




# HANCHER AUDITORIUM




THE UNIVERSITY OF IOWA OPERA THEATRE PRESENTS


# FIERCE

MUSIC BY **WILLIAM MENEFIELD**

LIBRETTO BY **SHEILA WILLIAMS**



**Friday & Saturday**  
**April 26 & 27, 2024**  
**7:30 p.m.**



*Co-produced by the  
University of Iowa School of Music,  
Performing Arts Production Unit,  
and Hancher Auditorium*

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# FIERCE

MUSIC BY WILLIAM MENEFIELD

LIBRETTO BY SHEILA WILLIAMS

Friday, April 26, 2024, at 7:30 p.m.

Saturday, April 27, 2024, at 7:30 p.m.

Hancher Auditorium, the University of Iowa

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## ARTISTIC TEAM

Director	WILLIAM MENEFIELD
Conductor	DAVID GOMPPER
Choreographer	CAMI REZABEK
Scenic/Costume Designer	MARGARET WENK-KUCHLBAUER
Lighting Designer	BRYON WINN
Rehearsal Pianists	MARIYA AKHADJANOVA, MINJI KWON
Stage Manager	KATYBETH SCHMID*
Assistant Stage Manager	MEENAKSHI CHINMAI
Assistant Lighting Designer	NICOLE BLODIG
Animator	EMILY BERKHEIMER

\* Member of Actors' Equity Association, The Union of Professional Actors and Stage Managers in the United States

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*Please be advised this production includes the use of haze.*

*The performance will last approximately 1 hour and 30 minutes.*

*There will be no intermission.*

*There will be a post-show reception in the Stanley Café following the performance.*



## HANCHER EVENT PARTNERS

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# CAST

## MUSES:

Rumer	KATE O'CONNELL
Nyomi	FINLEY McVAY
Morgan	BRIE BEVANS
Vesta	MADELINE YANKELL
Ms. Lee-Adler	LAUREN KUNDEL
Jackie (Rumer's Mother)	LAUREN KUNDEL
Margaret (Morgan's Mother)	SARAH HACHTMAN
Jim (Morgan's Father)	FOO CHEN GUI
Mary (Vesta's Mother)	ALIX BUSHARD
John (Vesta's Father)	ETHAN ELSBERND
Trolls and Ensemble	ALIX BUSHARD, TATUM CALDERWOOD, ELIZABETH CERRITO, ETHAN ELSBERND, OLIVIA STANGE, YAXIN SUN, ALLISON WRIGHT
Dancers	FABIOLA CASTANEDA-SANTIAGO, CHLOE SCHWAB, JOSLYN SHEELEY, TRINITY WOODY
Ballet Soloist	FABIOLA CASTANEDA-SANTIAGO

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# ORCHESTRA

<b>Violin</b>	YESTYN GRIFFITH
<b>Cello</b>	HANNA RUMORA
<b>Contrabass</b>	NATALIA TERRA
<b>Flute</b>	RYAN MacDONALD
<b>Clarinet</b>	SAYYOD MIRZOMURODOV
<b>Trumpet</b>	EMMA CRYER, ANNA KELLY
<b>Percussion</b>	McKENNA BLENK
<b>Drum set</b>	ANABEL PEREZ-BRENNEN
<b>Piano</b>	JASON LEE
<b>Electric Keyboard</b>	JOHN LOOS
<b>Acoustic/electric guitar</b>	JOSEPH SHANKS
<b>Bass guitar</b>	JOSE MEDRANO



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# SYNOPSIS

Four teenaged girls meet in an essay-writing class at their high school. While Rumer, Morgan, Nyomi, and Vesta are strangers to each other, they are also strangers to themselves. Their teacher is supportive and somewhat clueless. But that doesn't stop her from asking a provocative prompt: "Tell me who you are." This provocation sends the girls on a journey of discovery—individually and together. As they traverse the mountains and valleys of their experiences, they are stalked by a ridiculous posse known as "The Trolls" who represent threats both real and imagined.

Rumer explores loss and love as she mourns the death of a special friend who took their own life. Morgan is caught between her dreams of becoming an artist and those of her parents; she is constrained by their sacrifice and expectations. Nyomi is the "It" girl of her school but her vivacity is a mask for self-doubt and fear. And Vesta, the youngest and most vulnerable of the group, arms herself against the ugliness and instability of her troubled home life by disappearing into a fantasy world.

Together, Rumer, Morgan, Nyomi, and Vesta maneuver through the obstacle course of their lives with focus, determination, and tenacity. By supporting each other, they confront their fears and illuminate the path for those who follow them.

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## COMPOSER & DIRECTOR'S NOTE

Greetings, beautiful people! Thank you for joining us this evening. I consider it an honor that you chose to spend some quality time with us. This production is especially unique for me. I never imagined that I'd make my directorial debut at the university where I teach and for a piece that I composed. My hope is that you will leave here tonight feeling entertained, enlightened, and encouraged. Perhaps it will be a lyric that inspires you, a costume that excites you, a melody that moves you, or a rhythm that makes you dance!



*Fierce* tells the story of four teenaged girls, so it is easy to assume that it was written for an audience of young women. However, I truly believe that there is something in this piece for everyone. So, sit back, relax, and open yourself up to the possibilities. I think you'll find yourself reminiscing on the past, being grateful for the present, and enthusiastic about the future. Thank you! I appreciate you! Enjoy!

-William Menefield



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# FEELING FIERCE

By Sheila J. Williams

*Fierce* is about ... growing up, facing fears, taking responsibility, being compassionate, enjoying time spent with loved ones, standing up for oneself, and gathering courage to tackle the difficult moments. *Fierce* is about life. The story is told through the eyes of four teenaged girls living in contemporary society. For source material, the creative team coordinated a series of conversations with ten young women, who were (some still are) participants with community-based organizations Music Resource Center (“MRC”) and WordPlay Cincinnati. They are known as the “Muses,” talented musicians, composers, journalists, and poets. Later in the process, a trio of young women from i.imagine, a northern Kentucky-based organization, merged their talents for photography with this core group, documenting inspiration-gathering sessions on film.



**The conversations with the “Muses,” held over a period of a year, were richly layered, consisting of exchanges running the gamut from parental expectations and college admissions anxiety to spirited debates on lipstick color choices!**

The idea for the opera that became *Fierce* was the brainchild of former artistic development director Marcus Küchle who, in 2018, wanted to celebrate the Cincinnati Opera’s one hundredth season (2020) with, among other projects, an opera highlighting the lives of girls in contemporary society. The father of a daughter himself, Marcus sought to illuminate the challenges and celebrate the triumphs of young women navigating the terrain leading from girl- to woman-hood. The conversations with the “Muses,” held over a period of a

year, were richly layered, consisting of exchanges running the gamut from parental expectations and college admissions anxiety to spirited debates on lipstick color choices! They included passionate exchanges about ethnic identity and discussions on dating behavior. And the conversations concluded with a renaissance of ideas about what it means to be a woman in this world—as it is now. The deep-dives of conversation between the librettist and the “Muses” were held in a conclave of all female participants.

From these conversations emerged a story supported by four leads—Rumer, Morgan, Nyomi, Vesta—and a focus on issues that were of keen interest and relevance not only to the young women but also to the female members of the creative team (i.e. D. Lynn Meyers, stage director and Sheila Williams, librettist). The geography of the life of a young woman encompasses many layers and the excavation is not always easy or straightforward. There was as much laughter about the pizza served as there were silences once confidences had been revealed. The encroachment of technology into the lives of 21st-century people has meant not only increased access to news,

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2023-2024

# FEELING FIERCE

information, and entertainment, but also the erosion of privacy and exposure to a higher level of cruelty and abuse. The chorus known as “Trolls” arose from these discussions.

The names of the lead characters are also linked to the strengths of women throughout the centuries. We think of “Vesta” as a domestic Roman goddess of the hearth. But some archaeologists have posited that this incarnation is built on an earlier deity, a goddess of fire. “Nyomi” is a derivative of names from several cultures including Japanese, as well as “Naomi” from the Old Testament who may appear to be a follower but, in fact, may represent strength and resolve. “Morgan” is a derivative of the powerful Celtic goddess known by many names including the “Morrigan.” She is a shape-shifter and, from the stories told in Irish lore, she is not to be trifled with! “Rumer” is a name with mysterious and conflicting origins (English, German, Welsh) and vague meaning. Rumer the character is mysterious and full of conflicting desires. But she can focus on what’s important—when she wants to!

These women are warriors and it is their spirit that embodies the best definitions of the word “fierce”: determined, tenacious, strong. They will remake the world.

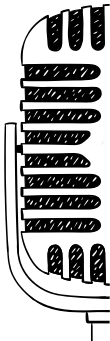
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# PRODUCTION STAFF

Production Director.....Briana Maxwell\*  
Production Stage Manager ..... KatyBeth Schmid\*  
Associate Company Manager..... Jason Millsap

## SCENIC AND PROPS

Technical Director ..... Don Schneider  
Scenery Shop Manager..... Mike Nolte  
Scenic Charge Artist Manager..... Joan Newhouse  
Props Artisan..... Gina Smothers  
Scenery Construction Crew..... Nicholas Feingold<sup>1</sup>, Delia Hallett<sup>1</sup>,  
Payton Hilton<sup>1</sup>, Allison Kruzich<sup>1</sup>, Grant Necker<sup>1</sup>,  
Ava O'Neil<sup>1</sup>, Christian Roque<sup>1</sup>, Kaden Walker<sup>1</sup>  
Scenic Painters..... Oliver Engelhardt, Bella Fortunato<sup>2</sup>, Blake LaVanchy<sup>1</sup>,  
Thomas Moberg, Nicole Vogt  
Props Assistants ..... Reese Morgan, Connor Muston<sup>1</sup>

## COSTUMES

Dance/Opera Costume Shop Manager ..... Cindy Kubu  
Wardrobe Staff ..... Joyce McKinley, Andrea Wright, Fiona Zachel

## LIGHTING AND ELECTRICS

Lighting Supervisor ..... Joshua Nathanson  
Electrics Crew ..... Jared Kiebel, Nicole Blodig<sup>1</sup>, La Della Gallagher<sup>1</sup>,  
Vi Kasych<sup>1</sup>, Colin Kiernan<sup>1</sup>, Gabby Johnson<sup>1</sup>  
Light Board Operator..... Gabi Vanek

## AUDIO/VIDEO

Audio/Video Specialist ..... Rachel Duncan  
Audio Engineer..... Christopher Jensen  
Digital Media Specialist ..... Emily Berkheimer  
Supertitle Operator..... Nathan Brown<sup>2</sup>  
Audio/Video Crew ..... Erika Chagdes<sup>1</sup>, Molly Costello<sup>1</sup>, David Gaunt<sup>1</sup>  
Mic Wranglers..... Erika Chagdes<sup>1</sup>, Audrey Frett<sup>1</sup>, Andelyn Sunderman<sup>1</sup>

## PRODUCTION CREWS

Performing Arts Production Unit Run Crew..... Nicole Vogt  
Hancher Stagehands ..... David Gaunt<sup>1</sup>, Brynna Hash<sup>1</sup>, James Halverson<sup>1</sup>,  
Colin Kiernan<sup>1</sup>, Emma Merkes<sup>1</sup>  
Spotlight Operators..... Emily Arvidson, Alexandra Hodal<sup>1</sup>, Colin Kiernan<sup>1</sup>,  
Shaun Klimesh<sup>1</sup>, Jackson Kopesky, Tyler Salow, Matthew Schulze<sup>1</sup>

*Thank you to our International Alliance of the Theatrical Stage Employees  
(I.A.T.S.E. Local 690) and Hancher Production*

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*\* Members of Actors' Equity Association, The Union of Professional Actors  
and Stage Managers in the United States*

<sup>1</sup> University of Iowa undergraduate student    <sup>2</sup> University of Iowa graduate student



# FROM THE SCENIC DESIGNER'S DESK



“ The set is inspired by the '60s and '70s later Brutalist movement of concrete architecture, used as a symbol of institutional strength, power, school, expectations, what the characters are up against in their journey, for their decisions about life in the present and beyond. Designers like Paul Rudolph, the repetition of shape and forms. These austere urban buildings—everybody in high school knows this kind of building—so it's relatable, with innate power of scale and proportion. ”

– Margaret Wenk-Kuchlbauer  
Scenery and Costume Designer

# ABOUT THE ARTISTS

**DR. WILLIAM MENEFIELD** (*Composer/Director*) wrote his first piece at age eight, responding to his mother's removal of all televisions from their home. Since then, he's had several notable achievements, including earning a doctorate degree in music composition from the University of Texas at Austin. Dr. Menefield has produced music for the HBO series *The Watchmen* and his choral/orchestral piece, *Prism*, was performed at Carnegie Hall in May 2019. Dr. Menefield was commissioned by the Cincinnati Opera to compose *Fierce* in 2018 and it premiered in July 2022. He currently serves as assistant professor of jazz studies at the University of Iowa and is making his directorial debut with this production.

**SHEILA WILLIAMS** (*Librettist*) is the author of seven novels including *Dancing on the Edge of the Roof*, adapted by Netflix for the film *Juanita* and *Things Past Telling*, which was on the *New York Times* 2022 recommended summer reading list. Her most recent book, *No Better Time*, is set in World War II era Europe, inspired by the 6888 Central Postal Directory Battalion, a unit comprised entirely of women of color.

**CAMI REZABEK** (*Choreographer*) is a fourth-year student at the University of Iowa pursuing a BFA in dance. Outside of choreographing for *Fierce*, her projects this semester have included performing *Panorama* with the Martha Graham Dance Company, providing live audio description for the University of Iowa Dance Company, and choreographing a capstone project exploring Regency-era social dances.

**DAVID GOMPPER** (*Conductor*) has lived and worked professionally as a pianist, a conductor, and a composer in New York, San Diego, London, Nigeria, Michigan, Texas and Iowa. He studied at the Royal College of Music in London with composers Jeremy Dale Roberts and Humphrey Searle, and pianist Phyllis Sellick. After teaching in Nigeria, he received his doctorate from the University of Michigan and taught at the University of Texas, Arlington. Since 1991, he has been Professor of Composition and Director of the Center for New Music at the University of Iowa. In 2002-2003, Gompper was a Fulbright Scholar, teaching, performing, and conducting at the Moscow Conservatory. He received an Academy Award from the American Academy of Arts and Letters in 2009, a Fromm Commission in 2013, and a Guggenheim Fellowship in 2020.

**MARGARET WENK-KUCHLBAUER** (*Scenery and Costume Designer*) is the scenery and costume designer for the Performing Arts Production Unit, collaborating with many UI faculty, staff, and guests on productions for the Martha-Ellen Tye Opera Theatre and the Department of Dance. Her recent designs for opera include *L'amico Fritz*, *La Traviata*, *Il Matrimonio Segreto*, and *HMS Pinafore*. *Dance Gala 2023* and *UIDC 2024* are her latest designs for dance.

**BRYON WINN** (*Lighting Designer*) is a professor of design and Director of Theatre for the Department of Theatre Arts, and is delighted to work with his two colleagues Margaret Wenk-Kuchlbauer and William Menefield on this production. Bryon has designed lighting, media, and/or scenery for theatre, opera, dance, and corporate events throughout the country. This includes over 250 productions and 50 premieres of new plays. His previous work with the School of Music includes *L'amico Fritz*, *Three Decembers*, *Grand Night for Singing*, *Così Fan Tutte*, and *The Pirates of Penzance*. Bryon is a member of United Scenic Artists 829.

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# ABOUT THE ARTISTS

**MARIYA AKHADJANOVA** (*Rehearsal Pianist*), a native of Uzbekistan, is a DMA candidate in piano performance and pedagogy at the University of Iowa where she studies under the tutelage of Dr. Ksenia Nosikova. She is currently working as a staff collaborative pianist at the School of Music, University of Iowa. Mariya has won various solo competitions such as "Golden Classical Music Awards" International Competition and Swiss International Music Competition, and has performed at Carnegie Hall and Merkin Concert Hall in New York, as well as on various stages in Iowa.

**MINJI KWON** (*Rehearsal Pianist*) is a versatile collaborator, educator, and musician. She received the Ambassadorial Scholarship from the Rotary Foundation to pursue studies in the U.S. and was awarded the Iowa Performance Fellowship during her DMA at the University of Iowa. Kwon, an adjunct professor at New York University with a master's degree in collaborative piano, has performed globally, including in Seoul, London, and New York City's renowned venues. She holds a DMA in piano performance from the University of Iowa, where she works as a staff pianist at the University of Iowa School of Music.

**KATYBETH SCHMID** (*Stage Manager*) is the production stage manager for the Department of Dance and the Martha-Ellen Tye Opera Theatre at the University of Iowa. She received an MFA in stage management from Iowa and spent many years working for Cirque du Soleil in Las Vegas and internationally. Recent work at Iowa includes *La Traviata*, *L'amico Fritz*, *Dance Gala 2022*, and *Dance Gala 2023*. KatyBeth is a proud member of the Actors' Equity Association.

**MEENAKSHI CHINMAI** (*Assistant Stage Manager*) is a second-year MFA stage manager. *Fierce* is very close to her heart and she is very excited to work on this new opera. She had a wonderful time working with the cast, creative team, and the crew. Meenakshi's previous University of Iowa stage management credits include *Men on Boats* (SM), *West Illinois Glass House* (SM), *La Traviata* (ASM), and *The Children's Hour* (ASM). She is extremely grateful for her mentor Melissa Turner, KatyBeth, Sam Paradis, her friends Savanha, JJ, and Maggie, her mother Charu, and her best friend Terry Converse. Meenakshi hopes everyone enjoys the show.

**NICOLE BLODIG** (*Assistant Lighting Designer*) is a fourth-year undergraduate lighting designer. After graduation in May, she will be working for Utah Festival of Opera and Musical Theatre as the assistant head electrician.

**EMILY BERKHEIMER** (*Animator*) is a local digital media designer skilled in interactive art and generative media, blending her background in art and technology to create captivating experiences for audiences. She currently serves as the digital media specialist for performing arts at the University of Iowa, where she provides technical support to faculty and students using digital media in classrooms, research, and performances.

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# ABOUT THE ARTISTS

**BRIE BEVANS** (*Morgan*), mezzo-soprano, is a fifth-year undergraduate studying vocal performance and music education. Most recently, she has been involved in shows such as *H.M.S. Pinafore*, *Beauty and the Beast* (Mrs. Potts), and *Freaky Friday* (Ellie), and is currently a counselor for the TKM Youth Theater Camp program. Outside of theater, Brie also sings in the Black Pop Music Ensemble at Iowa, as well as lead vocals for her band, Joint Custody. She is beyond excited to share the dedication that the *Fierce* team has put into telling this story!



**ALIX BUSHARD** (*Mary, Vesta's Mother; Ensemble; Troll*) is a third-year undergraduate student and soprano studying voice under voice area head, Dr. Élise DesChamps. She's had the opportunity to play roles in *Legally Blonde: The Musical*, *The Music Man*, and *Fiddler On the Roof*. *Fierce* is Alix's first performance with the School of Music as a collegiate performer. Alix notably sings the National Anthem for BIG10 sports and holds the position of vice president of the University Choir.



**TATUM CALDERWOOD** (*Ensemble, Troll*) is so excited to be involved in her first opera with the University of Iowa. She is a second-year vocal performance major studying under Dr. Élise DesChamps. Tatum has previously performed in community theatre musicals such as *Mary Poppins*, *Spamalot*, and *Songs for a New World*. She would like to thank Dr. Menefield, her fellow actors, and all crew members and those who made the show possible.



**FABIOLA CASTANEDA-SANTIAGO** (*Dancer, Ballet Soloist*) is currently in her third year at the University of Iowa pursuing a degree in biology with a minor in dance. She is also an undergraduate researcher in the Forbes lab. This is Fabiola's first time performing on the Hancher stage and she is excited to be sharing this experience with you all.



## ABOUT THE ARTISTS

**ELIZABETH CERRITO** (*Ensemble, Troll*) is a first-year masters' degree student studying voice performance at the University of Iowa. She received an undergraduate degree in music production and recording arts from Elon University in 2023. While at Elon University, she had roles in Puccini's *Suor Angelica* in Italian and in Bernstein's *Trouble in Tahiti* in English. Elizabeth has also participated in master classes with American dramatic soprano Angela Brown and the Blue Heron Renaissance Choir.



**ETHAN ELSBERND** (*John, Vesta's Father; Ensemble; Troll*) is a third-year BM student studying with Professor Stephen Swanson. Upon acceptance, he was pleased to be awarded a scholarship through the Martha-Ellen Tye Opera Endowment, encouraging a diligent study of voice. For two seasons, he has performed in productions with the Cedar Rapids Opera Company, and as a soloist in their Veteran's Day tribute recital. This summer, the American Gothic Performing Arts Festival will feature him in their productions of *Gianni Schicchi* (Marco) and *Hello Dolly* (Ensemble).



Malaysian tenor **FOO CHEN GUI** (*Jim, Morgan's Father*) is currently a first-year master's degree student and graduate teaching assistant at the University of Iowa School of Music majoring in vocal performance under the tutelage of Dr. Élise DesChamps. In the summer of 2024, Gui will be joining the Opera Quad Cities in *La bohème* where he will play Rodolfo. In the fall of 2022, Gui performed at the university's opera production *Il Matrimonio Segreto* as the leading role, Paolino, after performing Rodolfo in *La bohème* in Bay View Music Festival Main Stage Opera in Petoskey, Michigan. Gui's recent achievements include winning first place and lieder prize at the Chin Yong Vocal Competition in Kuala Lumpur in 2023, winner of the National Operatic Singing Competition 2021 held by the Kuala Lumpur City Opera, and second runner-up in the 43rd Malaysia National Vocal Competition in 2019.



**SARAH HACHTMAN** (*Margaret, Morgan's Mother*), soprano, is a student of Élise DesChamps, pursuing a master's degree in voice. She performed recently in *L'amico Fritz* (University of Iowa), *La Traviata* (University of Iowa), *The Secret Garden* (City Circle), and the premieres of *Orphan Train to Iowa* (Crescendo) and *The Machine Stops*. Sarah loves spending time with her husband and four daughters and is grateful for the encouragement and support of family, friends, and teachers.



## ABOUT THE ARTISTS

**LAUREN KUNDEL** (*Ms. Lee-Adler; Jackie, Rumer's Mother*), a first-year master's degree student under the tutelage of Dr. Élise DesChamps. A native of Muscatine, Iowa, she received a bachelor of music degree from the University of Iowa. As well as being an active performer, she also enjoys teaching private voice lessons at the Marion Music Academy. Lauren is honored to be making her operatic debut in *Fierce*. She also would like to thank Dr. Menefield, Dr. Gompper, and Dr. DesChamps!



**FINLEY McVAY** (*Nyomi*) is a first-year vocal performance major at the University of Iowa. She is studying with Élise DesChamps, whom she adores. This is Finley's first production at Iowa, and she cannot be more excited. She is from Mount Vernon, Iowa, and made an effort to get involved with opera and theater outside of school shows. Finley was involved with Cedar Rapids Opera's production of *Così fan Tutte* and *Gianni Schicchi*. She would love to thank her former vocal coach and mentor, the late, Cameron Sullenberger; her supportive parents and sibling; her gorgeous friends; and the amazing staff and team of *Fierce*. Enjoy the show!!



**KATE O'CONNELL** (*Rumer*), soprano, is a junior pursuing bachelor's degrees in vocal performance and English. She studies with Dr. Élise DesChamps. In addition to her vast musical theatre experience, Kate has recently been a featured soloist for various orchestral works, including Mozart's *Laudate Dominum*, Vivaldi's *Magnificat*, and Schubert's Mass in G. Her opera scene work includes *Hansel and Gretel* (Gretel), *Don Giovanni* (Donna Elvira), *Hamlet* (Ophélie), and *Die Zauberflöte* (Pamina). Kate has also appeared in *Il Matrimonio segreto* (Elisetta u/s) and *La Traviata* with the U of I Opera.



**CHLOE SCHWAB** (*Dancer*) is a first-year student at the University of Iowa. She is majoring in theatre arts on the music theatre track, and minoring in dance. Chloe has previous performance experience in multiple musicals, *The Nutcracker* ballet, competitive dance for over a decade, and now continues to teach dance at her hometown studio, Tina's Dance Studio. Enjoy the show!



## ABOUT THE ARTISTS

**JOSLYN SHEELEY** (*Dancer*) is a first-year student majoring in psychology and political science with minors in criminology and dance on the pre-law track. This is her first show at the University of Iowa, and she is very excited! She is grateful to her family and friends for their love and support, and she is thankful to everyone involved for making it such an amazing experience.



**OLIVIA STANGE** (*Ensemble, Troll*) is proud to be a part of her first production with the University of Iowa. She is in her last year of college studying English and French and is excited to pursue a master's degree in education. In her free time, Olivia enjoys reading, climbing, and spending time with her friends and family. Enjoy the show!



**YAXIN SUN** (*Ensemble, Troll*) is a mezzo-soprano in vocal performance at the University of Iowa, studying with Dr. Élise DesChamps. Previous credits include *Amahl and the Night Visitors*, *Speed Dating Tonight*, *My Big Operatic Wedding*, and *H.M.S. Pinafore*.



**TRINITY WOODY** (*Dancer*) is a freshman at the University of Iowa with a double major in dance and interdepartmental studies with an emphasis in art management. She is currently involved in three pieces this semester outside of *Fierce*: Martha Graham's *Panorama*, Zena Bibler's faculty piece *Any for Many*, and Cami Rezabek's BFA capstone.



## ABOUT THE ARTISTS

**ALLISON WRIGHT** (*Ensemble, Troll*) is thrilled to be a part of her fourth production with the University of Iowa. She is a third-year music education and vocal performance major studying under Professor Stephen Swanson. She previously had chorus roles in the UI productions of *H.M.S. Pinafore*, *La Traviata*, and *L'amico Fritz*.



**MADLINE YANKELL** (*Vesta*) is honored to bring the bubbly Vesta to life. As someone who obsessed over dogs as a child, Madeline felt qualified to manifest a love of otters. A master's degree student in music education, she recently defended her thesis on movement and choral singing. Past performances include *La Traviata* (chorus) and *Dialogues des Carmélites* (nun) in addition to choral solo opportunities. She hopes that you leave tonight feeling fierce and pugnacious!





# THE CERTIFICATE IN SOCIAL JUSTICE AND THE PERFORMING ARTS

# IOWA

Theatre Arts

By Bronwyn Stewart

Art has often been a catalyst for change in our society. Often, artists and performers are working at the front lines of movements that increase inclusion, give voice to new and differing perspectives, and create space for conversation and compassion.

The need for such work has only intensified in recent years as we are becoming increasingly aware of injustices across the community, the nation, and the globe.

The University of Iowa's Certificate in Social Justice and the Performing Arts offers undergraduate students a framework to address these demands, combining study of the performing arts with courses in race and ethnicity; gender, women's, and sexuality studies; global and transnational studies; and the environment and ecological justice. Students have the opportunity to learn methods and practices for creating socially engaged and community-based creative projects.

"Students in the Theatre Arts were advocating for more productions centering the voices of BIPOC and LGBTQIA people," says Loyce Arthur, an associate professor in the Department of Theatre Arts who coordinates the certificate. She collaborated with fellow faculty in theatre arts, the Department of Dance, School of Music, and Department of Gender, Women's, and Sexuality Studies to design the certificate, which encourages cross-disciplinary studies and fosters the

development of performing arts projects focused on advancing social justice.

"We wanted to create a formal process to help students align their studies more closely with their own interests," Arthur explains. "We wanted a way to meet their desire to create impactful work for their communities and peers."

The certificate asks students to also examine who their creative work will impact, who can benefit, and how they can make ethical choices as they develop, collaborate, and create their capstone projects.

"The certificate has really given me a wider scope," says Jason Vernon, a second-year student in theatre arts who is currently pursuing the certificate. "A performance is so much more than the performance itself; it's everything happening around the actual art piece. Pursuing the certificate has made me more aware of my own responsibility as an artist to take action towards inclusion."

Vernon came to the University of Iowa with a love for theatre and dance that had flourished through middle and high school. "I began to feel that just being a performer wasn't doing enough to make a change," Vernon explains, reflecting on how his pursuit of social justice and activism has grown in tandem with his love of the arts.

In his first semester at the University of Iowa, Jason took a class in the Department of Dance called "Performing Power, Performing Protest," one of many classes that fit into the certificate's malleable structure that explores how performance can challenge power structures, address social equity, and influence social change.

"I hadn't even heard of the certificate when I signed up," Jason admits. He was simply

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Jason Vernon, a second-year student in Theatre Arts who is currently pursuing a Certificate in Social Justice and the Performing Arts.





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**– Jason Vernon**

following his interests—and that’s exactly how the certificate is designed to work.

With a multitude of classes offered across disciplines, students can mold the certificate to fit their individual interests and schedules and develop their own project. Jason, for example, is currently doing research in disability studies and relating that to theatre practices.

“My goal is to create a radically accessible piece of theatre,” he explains about the direction of his capstone project, “so I’m in the process of reaching out to the disability community in town and on campus.”

Through close mentorship with faculty and collaboration with students from other disciplines, the Certificate in Social Justice and the Performing Arts is meant to help students access and hone human-

centered skills in empathy, compassion, and social responsibility, and gain a sense of belonging, equity, and inclusion as they approach their work and partner with others.

“For me,” Vernon says, “the certificate is about finding the people who are already doing this social justice work and learning from them. It’s about being part of the conversation. That way, when I leave Iowa City, I have the resources to create social justice performances in new places.”

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*Bronwyn Stewart is a PhD candidate in the Department of English at the University of Iowa and is currently working as a graduate assistant of marketing and communication for Performing Arts at Iowa. Her research brings together literary studies, feminist philosophy, and public performance art.*

# PERFORMING ARTS AT IOWA

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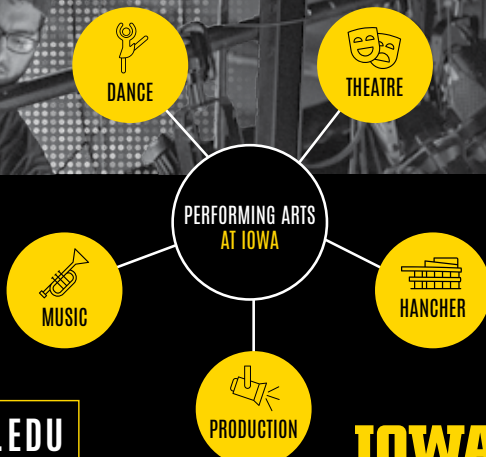
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