

A photograph of a dance studio with several students. In the foreground, a young woman with red hair, wearing a grey t-shirt and dark pants, is in a dynamic pose, leaning forward with her arms extended. In the background, other students are visible, some in similar poses, suggesting a dance or theater class. The studio has a high ceiling with exposed pipes and lighting equipment.

# JOHN HARVARD'S JOURNAL

## Theater, Dance, and Media's "Next Act"

THROUGH THE DOOR of Martin Puchner's office in Farkas Hall, bursts of clapping, shouts, and laughter erupt from the class in session next door: "What's So Funny? Introduction to Improvisational Comedy." Some 140 students came to the course's first meeting, says Puchner, and though this case is extreme, in the new Theater, Dance, and Media concentration (TDM), "our classes are at capacity."

This warm reception might be all the more gratifying because of TDM's protracted incubation; its faculty likes to call it "400 years in the making." The program emerged from the determined efforts—reports released, recommendations issued, and priorities identified—of what seems like a matryoshka doll of nested committees: the Task Force on the Arts, chartered by President Drew Faust in 2007; the Harvard University Committee on the Arts in 2009; and finally the Standing Committee on Dramatic Arts, chaired by Puchner, Wien professor of drama and of English and comparative literature, since 2011. Events accelerated last year, after Faust publicly pledged funds toward the concentration's development in October, and in March, Puchner won unanimous approval from the Faculty of Arts and Sciences for his proposal.



Dance director and senior lecturer Jill Johnson leading Music 12, “The Harvard Dance Project” (opposite page, at left, and on next spread), a two-semester, for-credit ensemble; (center and above) the first TDM concentration show, *The Man Who*, in dress rehearsals in Farkas Hall

Concentrators declared their interest in fall 2015; as of press time, 13 have done so.

Now that TDM has put down roots, its faculty proponents—with considerable student input—look ahead to how it will grow.

### “Get Rid of the Binaries”

TDM HAS BEEN nimbly built around Harvard’s existing theater infrastructure, and draws on those resources. The concentration hired two staff members from the Office for the Arts (OFA) to oversee performance spaces and run mandatory tech and safety workshops; the American Repertory Theater’s (ART) staff and visiting artists teach studio courses and assist with productions. Most of TDM’s history and theory courses are drawn from other departments, including music, English, and various foreign languages—as are most of its regular faculty, with adjuncts and term appointments filling the gaps.

Even the program’s academic structure borrows from a prior source: as in the longstanding secondary field in dramatic arts (which it now replaces), TDM splits requirements evenly between “practice-based” and “theory-based” courses. Without this structure, says Eliza Mantz ’18, “I’d be tempted to take acting classes all the time.” Though in high school Mantz strongly considered attending a conservatory, her studies at Harvard have broad-

ened her idea of how an aspiring performer should be educated: “There’s more to being an artist than movement and voice.”

Sam Hagen ’18, primarily interested in studying theater academically, offers the flip side of that perspective. (He’s in the minority: “In all of these articles that are coming out about TDM, there’s the actors—and then there’s Sam Hagen ’18,” he observes dryly.) Having to go to other departments for theory-based courses makes for a “scattershot” program of study rather than a coherent progression, says Hagen: “I want my major to give everything that it is asking for.”

“Theater is a performance art,” says visiting professor David Chambers, summing up the concentration’s ethos: just as it’s important to verse practitioners of that art in theory and history, “there’s no reason academicians shouldn’t be on their feet figuring out what acting is.” Chambers reports that at Yale, where he’s taught at the School of Drama for several decades, “You’re always fighting that studio-versus-academic division. I actually think one of the hopes for TDM is that we get rid of the binaries. We just get rid of them!” As Puchner puts it: “We are not theater studies. We are theater. And we are theater, dance, and media.”

Students’ early concerns about how

TDM might eat up resources, especially performance space, have abated. Undergraduates put on 20 to 30 shows each semester; TDM will stage only two each year, and roles in the cast and technical staff are open to non-concentrators. “We want to be permeable,” says Puchner, who adds that, far from drawing them away from Harvard’s extracurricular scene, “we want to send students *back*”—equipped with new skills and aesthetic ideas.

The scarcity currently causing tension is not space, but acting credits. TDM requires its students to participate in four productions, half of them within the concentration. Its inaugural show, *The Man Who*, called for only four actors and cast no concentrators. Future productions will be larger, says Puchner, but he also points to the upside: performers were nudged into apprenticeships with the professional designers on the show’s staff. “Pedagogically speaking,” he says, “that is even more important than who gets to perform.”

The concentration will offer a class in “technical theater” next year, and others agree that TDM could usefully contribute to the performing arts at Harvard by making students more invested in what happens backstage. Jake Stepansky ’17, who serves as vice president of the Harvard-Radcliffe Dramatic Club and, frequently, as a sound designer for student shows, says that the program is “not well-equipped, at the moment, to handle technicians.” Such production roles are often understaffed, he reports, and most students come to Harvard with no design experience and no clear way of gaining it, other than by what

## I N T H I S I S S U E

- |    |                               |    |                   |
|----|-------------------------------|----|-------------------|
| 20 | Harvard Portrait              | 26 | Campus Campaign   |
| 22 | University People             | 27 | Brevia            |
| 22 | CS50’s Expanding Global Reach | 29 | News Briefs       |
| 24 | Yesterday’s News              | 32 | The Undergraduate |
| 25 | Larry Summers Reflects        | 34 | Sports            |



## H A R V A R D P O R T R A I T



Ethan Lasser

**When he put the two paintings together,** on facing walls of a Harvard Art Museums gallery—Winslow Homer’s *Pitching Quoits*, showing Zouave-inspired Civil War infantrymen in their red seroual trousers, and Théodore Chassériau’s 1850 depiction of actual Arab horsemen carrying their dead from the battlefield—“It was a revelation,” says curator Ethan Lasser. Homer hadn’t yet been to France, but he admired French painters, who themselves were enamored of the Middle East and North Africa. “The vibrant conversation between these two paintings—you really need to see it in the flesh,” Lasser adds. As Stebbins curator of American art and head of the museums’ European and American art division, he tries to make such conversations visible, grouping artworks by theme and period, not country and medium: “a more contextual story.” Lasser’s parents owned a Boston art gallery, and he spent many boyhood hours roaming the city’s museums. Williams College led to a job at a New York auction house, where he was told, “You ask too many questions—go to grad school.” After a Yale Ph.D. and five years at Milwaukee’s Chipstone Foundation, specializing in furniture and decorative arts, he arrived in 2012 at Harvard, where he also teaches, co-leading classes that offer art historians hands-on experience with art-making. “You hear about ideas like ‘flow,’ or that materials always resist you,” he explains, “and here you can get a sense of what those mean in ways that are hard to express.” The museums’ artworks can be similarly elusive. “I’ll never know them fully,” he says. “I’ll be walking up the stairs one day and see something in a work that I’ve never seen before, just because it’s five o’clock in the evening in the summer.” A revelation.

—LYDIALYLE GIBSON

he calls “brute-force trial-and-error” as they start to work on shows.

“As an undergraduate who came here to pursue a liberal-arts education, I don’t want a class on microphone etiquette or the acoustics of speakers, or a class on the different kinds of lighting instruments,” Stepansky explains. “But *one* class on design, looking at a lot of different kinds of design, or design over time? I think there’s totally interest.” Offering a guided, curricular learning environment, he believes, could build student interest in technical matters, and thus strengthen productions as a whole.

## “Am I in the Right Place?”

THOUGH their fellow concentrators’ spirits were high, Laurel McCaull ’18 and Kathryn Kearney ’17, both dancers, stood together at TDM’s celebratory meet-and-greet in October feeling more uncertain. Kearney leaned over to McCaull to ask, “Am I in the right place?” “Please, stick it out with me,” McCaull told her, “We can make it work, and make it better.”

Kearney, a member of the Expressions Dance Company, had pursued her interest in dance studies through a concentration in social anthropology. When TDM was made official, she says, “I knew right away that I wanted to do it.” She will now write her senior thesis, on race and ballet, as a joint concentrator. McCaull, a joint concentrator in English who co-directs the Harvard-Radcliffe Modern Dance Company, says that her initial excitement abated once she read through the course offerings: “I was definitely a little underwhelmed with the representation of dance.” After seeing the concentration’s theater-specific requirements, “I almost chickened out.”

As reflected in the course catalog, dance seems to be a junior partner in the concentration. Aside from the Harvard Dance Project, a for-credit ensemble led by OFA Dance Program director Jill Johnson, the concentration offered no dance classes in the fall, and two in the spring. While thespians may choose from a menu of courses that spans “Acting Shakespeare” to “Practical Aesthetics” (conceived by playwright David Mamet and actor William H. Macy), dancers have tended to go off-campus for similar training. Some enroll in the Harvard Dance Center’s evening classes, which are open to the public and charge undergraduates a relatively low

fee—but don't offer credit. "It's like taking a yoga class or something," says McCaull. "It's just not considered serious."

Meanwhile, studio classes that do offer credit are extremely time-intensive: the Harvard Dance Project, which meets for six hours each week, and for additional rehearsals and performances later in the semester, yields half the credits of a typical course. Deborah Foster, TDM's director of undergraduate studies, acknowledges that these factors give students little incentive to prioritize practice. Technique classes, she says, "fall by the wayside when the semester gets rolling."

She and Johnson hope the gap will be bridged by a new hire in a three-year position, adding four more classes a year. The job notice seeks a lecturer to teach technique (in at least one of several suggested fields, including African dance, improvisation, and somatic practices) as well as other courses. The long-range goal is a course of study that covers what Johnson calls "the four Cs—classical, contemporary, collaboration, and choreography"; in the meantime, the faculty will deliberate on

how Harvard's dance offerings, once considered purely extracurricular, will "recalibrate to support a degree program."

### "What The Next Thing Will Be"

WHEN asked about the last initial of TDM—"media"—its faculty speak enthusiastically, and at length, about the convergence of technology and the performing arts. They cite an opera they've seen that uses digital projections, or a choreographer who uses virtual reality in her work; they point to courses like "Multimedia Experimental Theatre and Performance" and "Live Art in the Theater Environment." The students have far less clarity about how "media" might meaningfully fit into their program of study. This may be due to a "generational divide," Foster suggests. "Those of us on the other side of the media revolution see it as having enormous impact on things. Young people who've grown up with it maybe don't see that quite as clearly,



because they're saturated with it."

But TDM has also intentionally kept the role undefined. "Media" does not chart a third path through the concentration—faculty members insist that even "theater" and "dance" should not be viewed as separate "tracks"—but

instead is meant to suggest the program's receptiveness to the changing identity of the performing arts.

"We want to be open to what the next thing will be. We don't want to have to contain it, or put a tie on it, or say, 'This is what media means now,'" explains Johnson, "because that would be to date it before it is out of the gate. It would be a little like predicting our software updates or whatever technology is going to happen in three months—never mind in a year, or six years, or 20."

In the near future, TDM will expand. "We are hiring in all kinds of categories,"

## HM Explore More

Harvardmagazine.com brings you continuous coverage of University and alumni news. Visit to find these stories and more:



### What Is Critical Race Theory?

And why it is a subject of protest at Harvard Law School.

[harvardmag.com/racetheory-16](http://harvardmag.com/racetheory-16)



### St. Louis Blues

Urban planners and scholars talk racism and exclusion in St. Louis.

[harvardmag.com/stlouis-16](http://harvardmag.com/stlouis-16)



### Indigenous Australian Art and Thought on Display

The Harvard Art Museums' new exhibition of Australian art aims to make indigenous lives "visible."

[harvardmag.com/everwhen-16](http://harvardmag.com/everwhen-16)



### Commencement 2016

Planning for Commencement week exercises in May is already under way at the College and Harvard's graduate and professional schools. Read about the speakers who will be addressing the new graduates at Class Day and Commencement ceremonies and follow the week at [harvardmag.com/commencement](http://harvardmag.com/commencement)

visit [harvardmagazine.com](http://harvardmagazine.com)

says Puchner. In addition to the dance-lecturer search, they are partnering with the Committee on Studies of Women, Gender, and Sexuality to appoint a College Fellow in a three-year postdoctoral position, and with the English department to find a theater scholar. The concentration also plans to have between four and six visiting lecturers—"artists from New York or elsewhere," Puchner says—come and teach each year. Even TDM's physical presence has enlarged, securing dedicated rehearsal space in Hilles Library.

"We're in a *laissez-faire*, 'Let's learn some stuff' phase," says concentrator Aislinn Brophy '17, president of the Harvard-Radcliffe Dramatic Club. "Which is not to say it's not rigorous, but it's a little more, 'Well, what do *you* want to do? Let's try things out! Give us your feedback! Tell us what's working!'" The faculty feels the same way about their students: Puchner says, with a broad smile, "They are game for anything."

~SOPHIA NGUYEN

## CS50's Expanding Global Reach

DURING THE first lecture of "Introduction to Computer Science I," best known as CS50, McKay professor of the practice of computer science David Malan invites volunteers to the front of the auditorium to make peanut-butter-and-jelly sandwiches. Students in the audience shout out instructions that Malan compiles into a sandwich-making algorithm. By the end of the exercise, it's obvious the algorithm isn't precise enough to teach a computer how to make a sandwich: one volunteer's sandwich is a pile of bread covered by a pool of jelly. Malan calls the demonstration a "ridiculous example" that illustrates a rudimentary principle—that "computers are actually pretty dumb. They can only do literally what they are told."

That example sticks with a lot of students: CS50 is Harvard's largest undergraduate class, and, as of this year, Yale's,

too (see [harvardmag.com/cs50yale-15](http://harvardmag.com/cs50yale-15)). The online version, which has recorded some 700,000 registrants this year, towers over the other HarvardX courses. Even as critics have focused on the software industry's involvement in computer-science education, Malan's instructional reach is on the verge of reaching another huge audience: American high-school students.

Angela Yakes, who teaches CS50's curriculum in a rural high school in Cedarville, Ohio, believes examples like the sandwich-making exercise help her students grasp abstract concepts in computer science. "Those kinds of ideas were really eye-opening," she said; now every time the students "want to try something and it's not working, they'll say, 'Think back to the peanut-butter-and-jelly-sandwich.'"

Yakes is one of 40 teachers participating in a pilot of CS50 AP, an adaptation of the curriculum for high-school classrooms that will satisfy the requirements for Advanced Placement Computer Sci-

## University People

### Humanities Leaders

Cogan University Professor Stephen Greenblatt, acclaimed for his Shakespeare scholarship (see "The Mysterious Mr. Shakespeare," September-October 2004, page 54) and his Pulitzer Prize-winning book on Lucretius's *De rerum natura* (see "Swerves," July-August 2011, page 8), has won the Holberg Prize, conferred by Norway for academic work

for humanities scholarship, comes with an award of 4.5 million kroner (about \$525,000). Greenblatt is now working on a book about the story of Adam and Eve.... Burden professor of photography Robin Kelsey, chair of the department of history of art and architecture, has been appointed dean of arts and humanities within the Faculty of Arts and Sciences, effective July 1. Kelsey, profiled in "From Daguerreotype to Photoshop" (January-February 2009, page 42), succeeds Rothenberg professor of Romance languages and literatures and of comparative literature Diana Sorensen.

in the arts, humanities, social sciences, law, and theology. The prize, perhaps the leading honor

### Signal Scientists

Cook professor of radiation oncology Rakesh K. Jain has been awarded the National Medal of Science.... Wallace professor of applied physics Federico Capasso (see "Thinking Small," January-February 2005, page 50) and Alfred Cho have been awarded the American Academy of Arts and Sciences Rumford Prize, one of the nation's oldest scientific awards, in honor of their invention, at Bell Laboratories, of the quantum cascade laser.... Iacocca professor of medicine C. Ronald Kahn and Loeb professor of chemistry Stuart L. Schreiber were each named co-winners of a 2016 Wolf Prize, for work pertaining to diabetes and to gene regulation, respectively.... Mangelsdorf professor of molecular and cellular biology and of chemistry and chemical biology Erin



**DECANAL DEBUT:** Kay Family professor of public health and professor of global health and population Michelle A. Williams, holder of master's and doctoral degrees from the Harvard T. H. Chan School of Public Health, has been appointed dean, effective in July. She succeeds Julio Frenk, who departed last summer to become president of the University of Miami. Williams, chair of the department of epidemiology, has conducted research on maternal and infant mortality and health around the world, and is faculty director of two Harvard Clinical and Translational Science Center programs, drawing together public-health and medical expertise. She will become the first African-American leader of one of Harvard's faculties. An in-depth profile appears at [harvardmag.com/williams-16](http://harvardmag.com/williams-16).