The New Colossus
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De Beers Group
The Actors’ Gang

The New Colossus

Saturday, February 29, 2020, at 7:30 pm
Hancher Auditorium, The University of Iowa

Executive Producer
THE ACTORS’ GANG THEATER

Produced and Directed by
TIM ROBBINS

Co-written by
THE ACTORS’ GANG ENSEMBLE AND TIM ROBBINS

Musical Director
DAVID ROBBINS

Tour Manager
GRATIELA BRANCUSI

Technical Director
JOSH KEH

Exclusive Tour Direction
THE ROAD COMPANY

Tour Marketing and Press
BROADWAY BOOKING OFFICE NYC

This play is the story of:

Homayun Dideban
Born in Isfahan, Iran, in 1937

Mehmet Fatih Tras
Born in Adana, Turkey, in 1984

Anna Margaret Wong
Born in Borneo, Malaysia, in 1943

Yetta Rothschild
Born in Stuttgart, Germany, in 1870

Ly My Dung
Born in Dalat, Vietnam, in 1953

Sadie Duncan
Born in Tensas Parish, Louisiana, in 1830

Gabriela Mia Garcia
Born in Puruandiro, Michoacán, Mexico, in 1970

Elin Matilda Nylund
Born in Kronoby, Finland, in 1885

Aranka Markus
Born in Budapest, Hungary, in 1933

Mirko Petkovic
Born in Mokro Polje, Yugoslavia, in 1922

Tatyana Iosifovna Birger
Born in Moscow, The Soviet Union, in 1961

Helga Schmidt
Born in the Alpbach, in the Austrian Alps in 1888

There will be a conversation with the cast in the auditorium immediately following the performance.
EVENT PARTNERS

Richard and Vicki Siefers
Alan and Liz Swanson
Director’s Notes

The New Colossus is a movement piece.
A calling up of ancestors, spoken in twelve languages.
It is a play about waiting, the silence in waiting, and the chaos.
A story of the continuing journey.
And survival.

We began working on this piece a couple of years ago. During the Syrian refugee crisis, we noticed, in our national discourse, an irresponsible tendency to speak of refugees as potential terrorists. This insensitive distortion of the truth and a reluctance on our part to give asylum to people suffering from forced displacement led us to discussions about who we were as a country.

We began to research our own roots, our own families’ journeys, why they left, what their challenges were, and what was happening in their country that made it impossible for them to stay. This process led to great revelations for our actors as the layers were pulled back on unspoken histories.

To leave the place you love out of necessity, to live uprooted, with fences in front of you, with years of instability, to endure great danger, to have the strength and the will to survive, this is what defines our ancestors, these are the deep roots immigrants and refugees have planted in this garden.

The New Colossus is our collective story. Wherever we perform the play, we ask our audience to share their story, or their ancestors’ story of immigration. We have heard beautiful and inspiring testimonies of courage and faith, of suffering and perseverance. We perform this piece to honor those that came before us and in remembrance of those that didn’t make it, that lost their lives in pursuit of freedom. We do this piece for the “illegal” immigrants, for the children separated from their parents at our southern border and for all the ‘dreamers’ who carry the same hope of a better life that took root in our ancestors’ hearts.
Cast
(in alphabetical order)

PIERRE ADELI ................................................................. Homayun Dideban, his father
ONUR ALPSEN .............................................................. Mehmet Fatih Tras, his friend
QUONTA SHANELL BEASLEY ........................................ Sadie Duncan, based on her great-great-great-aunt
KAYLA BLAKE .............................................................. Ann Margaret Wong, her mother
KATHRYN CECELIA CARNER ...................................... Elin Matilda Nylund, her great-grandmother
DORA KISS ................................................................. Aranka Markus, her grandmother
STEPHANIE LEE ........................................................... Ly My Dung, based on her mother and grandmother
MARY EILEEN O’DONNELL ......................................... Helga Schmidt, based on research
ZIVKO PETKOVIC ....................................................... Mirko Petkovic, his grandfather
JEANETTE ROTHSCHILD ............................................. Yetta Rothschild, her grandmother
MASHKA WOLFE ........................................................ Tatyana Iosifovna Birger, her mother
PAULETTE ZUBATA ...................................................... Gabriela Mia Garcia, her mother

JAMES EDWARD ............................................................. Stage Manager
LUIS QUINTANA .......................................................... Assistant Stage Manager

ORCHESTRA
DAVID ROBBINS, Guitar and Percussion
MIKALA SCHMITZ, Cello

Original music composed by David Robbins and Mikala Schmitz

ADDITIONAL MUSIC
Sarabande, from J.S. Bach’s Cello Suite No. 2 in D Minor
Sarabande, from Bach’s Cello Suite No. 5 in C Minor

ADDITIONAL MUSIC PERFORMED BY DORA KISS
“Under the Csitars Mountains” is a Hungarian folk song.
The author of the lyrics is unknown.

ADDITIONAL MUSIC PERFORMED BY THE CAST
“Bella Ciao” is an Italian protest folk song that originated in the hardships of the mondina women, the paddy field workers in the late 19th century who sang it to protest against harsh working conditions in the paddy fields of North Italy. The song was adopted as an anthem of the anti-fascist resistance by the Italian partisans, between 1943 and 1945 during the Italian Resistance, the resistance of Italian partisans against the Nazi German forces occupying Italy, during the Italian Civil War, and the Italian partisan struggle against the fascist Italian Social Republic and its Nazi German allies. Versions of “Bella Ciao” are sung worldwide as an anti-fascist hymn of freedom and resistance. In addition to the original Italian, the song has been recorded by various artists in many different languages. The author of the lyrics is unknown.
Imagine the Power in Partnership

Craig Vander Leest, CFP®
Senior Investment Consultant
Doug Wenzel, CIMA®
Senior Investment Consultant

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PIERRE ADELI (Homayun Dideban) has been a member of The Actors’ Gang for 14 years. He was born in San Jose, California, and moved to Los Angeles in 2004. He’s performed in 25 productions, including Johnny Got His Gun, Love’s Labour’s Lost (Costard), Carnage: A Comedy (Phil the Vet), The Rivals (Bob Acres), George Orwell’s 1984 (Winston), A Midsummer Night’s Dream (Oberon/Theseus), and Harlequino: On to Freedom European and China tours (Harlequino and Pantalone). Pierre is also a Teaching Artist with the Education Program and Prison Project.

ONUR ALPSEN (Mehmet Fatih Tras) has been a member of The Actors’ Gang for eight years. Past productions include Red Noses (Boutros), Atomic Holiday Free Fall (Alien), Queen Family’s Very Special Holiday Special (Astronaut, Foster Kid), A Midsummer Night’s Dream Europe and China tours (Puck and Philostrate), Harlequino: On to Freedom European and China tours (Father Ambrosia, Max), Winter Solstice Pagan Holiday Show (Ensemble), and Angels, Devils and Other Things (Devil). Onur is also the Production Manager and Projection Designer of The Actors’ Gang.

QUONTA SHANELL BEASLEY (Sadie Duncan) was born in Rockford, Illinois, and moved to Los Angeles in 2008. She graduated from the University of California San Diego with an MA in acting and from Western Illinois University with a BA in acting and sociology. Quonta has been a member of The Actors’ Gang for two years. As part of The Actors’ Gang Theater company she has been cast in Tradition (Brad), Angels, Devils and Other Things (Ensemble), The New Colossus South American tour (Sadie Duncan), and Aphrodite’s Holiday Show (Ensemble). Quonta has also worked with the Collaborative Artist Bloc in LA, and the Synaesthetic Theatre and Classical Theatre of Harlem in New York, being cast in A Dream Play (Strindberg), The Pillowman (McDonagh), Gem of the Ocean (Wilson), Woyzeck (Buchner), F---A (Lori-Parks), and Medea (Euripides), amongst many others. She is currently a Teaching Artist with The Actors’ Gang Prison Project and Education Department.

KAYLA BLAKE (Anna Margaret Wong) was born in Honolulu, Hawaii, and moved to Los Angeles to work professionally as a dancer (Fame television series, Disneyland, and music videos). With the advice of an actor on Fame, she took her first acting class over 20 years ago and it has been her passion ever since. Kayla has been a member of The Actors’ Gang for three years, and she was a part of the Refugee Project Workshop Production. Film and television credits include Four Christmases, the critically acclaimed series Sports Night created by Aaron Sorkin, House of Cards, and most recently, For All Mankind.

KATHRYN CECELIA CARNER (Elin Matilda Nylund) was born in Laguna Beach, California, and spent her formative years in Summit County, Colorado. She graduated from the University of Colorado, Boulder, with a bachelor of arts and double major in theater and history. She returned to California to train at the American Conservatory Theatre, STP, and Dell’Arte School for Physical Theater. She utilized her physical training to create a one-woman show, Wisdom While on My Back, which toured Northern California. In 2010, Kathryn became a company member of The Actors’ Gang, where she continues to hone her craft as an actor. Her acting credits with the company include Tartuffe, Lysistrata, and The New Colossus. Some of her most rewarding work is practiced offstage, directing the daily operations of The Actors’ Gang Prison Project. This journey began by volunteering as a Teaching Artist for three years within the program. In 2015, she took on the role of Manager of The Prison Project, overseeing the daily operations and finances for prison
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About the Artists

programming. Since then, The Actors’ Gang Prison Project has grown from four to 13 prisons on 15 yards, added two reentry programs (for both women and men), a juvenile program for incarcerated youth, and a pilot program for correctional officers. She is honored to be the Director of Operations for The Actors’ Gang Prison Project and thanks all who recognize the importance of this work.

DORA KISS (Aranka Markus) is originally from Hungary and has been living in Los Angeles for 11 years. She was a professional tennis player and later moved to Los Angeles to pursue her dreams. She graduated from California State University, Los Angeles, with a theatre degree. Dora has been a member of The Actors’ Gang for eight years. Past productions with the company include Fritz Lang’s M Workshop Production (Ensemble), Harlequino: On to Freedom (Mama Pina), Lysistrata (Dispas), The Ghost Sonata (Ensemble), The Queen Family Very Special Holiday Special (Ensemble), Refugee Project Workshop Production, and Captain Greedy’s Carnival (Tumble). Dora would like to dedicate this show to her beloved grandmother whose memory and courage will never be forgotten.

STEPHANIE LEE (Ly My Dung) was born in Vietnam and came to the United States as a refugee in 1990 with her family. Her first performance was held in her family’s small living room, and she was no older than three. She sang a Vietnamese pop song to an audience made up of doting aunties and uncles. Ever since that first performance, she has never stopped pursuing a life in art. She holds a degree in theater performance from Chapman University. As part of The Actors’ Gang Theater Company, she has been cast in a number of productions including The Queen Family’s Very Special Holiday Special, The Ghost Sonata, Aphrodite’s Holiday Show, Violence: The Misadventures of Spike Spangle, Farmer, and The New Colossus (South American Tour). Stephanie is currently a Teaching Artist and the Operations Manager for The Actors’ Gang Education Department. Her film credits include Everybody is Doing Great, High, Without Regret, and LifeLike. She has also appeared in numerous national commercials.

MARY EILEEN O’DONNELL (Helga Schmidt) was born in Troy, New York, and moved to Los Angeles in 1991. She has been a member of The Actors’ Gang for 16 years and has been in many productions, including Johnny Got His Gun (Ensemble), The New Colossus (South American Tour), Harlequino: On to Freedom (Mme Brancantini), Exonerated (Sunny Jacobs), A Midsummer Night’s Dream (Quince), OY! (Selma), Red Noses (Pope), Break the Whip (Shaman), I am not a racist, but… (Ensemble), Love’s Labour’s Lost (Holofernes), The Women of Lockerbie (Olive), Tartuffe (Madame Pernelle), and The Refugee Project Workshop Production. She has also appeared in the late-night shows Beast of Burden and Die Arty Farty Die, as well as in three of the Free Shakespeare in The Park productions: Cymbeline The Puppet King, Romeo and Juliet: Monsters in Love, and Harry Potter Hamlet. Mary Eileen has also worked with the Classic Stage Company, being cast in many Shakespeare plays, with SoHo Rep in NYC, and with the Los Angeles Women’s Shakespeare Company. Mary Eileen graduated from SUNY Albany with a BA and The Guildhall School of Music and Drama (Gold Medalist). Last but not least, she holds a Letter of Commendation for Bravery from Scotland Yard.

ZIVKO PETKOVIC (Mirko Petkovic) has been a member of The Actors’ Gang for four years. Past productions with the company include The Refugee Project Workshop Production, Harlequino: On to Freedom (Dr. Baloardo), and Captain Greedy’s Carnival (Mr. Earnie Bernie, Ensemble). Zivko is also a Teaching Assistant with The Actors’ Gang Education Department.
JEANETTE ROTHSCCHILD (Yetta Rothschild) was born in NYC. She worked with the Irondale Ensemble in Brooklyn, the Judith Shakespeare Company, Starfish Theatreworks, and The Living Theatre in NYC before moving to Los Angeles in 2008. She holds an MFA in theatre from CUNY and studied with Uta Hagen and Patsy Rodenburg. Jeanette has been a member of The Actors’ Gang for ten years. As an Actors’ Gang company member, Jeanette was cast in The Refugee Project Workshop Production, Mate (Sara Fischer), Ghost Sonata (The Fiancée), and OY! (Jenny), amongst many others. Jeanette was the Director of Education for The Actors’ Gang and is a Teaching Artist with The Prison Project.

MASHKA WOLFE (Tatyana Iosifovna Birger) was born in Moscow, Russia, and came to Los Angeles with her family as a refugee when she was five years old. Mashka has been a member of The Actors’ Gang Theater Company for seven years. Past productions include Lysistrata, Angels, Devils and Other Things, and The Refugee Project. She studied theater arts at the University of California, Santa Cruz. She also produced and starred in award-winning web series Lifelike and Y2K Babes, and she has appeared on the television shows Jane the Virgin, I am the Night, and The Climb.

PAULETTE ZUBATA (Gabriela Mia Garcia) has been a member of The Actors’ Gang for five years. Born and raised in Santa Barbara, Paulette studied dance and theater at UC Santa Cruz, and graduated from UC Santa Barbara with a BFA in acting. Past productions include No Exit (Estelle), The New Colossus South American Tour (Gabriela Mia Garcia), Harlequin: On to Freedom European and China tours (Mama Piña), and Captain Greedy’s Carnival (Rough), as well as four Free Shakespeare in the Park for Families productions. Paulette is also a Teaching Artist with The Actors’ Gang Education Department’s after-school and on-site programs.

MIKALA SCHMITZ (Composer, Cellist) has worked with The Actors’ Gang as a cellist and co-composer for six years. She has had the pleasure of working with The Gang on A Midsummer Night’s Dream and The New Colossus, with both productions having the honor of embarking on national and international tours. Mikala performs, composes, and teaches around Los Angeles. She has also worked and/or toured with John Williams, Father John Misty, The Last Shadow Puppets, Christina Perri, StarKid Productions, and Emilie Simon, among many others. She has bachelor and master degrees in cello performance from Oberlin College Conservatory and The Cleveland Institute of Music, respectively.

DAVID ROBBINS (Guitar, Percussion, Sound Design) has been a member of The Actors’ Gang for 34 years and is the Music Director for the company. Past productions include Harlequin: On to Freedom, A Midsummer Night’s Dream, George Orwell’s 1984, The Exonerated, Red Noses, Break The Whip, WTF? Festival, Trial of the Catsonville 9, Tartuffe, Embedded, The Mysteries, Orlando, Mephisto, The Seagull, Titus Andronicus, Mein Kampf, Mayhem: The Invasion, Carnage: A Comedy, Freaks, Violence: The Misadventures of Spike Spangle, Slick Slack Griff Graff, and more. David has also been a film composer since 1990 scoring over 35 features and documentaries.

TIM ROBBINS (Writer, Director) has served for the past 39 years as the Artistic Director for The Actors’ Gang, a theater company he co-founded in 1981 that has over 150 productions and more than 100 awards to their credit. Robbins and The Actors’ Gang productions of A Midsummer Night’s Dream, George Orwell’s 1984, Harlequin: On to Freedom, Embedded, and The New Colossus have toured in forty U.S. states and throughout the world.
About the Artists


Co-founded by Robbins in 2006, The Actors’ Gang’s groundbreaking Prison Project now provides rehabilitative programming for incarcerated men and women on 15 yards, in 13 California prisons, in three juvenile detention camps, and two reentry facilities in the Los Angeles area. Robbins’s advocacy has recently been instrumental in reinstating eight-million dollars into the California State budget for Arts in Corrections. In addition, with Robbins’s support, The Actors’ Gang provides free in-school and after-school programs for thousands of public-school students in the Los Angeles area. Over the years, The Actors’ Gang has received awards and commendations from the California Legislature, the Governor’s office, the U.S. Department of Justice, and the White House.

As an actor, Robbins’s credits include the current Focus Pictures release, Dark Waters, Marjorie Prime, The Secret Life of Words, Mystic River, The Shawshank Redemption, Code 46, Catch a Fire, The Player, Bull Durham, Jacob’s Ladder, The Brink, and the current Hulu series Castle Rock. As a producer/writer/director, his credits include Dead Man Walking, Cradle Will Rock, and Bob Roberts. His most recent film, 45 Seconds of Laughter, recently premiered at the Venice Film Festival and the New York Film Festival. Robbins has won the Academy Award, Golden Globe, SAG Award, Humanitas Award, National Board of Review, the Prix d’Interprétation Masculine at the Cannes Film Festival, and French Officier de L’Ordre des Arts et des Lettres.

He is the proud father of three creative, rebellious, and independent adults and the lucky grandfather of two genius toddlers and another one currently gestating.

BOSCO FLANAGAN (Lighting Design) is a native of Enniskillen in Northern Ireland. Bosco has designed lights for theatre on four continents, winning multiple awards from Edinburgh (Best of The Fest), to New York (Fringe Festival award winner) and Los Angeles (LA Weekly awards). He has worked on projects as diverse as world tours with The Rolling Stones and David Bowie, through the RSC and the Royal Court in London, to the Bolshoi Ballet. Though he currently lives and designs in L.A., his work continues to take him all over the world. Recent work includes Much Ado About Nothing, Romeo and Juliet, Titus Andronicus, Julius Caesar, A Midsummer Night’s Dream, Twelfth Night, and Snow Geese for ISC; Violence: The Misadventures of Spike Spangle, Farmer, Johnny Got His Gun, The Pursuit of Happiness Workshop Production, Harlequino: On to Freedom, George Orwell’s 1984, A Midsummer Night’s Dream, and The New Colossus (International Tour) for The Actors’ Gang; Lysistrata Unbound, Naked, Tempest Redux (won a Stage Raw Award for light design) for Odyssey Theatre; Mine Eyes Have Seen and By The Bog Of Cats for Theatre Banshee; Macbeth In Rhythm for Shakespeare Center; and Hitchhikers Guide to the Galaxy and SOS for Wallis Annenberg.
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JAMES EDWARD (Stage Manager) is originally from Celina, Tennessee, and a former U.S. Marine. He moved to Los Angeles in 2009 and holds an MFA from USC. He has been a member of The Actors’ Gang for three years. Past productions include Fritz Lang’s M Workshop Production, Winter Solstice Pagan Holiday Show, Angels, Devils and Other Things, Much Ado About Avengers, Accidental Death of An Anarchist, Aphrodite’s Holiday Show, and Toy Story Tempest.

LUIS QUINTANA (Assistant Stage Manager) began his acting career while attending the University of Puerto Rico, Río Piedras Campus in 2005. During this time, he was a member of the Teatro Rodante Universitario where he performed in several productions, including Widows by Ariel Dorfman, Oleanna by David Mamet, and As You Like It by William Shakespeare. Luis moved to Los Angeles in 2013 to further pursue a film and theater career. He joined The Actors’ Gang in 2016 where he now works as a Teaching Artist with the theater’s Education Department, and has been a part of productions Captain Greedy’s Carnival, Aphrodite’s Holiday Show, Johnny Got His Gun, and Toy Story Tempest, among others.

THE ROAD COMPANY (Tour Booking) was founded in 1997 by Stephen Lindsay and Brett Sirota. In addition to The New Colossus, current representation includes Wicked, Moulin Rouge! The Musical, Jagged Little Pill, Ain’t Too Proud, Oklahoma!, The Prom, Beetlejuice, Charlie and the Chocolate Factory, The SpongeBob Musical, Bandstand, The Band’s Visit, and more.

About the Artists

THE ACTORS’ GANG was founded in 1981 by a group of young actors looking to build a theater that would present relevant and vibrantly entertaining plays. Over the past 38 years, The Actors’ Gang has performed for audiences in Los Angeles and throughout the world, on five continents and in 40 U.S. States.

The company’s groundbreaking Prison Project is currently in 13 California prisons, serving incarcerated women, men, and children with rehabilitation programs that significantly reduce the recidivism rate. Each year, thousands of children in Los Angeles public schools discover confidence and creativity with our Education Department through in-school immersion and after-school programs and by participating in classes that encourage acceptance, respect, and team building in a fun and impactful way.

The Actors’ Gang ensemble has included accomplished actors such as Jack Black, Lee Arenberg, John Cusack, John C. Reilly, Brent Hinkley, Helen Hunt, Kate Walsh, Kyle Gass, Fisher Stevens, Ned Bellamy, Jeremy Piven, Ebbé Roe Smith, Kate Mulligan, and Tim Robbins. The theater company has presented the work of innovative theater artists, including Georges Bigot, Simon Abkarian, Charles Mee, Culture Clash, Bill Rauch and The Cornerstone Theatre Company, Tracy Young, Namaste Theater Company, Roger Güenver Smith, Eric Bogosian, Oskar Eustis, Danny Hoch, Beth Milles, David Schweizer, Brian Kulick, Stefan Haves, Jason Reed, Michael Schlitt, and Tenacious D.

Guest artists who have appeared on The Actors’ Gang stage include Jackson Browne, Sarah Silverman, Ben Gibbard, John Doe, Tom Morello, Jenny Lewis, Wayne Kramer, Paul Provenza, Zooey Deschanel, Serj Tankian, David Crosby, Pink, Felicity Huffman, Jill Sobule, William H. Macy, Phillip Baker Hall, Jeanne Tripplehorn, T.C. Boyle, and the late, beloved, Gore Vidal.

Past touring productions include The New Colossus, Harlequino: On to Freedom, A Midsummer Night’s Dream, George Orwell’s 1984, The Exonerated, Tartuffe, Embedded, The Trial of the Catonsville Nine, and The Guys. The Actors’ Gang has toured the U.S. and performed throughout the world, from London to Milan, Bucharest, Athens, Madrid, Barcelona, Bogota, Beijing, Shanghai, Hong Kong, Melbourne, Buenos Aires, and recently, Santiago and Concepcion, Chile.

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César Pelli (1926–2019)
Hancher architect and friend

César Pelli was a brilliant architect, and it was truly an honor to have him design the current Hancher Auditorium. We were even more honored to call him our friend.

That friendship began immediately after Pelli Clark Pelli Architects was selected to design a new Hancher Auditorium following the destruction of the original building by the flooding of 2008. César felt a personal connection to Hancher’s work, and he made sure to connect with members of the staff and the University of Iowa community to ensure his ideas honored Hancher’s past and elevate its future. At his firm’s offices in New Haven, Connecticut, he devoted an entire room to the project, and he was always happy to share his thoughts about the building with visitors.

César was delighted by the beautiful setting—often commenting that it was the most gorgeous site for which he had designed a building—and he was committed to making the most of the space. He brought the indoors and the outdoors together in the lobby spaces and rehearsal room and designed an exceptional performance space.

His joy for the project was palpable from beginning to end. He came to Iowa City for the major milestones of the project, including our Site Ceremony connecting the original Hancher to the new, our Leave Your Mark beam signing (after which he joined hundreds of construction works on the as-yet-unfinished stage for lunch), and our Gala Opening. On opening night, César took the stage with Hancher Executive Director Chuck Swanson to launch a new era for Hancher. We’ll always remember his words that night: “Hancher was built with love.”

We are saddened to lose our friend. We are blessed to have the opportunity to serve our campus and community in a building that will always stand as a tribute to César.
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The Vision for Hancher Auditorium: Cultivating the Arts at Iowa

This is the third in a series of essays about Virgil Hancher and his vision for the arts in general, and Hancher Auditorium in particular, at the University of Iowa. The essays will appear in playbills throughout this season and will be available on the Hancher website, as well.

By Daniel Boscaljon

Virgil Hancher was an important part of a larger context that championed innovations in the fusion of academics, the arts, and student life that coalesced in the vision for what is now called Hancher Auditorium on the University of Iowa campus. Hancher had recognized the need for a vital student center due to his experience of isolation as a freshman. Then he was part of campus life in the early 1920s when administrators first began to envision Iowa as a cultural leader.

President Walter Jessup and Graduate Dean Carl Seashore initiated the Iowa Idea of integrating creative and critical work and bringing artists into academic contexts. Thanks to them, Iowa was one of the first schools to reward creative work with graduate degrees beginning in 1922. This work came in conjunction with the creative leadership of departments in the arts that were beginning to emerge.

Philip Clapp came to Iowa in 1919 and both created and led the School of Music until his death in 1954, with courses earning academic credit beginning in 1921. One of Clapp's innovations was to broadcast his music appreciation/music theory course over the radio beginning in 1931, with a positive response from "students" all over the state. The Department of Speech was not far behind following the appointment of E. C. Mabie, who led the department from 1923–1956. Mabie worked together with the Englert Theatre and the university (using what is now Macbride Auditorium) as stages.

A third important ingredient in the foundation of what became Hancher Auditorium is the Iowa Memorial Union and its director Rufus Fitzgerald, who was also active in the cultural scene of the early 1920s. He left the YMCA in 1923 to become as the director of the IMU, which was beginning to raise funds to construct a building that would house extracurricular clubs as well as serve as a place where students and faculty could socialize. Virgil Hancher recognized the need for a Union early on, writing of the need for one in a 1919 editorial. He became one of Fitzgerald's active fundraisers among alumni in 1923.
By 1933, following SUI’s acquisition of land on the west bank of the Iowa River, Jessup, Clapp, and Fitzgerald joined together to dream about an arts campus along the river.

Soon after, the campus saw an explosive expansion of academic and artistic hybrids in various departments throughout the liberal arts. Wilbur Schramm began the Iowa Writers’ Workshop in 1936, and Lester Longman, the first chair of the Department of Art, merged Art History and Studio Arts together beginning in 1938. Grant Wood taught at Iowa from 1934–1941, as did Robert Penn Warren in 1941.

This innovative foundation led to additional new developments. For example, a collaboration between Norman Foerster (English) and Harrison J. Thornton (History) using history and the social sciences as a way to discuss the production of literary texts became the American Studies program in 1947 with Alexander Kern serving as its first director.

Thus, by 1941 and Hancher’s inauguration as President of SUI, the campus had created a clear culture of aesthetic and academic innovation—one that
Hancher had participated in from its beginnings. Some changes were made in leadership at this time, including Paul Engle taking over the Writers’ Workshop. The idea for an auditorium was important as an expansion on the space of the IMU, one that was designed to provide a home that would showcase work of the caliber of its increasingly esteemed faculty and serve as a home for a vital, creative student body.

The larger international context of conflict and racialized hatred made the success of SUI’s innovative leadership even more important. In an age of nationalist attempts to use fear to unite people in hatred, the creation of a space of unity via the arts was an important alternative. It is in this spirit that Earl E. Harper—who took over Fitzgerald’s role as Director of the IMU in 1938, declared in his October 30, 1943 speech Fine Arts when Peace Comes:

...the more the limited interests of the present keep the minds of the people narrowed and subjugated, the more urgent becomes the desire to unite the politically divided world under the flag of truth and beauty. ...[while] the fine arts as the free expression of the free spirit of mankind are driven out or forgotten for a while in ancient centers where they once reigned supreme, they will find new homes.

The State University of Iowa had developed a forty-year legacy of becoming an inviting home of the free expression of the free spirit of humans under the flag of truth and beauty. Hancher’s vision for an auditorium would cement this vision and commit the University of Iowa to continuing to create, innovate, and promote a liberated and expanded vision of human community.

Daniel Boscaljon is a longtime contributor to arts writing in the ICR, often providing interviews, reviews, and essays on aesthetics for Little Village and The Englert as well as for Hancher. An independent scholar, teacher, and arts critic, he is committed to inviting others to incorporate wisdom and joy as part of everyday life. In addition to teaching workshops and holding free public conversations in the area, Daniel also has three current ventures including the Center for Humanist Inquiries (professional consultations), Coffee with Dan (spiritual direction and philosophical life coaching), and The Thoughtful Life (a non-profit venture that includes his “Making Space for Yourself” podcast). You can find his writing and more information about his services at danielboscaljon.com.
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