

# ALUMNI NEWSLETTER

## COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF THE ARTS

March 2021

Dear School of the Arts Alumni:

As you continue to navigate the terrain ahead, I wanted to send this note of encouragement and also remind you of some useful resources available to you wherever you are.

This month The School of the Arts is co-sponsoring [a series of virtual networking events](#) with Columbia Alumni Association Arts Access. These sessions are a chance to meet fellow alumni working in similar industries, share helpful advice, and expand your network.

[Columbia Global Centers](#) have made space available at their locations around the world for students and alumni, and also host webinars, can help with in-country networking, and more. The Global Centers have physical locations in Amman, Beijing, Istanbul, Mumbai, Nairobi, Paris, Rio de Janeiro, Santiago, and Tunis, and are offering limited in-person events as safety allows.

In cities abroad, as well as here in the United States, the Columbia Alumni Association has [numerous regional clubs and shared interest groups](#). Other alumni association resources include the [CAA LinkedIn group](#), which has over 59k members, and the [CAA Alumni Community](#). These are great places to find and make connections in your field, meet potential collaborators, or make new friends in a new town.

And don't forget our School of the Arts alumni [Facebook group](#) and [LinkedIn group](#), where you can share updates about your work, upcoming events, and be inspired by what your fellow alums have been up to. The Artists' Resource Center's [LinkedIn page](#) is a great place to find grant, fellowship, and residency opportunities.

Please continue to send your updates to [artsalum@columbia.edu](mailto:artsalum@columbia.edu); we love hearing from you! With that I will leave you with this month's news from your peers, as well as our Alumni Spotlight of Theatre alum **Ashley Tata '12**.

Sincerely,

Laila Maher  
Dean of Student and Alumni Affairs

## Film

*Black Prom*, produced by **Avril Speaks** '03, and *Home*, written and directed by **Ellie Foubi** '17 are now available to view on the [Netflix Film Club](#) channel on Youtube, part of a showcase co-presented by Netflix and Film Independent. *African America*, also produced by Speaks, is screening at the [Pan African Film + Arts Festival](#). It is nominated for the Best First Feature Award. *Jules of Light and Dark*, produced by **Cameron Bruce Nelson** '20, is now available to stream on [Showtime](#). *Bittu*, edited by **Colin Elliott** '12, [has been shortlisted](#) for Best Live Action Short for the upcoming Academy Awards. It also won a Student Academy Award and is now up for the main event. *I'll See You Around*, written and directed by **Daniel Pfeffer** '18 and co-produced by **Michael Goitanich** '18, is now available to stream on [Amazon](#), [iTunes](#), and [Vudu](#). *Ben and Mimi - Mimi and Ben*, written and directed by **Eva Rini May** '19, produced by **Apoorva Charan** '18 and photographed by **Gabriel Wilson** '19, is screened at the [Berlin Lift-Off Film Festival](#). *I'm No Longer Here (Ya No Estoy Aqui)*, written and directed by **Fernando Frias de la Parra** '15 and produced by **Gerry Kim** '11 was shortlisted for the [Academy Award](#) for Best International Feature Film. It was also nominated for Best Ibero-American Film at the [Goya Awards](#). *The Truffle Hunters*, co-directed & produced by **Gregory Kershaw** '11, was nominated for the [Producers Guild Award](#) for Outstanding Producer of a Documentary Motion Picture. It has also been shortlisted for the Academy Award for Best Feature Documentary. *An Evening with Laila*, directed and produced by **Haya Alghanim** '20 and edited by **Waleed Alqahtani** '20, will screen at the [Malmo Arab Film Festival](#) in April. *Little Big Women*, co-written by **Maya Huang** '16, is now available to view on [Netflix](#). *Song Without a Name (Cancion Sin Nombre)*, written and directed by **Melina León** '08, will screen virtually next week as part of the Museum of Modern Art's [The Future of Film Is Female](#) series. *It Cuts Deep*, written and directed by **Nicholas Santos** '19 and produced by **Kristy Richman** '19, will premiere on [Showtime](#) on March 16, and be available on Showtime On Demand beginning March 14. *Must Love Pie*, written and directed by **Patrick Clement** '20, screened at the [Green Bay Film Festival](#). *The Mauritanian*, co-written by **Rory Haines** '11 and **Sohrab Noshirvani** '12, was nominated for the [Golden Globe Awards](#) for Best Actor in a Drama and Best Supporting Actress and three [London Critics Circle Film Awards](#), including Film of the Year and British/Irish Film of the Year. *Muscle Memory*, written and directed by **Saladin White II** '20, produced by **Najah Diop** '20 and edited by **Daniel Becerril** '20, will screen virtually as part of the [Woodstock Film Festival](#)'s Short Films, Big Stories showcase. *Lust Life Love*, written, co-directed and produced by **Stephanie Sellars** '13, who also stars in the film, and co-directed by **Ben Feuer** '13 won [Best Romance Feature](#) at Berlin Independent Film Festival. **Sola Fasehun** '15 co-produced.

## Theatre

**Alice Reagan** '04 directed *On Loop*, a [New Plays at Barnard](#) commission by Charly Evon Simpson. *On Loop* is a hybrid production, with actors in a designed theatre space being live streamed. *Ghostwriter*, a play by **Alix Sobler** '17, will be featured in Cadence13's [Debut Audio Feature Slate](#). **Amber Chardae Robinson** '15 can be seen in *Judas and the Black Messiah* now streaming on [HBO Max](#) and in select theaters. **Anchuli Felicia King** '18 was named a Rising Star of 2021 in Australia's [Financial Review](#). *The Trade Federation, Or, Let's Explore Globalization Through the Star Wars Prequels*, [the new play](#) by **Andy Boyd** '18, was published by NoPassport Press. **Ayvaunn Penn** '18 was featured in the "Future of Black

Theatre Leaders and Professionals" segment of [Upon These Shoulders](#), a Black History Month virtual concert presented by Playbill.com and the Black Theatre Coalition. *Thin Mints*, the new play by **Ellen Steves** '17, has a reading as a part of Sideshow Theatre's House Party Reading Series on March 19. **Ines Braun** '17 will direct a Zoom reading of the play *Classic Six*, by **Leigh Flayton** at [Powerstories Voices of Truth Theatre Festival](#). The filmed performance will livestream on March 27. **Jillian Walker** '17 [was a panelist](#) on New York Theatre Workshop's *FIRESIDE CHAT: The Power of Proverbs & The Tradition of Oral Storytelling*. **Tiffany Small** '18 [participated as a panelist](#) on *FIRESIDE CHAT: No Passing Here: Four Latinx Artists on Theatre and Race/Ethnicity*, also with New York Theatre Workshop. **Johnny Lloyd** '20 writes *Alexander Moments Before*, a New York Times Critics Pick, for [Theater in Quarantine](#). [The Apocalyptic Artists Ensemble](#), founded by acting alumni **Kea Trevett** '16, **Alice Renier** '16, **Peter Romano** '15, and **Bryne McManimie** '16, presents *She Kills Monsters: Virtual Realms* by **Qui Nguyen**, directed by Romano, and featuring McManimie, Trevett and Renier as well as **Aaron Morton** '16 and **Kenard Jackson** '15. **Marika Splint** '07 creates and directs *You Are Here*, a [homebound travelogue](#) as a part of the Digital Without Walls (WOW) series at La Jolla Playhouse. *Love Letter to a Seed*, written by **Nana Dakin** '18, will be presented as part of [Clubbed Thumb's Winterworks 2021](#) until March 20.

### **Visual Arts**

**David Brooks** '09 exhibits his work at *Stayin' Alive* at [Another Space](#) from through March 25. Work by **Jaqueline Cedar** '19 curated the show *Adult Sledding* with [Good Naked Gallery](#) in Brooklyn. **Julian Day** '20 offers a series of 24 hour-long soundscapes in the exhibit [Elastic Ambience](#), creating a 'clock' that uses sound to differentiate our sense of passing hours. **Kevin Claiborne** '21's work was included in the exhibition [Let Freedom Ring Vol. 2](#) at Brooklyn Academy of Music. **Klara Hobza** '05 exhibits her work at [Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg](#) until May 4, at [Nassauischer Kunstverein Wiesbaden](#) until July 2, and at [Naturama, Museum+Natur](#) until August. Part II of the Monuments Now exhibition, [Call and Response](#), presents ten projects realized by the Park's 2020 Artist Fellows, which include **Kiyan Williams** '19 and **Fontaine Capel** '20. **Midori Curtis** '89 shows her *Printmaking Exhibition* from March 10-27 at Yoseido Gallery in Tokyo, Japan. Work by **Norma Markley** '84 is showcased in the online exhibit [END](#) through December. **Priscilla Aleman** '19's project for the [do it \(home\)](#) exhibition will be a cultivated community landscape situated and performed within a series of sports stadiums throughout Miami. [Mucciaccia Gallery New York](#) announced the exhibit *Intersections*, featuring a solo project by **Stipan Tadić** '20 and **Kati Vilim**. **Uri Aran** '07 has work in the [online exhibit](#) *Homework*. **Yi Sara** '20 has work in *Properties of*, [a new exhibition](#) at the AHL Foundation in New York that runs until April 30.

### **Writing**

*The LA Review of Books* published a [review](#) of *American Divine* by **Aaron Poochigian** '16. **Abigail N. Rosewood** '17 published [an essay/recipe](#) titled "Cooking Thặt Kho, and Remembering What it Means to Be Vietnamese" in *Literary Hub*. **Brysen Boyd** '20 is the Inaugural Writing Fellow on HBO's [Succession](#), and has also been named the Playwright in Residence at [Epic Theater Company](#). *Fieldglass*, the first book of poetry by **Catherine Pond** '13, will be published by [Southern Illinois University Press](#) on March 19. **Cheryl McCourtie** '19 [published an op-ed](#) titled "Why Not Immunize Whole Families? A Better Way to Get People of Color Inoculated from COVID" in *New York Daily News*. **Daniel**

**Felsenthal** '15 [reviewed](#) *Open Door Policy* by The Hold Steady for *Pitchfork*. **Gavin Thomson** '19 [published an interview](#), "The Strangest of the Strange: An Interview with Mark Leyner" in *Southwest Review*. G'Ra Asim '18's upcoming nonfiction book, *Boyz n the Void*, [was reviewed](#) in *Shelf Awareness*. **Gila Ashtor** '20 published a memoir, *Aural History*, with [Punctum Books](#) in 2020, [as well as the essay](#) "Toxic Relationships in the Affective Age" in the *Los Angeles Review of Books*. **Jackie Thomas-Kennedy** '06 published [a short story](#) titled "Bronze" in *Crazyhorse*. Action Books and the University of Notre Dame [celebrate the release](#) of **Ursula Andkjær Olsen**'s new book, *Outgoing Vessel*, translated by **Katrine Øgaard Jensen** '17. *The Word Next to the One I Want*, the new book by **Lori Toppel** '90, has been published by [Los Galesburg](#), a new press dedicated to the novella. **Harmony Holiday** '13 [was in conversation](#) with **Hanif Abdurraqib** exploring "Haunting Refrains: Sampling Practice in Black Poetry and Music" which also included a reading. **Mike Harvkey** '04 [published a short story](#) titled "The Complications of Others" in *Another Chicago Magazine*. **Nina Sharma** '16 published a personal essay titled "[Touch of Grey](#)" in *Entropy*. Her essay "[Shithole Country Clubs](#)" was included in *The Margins*' reading list. On March 15, **Rebecca Donner** '01 delivered the [Dorothy O. Helly Works-In-Progress Lecture](#) at CUNY. She discussed the impediments and opportunities she had encountered in writing her third book, *All the Frequent Troubles of Our Days*, a narrative nonfiction about her great-great-aunt Mildred Harnack, the sole American in the leadership of Berlin's underground resistance during the Nazi regime. Several alumni have [teamed up to relaunch](#) *Northwest Review*, a triannual literary journal. **S. Tremaine Nelson** '12 has joined as Editor and Publisher, **Tsering Lama** '12 has joined as Fiction Editor, **Sarah Ulicny** '12 as Deputy Fiction Editor, and **Kelsey Motes-Conners** '12 as Interviews Editor. **Shoshana Akabas** '19 [published an interview](#) titled "The Poems of 'Ghost Letters' Erase Boundaries of Language" in *Electric Literature*. **Terese Svoboda** '74's 19th book, [Theatrix: Poetry Plays](#) will be published this month by Anhinga Press. She is also in conversation with fellow Columbia alumna **Rachel DuPlessis** in the current issue of [Adroit Journal](#).

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## ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT

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**Ashley Tata** '12 makes multimedia works of theater, contemporary opera, performance, cyberformance, live music and immersive experiences. These have been presented in venues and festivals throughout the US and

internationally including Theatre for a New Audience, LA Opera, Austin Opera, The Miller Theater, National Sawdust, EMPAC, BPAC, The Crossing the Line Festival, the Holland Festival, The Prelude Festival, The National Centre for the Performing Arts in Beijing, and the Fisher Center at Bard. Tata's work has been called "fervently inventive," by Ben Brantley in *The New York Times*, "extraordinarily powerful" by the *LA Times* and in *The New Yorker*, Alex Ross named Tata's production of Kate Soper's *Ipsa Dixit* (also at Miller Theater) a notable production of the decade.

Since the pandemic-induced theatrical shut down, Tata has continued to make, directing a live cyberformance of Caryl Churchill's *Mad Forest* which transferred from Bard College's Fisher Center, Off-Broadway to TFANA, wrote and directed a Zoom-accessed Virtual Nightclub and dance party called *The Boot* with Beth Morrison Projects, created a music video for rock band Sylvan Esso which aired on Colbert's YouTube Covid channel, directed a physically-distanced adherent, landscape-integrating adaptation of John Luther Adams's *Ten Thousand Birds* with ensemble Alarm Will Sound at PS21 in Chatham, NY, and a multimedia live-streaming event from National Sawdust to mark the release of the quarantine-created album *Con Alma* with Paola Prestini and Magos Herrera and broadcast to Canal 22 in Mexico and WNET All-Arts.

Tata also works in the realm of immersive entertainment, escape rooms, and advertising and was the Creative Director of Immersive Escape Productions devising environmental, multi-platform, immersive escape rooms, created an experience for musician St. Vincent tailored for the drop of her album, *Masseduction* and led the team that was awarded a gold medal in Medical, Marketing & Media awards in 2018 for an immersive escape experience tailored for the release of a cholesterol-reducing drug for Amgen. Tata earned an MFA in directing at Columbia University and has taught, guest taught or been a guest artist at Columbia University, Mannes School of Music, Harvard University, MIT, Marymount Manhattan College, Colgate College, Bard College and LIU Post. Member of the Lincoln Center Theater's Directors' Lab, the recipient of the Lotos Foundation's Emerging Artist Award in Arts and Sciences and a winner of the 2017 Robert L. B. Tobin Director/Designer grant. Currently in residence at 153 Coffey, a multi-disciplinary warehouse space in Red Hook, Brooklyn and one of the inaugural members of the Brooklyn Academy of Music's residency cohort. [www.tatatime.live](http://www.tatatime.live) ig/twitter/twitch: @tatatime\_

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***Was there a specific faculty member or peer who especially inspired you while at the School of the Arts? If so, who and how?***

I can't say there was a specific person at SoA who inspired me. But that seems by design. What's incredible about traveling through the master's program is having a cohort of five other directors who know your work, obsessions and blind-spots better than anybody else. Learning how to hear criticism from a chorus of voices turned from intimidating to empowering. I started listening from a perspective of "it's not about me, it's about the thing." Beyond the cohort of directors in my year what remains a source of inspiration are all the artists I met at Columbia. To this day (and very likely on whatever day you read this) I communicate and share ideas with a wide net of alums from different disciplines and years. And when I think back on it there was a very specific moment of inspiration facilitated by Anne Bogart who has an uncanny ability to speak into existence what you're really secretly wishing might be possible. I vividly remember presenting a multi-media work in a class and at one point the performer, Lea McKenna-Garcia, opened the curtain with some music scoring the

revelation of a sunlit window behind her (we were in Nash). In critique Anne simply said “you should look into opera.” It was like I had been holding my breath, waiting for this permission for years. And it took that totally benign suggestion to actually pursue working in opera.

***How did attending the School of the Arts impact your work and career as an artist?***

Before SoA I was working as a bartender and server at a diner around the block (Deluxe on Broadway, RIP). I had been there for five years having worked many other like jobs in the years preceding that. My parallel artistic career had been built by saving enough to secure park permits (\$25 at the time) so I could create works in parks. Or the back room at Jimmy’s No. 43 (RIP). And the like. It’s funny that the parks have become a very promising venue again... Being at SoA where I could just focus on projects for classes, read and meditate on theater and performance and work with other artists on their projects provided an opportunity to be immersed in what seemed like a fantasy life. But it very slowly morphed into a grounding awareness that these spaces are where I can best serve. I became intensely disinterested in going back to being a server at Deluxe. At CU Tom Gilmore hired me to work in the scene shop. I hoped that these skills would transfer to my post CU life. And they did. Ever since graduating the Theater has supported me.

***What were the most pressing social/political issues on the minds of the students when you were here?***

My thesis production was Brecht’s *The Good Person of Szechwan*. Dramaturg, Jess Applebaum and I were invested in the Occupy Wall Street movement. We would go down, talk with organizers and occupants and participate in the community being built. There was a not-so-successful attempt at working on some of Brecht’s *Lehrstücke* plays at Zuccotti. We passed out invites to attend our production and after the second performance we programmed a conversation between Occupy organizers and the audience. How to be a “good” person and survive in a capitalist society. It’s a question. Shout out to Jess who helped remind me of the specifics of this and dramaturged this response.

***What was your favorite or most memorable class while at the School of the Arts?***

The two most important classes for my practice were an interdisciplinary arts incubation course taught by Gideon Lester that was offered to students across the school of the arts and the music school. And the design collaboration course with the designers at NYU. It was in these spaces, with artists working in different media, seeing things from different experiences and prismatically manifesting works where I started to finally practice what I had imagined theater was. And Arnold Aronson’s Avant-Garde Theater class enabled me to radically expand my definition of being a theater artist.

***What were the first steps you took after graduating?***

While still in school I started developing a project called “Decay of Cities” in which we occupied locations and made pieces that were a meditation on structural, cultural and social decay in the US. Between my 2nd and 3rd year we created in a former family farm in Maine. Right after graduating we went to a former auto shop in New Orleans. I then assisted Robert Woodruff on David T. Little and Royce Vavrek’s opera *Dog Days* which was a very early Beth Morrison Projects production. That got

me into the contemporary opera scene. And I kept working at the CU shop. Most of my time since graduating has been split between my own directing work, assistant or associate work, and tech work. Slowly the majority of my work has shifted to my own projects. Tech work has faded away. And I've been able to add teaching to the mix. Which is the reason I applied to grad school to begin with.

*What advice would you give to recent graduates?*

Get into the rooms you want to be in. There are many entry points. And create the rooms you want for your collaborators. I make a daily practice of clarifying why I'm in a room. How am I best serving the thing there? Am I learning from a collaborator? About a system? Is it an "impossible" problem that's fascinating to solve? Is it to pay bills? If there's nothing there maybe someone else is better positioned to support the thing. I also strongly encourage seeking nourishment by art works in all disciplines, across category, geography, medium, etc. It's an endless feast and you won't go hungry. Oh. And there's no shame in a nap. In the back of the theater, in the park, on your subway commute. 20 minutes can save a rehearsal.

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## ALUMNI BENEFITS

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- +[Artists' Resource Center \(ARC\)](#)
- +[Update Your Information](#)
- +[Email Forwarding & CU Address](#)
- +[Online Alumni Community](#)
- +[CAA Arts Access](#)
- +[Complete List of Benefits](#)

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Columbia University School of the Arts  
[artsalum@columbia.edu](mailto:artsalum@columbia.edu)

Office of Alumni Affairs  
Columbia University  
School of the Arts  
305 Dodge Hall, MC 1808  
2960 Broadway  
New York, NY, 10027  
email: [artsalum@columbia.edu](mailto:artsalum@columbia.edu)