studio*** **(2019) Oil and acrylic on canvas, 72 x 72 in.**

Left: ***Objects of Affection,*** **solo exhibition installation at Hashimoto Contemporary in San Francisco, Calif.**

Right: ***Objects of Affection*** **(2020) Oil on canvas, 85 x 80 in. The painting brims with details from Valdez's studio, far right.**

books about women artists. There's a story in the objects—all what she calls symbols in art history.

"I wanted to make a painting that glorified women in art, but without it being a nude of a woman reclining," she says. "When you see women depicted in art, it's usually from a male lens, so it's usually sexualized."

Objects of Affection is a big painting, more than seven feet tall and six feet wide. Valdez says she spent a lot of time climbing up and down a ladder to add the many details.

"It's a very physical action to make that painting," she says. "It's interesting because big paintings are considered masculine paintings. I like that little bit of duality in the piece."

Valdez appears in few of her paintings, but says they're all "self-portraits to some degree." Before becoming an artist, she studied anthropology and archaeology and sees parallels between recording the past and chronicling her present.

"When I was studying archaeology, we would re-create and reconstruct someone's life based off the objects that were in that space," she says. "You would write a story from the things they surrounded themselves with."

Despite her autobiographical approach to art, Valdez's paintings are not straightforward retellings of her life. The paintings show not only what she sees in the studio, but what's on her mind—things she's noticed and thought about over days and weeks.

"There are so many moments that go into making one painting," she says. "I try to layer a lot of moments into a piece. You see me as a person in it."

Occasionally, the view shown from a window may be an artistic lie: a snapshot from a previous day or even of a different place altogether. Sometimes, the artworks shown hanging on her studio walls live only in Valdez's sketchbook—they have no canvas of their own.

"And there are little surprises that happen," says Valdez. If she paints a vase into a picture that doesn't exist beyond the canvas, she'll try to re-create the vase in real life—then paint it, for real this time, into another work. "I like to play," she says. "I like to not take myself too seriously." When galleries show her work, viewers can track the genesis of an object: the painting that gave birth to its fictional creation, the ceramic that made it real, the painting that immortalized it.

"I am fascinated by how one idea can lead into the next," says Valdez. "Or, more specifically, how one painting creates an idea for the next painting. Incorporating ceramics and

other mediums into my still life installations feels like a natural step."

Most of Valdez's paintings start with a rough ballpoint pen sketch—she carries a sketchbook everywhere. Once she's set up her canvas, she'll do an underpainting in acrylic—"just getting the skeleton of the painting down"—then begins building the final piece with oil paints. The paints are homemade: she buys pigments, mixing them with oils in her studio. It's a practice she picked up during Associate Professor Richard Raiselis' CFA classes on painting and color.

"It's this journey of this relationship to making the whole painting," says Valdez, who compares it to growing, making, and fermenting her own food. "It gives me a better understanding of why certain colors will work with each other, understanding the chemistry of why one pigment is oilier than another, its absorption rate, its lightfastness, how it will change over time."

Reviewers often comment on Valdez's use of color, praising its Californian brightness or making favorable comparisons to Henri Matisse. But her relationship to the vibrant colors in her work is complicated. It's one reason she doesn't expect the COVID-19 pandemic to reshape what or how she paints.

"I've struggled with depression and anxiety for most of my adult life," she says. "People will look at my paintings and they'll assume I'm a really happy person. These things are ways of focusing my energy and being able to step into this reality that I'm creating. I don't want to change that, because I find safety in these spaces I'm creating."

Afsoon Pajoufar ('19) was the scenic designer for the 2018 production of *s.i.n.s.o.f.u.s.* at Harvard University.

RISING STAR

A New Look at Set Design

By Joel Brown

COVID-19 SHUT DOWN most live theater at least through 2020, but when plays come back, Afsoon Pajoufar ('19) will be building worlds again. A New York–based set designer for plays, operas, and film, she's designed for New Repertory Theatre, Gloucester Stage, Brooklyn Academy of Music, and many others. Trained as a painter in her native Iran, Pajoufar studied scene design at CFA, where her work on a 2017 production of *Cabaret* was chosen for the 2019 American Exhibit at the Prague Quadrennial of Performance Design and Space.

You didn't start out as a designer.

The overall culture in Iran is parents want their children to be doctors or other "successful" careers. I was "the bad child." I went the opposite direction—I wanted to go to art school.

You were a painter. What happened?

As a sophomore in college, I got this feeling that I had to go beyond the two-dimensional space of the canvas. I have a fascination with the relationship between the human body and space.

What's your set design method?

Research is the first phase. But for me, the next step is model making. I find it much easier when I think with my hands.

What's the most unusual material you've used?

In *s.i.n.s.o.f.u.s.* (at Harvard in 2018), I replaced the main rag—the house curtain—with orange construction netting.

What skills do you use most?

I've found it really satisfying to explore a wide array of disciplines—photography, printmaking, sculpture, graphic design. I bounce around the room during rehearsals, between the actors, taking photos. I can evaluate the design in my head when I share the space with the actors.

You often say you design environments rather than sets.

It's not only about the actors, it's about the relationship between the actors and the audience. In the production of *Cabaret*, I considered the whole space, designed the audience space as well.

What's a mistake you've learned from?

They say take all opportunities that come to you after graduation. That is the worst suggestion. I learned I don't need to say yes to everything. Sometimes you can read the signs that this won't be the right production, that I won't be the right collaborator for it.

How has COVID-19 affected your work?

Four or five productions I had lined up for April, May, and June were canceled or postponed. It's had a negative effect on so many people's careers in theater, but especially for the new people.

But you sound upbeat.

I'm in touch with my collaborators. We talk about the shape of theater after the pandemic. We are finding ways to keep making things. Maybe we have to use digital platforms that will challenge the idea of theater: is it theater or not? We keep pushing.

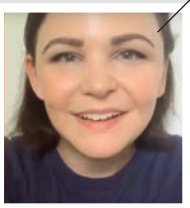
Tell us your dream for when we come back.

I want to explore more operas. The music brings an abstract quality into my design. And operas receive big budgets, so of course I'd love to explore unlimited options as part of my design.

Courtesy of Afsoon Pajoufar

SOUND BITES

"Maybe some form of our art will be born that we never could have imagined before the world changed."



Actor Ginnifer Goodwin ('01) provided students words of encouragement during the pandemic in her appearance on *From a Distance: BUTV10 Variety Hour*. "This is time to reflect, to read plays, watch movies and filmed theatrical performances, write, and observe. It will serve your creativity in unforeseen ways. . . . I can't wait to see what you make of things." The virtual showcase was produced in May 2020 by BUTV10, Boston University's student-operated media production and distribution network.

Watch the episode featuring Goodwin at **bu.edu/cfa-magazine.**

AWARDS

BOLSTERING MIDDLE SCHOOL THEATER ARTS PROGRAMS

SASKIA MARTÍNEZ ('20) was named the grand prize winner of the 2020 Esther B. and Albert S. Kahn Career Entry Award. Martínez, who studied scene design at CFA, will use the $20,000 award to fund an effort to bring her technical expertise to middle schools where theater arts are underfunded. "Many people in prominent roles in our side of the industry are white men, so role models and trailblazers for people who aren't white or male are few and far between," Martínez wrote in her proposal. "This disparity is also due to a pipeline issue, where only well-funded school districts can afford theater technology, let alone any arts program." The early career award is supported by a $1 million endowment from Esther Kahn (Wheelock'55, Hon.'86) and is open to undergraduate and graduate CFA students in their final semester. Five other finalists received $2,500 stipends to pursue their project proposals: **Eric Carey ('20)**, **Tak-Cheung Hui ('20)**, **Alex Stern ('20)**, **Nicholas Walker ('20)**, and **Diana Walsh ('20)**.

James Burton

FACULTY

NEW FACES

CFA has welcomed a number of renowned artists to its full-time faculty this fall:

James Burton, director of orchestral activities and master lecturer, music. Burton is the choral director of the Boston Symphony Orchestra and conductor of the Tanglewood Festival Chorus.

Wendy C. Goldberg, master lecturer, theater. An accomplished theater director, Goldberg is the first woman to run the National Playwrights Conference at the Eugene O'Neill Theater Center in Waterford, Conn.

David Guzman, assistant professor of music, voice. An operatic tenor, Guzman has starred as Orpheus in *Orpheus in the Underworld* with Western Plains Opera and the Duke of Mantua in a performance of *Rigoletto* with Opera Tampa.

Kelly Bylica, assistant professor of music, music education. Bylica, who was a middle school music educator in Chicago, Ill., received her PhD in music education from Western University in Ontario, Canada.

Gareth Smith, assistant professor of music, music education. Smith, a drummer, was previously a visiting research professor at New York University, where he taught in the music education program, and is the founding editor of the *Journal of Popular Music Education*.

Christopher Sleboda, associate professor of art, graphic design. Sleboda was director of graphic design at the Yale University Art Gallery in New Haven, Conn.

Meena Hasan, lecturer, painting. Hasan was previously a part-time lecturer at Rutgers University, a visiting assistant professor at Pratt Institute, an assistant professor at RISD, and a teaching artist with Studio in a School in New York City.

Courtesy of BUTV10 (Goodwin); Courtesy of Saskia Martínez; Marco Borggreve (Burton)

Joel Christian Gill

CONVER

ARTISTS JOEL CHRISTIAN GILL AND CHARLES SUGGS DISCUSS USING THEIR WORK TO TELL LESSER-KNOWN STORIES FROM BLACK HISTORY

Edited by Mara Sassoon

Photos by Hannah Rose Osofsky

SATION

Charles Suggs

IN THE WEE HOURS of May 13, 1862, Robert Smalls, an enslaved Black man, stole the Confederate ship the CSS *Planter*. It was the middle of the Civil War, and Smalls, one of the *Planter*'s eight enslaved crew members, steered the ship away from a dock in Charleston, S.C., after its white captain, pilot, and engineer disembarked for the night. Donning the captain's hat as a disguise, Smalls picked up his family and the families of other crew members and sailed out of Confederate waters and into freedom.

Little-known stories from Black history, like that of Robert Smalls' sail to freedom, fascinate Joel Christian Gill, an associate professor of illustration at Massachusetts College of Art and Design. Gill ('04) explains that he's not exclusively interested in stories about "Black firsts—like the first person to do this or that," but rather moments in history "that would be amazing no matter what race a person is—like, stealing a Confederate warship is amazing, but stealing a Confederate warship when you're an enslaved African is doubly amazing."

Inspired by the comics he loved to read and draw growing up, Gill tells these stories in graphic novels, starting with *Strange Fruit, Volume I: Uncelebrated Narratives from Black History* (Fulcrum, 2014), which chronicles the lives of figures like Theophilus Thompson, a former enslaved person who became the first Black chess master, Marshall "Major" Taylor, a world champion bicycle racer, and many others. The *New York Times* said of the book that "at a moment when racial inequities have ignited this nation, Mr. Gill offers direction for the road ahead from the road behind."

Gill has gone on to write and illustrate *Strange Fruit, Volume II: More Uncelebrated Narratives from Black History* (Fulcrum, 2018) and a memoir, *Fights: One Boy's Triumph Over Violence* (Oni Press, 2020). He is also the author of the *Tales of the Talented Tenth* series, which comprises individual graphic novels about notable figures in African American history, and the children's book *Fast Enough: Bessie Stringfield's First Ride* (Oni Press, 2019), and has illustrated a forthcoming graphic novel adaptation of *Stamped from the Beginning* by Ibram X. Kendi, the Andrew W. Mellon Professor in the Humanities at BU and director and founder of BU's Center for Antiracist Research.

Like Gill, Charles Suggs is fascinated with researching lesser-known stories from Black history and exploring them in his art—a passion he only started pursuing recently. For many years, Suggs ('20) worked as an administrative assistant at Massachusetts Institute of Technology, but he finally decided to apply to BU's MFA program. "I was feeling restless. I want to do this, why am I not? I want to be a professional artist," he told the *Boston Globe*, which in May 2020 named him one of "5 outstanding art-school grads for 2020."

Suggs admits that "sometimes I'll end up spending so much time on research that I have to just shake myself and tell myself, 'Get to work on something now, or else you never will.'" At first, Suggs was making mostly drawings, then transitioned to working with oil paints. "But, there were so many different mediums that I liked and wanted to use, like watercolor markers. I wanted to find a way to use them all in one way, so to speak." That's when he started experimenting with video and animation. "With video, you can see all the different work that I'm doing, all the mediums I'm working with. Video is a format that can output it all."

This is evident in his video *Shadrach*, which tells the story of Shadrach Minkins, a Black man who fled slavery and went to Boston, only to be arrested in 1851 under the Fugitive Slave Act. Members of an abolitionist organization infiltrated the courtroom where Minkins was being tried and helped him escape to Canada via the Underground Railroad. The piece blends video footage, animated pencil drawings, digital drawings, and prints along with images from Suggs' research.

Gill and Suggs spoke this summer over Zoom about why it is important to tell little-known stories from Black history through their art and using their work to address issues of race and racism.

"History doesn't lie. I try to just tell the truth with my work. When I say truth, I mean what people were saying at the time, because you can't really argue with that."

JOEL CHRISTIAN GILL

Joel Christian Gill: Charles, I don't know about you but I think for the first couple of weeks after George Floyd was murdered, I spent a lot of time just avoiding. I bought a grill and decided to try to do some really long cooking—like briskets cooking for about 12 to 15 hours—just to have something to focus on to not think about what was going on.

For me, it was like, "Not again." It feels like America has had this great awakening to this thing called racism that has existed and has been happening for years and years. The only thing different is that the cell phone footage is showing us the things that have been happening behind the scenes for all those years. Honestly, I drew a comic about it that was just me sitting at my drawing tablet with a word balloon that just said "F*ck." Because that's how I felt.

But at some point, when you have a platform, whatever that platform may be, it's your responsibility to say something. So, slowly, I started to creep out and make art related to what's happening. I got on a soapbox on social media. My work is telling stories about obscure Black history. That has always been what I do. I'm just doing what I normally do. It's almost like I was already over here, and I feel like everybody else is coming now. And they're like, "Hey, this is a really new thing you're doing, why don't you explain it to us?" And I'm like, "I've been here for a long time, I'm settled. The grass has grown around me. I know exactly what's going on." So, that's kind of how I feel. What about you, Charles?

Charles Suggs: Quite similar, honestly. All of these historical things are coming into focus again. Now it's people saying "Wow," about what happened in Tulsa in 1921, and I'm like, "I've always thought about that." I think about that a lot, especially around Juneteenth time. When I saw the George Floyd footage, I was just thinking, "Man, if there wasn't such a thing as cell phone video, we wouldn't be here discussing what happened." It would have just been what the police said, end of story.

I was absorbing all of this at that time, and I wasn't doing a lot of drawing. But what started me drawing again was when [New

Orleans Saints quarterback] Drew Brees said he doesn't agree with kneeling during the national anthem. He said something like, "My grandfathers fought in World War II for this country," and I started thinking about Black grandfathers who fought in World War II and what they came back to. There are historical stories about that and I started sketching some of them. One of them is a very brutal story about a Black soldier returning from World War II who happened to be wearing his army uniform. He was attacked by a mob, and they gouged his eyes out. And that's not an isolated story. I want to compare how some people came back to a hero's welcome—if you were a white soldier. But, what was that like for a Black soldier?

JCG: In the case of Drew Brees, this is the height of privilege—never having to think about this other thing and to only be self-centered on what your family has done. That's the thing people like Drew Brees need to understand—we're not talking about you right now. White men between the ages of 35 to 40 are not many times more likely to be killed by police. If you say Black and white people are the same, then the only thing you can point to that is the difference here is systemic racism. There are people who refuse to understand that, and it makes me angry.

CS: That makes me angry, too, and I spent a lot of time trying to check my anger. I was yelling at the TV on a lot of things. The fact is that these are people who are dying over something like selling cigarettes.

JCG: It's like the bar has been moved for what the death penalty is: It's "Oh, he ran"; "He was asleep in a Wendy's parking lot." Those should not be death sentences. But they are if you are Black. And that goes back to the history of what has happened to Black men.

History doesn't lie. I try to just tell the truth with my work. When I say truth, I mean what people were saying at the time, because you can't really argue with that. I try to be as honest with history that I think that you possibly can. With that honesty, you have to understand that, in this context, history is super complicated in that sometimes it's not black or white. Sometimes it is gray. Ibram Kendi, who I'm collaborating with on the *Stamped from the Beginning* graphic novel, says in the book that anyone is capable of holding racist ideas—Black, white, anybody. When you look throughout history, it's been as recent as Senator Tim Scott of South Carolina saying, "We are not a racist country." People of all cultures and races can hold racist ideas, and in order to dispel them as a country, we need to acknowledge we have a problem.

"It's striking to me that that law [Executive Order 13678], which came about three years ago, is so similar to the Fugitive Slave Act from 170 years ago. They're so similar in language and execution."

CHARLES SUGGS

CS: With my work, I like to compare something from history and bring it back into the present. With the Shadrach Minkins piece I did, I focused on the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, which forced local municipalities and police forces in the North to help the federal government retrieve people who ran away from slavery and send them back into slavery. I compared that with Executive Order 13678—I actually remember that number by heart now. And that is a part of a federal act that was enacted in 2017 by the Trump administration that basically says local municipalities, police forces, must help the federal government in rounding up people who they suspect are illegal immigrants in this country. It's striking to me that that law, which came about three years ago, is so similar to the Fugitive Slave Act from 170 years ago. They're so similar in language and execution.

JCG: The more things change, the more things stay the same. Through the years, there has been significant progress, but then significant setbacks, and I think that those setbacks are a direct result of us not dealing with the fact that this is a racist country. It was built for straight, cisgender, white, land-owning men of a certain age—that's codified in our Constitution. And there hasn't been a law that has changed that. We tweaked it a little bit. We have never dealt with the underlying problem of why we have these issues in America in the first place.

CS: Do you think we're on that road of dealing with the underlying problem now? Does it feel different? I keep hearing people say, "Things feel like they're going to be different now."

JCG: Honestly, not with the politicians that we have in charge right now. They just don't believe it. To support a racist system, all you have to do is follow the rules set in place by the people who built that system. I think as long as people like Tim Scott will stand on the floor of the Senate and say we're not a racist country, we're going to have this problem. ●

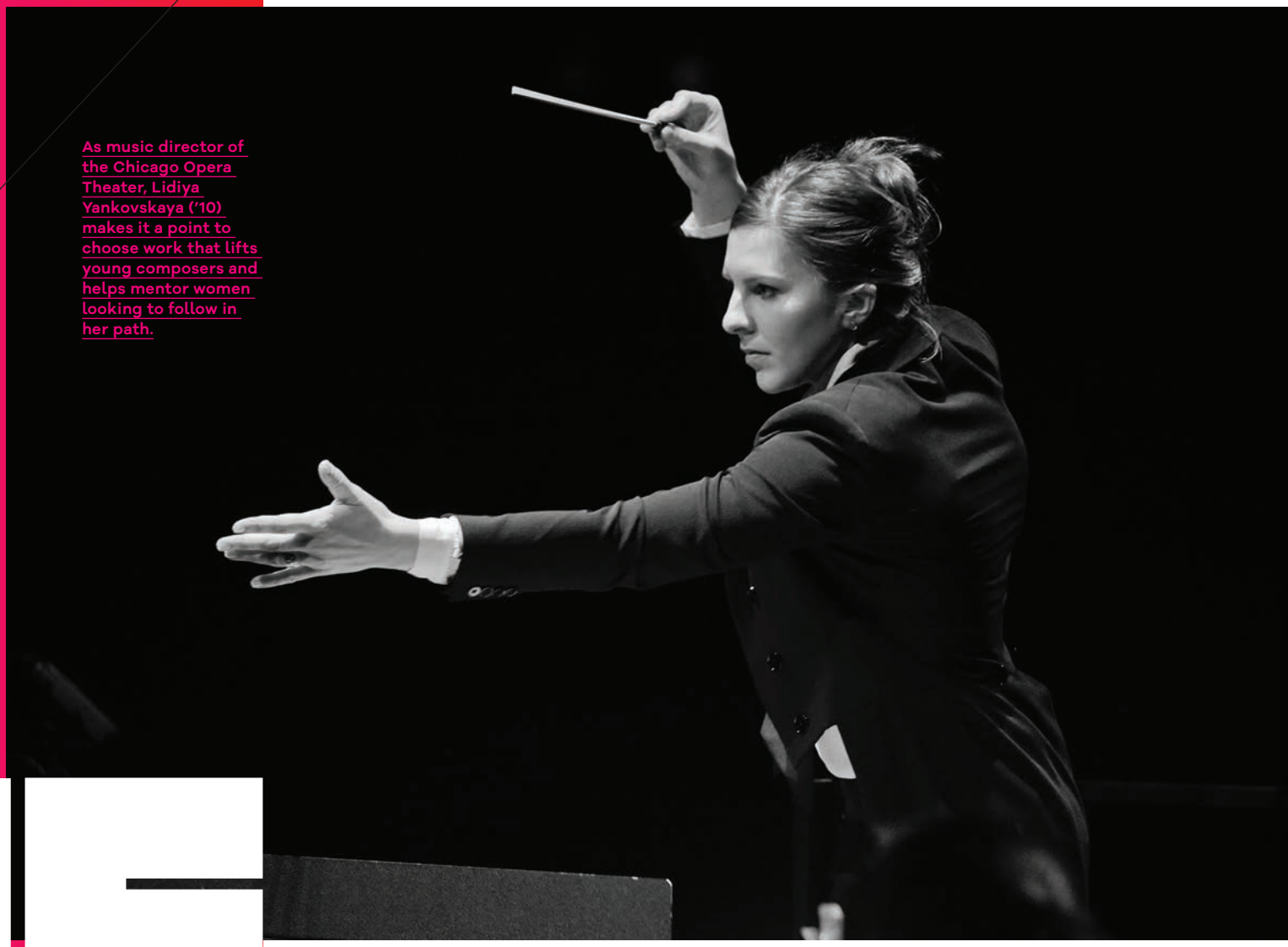
FEATURE

THE FUTURE OF OPERA

Kate Lemmon

Chicago Opera Theater music director Lidiya Yankovskaya is one of America's few women conductors and a force for change

By Andrew Thurston



As music director of the Chicago Opera Theater, Lidiya Yankovskaya ('10) makes it a point to choose work that lifts young composers and helps mentor women looking to follow in her path.

Karen Almond

If you watch any US orchestra, particularly one with a multimillion-dollar budget, you're almost guaranteed to see a white man standing on the conductor's podium. Most estimates put the share of women conductors in America at or below 10 percent—and that's only if you include those holding the baton for community groups, youth orchestras, and summer festivals.

At Chicago Opera Theater, Lidiya Yankovskaya is among the few to crack an especially thick glass ceiling. She's one of only a handful of women conducting at a leading US orchestra—and one of just two at a major opera company.

"There's a larger percentage of women who are studying conducting at universities, conducting with smaller organizations, or doing really fantastic work out there," says Yankovskaya ('10), who sets the tempo and cues in the musicians as Chicago Opera Theater's Orli & Bill Staley Music Director. "Not enough of them have gotten opportunities to move to the next level and work with larger-budget institutions. But I think it's changing and will probably continue to change."

In part, that change is a result of Yankovskaya's efforts. She chooses work that lifts young composers and helps mentor women looking to follow in her path.

"Her presence behind the podium is breaking down barriers that have long existed for women in the industry," says Ishan Johnson, associate director of development at Chicago Opera Theater. A voice performance major at CFA, Johnson ('06) has known Yankovskaya since 2008, when the two worked on an Opera Boston performance of Dmitri Shostakovich's *The Nose*. "There is a lack of minority and women leadership in opera administration, and Lidiya seeks to change that."

"Her presence behind the podium is breaking down barriers that have long existed for women in the industry."

ISHAN JOHNSON ('06), ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR OF DEVELOPMENT AT CHICAGO OPERA THEATER

A NONTRADITIONAL TRAJECTORY

Born in perestroika-era St. Petersburg, Yankovskaya spent her early childhood in a crumbling Soviet Union, then in a Russia struggling to find its identity. As the country staggered through coups and constitutional crises, waves of Jewish families left, including Yankovskaya's. In 1995, they fled their home in Russia and became refugees.

"I remember passing by a major square in the middle of the city where fascists would fly large swastika flags and hand out pamphlets that said 'Kill all the Jews' on them," she told *Newsweek* in 2016. "Russia, in general, at the time was in economic and political turmoil, so there was a lot of hardship overall. When that happens, people tend to blame any larger minorities that exist."

Many Russian Jews emigrated to Israel, but the Yankovskayas came to upstate New York. Despite the upheaval for young Lidiya—just nine when her family moved across the world—there remained one constant: music.

As a child, Yankovskaya studied piano and voice, adding violin when she moved to the United States. Music was more than a hobby. "It was always something I lived for and that was a top priority for me. I even remember as a kid saying I'd rather just stay home and practice than go do the social thing."

During high school and college—she studied music and philosophy at Vassar College—Yankovskaya kept practicing and playing, but wasn't sure what a life in music would look like.

"You see these traditional musical trajectories of where your career would be," she says. "For me, it seemed that solo piano would be the thing I would have to do, and I did not want to sit alone in a practice room for that many hours and be traveling alone. That just wasn't right for me."

Her undergraduate experience included conducting—and she'd even had a few turns with the baton as a teenager. But it was "not something I realized you could make a career out of," says Yankovskaya.

At CFA, her thinking began to change. For two years, Yankovskaya studied musicology, music theory, and conducting techniques, learning the technical skills necessary to hold an orchestra together. She also began to work as a conductor, standing out front for Opera Boston, Boston Opera Collaborative, and Lowell House Opera. After graduation, she was appointed artistic director and conductor for the Juventas New Music Ensemble, a group dedicated to performing the work of young, contemporary composers, and later added the Commonwealth Lyric Theater to her résumé. Soon, she was being hailed as a rising star.

"If there were a futures market for classical music, the touts would be pushing Lidiya Yankovskaya," wrote Keith Powers for WBUR in March 2017. "She's busy. She's busy because she's good."

Three months after that glowing review, Yankovskaya was named music director at Chicago Opera Theater.

"She is as skilled with operas of the past as she is with works of living composers," said the president of Chicago Opera Theater's board of directors, Susan J. Irion, of the appointment. "Lidiya is sure to be a charismatic ambassador of opera in today's world."

NEW AUDIENCES

There's a common conductor stereotype: tyrannical, wild-eyed, eccentric. It's generally unfair—and it's definitely not Yankovskaya. She describes conducting as a collaborative process, working with individual musicians to help them become part of a whole. Sometimes, that simply requires her to provide a channel for them to connect with each other; other times, she has to firmly guide them. She says each group of musicians and each piece of music bring their own dynamic—it's as much an exercise in psychology as understanding and interpreting a score.

"One type of artistic work may require something very rigid and precise, while another needs complete freedom," she says. "One of the things I strive for is figuring out for each piece of art, what does this piece need from me in this moment, what do I need to do to create the greatest impact?"

There's also plenty that happens offstage and outside of rehearsals. Yankovskaya is a leader and figurehead for Chicago Opera Theater, working with donors and shaping the organization's direction through its choice of shows. Given her history, Yankovskaya is especially interested in Russian masterpieces, but she's also an advocate for contemporary opera. Under her leadership, the theater has given Chicago premieres to work as diverse as Jake Heggie's 2010 opera,

Yankovskaya founded the Refugee Orchestra Project in 2016 to raise awareness of the role émigrés play in American society.

Moby-Dick, and Tchaikovsky's 1892 lyric opera, *Iolanta*.

"One of the things we focus on is bringing work to the stage that speaks to our audiences today and that is about issues or questions that may arise for our audience," says Yankovskaya. "Even if it's for traditional work, making sure that we connect it to our audiences and their experience."

One part of that is helping the theater reach new audiences. In February 2020, the theater premiered Dan Shore's *Freedom Ride*, about the civil rights activists who rode buses to protest segregation. The show was produced in partnership with the Chicago Sinfonietta, which aims to improve diversity in—and increase access to—classical music.

"She's made a commitment helping to make opera accessible to different communities," says Johnson, "exploring repertoire that adds to the canon, and finding innovative ways to bring opera to a greater audience."

Yankovskaya also started Chicago Opera Theater's Vanguard Initiative, a mentorship and development residency program for emerging opera composers. And, as music director, she's involved in the theater's broader educational efforts, including one in Chicago Public Schools that gives children the chance to write their own operas.

Just before she spoke with *CFA*, Yankovskaya was on a call in support of the Taki Concordia Conducting Fellowship, which mentors young women hoping to make it at the highest level. In 2015, she was one of those who benefited from its backing.

"One of the most important things in order for any industry—for our world—to have progress and change moving forward is to attract the brightest young talents," says Yankovskaya. "It's also important to make sure that we fight the inequities that exist that prevent new ideas from entering our work."

A REFUGEE ORCHESTRA

As a refugee, Yankovskaya is also focused on tackling the inequities that impact people forced to flee their home countries.

In 2016, she founded the Refugee Orchestra Project to help raise awareness of the role émigrés play in American society. The orchestra, which has played concerts across the northeastern United States and in the United Kingdom, brings together musicians who found shelter in the US after escaping persecution, as well as their families and friends. Yankovskaya says the nonprofit proved especially vital during the COVID-19 lockdowns. Because so many refugees lack family networks or other support systems, they're especially vulnerable to health or economic insecurities.

"We commissioned composers to write solo work for some of our performers that they can play on their own, record on their own," she says. "It was an opportunity for the creation of new work and to showcase the artists and composers we work with—and to give them some employment and some opportunity to create."

With theaters shuttered for much of 2020, Yankovskaya has experimented with other virtual projects, too, including digital performances and online conversations about the inner workings of an opera theater. While that may have encouraged an exploration of different ways of reaching new audiences or sharing music, she says the year has mostly been a chance to reflect on what she loves the most.

"To me, live performance is irreplaceable," she says. "I so miss being in a room with people making music. I do not think there's a substitute for that." ●

Scott Bump

REVITALIZING MUSIC EDUCATION IN SCHOOLS

Professor's Classics for Kids Foundation supports string programs across the US

By Mara Sassoon

$8 BILLION. That's the National Science Foundation's yearly budget. Meanwhile, federal funding for the National Endowment for the Arts, which has suffered major budget reductions over the years and which the Trump administration has repeatedly called for eliminating, is around $160 million per year. And the disparity trickles down to the steady decline in funding for school arts programs, including music education.

Michael Reynolds

Courtesy of Michael Reynolds

"The budget cuts are devastating," says Michael Reynolds, a cellist and longtime CFA professor of music. String programs, he says, are often the first to be cut because the instruments are typically more expensive and more fragile than wind and brass instruments. And often, trumpets, tubas, and trombones get priority if a school has a marching band.

Reynolds is working to change that. In 1997, he established the Classics for Kids Foundation (CFKF), a grant program that supports string programs serving rural and at-risk youth in all 50 states. The foundation's matching grants fund high-quality string instruments, including ukuleles, guitars, and harps. At first, CFKF supported only public school programs, but the organization has grown over the years to back all types of youth music initiatives, such as those by Boys & Girls Clubs of America.

"Now, almost half of the programs we support are brand-new programs and initiatives that are springing up all over the country—it's very exciting," says Reynolds, who has played with the renowned Muir String Quartet since it was founded in 1979 and also works with Boston University Tanglewood Institute's String Quartet Workshop. "I think there is a lot of developing knowledge that this sort of thing really helps kids to thrive—academically, socially, and behaviorally."

The son of two violinists, Reynolds was always surrounded by music. His father founded Montana's Bozeman Symphony and his mother started the now-thriving orchestra program in Bozeman's public schools. Before his parents settled in Montana, "music life in Bozeman was pretty quiet. My parents gradually became the epicenter of that music life there," says Reynolds. He joined the program his mother started and thought back to his own formative school orchestra experience when founding CFKF.

The foundation provides grants to 60 to 70 organizations each year, and Reynolds is in the process of setting up an endowment with the hopes of reaching even more. This year's recipients had to contend with shifting their programming online due to the pandemic, says Reynolds, but "they all went virtual and were amazingly vibrant and active. Nobody shut down."

LEARN MORE ABOUT THE CLASSICS FOR KIDS FOUNDATION AT CLASSICSFORKIDS.ORG

What is most fulfilling for Reynolds is hearing from the students that CFKF grants have benefited.

"I heard from a student living in a community with gun violence who said playing the violin makes them feel safe. Giving that kind of positive experience to a kid can be truly transforming," he says. "We are seeing how playing an instrument helps give kids a sense of meaning and joy in sometimes very tough personal, family, and community circumstances. That's exactly what I was hoping would happen from the beginning. I'm very proud of what we are doing."

changing minds

Good cop, bad cop, superhero. How Michael Chiklis reinvented himself to stay on top in a fickle business

By Mara Sassoon Photos by Patrick Strattner

In the 2002 pilot episode of the hit FX series *The Shield*,

the show's merciless and corrupt protagonist, Los Angeles Police Department detective Vic Mackey, played by Michael Chiklis, brutally beats a suspect and murders a fellow officer in cold blood—and it only gets worse from there. For the rest of the show's seven seasons, Mackey displays increasingly disturbing and illegal behavior: torturing and killing suspects, stealing evidence, embezzling money. Not only did the events of that first episode make it onto *Rolling Stone*'s "The Shocking 16: TV's Most Heart-stopping Moments," but *Entertainment Weekly* also named Mackey one of its "16 Ultimate TV Antiheroes."

It's a role Chiklis ('85) played with compelling, can't-look-away grit and one that earned him critical acclaim—he won a 2002 Emmy Award for Outstanding Lead Actor in a Drama Series and a 2003 Golden Globe Award for Best Actor – Television Series Drama. And he's bringing a similar captivating performance to his starring role in the upcoming series *Coyote*. But before he got to the A-list, Chiklis had plenty of time out of the limelight, working in a host of small theaters, waiting a lot of tables, and even starring in a movie so controversial he thought he'd never act again.

Michael Chiklis ('85) earned critical acclaim for his role on *The Shield*, for which he won a 2002 Emmy and a 2003 Golden Globe.

THE ACTING BUG

"My parents used to tell me that I announced when I was five years old that I was going to be an actor," Chiklis says. Growing up in Andover, Mass., he recalls watching *The ABC Comedy Hour*, which featured a group of comedic impressionists called The Kopykats that included the actors Frank Gorshin and Rich Little. Chiklis would walk around "imitating those two guys imitating other people" and make people laugh. "I think it was that response that made me feel like acting was my calling."

That calling became a little more real during the ninth grade, when Chiklis starred as Hawkeye Pierce in his school's stage production of *M*A*S*H*. "It was pretty racy for a high school play," he says. His turn as the chief surgeon caught the attention of a casting director from a local summer stock theater, landing him a spot in a production of *Bye Bye Birdie*. The production's director, Mark Kaufman, would become Chiklis' first theatrical mentor. When Kaufman cofounded the Merrimack Repertory Theatre in Lowell, he cast Chiklis in a production of *Romeo and Juliet* during its first season.

"I gained incredible insight from watching Mark open a regional theater, from inception to fruition," Chiklis says. "Seeing that process and getting to be onstage so much, it solidified my love for the theater and acting." Kaufman also encouraged him to apply to Boston University's theater program. It was the only school Chiklis applied to. "Now, I think to myself, 'Oh my God, what if I didn't get in?' I don't know what I was thinking."

Chiklis attributes much of his success to the guidance he had as a young actor from people like Kaufman and—at CFA—the late Jim Spruill, who was an associate professor of theater. "Good mentorship can completely change the outcome in a person's life," Chiklis says. That kind of mentorship, he believes, extends far beyond acting advice. During his freshman year, he was blindsided by the news that his parents were divorcing. "My family broke. It really cracked my foundation and sent me into a kind of a spiral." His grades and performances started to suffer and Spruill took notice. "He knew I was a good student, that I loved the craft. But all of a sudden, I was aimless and unfocused. He cared enough to say, 'What's up with you? What's happening?' He nurtured me through it. He cared enough to just ask a couple of questions."

Kevork Djansezian/AP (bottom); Reed Saxon/AP (top)

Chiklis at a rehearsal for a 1984 BU mainstage production of *The Hostage*. Rehearsals, he says, "were where I learned the most."

While Chiklis fondly recalls performing in shows like *On the Razzle* at the Huntington Theatre Company, which BU had established during his freshman year, he loved the rehearsals more than anything. "They were where I learned the most. At rehearsals, we were exchanging ideas—students from all over the country, from every race, creed, and walk of life. The truth is, we would go at it. Everyone was super opinionated and we discussed and argued about the shows.

"BU just opened my mind to so many things, so many people. It made me think, 'Wow, there's just so much to know.'"

BREAKING THROUGH

As graduation loomed, Chiklis envisioned himself heading to New York and getting a big break on Broadway. He moved to the city two days after graduating, ready to make headlines.

"I commend the School of Theatre for all the things I learned in terms of the craft and how to be the best actor that I could be. But what was lacking at the time was learning the vocational side of it—the business of show business," he says. "That's why I love coming back to BU and speaking to students, because I feel like I was that wide-eyed kid five minutes ago thinking, 'Please give me some insight.'"

When Chiklis arrived in New York, Broadway was in a slump. "There were only maybe eight theaters lit," he says. "It was all musicals and they were mostly revivals. There were almost no original musicals happening at that time." He found some small off-Broadway and off-off-Broadway gigs, and did a few performances at La MaMa, the experimental theater group in the East Village. But he was mostly biding his time, waiting tables and bartending to make a living, and hoping that something big would come along soon. It would take two years.

Boston University Photography

Chiklis was working as a waiter at a West Village restaurant called Formerly Joe's, alongside the late chef Anthony Bourdain and an up-and-coming Edie Falco. One day, his agent called the restaurant's phone—Falco was the one who picked up: Chiklis had gotten a break. While he was still at BU, a casting director for a forthcoming film adaptation of Bob Woodward's John Belushi biography *Wired* had spotted Chiklis in the senior theater showcase in New York City at Lincoln Center and offered him an audition for the role of Belushi. It took more than 12 auditions over the course of two years to finally get the role.

Things were looking up.

REINVENTION

Until they weren't.

Woodward's book had reaped its fair share of controversy when it was released, with Belushi's friend and *Saturday Night Live* costar Dan Aykroyd claiming it misquoted him and misrepresented Belushi. When the film adaptation was announced, there were plenty of vocal opponents: Chiklis has long maintained that at least one of them warned casting directors not to hire anyone from the movie. *Wired*'s coproducer Edward Feldman told *Time* magazine months before the film was released that "word was put out that this was a project not to be touched."

"Here it is, I got a huge break playing an icon in a big feature film with an Academy Award–winning producer. It was a completely exciting, life-changing moment," says Chiklis. "And then, by the time I'm not even finished filming the movie, I find out that I'm going to be blacklisted from making movies. My career seemed like it was over."

For a little more than a year, Chiklis says, he was snubbed: "I couldn't get seen for anything," he says. "It was a horrible, fretful time."

When the film eventually appeared on screens, Chiklis says it was "cut to pieces to avoid the onslaught of lawsuits pending against it." The movie was panned. Moviegoers walked out of the 1989 Cannes Film Festival premiere.

Chiklis returned to New York and played some small parts in stage productions while trying out for guest roles in popular television series. Finally, the television doors opened when the late Burt Reynolds advocated for him to get a part in an episode of his show *B.L. Stryker*. A cameraman who had worked on *Wired* was now working on *B.L. Stryker* and arranged for Chiklis to meet with Reynolds. In a 2015 interview with the Television Academy Foundation, Chiklis says Reynolds told him he "didn't believe in blackballing and thought I was a great talent, and he wanted to hire me, so he did." Guest starring roles in some of the biggest shows of the time, like *Murphy Brown*, *L.A. Law*, and *Seinfeld*, followed. Networks were even considering him for his own show.

In 1991, he landed the starring role in *The Commish*, in which he played Tony Scali, the affable police commissioner

"I love coming back to BU and speaking to students, because I feel like I was that wide-eyed kid five minutes ago thinking, 'Please give me some insight.'"

MICHAEL CHIKLIS

of a small town in New York. He was encouraged to gain weight for the role; although he was in his late 20s when the show started filming, he was playing someone more than a decade older. The show ran for a successful five seasons, but Chiklis felt stuck, pigeonholed by the part. "Everybody thought that I was a 50-year-old, roly-poly nice guy."

At his wife's encouragement, Chiklis shaved his thinning hair and hit the gym, ready to reinvent himself. "At this point, no one would have hired me to play Vic Mackey. I did what I had to do to change minds," he says. "It's a very fickle industry. Listen to the lyrics of Frank Sinatra's song 'That's Life': 'Riding high in April, shot down in May.' That is exactly the life of an actor."

STRIKING GOLD

In 2019, the *Guardian* reminisced about *The Shield,* writing, "If you talk about the golden age of TV without mentioning *The Shield*, you're doing it wrong." The newspaper lauded the show for maintaining its quality all the way through its last episode. It praised Chiklis' "magnificent performance" of a character who, despite his amoral deeds, still garners sympathy. Playing Mackey, which has arguably become Chiklis' best-known role to date, was "an amazing, life-changing experience," he says.

"We knew we were doing something special. It was artistically just such an incredible time. The show felt very relevant. It still feels so relevant because a question we were asking at the time through the show was, 'What are we willing to accept from law enforcement in post–9/11 America to keep us safe?' And, as it turns out, a lot of us were willing to accept way too much."

His turn as Mackey opened up other parts, like Ben Grimm/The Thing in *Fantastic Four* and *Fantastic Four: Rise of the Silver Surfer* (passion projects for Chiklis, a lifelong comic book fan) and more recent roles in *American Horror Story: Freak Show* and *Gotham*.

Soon, Chiklis will bring a Mackey-esque tough-guy edge to his starring role in the upcoming series *Coyote*, set to premiere on an as-yet undisclosed streaming service in early 2021. He plays Ben Clemens, a longtime US Border Patrol agent who, on the same day of his mandatory retirement, finds a tunnel used for smuggling black market goods into the United States from Mexico. Through a series of events, he becomes a coyote, someone who smuggles people across the border. Chiklis, who also serves as a coexecutive producer on the series, worked with the show's director and executive producer Michelle MacLaren for more than two years to polish the series and get it ready for development.

"This show is about a collision of cultures. It's very timely, but the show is not political," says Chiklis. Half of the show's writing staff, he says, are South and Central American and Mexican, while the other half are from the United States. He is drawn to playing the complex Clemens, a character whose "viewpoint has been galvanized through echo chambers. But he starts questioning his views. It's very disillusioning for him and very disorienting."

Top: Chiklis, a lifelong comic book fan, played The Thing in *Fantastic Four* and its sequel. Bottom: a sculpture of The Thing—one of only three in existence—on display at Chiklis' home.

Filming for the show started in November 2019, mostly around Baja California, Mexico, and Chiklis often faced rigorous shoots—including one that landed him in surgery. While shooting a scene in the Sonoran Desert during the first couple of weeks of filming, he was running up a mountain face and hopped over a prairie dog hole to avoid it. "Unfortunately, I landed right above the hole, where the tunnel was, and it collapsed. My knee completely hyperextended." He kept going and finished the take. Although he knew he was hurt, he continued filming through the next few months with two tears in his meniscus.

Then, in March, six and a half episodes into filming, production had to suddenly shut down due to COVID-19. "We had to stop in the middle of this amazing experience that we were having. It was horrible," says Chiklis. Still, he was inspired by how the cast and crew adapted.

"The postproduction on those episodes was done entirely remotely, which was just an extraordinary and arduous experience. But it was the only way to be able to do it. I really think this will change the way the industry does business in the future."

Chiklis says filming *Coyote* brought back memories of making *The Shield*.

"Sometimes, when people watch something on TV, they're watching with this benign, removed attention," he says. But, he's not interested in that. "I want to affect people. I want to make people feel something. It's so satisfying when I make something that entertains people, but also gets them thinking, gets them engaged, and maybe makes them see things in a different way."

20th Century Fox (*Fantastic Four*)

PROCESS

THE PAINTINGS

How muralist Lena McCarthy transformed a Victorian firehouse

By Marc Chalufour Photos by Janice Checchio

ON THE DOORS

"Every project is so, so different," says muralist Lena McCarthy. She has painted murals in Chile, India, and Ireland, as well as the United States. She might paint a 100-foot brick wall one week and multiple sides of a concrete courtyard another. So when she accepted a commission to transform the front of a historic century-old firehouse 30 minutes from her home outside of Boston, McCarthy ('14) wasn't phased by the challenge.

Jannelle Codianni, director of ātac, the community arts center that has organized exhibits and live performances in the Framingham, Mass., firehouse since 2008, gave McCarthy a lot of freedom with this project—but it was no blank canvas. The mural needed to span three large bay doors. Small window panes would interrupt the design while brick columns topped by iron sconces split it into three panels, creating a giant triptych. McCarthy would be trying to reflect themes of hope, connection, and resilience.

Codianni wanted to hire a local artist and reached out to McCarthy, a past exhibitor at ātac, in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. "We've been closed to the public since March and are preparing to start our fall season with virtual performances," Codianni says. "I'm hoping the mural reminds people we're still here, even if in a different form for now."

The two met in April to discuss the project. Then McCarthy got to work.

Over four hot days in June, muralist Lena McCarthy ('14) transformed the front of a historic firehouse in Framingham, Mass., that now houses ātac, a community arts center. She worked within ātac's color palette of teals and blues, which contrasted nicely with the building's red brick façade.

FINDING HER WAY TO THE WALL

McCarthy's mural career sputtered at first. She founded a mural club at BU, but it was a failure. "We only did one project," she says, a mural in a Brighton park. The club disbanded after McCarthy graduated.

The fine arts major knew she wanted to paint, but graduated without an immediate career plan. "I was interested in traveling and seeing the world," she says. She moved to Chile, where she taught English for two years. McCarthy immersed herself in Santiago's active street art community. "It was a very stimulating environment," she says. By the time she returned to Boston, she considered murals to be her primary focus.

McCarthy found that her fine arts training served her well in muralism. But there were still some new skills she had to learn, among them, "How to be brave and put yourself out in the world and how to make connections with the community you're painting in," she says. Helping her make that transition has been a series of mentors, including Cambridge, Mass.–based street artist Caleb Neelon, coauthor of *The History of American Graffiti*.

"There's a lot of graffiti history intertwined with muralism," McCarthy says. Part of that influence is the value of visibility—finding spaces that will be seen by the most people. McCarthy estimates she's completed between 30 and 40 murals, and as she's established herself, she's begun considering other factors. "I've looked for more projects where the site has meaning, or the site has impact, like neighborhoods that don't have as much public art." Sometimes that means a work has an explicit social message: McCarthy collaborated with Neelon on murals in Queens, N.Y., of Gynnya McMillen, a 16-year-old who died in police custody, and Marsha P. Johnson, a gay rights activist who died under suspicious circumstances.

DRAWING FROM WITHIN

Once McCarthy and Codianni had discussed the goals of the firehouse project, she began the same way she starts every project: pencil on paper sketches. "A sensation or a feeling of 'hope'—that's an infinite thing," she says. "I tried to just draw from within myself, what I believe that would look like. It's my interpretation of the language that they asked me to use."

McCarthy began her mural career using just brushes and rollers, but she's since moved to fine art spray paints, which allow her to work fast and cover just about any surface. She uses two types of spray can caps: a skinny cap creates fine lines while the versatile New York fat cap has a broader stroke for filling and shading.

Accepting a commission means agreeing to some limitations. In this case, that meant sticking with ātac's color palette. Fortunately, the teals and blues contrasted nicely with the building's red brick. Some commissions involve several rounds of revision, but there was no micromanaging of this project. McCarthy presented four sketches to Codianni and the ātac board. Once they chose one, she imported her drawing into Procreate, an iPad app. Using an Apple Pencil, she refined the drawing, added colors that matched the paints she planned to use, and layered it onto a photo of the building.

McCarthy expects her art to evolve once she begins to paint. "I always have to leave room for it to breathe—I never make things exactly as they look [in the sketch]," she says. McCarthy began her mural career using brushes and rollers, but she's since moved to fine art spray paints, which allow her to work fast and cover just about any surface. Color selection is important—she can't mix paints as an artist with a palette might. But, she says, "there are ways to blend and overlay colors." McCarthy uses two types of spray can caps: a skinny cap creates fine lines while the versatile New York fat cap has a broader stroke for filling and shading. It can even create a mist effect. By adjusting her finger's pressure on the cap, the can's angle to the surface, and the speed of her arm, she can create different visual effects on the wall.

"One of the main things I love about mural painting is it's so in your body," she says. "It's so cheesy but it's true: You become the tool. You're the brush."

THE MANY LAYERS OF A MURAL

On June 17, McCarthy unloaded her Honda Civic in front of ātac and began painting. Then, over four hot days, she transformed the façade of the firehouse.

McCarthy's gear, beyond the 22 cans of spray paint she had estimated she would need, is limited. She has an adjustable ladder and sometimes uses a piece of cardboard as a straight edge. And, she says, "A friend gave me a really nerdy muralist's tool belt that I wear [so] I can hold six spray cans."

"On the first day, the goal is to get ready to paint," McCarthy says. She scrubbed the wooden doors and laid out some of her design's straight edges with a chalk line. Then she sketched the

"ONE OF THE MAIN THINGS I LOVE ABOUT MURAL PAINTING IS IT'S SO IN YOUR BODY. IT'S SO CHEESY BUT IT'S TRUE: YOU BECOME THE TOOL. YOU'RE THE BRUSH."

LENA MCCARTHY

more organic shapes with spray cans. She also used a paint roller on an extension arm to draw on the wall from a distance so she could see what she was doing.

When she returned the next morning, she began covering the doors with paint. She filled in dark background colors, then began layering on lighter shades. Over the next three days, the contours of her design took shape. Three tiered triangles extend toward the center of the building while the natural curves of leaves and grass blades spring up behind them.

Some muralists project their design on a wall to provide a guide, others use stencils. "I've never been a very exact person," McCarthy says. "I just go for it, and if it's wrong, I fix it. I think the organicness of my stuff lends itself to that method."

She checks her work frequently, though, backing away from the wall and asking, "'What did that stroke just do to the whole thing?' It's kind of like this dance back and forth."

After working her way to the lighter end of the spectrum, it was time for some final flourishes. "I make some wispy lines that weave through everything," McCarthy says. "And I do some starburst-like dots. Those are the last little highlights that make it sparkle."

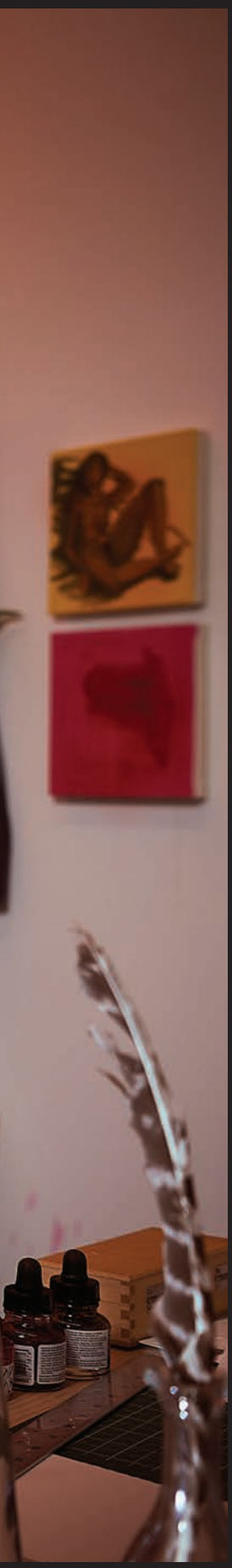
THE ART OF INCLUSION

McCarthy's completed mural evokes a moonlit scene. A dark sky emerges from the recesses of the doors' arches. Grasses reflect light and bend in a gentle breeze. Delicate dandelions appear ready to release their seeds. "I'm using organic forms to convey a sensation," she says. "I wanted it to feel like there was a light or an energy coming from within the space."

Scroll through McCarthy's Instagram account, @lenamccarthyart, and you can see why she uses the word organic to describe her work. Floral elements permeate her designs. A mural in Cambridge, Mass., features a red heart sprouting colorful leaves and branches. Female figures are also a frequent motif. "There's a really strong male energy in graffiti, and my work can have a more feminine vibe," she says.

Reflecting on the difference between her outdoor work and studio paintings, McCarthy says, "There's something about public art and muralism that's so inclusive." No curator has chosen where to hang the painting. No museum guard stands nearby. "You're injecting color in your neighborhood—it's fun, it's energy. We should live our lives surrounded by art all the time," she says. "To me, that's a no-brainer."

Atlanta-based artist Adrienne Elise Tarver ('07) has focused her recent work on "Black female identity within the Western landscape."



MINING THE PAST, MIRRORING THE PRESENT

Adrienne Elise Tarver's art explores perceptions of Black women

By Taylor Mendoza

Photos by Stephanie Eley

IN ADRIENNE ELISE TARVER'S *THREE GRACES*, a trio of women stand together in naked repose. Surrounded by sugarcane and banana and pineapple trees, they lean into each other: hands gripping hands, arms and heads resting on shoulders. It's a seemingly peaceful scene—but the inspiration for the painting is mired in racism. *Three Graces* is based on a photo Tarver ('07) found online showing Black women who were exhibited in Europe in the 19th or early 20th century. In Tarver's painting, the women's expressions are solemn and shadows of palm fronds slash across their shoulders and faces, reminiscent of the bars of a cage; the foliage covers turquoise boxy forms, suggesting a constructed background.

"There were human zoos all around Europe and America throughout the 19th and early 20th centuries," says Tarver, an interdisciplinary artist whose work has been shown across the world and lauded by publications like the *New York Times* and *Brooklyn Magazine*. "We understand how wrong that situation is and how exploitative it is, and yet the way the women were posed, it reminded me of so many images I had seen through my entire education, which had been sculpted and painted by mostly European men."

Tarver was particularly reminded of postimpressionist Paul Gauguin's exoticized and idealized depictions of French Polynesia and the women who lived there. She says the trope of the sexualized tropical seductress is one that has influenced the perception of modern Black women and that she has explored in much of her art.

"My work for the past five years has really been about Black female identity within the Western landscape," she says. For Tarver, Black femininity of the past and present are inseparable. "I was thinking about the dualities of how we have been made to exist within this context, from this domestic, silenced figure who's supposed to fade into the background to this oversexualized tropical seductress on display, and figuring out the narrative to give women in these spaces more agency."

ESCAPE

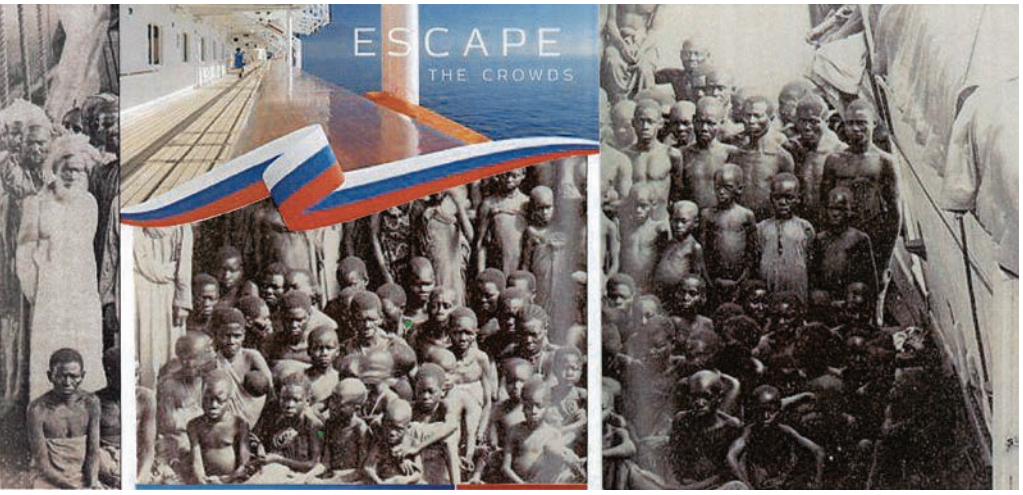
Three Graces debuted in January 2020 in *Escape,* an exhibition of Tarver's work at Victori + Mo, a contemporary art gallery in New York City. The exhibit showed how the history of colonialism continues to impact Black women, showing lush tropical landscapes, vacation photos, and cruise ads as well as images of human suffering and exploitation.

"I was thinking about the duality of the word 'escape,'" says Tarver, who centered the exhibition on the tourism industry and its roots in slavery and colonialism. "Sandals resorts and all of these vacation places, they all use 'escape' in their ads. The idea that you're escaping your normal life, you get to go visit this place for a moment and forget everything. It just felt so ironic, because, ultimately, these places were built upon slave labor. The people who were creating these seductive landscapes that everyone is trying to escape to would have loved to escape to freedom."

Escape also included a projected installation of tropical vacation photographs from the '60s and '70s. Tarver says she wanted to play with the feelings of nostalgia the photos provoked.

"It's easy to fall into the warm, fuzzy feeling of memory with that, and as you walk down this narrow hallway, there are these collages juxtaposing ads for cruise ships and resorts with historical imagery of plantation workers, domestic help, and slave ships, so it's clear that this more lighthearted thing is not as it seems."

The first painting viewers saw as they entered *Escape* was *Head Above Water*, which shows a woman's legs dangling as she floats in sunlit water. Her crisp white bathing suit bottom contrasts with her brown legs. In her review of the show, *New York Times* art critic Jillian Steinhauer said when she first saw the painting, it suggested "glamorous



Tarver's exhibition, *Escape*, showed how the history of colonialism still impacts Black women, juxtaposing tropical landscapes, vacation photos, and cruise ads with images of human suffering and exploitation. Clockwise from top right: *Head Above Water*, *Escape the Crowds*, and *Three Graces*.

"IT'S NOT POSSIBLE TO SEPARATE MY EXPERIENCE AS A BLACK WOMAN FROM MY ART, BECAUSE SO MUCH OF MY ART IS ABOUT MY EXPERIENCE."

freedom," but after seeing the slideshow and works like *Three Graces*, "instead of seeing a scene of luxury, I imagined one of the women swimming to freedom."

ART AND IDENTITY

Photography has long been an important part of Tarver's art. While *Three Graces* was influenced by a photograph she found online, much of her earlier work was inspired by family photos—in particular those of her older brother. He died when she was 16.

"I painted a lot of photos of him, of him and me, of my family," she says. "I went to a summer program at the Art Institute of Chicago and made this series of 16 small paintings all arranged together of different parts of my brother's life."

Although Tarver had initially thought of architectural design as a potential outlet for her creativity, her brother's death prompted a fresh look at her plans. "I was really understanding how short life is," she says. "I really don't know if I would have pursued art if that hadn't have happened."

At CFA, Tarver shifted away from portraits of her family—"I couldn't separate how people talked about the art from what I felt about my family"—and began to use her art to explore what it meant to be Black and female in America.

"I got a bunch of old silver platters and silver serving things and I started doing a lot of self-portraits. I balanced the tray on my head with the objects, taking on this character of a house servant. I was diving into this history of who I was to America—the domestic woman."

Now an associate chair of fine arts at Savannah College of Art and Design in Atlanta, Ga., Tarver says her identity as a Black woman continues to be essential to her work. "It's not possible to separate my experience as a Black woman from my art," she says, "because so much of my art is about my experience."

PROJECTING FUTURES

Escape closed on March 14, 2020, around when New York placed coronavirus-related restrictions on its residents. While Tarver had some downtime in the wake of her exhibit closing, the uncertainty of coronavirus and the resurgence of the Black Lives Matter protests have inspired her to explore the ideas present in the exhibition, as well as what the future means to Black people.

"The longer we were in this situation, the more unknown it became, I thought a lot about fortune-telling and tarot," says Tarver, who began studying the stories of—and attitudes toward—Black women like famed New Orleans Voodoo priestess Marie Laveau and TV psychic Miss Cleo. "There's this idea of the Black woman holding some sort of deep wisdom or mythology, so there's always a separation between this world and their world. In a moment where there's so much uncertainty, I think people fall back to religion or astrology, just because nobody else can tell them real answers."

This summer, Tarver started making her own tarot cards. Using ink, oil pastel, and colored pencil, she created a series of vibrantly colored images inspired by Afrofuturist ideas and imagery of the tropics. The titles of the works share the names of cards typically found in a tarot deck, such as *High Priestess* and *Chariot*. In *Strength*, a woman sits perched on an elephant's trunk. Both woman and elephant are painted in washy ink, starkly contrasting with the bold yellow sky behind them and the bright blue ground beneath them, which is thickly built up with pastel. Tarver will eventually make these images into a printed deck of cards.

"It was this understanding that saying that we exist in the future—that there's a future for Black people—is actually a radical statement," says Tarver. "This idea of projecting futures, of telling fortunes, is a radical idea in and of itself, and telling somebody that you will exist tomorrow is a really heavy statement when you are consumed with how unpredictable life can be."

CLASS NOTES

WRITE TO US!
We want to hear what you've been up to. Send us your stories and photos, and we'll share the highlights here. Email **cfaalum@bu.edu**.

1960s

Emory Fanning ('64), an organist, performed a solo recital on March 8, 2020, at Middlebury College's Mead Memorial Chapel. The performance featured works by Louis Couperin, César Franck, and Johann Sebastian Bach.

1970s

Kate Katcher ('73) was one of 10 writers to participate in theater company Thrown Stone's *Acts of Fate*, which premiered on Zoom in June 2020. The show was a collection of memoir, performance, and poetry that answered the prompt: "What was the moment in your life that changed everything?"

Peri Schwartz ('73) showcased her recent body of work, "Studio Interiors," which features dynamic, flattened compositions that focus on the interplay of color, light, and space at Gallery NAGA in Boston in January 2020.

Carol Barsha ('75,'77) had her closely observed nature studies and flowery landscapes featured in the exhibition *Landscape in an Eroded Field* at the American University Museum in Washington, D.C., from January to March 2020.

Paula Plum ('75) received the 2020 Elliot Norton Award in the Outstanding Actress, Midsize Theater category for her performance in *The Children* with SpeakEasy Stage Company.

Sue O'Daniel ('78) retired from her 42-year career as a music teacher at Vergennes Union High School (VUHS) in Vergennes, Vt., in June 2020. During her time at VUHS, she grew the music program, school musicals drew ticket requests from across the state of Vermont, and band participants grew to 25 percent of the student body.

IN A SPECIAL VIDEO for graduating student artists, CFA alums sent their well-wishes and advice to the Class of 2020. Actor **Kim Raver ('91)**, top right, told grads, "Stay curious. Stay disciplined. Stay connected to your friends. Stay creative. And stay true to yourself." Other alums featured in the video were, clockwise from top left, painter **Sedrick Huckaby (BUTI'95, CFA'97)**, opera singer **Sandra Piques Eddy ('99,'02)**, film producer **John Bartnicki (BUTI'02, CFA'07)**, oboist **Eugene Izotov ('95)**, and actors **Uzo Aduba ('05)**, **Julianne Moore ('83)**, and **Michael Chiklis ('85)**.

Paul Schulenburg ('79), a painter, is represented by Addison Art Gallery in Orleans, Mass. The gallery recently published a book of his work, *Paul Schulenburg: Oil Paintings* (Addison Art, Inc., 2020), which features landscape and figurative oil paintings from the past 20 years.

1980s

Todd London ('80,'81) is a writer and theater historian. He presented his workshop "Let Me Sit With You a While, or the Challenge of Theater is the Challenge of the World" in February 2020 as part of the School of Performing Arts at Virginia Tech's colloquium series "Art, Community, Ecology, and Health." The series focused on the "power and practice of art and culture as essential elements of healthy communities."

Julia Shepley ('80) was a resident at the Scuola Internazionale di Grafica in Venice, Italy, and exhibited her sculpture work in *RING*, the Boston Sculptors Gallery annual members' group exhibition, from January 29 to February 23, 2020, and in *The Gold Standard of Textile and Fiber Art* at Westbeth Gallery in New York City in February 2020.

Jason Alexander ('81, Hon.'95) starred in *Closing the Distance*, a scripted podcast exploring social distancing, quarantine, and isolation in a series of 10 short audio dramas. Alexander also participated in Stephen Sondheim's 90th birthday celebration concert on Broadway.com along with **Brad Oscar ('86)** and **Greg Hildreth ('05)**.

Karen Carpenter ('81) directed a reading of *Bette Davis Ain't for Sissies*, a one-woman show that tells the story of Bette Davis' fight against the male-dominated studio system, in February 2020. The play has had multiple runs at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe in the United Kingdom and had a US tour in 2015.

Julianne Moore ('83) is starring as Gloria Steinem in the film *The Glorias*. The film is based on Steinem's memoir, *My Life on the Road*. In January, Moore moderated a roundtable discussion in New York City during which gun violence survivors shared their personal stories. The event was sponsored by *People* magazine and the nonprofit advocacy organization Everytown for Gun Safety. Moore also signed an open letter by Guns Down America urging studios to end contributions to candidates who take money from the NRA and vote against gun reform.

K. Johnson Bowles ('86) had 46 works from her most recent body of work, *Veronica's Cloths*, selected for publication in 24 art and literary journals, including

Courtesy of CFA

Alexander Golob ('16) painted a mural memorializing George Floyd in Jamaica Plain, Mass., in June 2020, outside a marijuana dispensary, which funded the project. In late July, it was moved for display inside the dispensary. Proceeds from the mural were donated to Boston Art & Music Soul (BAMS) Fest, a nonprofit that works to "break down racial and social barriers to arts, music, and culture."

Courtesy of Alexander Golob

Russell Hornsby ('96), center, in long-sleeve red shirt, starred in the NBC show *Lincoln Rhyme: Hunt for the Bone Collector*, about a forensic criminologist whose search for a serial killer left him paralyzed. In February 2020, he returned to BU to visit a senior theater class (pictured here). He also participated in *From a Distance: BUTV10 Variety Hour*, a virtual showcase featuring exclusive interviews and words of wisdom for BU students, and joined fellow actors **Kim Raver ('91)** and **Jessica Rothe ('09)** to surprise graduating seniors during the first virtual BU Senior Breakfast.

the *American Journal of Poetry*, *Twyckenham Notes*, and *The William and Mary Review*. She showed *Veronica's Cloths* in an online solo exhibition with PH Gallery of Troy, N.Y., through July 2020.

Brad Oscar ('86) played Frank Hillard in Broadway previews of the musical comedy *Mrs. Doubtfire*.

Suzanne Teng ('86), a flutist, received the Album of the Year award from the Native American Style Flute Awards and a gold medal from the Global Music Awards, both in April 2020, for her newest album with musical partner Gilbert Levy, *Autumn Monsoon*.

Nanette Kaplan Solomon ('87) is a pianist who performed in "From the Salon to the Shtetl: A Selection of Works for Clarinet, Violin and Piano" at the Hoyt Art Center in New Castle, Pa., on March 12, 2020. Solomon is also a professor emerita of music at Slippery Rock University.

Suzanne Wilson (BUTI'88) became the president and CEO of the Phoenix Symphony in January 2020.

Beth Morrison (BUTI'89, CFA'94) is an opera producer whose company, Beth Morrison Projects, offered an "Opera of the Week" during the pandemic. Each opera was posted on bethmorrisonprojects.org.

1990s

Rebecca A. Hartka (BUTI'92, CFA'02,'07), a cellist, has performed with Grammy-nominated guitarist José Lezcano as Duo Mundo. They performed together this past winter in New York and Mexico until COVID-19 shutdowns.

Abraham Higginbotham ('92) was a writer and producer for the Emmy Award–winning series *Modern Family*, which concluded in spring 2020 after 11 seasons.

Nancy King ('93) directed a production of selections from Purcell's epic tragedy *Dido and Aeneas*, performed by UNC-WOOP! in March 2020 for the 18th annual Opera Sunday event in Southport, N.C. King created UNC-WOOP!, an opera outreach project at the University of North Carolina Wilmington, as a means to provide her students with opportunities to hone their live performance skills and introduce the public to opera in a relaxed, lighthearted manner.

Michael Medico ('94) directed the January 30, 2020, episode of *Grey's Anatomy*, "A Hard Pill to Swallow," which also featured **Kim Raver ('91)** as the character Dr. Teddy Altman. He also directed a table read of the pilot episode of the show *The Fosters* over Zoom, which reunited many of the show's cast members. *The Fosters* co-creator and executive producer **Peter Paige ('91)** read the stage directions for the virtual event, which benefited The Actors Fund.

Brian Reagan ('94) was appointed superintendent of schools for Waltham, Mass., in March 2020. Reagan was previously the Wilmington, Mass., assistant superintendent.

Amanda Gentry ('95) opened her contemporary ceramic exhibit *Murmuration* at the Cuesta College

Courtesy of CFA

Harold J. Miossi Art Gallery in spring 2020 in San Luis Obispo, Calif. The interactive exhibit explored the individuality of one's voice in isolation.

Susanna Klein ('96) has self-published *Practizma Practice Journal: 16 Weeks of Efficiency, Empowerment & Joy for Musicians*, which includes strategies for musicians to get more out of their practice sessions. She blogs and presents nationally on musician health and empowered and joyful practice in music.

Hannah Barrett ('98) was appointed the director of the Milton Avery Graduate School of the Arts at Bard College in Annandale-on-Hudson, N.Y. Prior to this appointment, Barrett, an award-winning artist and educator who has taught, lectured, and exhibited widely, was the international program coordinator at Bard College Berlin, Germany.

Angela Fraleigh ('98) presented an exhibition of her work, *Sound the Deep Waters*, at the Delaware Art Museum in fall 2019. The exhibition presented a contemporary look at gender and identity through the lens of historic narrative art.

2000s

Gregg Mozgala ('00) starred in Caryl Churchill's *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire* at the New York Theatre Workshop and in the play *Teenage Dick*, both in 2018. Mozgala is an activist for the disabled community in the arts.

James Perrin ('01) had an exhibition of his paintings, *Percept Upon Percept*, at Hope College in Michigan in February and March 2020. Perrin's paintings "explore the integration and resolution of disharmonious elements relating to themes in painting and its processes: abstraction and representation, surface and illusion, discord and resolution, chaos and structure."

Duncan Cumming ('03), a pianist, performed at the First Presbyterian Church of Ironton in Ironton, Ohio, in January 2020. He performed as one half of the Capital Duo, which also features his wife, violinist Hilary Walther Cumming.

Uzo Aduba ('05) will appear in *Americanah,* a 10-episode miniseries set to air on HBO Max. The series is based on Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's 2013 novel of the same name, which tells the story of a young Nigerian woman who immigrates to the United States.

Sara Chase ('05) played Cyndee Pokorny in the Netflix interactive movie *Unbreakable Kimmy Schmidt: Kimmy vs. the Reverend*, a role she also played in the series.

Greg Hildreth ('05) was set to play Peter in the Broadway production of Stephen Sondheim and George Furth's musical comedy *Company* at the Bernard B. Jacobs Theater before Broadway performances were suspended due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Jennifer Bill ('07), Emily Cox (BUTI'08, CFA'13,'15), Zach Schwartz ('13, CAS'13), and **Amy McGlothlin ('15)**, members of the Boston-based saxophone group Pharos Quartet, performed with composer and pianist **Thomas Weaver ('13)** in January 2020 at BU's Marsh Chapel.

Steve Eulberg ('07) plays the dulcimer and frequently collaborates with mountain dulcimer player Erin Mae Lewis. The two have shared their music through radio broadcasts, master classes, and performances.

Beth Willer ('08,'14) joined the faculty of the Peabody Conservatory of Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, Md., as associate professor and director of choral studies. Willer is also the founder of Lorelei Ensemble, a women's vocal ensemble.

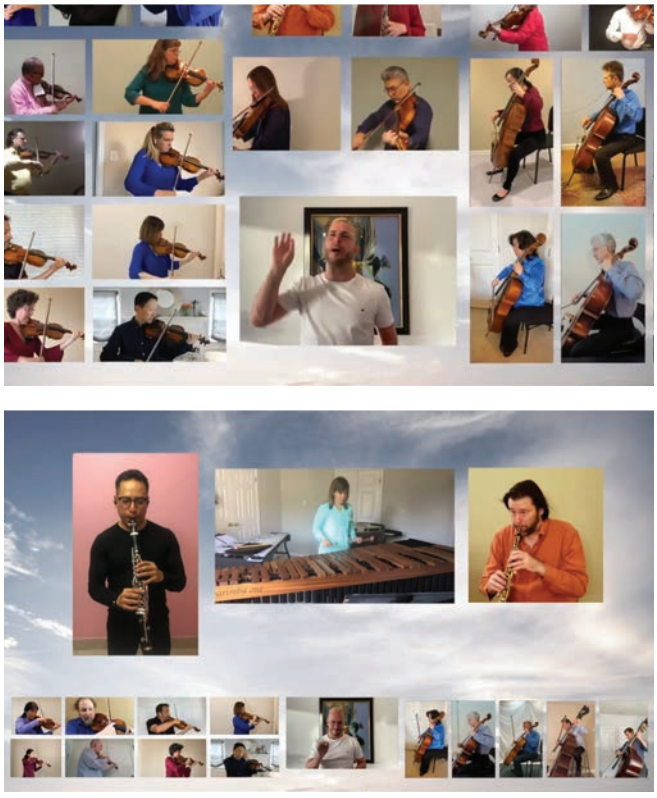
Jason Berger (BUTI'09, CFA'14) became known as "Delaware's opera singing barista" after a customer filmed him serenading her husband while serving him coffee at a Starbucks in Wilmington. Berger is studying at OperaDelaware's Young Artist Program.

Clare Longendyke ('09), a pianist, and Rose Wollman, a violist, performed in a concert in February 2020 at Saint Meinrad Seminary and School of Theology in St. Meinrad, Ind. The concert drew from their album *Homage to Nadia Boulanger* (2019) and consisted of four pieces by the late French composer Boulanger and her composition students.

Alex Wyse ('09) is the cocreator and cowriter, with Wesley Taylor, of *Indoor Boys*, an LGBTQ+ digital comedy series that "follows two homebody roommates as they navigate the boundaries of their no-boundaries friendship." Wyse, who also stars in the show with Taylor, won a 2020 Indie Series Award for Best Actor. He and Taylor together received awards for Best Comedy Series, Best Directing-Comedy.

2010s

Richard Andrew Schwartz ('10) is an associate professor of music at Eastern New Mexico University in Portales, N.M. The saxophonist released his album *Song for My Mother*, which features two original compositions, "Alpha Cat"



The Philadelphia Orchestra commissioned a new work, "Seven O'Clock Shout," from Grammy-nominated composer, flutist, and teacher Valerie Coleman (BUTI'89, CFA'95). The piece, which honors frontline workers during the COVID-19 pandemic, debuted at the Philadelphia Orchestra's online HearTOGETHER event in June 2020 (pictured here), which featured performances by individual members of the orchestra, as well as stars such as Wynton Marsalis (Hon.'92). Coleman was also the featured keynote speaker for the closing of the League of American Orchestras online conference in June 2020.

The Philadelphia Orchestra

and "7-11 Blues," recorded with the late jazz legend Ellis Marsalis.

Samantha Silverman ('11) illustrated a *Curbed New York* story on how New Yorkers are using their apartment building stoops as spaces for connection and community during the pandemic.

Jimmy Greene ('12) released *Flowers: Beautiful Life - Volume 2*, a companion to his 2014 album *Beautiful Life*. Both albums remember the saxophonist's daughter, Ana, who was murdered at Sandy Hook Elementary School in 2012. Greene also performed with the Jimmy Greene Quintet at Columbia University School of the Arts as part of its 2019–2020 jazz series in February 2020.

Francesca Blanchard ('14), a folk singer-songwriter, released a new song, "Ex-Girlfriend," in February 2020.

Maya French ('15) is a cofounder, coartistic director, and comanaging director of Palaver Strings, a string ensemble and nonprofit organization based in Portland, Maine. The violinist is also a faculty member at Bay Chamber Concerts Music School and the education director for Chamber Music Now, an annual weeklong festival in Portland, Ore.

Ellen Humphreys ('15) plays Sharon Russell in the CBS All Access drama *Interrogation*. She also makes an appearance as a bank teller in the forthcoming film *Silk Road*.

Courtney Miller ('15) is an assistant professor of oboe at University of Iowa in Iowa City, Iowa. She released her second album, *Portuguese Perspectives* (MSR Classics, 2019), which features world-premiere recordings for the oboe by Portuguese composers.

Rebecca Ness ('15) exhibited her paintings in a show that ran from December 2019 through January 2020 at the Alexander Berggruen Gallery in New York City. Her body of work featured in the exhibition explores both portraiture and the objects of domestic and artist-studio life.

Laura Randall ('15), a flutist, and **Jessica Cooper ('17,'19)**, a violist, participated in Newton Covenant Church's hour-long live "Concert for Chromebooks" on Zoom on April 9, 2020. The Newton, Mass., church's benefit concert raised money to provide 20,000 Chromebooks for Boston Public School students without access to a computer at home. The concert also supported professional musicians whose scheduled engagements during Holy Week and beyond were canceled due to the pandemic.

Aija Reke ('15) performed "Memoire de Claire," a piece inspired by the French composer Olivier Messiaen, on the violin as part of the Charm of Impossibilities concert at BU in February 2020. The piece was written by **Elena Levi ('21)**.

Natalie Guerrero ('16) launched a Venmo campaign to support the National Bail Fund and the George Floyd Memorial Fund. She raised more than $67,000.

Christian Frentzko ('17) and his wife, Jennifer Sisco, are public school teachers in New Jersey and perform as the musical duo The Harrisons. Throughout the pandemic, they have been streaming their performances on Facebook.

Matthew Scinto ('17) is the music director of the Cape Cod Chamber Orchestra (CCCO). He conducted the CCCO in its second annual *An Afternoon of Chamber Music* winter concert in February 2020.

Annalise Cain ('18) played The Bastard character in Shakespeare's *King John* at the Calderwood Pavilion at Boston Center for the Arts from January 30 to February 16, 2020.

Lina González-Granados ('18) was awarded a Sphinx Medal of Excellence, which recognizes extraordinary classical Black and Latinx musicians. González-Granados is an internationally celebrated conductor and the founder and artistic director of Unitas Ensemble, a chamber orchestra that performs the works of Latinx composers and provides access to free performances for underserved communities.

Scott Humphries ('18) was named the Indiana Music Education Association's 2020 Outstanding Collegiate Educator. He was nominated by a student at Manchester University in North Manchester, Ind., where he is assistant professor of music and director of instrumental studies and music education.

Krishan Oberoi ('18) is the new artistic director of the Falmouth Chorale in Falmouth, Mass. Oberoi is also the founder and principal guest conductor of SACRA/PROFANA, a San Diego–based chorus, and in 2018 he founded the Boston-based Analog Chorale. Oberoi has engaged diverse populations through innovative education and outreach programs, including an after-school program for students impacted by homelessness.

Leyla Tonak ('18) had her first solo show, *New Mythologies*, at Ghost Gallery in Brooklyn, N.Y., in January 2020. Tonak makes large-scale oil paintings that explore gesture and metaphor through the lenses of sex, power, and family.

Keith Heimann ('19) has been named executive director of the Association Répertoire International d'Iconographie Musicale (RIdIM), an international index of visual sources of music, dance, theater, and opera.

Colleen Kinslow ('19) launched *Cadmium*, an independent online magazine, in May 2020. Kinslow created the magazine "in the hopes of memorializing and honoring those who matter most: our communities, friends, peers, colleagues, family, and ourselves." You can read the magazine at cadmiummag.com.

Zimeng Wang ('19) received a 2020 American Inhouse Design Award from Graphic Design USA for work she created for her 2019 thesis project, *A Banned Exhibition*. The project focused on Chinese government censorship. Wang sourced thousands of words banned by Chinese media and presented various forms of banned information in a subversive and humorous way.

THROUGHOUT SUMMER 2020, BU Tanglewood Institute (BUTI) hosted Intermissions: A Spotlight Conversation Series. The eight-week series consisted of live-streamed conversations with BUTI alumni and friends, including conductor Teddy Abrams (BUTI'03), bassist Joseph Conyers (BUTI'98), harpist Angelica Hairston (BUTI'08,'09), clarinetist Anthony McGill (BUTI'95), producer Beth Morrison (BUTI'89, CFA'94), composer Nico Muhly (BUTI'96,'97), flutist Olivia Staton (BUTI'12,'13,'14), and soprano Sarah Vautour (BUTI'11). Topics ranged from music performance and education to the many facets of building a career in classical music.

MARIA DECOTIS TURNS A CORONAVIRUS PRESS BRIEFING INTO A HIT VIDEO

By Taylor Mendoza

WHEN COMEDIAN AND ACTOR Maria DeCotis watched New York Governor Andrew Cuomo's April 19 coronavirus press briefing, she knew she was witnessing the perfect fodder for her next routine. After discussing hospitalizations, nursing homes, and testing, Cuomo switched from covering the state's COVID-19 response to talking about his daughter Mariah's boyfriend, who would be joining the governor's family for dinner later that night. "He went on this long tangent. It was so mesmerizing. He just kept going and going, and I was like, 'When is he going to stop?'" says DeCotis ('15). "He said, 'I like the boyfriend,' so many times, and I thought, 'There is no way he likes the boyfriend.'"

DeCotis decided to make a parody video of the press briefing, inspired by political lip-sync videos on TikTok that were popularized by Sarah Cooper's spoofs of Donald Trump. Using clothes and makeup she already had, DeCotis set up a tripod in her New York City apartment and filmed herself lip-syncing to the press briefing audio, then edited it all together. In the video, she plays three roles: Cuomo, his daughter, and "the boyfriend." As Cuomo, DeCotis gets increasingly frazzled, taking an exaggerated swig from a bottle of wine and, eventually, waving around a knife while continuing to discuss "the boyfriend." Interspersed throughout are reaction shots of DeCotis as an embarrassed Mariah Kennedy Cuomo and the nonplussed boyfriend.

"It was basically a one-woman production company," DeCotis says. "I played [the press briefing] over and over again, and I broke it up into parts to get the timing just right. I didn't write it out. I figured it would be easier just to listen to it."

DeCotis started experimenting with comedy as a member of the School of Theatre's improv group, Spontaneous Combustion, and while studying abroad in Italy, where she took classes on commedia dell'arte. She's since opened for Mike Birbiglia's one-man show, *The New One*, on Broadway, and performed in off-Broadway productions and commercials.

But the Cuomo parody has helped her reach a much broader audience. After she posted her video to Twitter on May 1, it quickly went viral, racking up more than one million views. She was interviewed by *Rolling Stone* and *Today*. The video's success inspired her to make other Cuomo spoofs, which she posted to her YouTube channel.

"Alec Baldwin has retweeted a few of my videos, Chrissy Teigen retweeted a couple, Lin-Manuel Miranda—which is mind-blowing—Padma Lakshmi, and Steven Colbert retweeted a few of mine. It's pretty exciting."

In mid-June, Cuomo announced he was ending his daily briefings, and DeCotis' fans questioned what she would do next. They'll have to wait and see, DeCotis says. "I can go with whatever's happening in the world."

Courtesy of Maria DeCotis

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