


cue

INSIDE DES MOINES PERFORMING ARTS
2019





Cover: Des Moines Performing Arts Summer Camps are a place for students to learn and grow, to stand tall and raise their voices, immersed in the experience of educational programs.

This page: Illuminated by colored lights, columns of water arc over a section of the Lauridsen Fountain on Cowles Commons, an engaging tract of downtown real estate owned and operated by Des Moines Performing Arts.

WELCOME

Your support keeps the performing arts thriving in our community.

Over the course of 40 seasons, Des Moines Performing Arts has presented world-class performances at our venues. These performances have shared some of the greatest stories, from the classics like “*West Side Story*” and “*Miss Saigon*” to modern musicals like “*The Color Purple*” and “*Hamilton*.” Dance performances have introduced thousands to cultures from around the globe. Our stages have sent more than 10 million theatergoers on their own adventures of self-discovery and inspired local theater enthusiasts to strive for their own successes.

But it is what is happening offstage that I am most excited about. We continue to grow the Iowa High School Musical Theater Awards, a yearlong initiative designed to complement local schools’ theater programs. Our Applause Series welcomes over 45,000 students annually to special matinee performances that coordinate with existing school curriculum. Our partnership with the Kennedy Center brings teaching artists from across the country to Des Moines. They work with local educators on proven strategies



for integrating arts into all subjects. These are just some of the initiatives DMPA is committed to, so the arts continue to have a prominent place in our schools, our homes and our communities.

None of these initiatives would be possible without the loyal generosity of you, our donors. You have recognized the important role performing arts play in the lives of our neighbors, both young and old. You have created the foundation for the programs that foster confidence in students across our state. You are making a significant difference, and for that I humbly say – THANK YOU. We hope you enjoy learning more about your impact in this issue of CUE. ■

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jeff Chelesvig". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Jeff" and last name "Chelesvig" clearly legible.

A young girl with long brown hair in pigtails is performing on a stage. She is wearing a white long-sleeved shirt, a dark red bow tie, and a maroon and white plaid vest over a matching pleated skirt. Her right arm is raised in a fist, and her mouth is open as if singing or shouting. She holds a clipboard in her left hand. The background is a dark chalkboard with large, colorful chalk drawings of the letters 'H', 'B', '6', 'S', 'U', 'N', 'T', 'H', 'E', 'B', 'A', 'L', 'E' and some radiating lines. A large, semi-transparent number '26' is overlaid on the bottom right of the image.

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FINDING ONESELF ONSTAGE

How performance can build identity and understanding



Shared joy is a component of theater, expressed in uplifting roles and common experience.

The first time Kito Young saw Ballet Hispánico perform, it was a special taste of home for a college student in Wisconsin, far from his native Panama. When he saw the dance troupe again last May in

Des Moines, where he lives now with his wife and 10-year-old daughter, it was even more meaningful.

“It’s important to us that our daughter is able to connect with Latin culture, with cultures in general,” Young said. “If you are not exposed to other cultures, you tend to see the things that separate us more than the things that join us.”

Des Moines Performing Arts takes every opportunity to create those connections, shared experiences that have a lasting impact on a community. For Ballet Hispánico, that included a Latin dance class the night before their performance, a pre-show chat with a member of the ballet company, and a question-and-answer session with the dancers after the show.

“The dancers were from different parts of the world,” Young said. “Some were Americans, some

immigrants from Cuba, a woman from Spain. All those interactions make you think about what it means to be a diverse community.”

When the Tony Award-winning musical “Fun Home” came to the Civic Center in April 2017, DMPA offered guided conversations after each performance about the show’s themes of family and acceptance.

Daniel Hoffman-Zinnel, executive director of One Iowa, says even people who don’t identify as LGBTQ connected with the “Fun Home” characters. “That just shows the strength of having three-dimensional characters,” he says. “It provides a wide range of connection for a lot of people.”

The arts remind us of how similar our life experiences are, even though we may seem different.


“There’s a beautiful metaphor that says the arts are both a mirror and a window,” says DMPA education manager Karoline Myers. “Everybody in an audience either sees something they can identify with or they look into somebody else’s life and build empathy.”

DMPA is ever mindful of representation and how the community sees itself on its stage, says

06 ENGAGEMENT



Ballet Hispanico and "The Color Purple" have presented powerful opportunities for connections across the community.

A photograph showing the backs of several people in a dark room, with their hands raised in the air. The scene is lit with warm, golden light, creating a sense of unity and participation. The focus is on the hands and arms, with the faces of the individuals blurred in the background.

**“THERE’S
A BEAUTIFUL
METAPHOR
THAT SAYS THE
ARTS ARE
BOTH A
MIRROR AND
A WINDOW.”**

Karoline Myers
DMPA education manager

08 ENGAGEMENT



Black Violin, a string duo that veers between classical and hip-hop music, performed at the Civic Center last October.



Eric Olmscheid, Des Moines Performing Arts' director of programming and education. That's especially true in programming for young people.

"We want them to see a pathway for themselves on our stage related to how they self-identify, whether that's through the color of their skin, through their sexual orientation or other ways," Olmscheid says. "We want to make sure they see themselves represented through the arts."

Jennifer Hahn knows how powerful that can be. She's an adviser to the Sisters for Success program for middle school and high school students through Des Moines Public Schools. Sisters for Success helps young women of color find their voice, connect with their community, learn leadership skills and more.

In 2017, DMPA collaborated with Sisters for Success, giving 90 students the chance to experience the Broadway musical "The Color Purple." The students read the book beforehand and then enjoyed a variety of workshops at the Civic Center the day of the show.

"The part that was most powerful was a meet-and-greet before the show with all four of the main characters," said Hahn. "The girls just loved it, to see these young women who look like them being successful and honing their craft."

They also had a chance to hear from and talk with women who are local leaders in the arts, academics and advocacy.

"These young women weren't just seeing a story about women who looked like them," Myers says. "They were connecting with role models and having great heart-to-heart conversations about what it means to be a young woman with their background and how they can navigate themselves into the world."

Opening up a world of possibilities is another benefit of bringing diverse performers to Des Moines. Just ask Amanda Drish of the Des Moines Symphony Academy. She gives violin lessons to youngsters in grades K through 4, through a partnership with Boys & Girls Clubs of Central Iowa called Project Encore.

DMPA made it possible for her students and their families to see the duo Black Violin at the Civic Center. The energetic musicians play a blend of classical, hip-hop, rock, R&B and bluegrass.

"They did an amazing job of creating a space for people to dance and clap and sing with each other while they were performing," Drish said. "It was not like a traditional classical concert where you sit quietly. They broke down that barrier in such a wonderful way."

That gave everyone in the audience a chance to connect with the music and with one another in new ways.

"I think it's something that we all in the arts should take into consideration," Drish said. "When you create opportunities like that, our community here feels seen and heard." ■

10_SPOTLIGHT

Ten-year-old Makena Miller of Clive has gained poise and confidence through participation in musical theater camps offered by Des Moines Performing Arts.



**“IT’S FUN TO PRETEND
TO BE A DIFFERENT
CHARACTER AND TO LEARN
ALL ABOUT ACTING.”**

Makena Miller

MISSION MOMENT

MAKENA MILLER

10-year-old finds her voice at DMPA's musical theater camp.

Ten-year-old Makena Miller of Clive has discovered a surefire way to combat stage fright. "There is nothing to be afraid of if you practice and know what you are doing," says Makena, a veteran of two summer musical theater camps through Des Moines Performing Arts.

Her newfound confidence has amazed her parents, Monique and Patrick Miller.

"Outside of home or among close friends, Makena used to speak barely above a whisper," Monique says. "In theater camp, she learned how to project her voice and seems to have discovered how nice it is to be heard. Now she speaks up, speaks clearly and participates more in class. It's easier for her to communicate with friends, and she seems much happier in school."

Makena was the youngest member of her first camp, which concerned her mom a bit.

"But the program director was there to greet each student and parent," Monique says. "She told me she would watch out for Makena and that often shy students enjoy acting."

Makena just remembers making lots of new friends and having a great time. The first year, the

class performed the children's musical "We Are Monsters." Last summer, the campers performed the musical "Press Start."

"It was really fun to sing and dance," Makena says. "I liked that the audience liked it, and I felt I could inspire the audience. I liked being onstage. It's fun to pretend to be a different character."

Makena got a taste of many aspects of theater, Monique says. "They spent time learning about and practicing music, choreography, costuming, stage positioning and production. She spoke of stage left/right, forward/back, character development, diction and projection. They also learned breathing, listening, accuracy and awareness of space."

"What I liked most was the very important emphasis on being the most positive person you can be ... and, above all, to have fun," Makena says.

As a result, Makena seems more self-confident.

"When we go out to a restaurant, she will now speak up and tell the server her order," Monique says. "Or when we are among adult friends or new people, she is more likely to join us in conversation."

Makena says she plans to take more acting classes and to do more acting in school.

"She has changed her ambitions from astronaut to actress," Monique says. ■

12_EDUCATION

BURS



STING

AT THE SEAMS

DMPA seeks new spaces to accommodate the rapid and dynamic growth in educational programming.

The appeal of DMPA educational programs has strained the organization's capacity for additional students. The last decade has seen the most rapid growth, heightening the need for additional facilities.

14 EDUCATION

Central Iowa is rich with dreamers. Some are hopeful young performers who dream of dancing across the Civic Center's 78-foot stage or singing to a sold-out crowd of nearly 2,800.

Others are audience members who dream – at least for an hour or two – of being transported to fictional destinations.

“If you go back in CEO Jeff Chelesvig’s tenure, arts education, particularly for young people, was clearly one of his priorities and one of his dreams,” says Cherian Koshy, director of development at Des Moines Performing Arts. “In his very first years, he launched the Applause Series. That has been the foundation of our education program.”

Today, Chelesvig’s vision of offering a quality matinee series for schoolchildren has grown into an education program that annually serves more than 75,000 Iowans of all ages. Summer musical theater camps, interactive classes featuring guest Broadway artists and world-renowned performing arts professionals, dance master classes, educator development workshops, Iowa High School Musical Theater Awards and a host of audience engagement opportunities keep the DMPA Education Team scrambling to find adequate spaces.

“All of us at DMPA are dreamers,” Koshy says. “And we constantly hear the need for more arts

education especially as schools receive less by way of public funding.”

DMPA’s educational programs have experienced continual growth since their inception – to the point that facilities are bursting at the seams.

“The last decade has seen the most rapid growth,” Koshy says. “It really grew out of a strategic plan that started in 2006, when the DMPA board of directors prioritized education as a focus area of growth for future development. At that point, they dedicated financial resources for program materials and human resources for educational and engagement programs.”

By the 2009-10 season, new programs were being introduced.

“The Family Series was launched, and we significantly expanded the school matinee series and started offering workshops in the schools,” Koshy says. “In 2011, we launched the Dance Series and educational programs around that. Also, summer camps began around that time.”

But DMPA’s buildings were not designed with these purposes in mind. As those programs have grown and matured, they’ve consumed available space at the Civic Center and other DMPA venues. In 2012, the DMPA strategic plan began addressing dedicated space for education, and the staff started dreaming about how it could help the programs thrive.

“There are more programs we hope to develop



**“ALL OF US
AT DMPA
ARE
DREAMERS.”**

Cherian Koshy
DMPA director of development

Educational programs have grown to embrace a broader range of ages, now engaging the imaginations of even the very young.

**“TODAY OUR
PROGRAMMING
IS RUN AT
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SITES, WHICH
CAN FEEL
DISCONNECTED.”**

Cherian Koshy
DMPA director of development

All of the Civic Center
sometimes serves as creative
spaces for learning, from the
spot-lighted stage to the
expansive lobbies.

that aren't even launched yet," says DMPA education manager Karoline Myers. "They're small seeds we are currently nurturing that can evolve into new and exciting initiatives."

In summer 2018, DMPA offered a record eight weeks of summer camps, despite construction that was underway to enhance the Civic Center.

"The construction meant no camps could happen in the Civic Center last summer," Myers says. "So we moved them to the Temple for Performing Arts, which isn't meant to be an educational facility, with 30 kids in multiple sessions. We had students making art in the hallways when they weren't in rehearsal."

Scheduling studios for dance classes or for rehearsals for visiting dance companies is also a challenge, because the Civic Center has no rehearsal rooms and no dance studios, Myers says.

"There are few full-size dance studios in downtown Des Moines, so we try to see when private studios around town can move a class to accommodate us or when can we wedge in to use their space," she says.

Programming at the Civic Center also has increased over the years, Myers points out. Whenever educational programs use spaces within the Civic Center, it's not available for shows — and vice versa.

"If we want to schedule a teachers' workshop with a guest presenter from the Kennedy Center, we need to be able to hear that speaker," Myers says. "We can't do that during a week of Broadway shows bringing 2,700 people into the building at the same

time, filling the lobbies and creating lines for the restrooms."

This is what arts philanthropy is designed to address, says Koshy.

"Today our programming is run at different sites, which can feel disconnected," he says. "We have the vision. With the right community support, our students and educators will be able to sing, dance, rehearse and learn in a new space dedicated to nurturing a lifelong love and appreciation for performing arts."

Proximity to the Civic Center is also an important consideration, Myers says.

"When we dream on paper about what this could look like in five or 10 years, the list of programs we feel we could launch in a sustainable and meaningful way nearly doubles if we're close to the Civic Center," she says. "For example, if students are coming to see a Broadway show, it would be a natural fit to build some sort of workshop around it to deepen their experience. Or kids coming to the Applause Series could spend the afternoon in the education center doing something related to what they saw."

"The students, the educators, the lifelong learners we serve are all creative, and creativity has helped us grow these important programs to where they are today," Koshy says. "We are excited to explore where this passion and energy will take us. We know we cannot get there without the support of the donors, community leaders and volunteers that helped us get this far." ■

18_SPOTLIGHT



Des Moines sisters Mya (foreground) and BaiYu Fisher are more certain of their futures plans, thanks to the training and experience they have received through DMPA master classes.

MISSION MOMENT

MYA AND BAIYU FISHER

Mother credits performing arts experience for her children's growth as 'fantastic people.'

For years, Lisa Fisher's Des Moines home has been brimming with performing arts talent. Her son Talen, 20, plays piano and viola and spent most of his childhood training to be a ballet dancer.

"He danced on the Civic Center stage for several years with Iowa Dance Theatre," Fisher says. "He also spent a year in Salt Lake City training and working as a professional ballet dancer."

Her son Wen, 18, developed an appreciation for DMPA children's programs that led to an interest in speech therapy to cope with his severe hearing loss and speech difficulties.

At 16, her daughter Mya is a freshman at Iowa State University majoring in chemistry, with aspirations of becoming a professional ballet dancer – or a forensic scientist. The teen overcame painful childhood shyness with the help of DMPA summer camps and Dance Series master classes.

"I found it much easier to speak to people if I had a script," Mya says. "And being able to learn from internationally renowned dancers was a precious gift. Performing arts is an amazing creative outlet. The confidence you gain is something you can use in all aspects of your life."

Fisher's daughter BaiYu, also 16, attended DMPA programs too.

"I was a hyper little kid without a lot of focus, and I couldn't sing to save my soul," she says. "But I absolutely love the Dance Series master classes. Performing and hearing the appreciation of a great audience is the best feeling ever."

BaiYu, who is home-schooled and dual-enrolled at Roosevelt High School, deals with albinism, a genetic disorder that causes an absence of pigmentation in her hair, skin and eyes. It also has blurred her vision.

Still, she plans to attend college until she is old enough to audition for dance companies. "I would love to dance with a professional contemporary dance company – or be a circus performer," BaiYu says.

Fisher discovered performing arts as a way for her kids to burn energy and learn life skills, even though she says she personally has little artistic talent.

"Here I have these kids who are musicians, artists and dancers, and I have absolutely no ability to help them grow and develop their skills – except to turn to organizations like Des Moines Performing Arts for help," she says. "Involvement in the performing arts is such a big part of their lives and has molded them into the fantastic people they have grown up to be." ■

20_GET TO KNOW



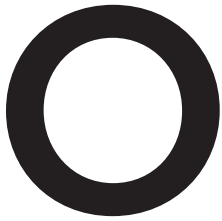
Emily Kruse, development manager for DMPA, meets with donors to strengthen "the DMPA family." That still leaves time to share with her own family — husband Terry and sons Aaron and Scott.



LIVING HER DREAM

As DMPA's new development manager,
Emily Kruse is thrilled
to connect with donors and learn from
their perspectives and insights.

22_GET TO KNOW



On her first day as a development manager at Des Moines Performing Arts, Emily Kruse tried hard to maintain her well-cultivated professional demeanor.

"Keep calm," she told herself as she navigated backstage at the Civic Center. "Don't geek out. ... Oh, my gosh! I cannot believe I am doing this! I get to work here ... every day!"

Kruse, 44, joined the DMPA staff in March 2018. "I meet one-on-one with current donors to learn why they support the performing arts. Then I hope to match their philanthropic interests with our goals, through building relationships with our donors."

"There are thousands of people who support DMPA financially, and each has his or her own story," she says. "These stories make our community unique and a powerful force in arts philanthropy. My job is to better understand our donors' excitement, as well as to share upcoming opportunities for engagement. Meeting one-on-one with them is the best way to hear their thoughts."

Her goal, of course, is to increase support for critical arts and arts education projects in the community, and to continue to build upon the culture of philanthropy within the DMPA family. But she enjoys just chatting with donors – and comparing notes about favorite shows.

"I am grateful to our donors for sharing their time with me," Kruse says. "Their unique responses to what shows they enjoy give insight into their perspectives. In addition, I like hearing stories about how people came to be connected to the arts. Some

participated in school, others remember coming to shows with their parents and are lifelong fans. There are some who were dragged along by a spouse or friend and then fell in love with the arts, too."

Kruse, a native of Libertyville, Ill., graduated from the University of Iowa with a bachelor's degree in psychology and earned a master's degree in communication from the University of Dubuque. She spent 18 years working in college admissions at Loras College, Drake University and Clarke University, and two years as director of development for Iowa State University's College of Design.

"However, I always had in the back of my head that my dream was to work with the performing arts in some capacity," she says. "When I heard about DMPA's new position, I could not pass up the opportunity to pursue my dream. Every morning I pinch myself that I work in the Civic Center. I love the fact that I spend my days talking with people who share my passion for the performing arts."

Kruse's husband, Terry, is an academic adviser in the Iowa State University Chemistry Department. They live in Ankeny with their two sons, Scott, 12, and Aaron, 7, who already have become involved in performing arts by taking piano lessons. Scott also has participated in school plays and the DMPA musical theater camp. And they've become frequent audience members at DMPA shows such as "Newsies," "Stomp" and "Aladdin."

"After one family show, my kids got a tour of the theater," Kruse says. "My oldest son was so excited he was practically vibrating. He said to me, 'Mom, you have the best job ever!'" ■



Emily Kruse started playing French horn as a fourth-grader, inspired by the Iowa-based musical "The Music Man."

A LIFELONG LOVE

Emily Kruse's excitement about performing arts stemmed from watching "The Music Man" many times as a child. She started playing French horn in fourth grade with the distinct goal of joining a marching band.

"Throughout high school, I was very involved in band and orchestra and played in the pit orchestra for school musicals," Kruse says. "At the University of Iowa, I was a four-year member of the Hawkeye Marching Band, basketball pep band and concert band. I still play with a community band that visits assisted living centers in the Des Moines area."

Her connection to the Civic Center began in 2001 when her childhood-favorite production, "The Music Man," came to Des Moines.

"It opened on my birthday, which I took as a sign," she says. "We were DMPA season ticket holders before joining the team and donors, too, as we believe in the mission of DMPA and appreciate what they do, not just for Greater Des Moines but the entire state of Iowa."

24. TIMELINE

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE FIRST 40 SEASONS

Group of community leaders form a privately held, not-for-profit corporation and raise **\$9.3 million** in less than 90 days to build the Civic Center of Greater Des Moines

1974

"Guys and Dolls" opens in July, and becomes the first national touring Broadway show to make a stop at the Civic Center

1979

Jeff Chelesvig is named general manager on January 9

The national tour of **"State Fair"** opens at the Des Moines Civic Center

1995

"The Phantom of the Opera's" record-breaking five-week run puts Des Moines on the Broadway map. More than 98,000 people attend the show

1997

The national tour of **"The Music Man"** opens at the Civic Center

2001

"Triple Espresso – A Highly Caffeinated Comedy" closes as Iowa's longest-running show. The show's first run was onstage for 16 months (68 weeks) with more than 88,000 people in attendance

2004



Willis
BROADWAY SERIES

1979

The Civic Center's first public performance, the **Des Moines Ballet**, is held June 14

1981

The Civic Center presents its first multiweek engagement with two weeks of **"Annie"**

1996

The Applause Series for schools launches in October with "Kayaga"; **15,000 students and teachers** attend the first season

1997–98

The first **Broadway subscription series** is offered

2002

The Temple Theater opens in October with a successful run of **"Triple Espresso – A Highly Caffeinated Comedy."** The show is originally booked for eight weeks and is ultimately extended for 60 additional weeks

2005

Betts Auto Campus becomes the Broadway Series presenting sponsor. The name is changed to the **Willis Broadway Series** in 2008

Disney's
"The Lion King"
opens for a
six-week run,
representing the
longest single
run to date at
the Civic Center.
The show
attracts more
than 113,000
people
2006

The **Wellmark
Family Series**
launches
2009

The national
tour of **"La
Cage aux
Folles"** opens
at the Civic
Center
2011

The Civic Center
of Greater
Des Moines
refreshes its
brand and the
organization
becomes
**Des Moines
Performing
Arts**

Construction
begins on
Cowles
Commons
(formerly Nollen
Plaza)
Applause Series
attendance
surpasses
**50,000 student
attendees in a
single season**
2013

The **Iowa High
School
Musical
Theater
Awards**
expands to
serve schools
statewide. Sixty
schools are
welcomed into
the program
2016

Jeff Chelesvig
welcomes the
**10 Millionth
Guest** to the
Civic Center
stage during
opening night of
"Something
Rotten!"
2017



2008
The national
tour of **"Frost/
Nixon"** opens at
the Civic Center
**Prairie
Meadows Live
at the Temple
Concert Series**
launches

2010
The **Dance
Series** launches

2012-13
The **Iowa High
School
Musical
Theater
Awards**
launches with
nine
participating
schools

2015
**Cowles
Commons**
opens in June
and provides an
opportunity to
program
outdoor events
The national
tour of **"The
Bridges of
Madison
County"** opens
at the Civic
Center in
November

2016
**"Triple
Espresso –
A Highly
Caffeinated
Comedy"**
celebrates its
750th
performance on
December 11

2018
The Civic Center
announces the
2018-2019
Season and the
beginning of its
**40th
anniversary
year**

26 BROADWAY



"School of Rock" is both an entertaining show and an educational experience for talented students recruited to join the cast. The traveling production comes to the Civic Center in April.

A man and a young girl are performing on stage as a rock band. The man, on the left, is wearing a dark velvet jacket, a plaid skirt, knee-high socks, and Union Jack sneakers. He is holding a guitar and singing into a microphone. The girl, on the right, is wearing a similar plaid skirt, knee-high socks, and dark sneakers. She is holding a red electric guitar. They are both wearing school-style blouses. The background features large, stylized letters and Marshall amplifiers.

'SCHOOL OF ROCK' TEACHES YOUNG ACTORS

Directors are always searching for 'quadruple threats,' children with multiple talents.

They sing. They dance. They act. They play musical instruments. These young performers – sometimes called “quadruple threats” – are extraordinary talents. And if they’re not too tall, they may make the cast of Andrew Lloyd Webber’s hit musical “School of Rock.”

The show – about a wannabe rock star posing as a substitute teacher who turns a class of straight-A students into a rock band – comes to the Civic Center April 30 through May 5 with a cast that includes 16 children between the ages of 8 and 12.

Finding young actors who can play musical instruments requires an intensive search, says “School of Rock” casting director Claire Burke.

“Every year, we have at least one or two open calls in New York, then we usually go to Los Angeles, Chicago and one other city,” she says. “We’ve done open calls in Charlotte, N.C., and in Atlanta. We advertise a lot before we go about what we’re looking for.”

Anyone can audition, she says, but to be selected, actors must not be more than 5 feet tall.

“They need to believably be in fourth or fifth grade, and we need to make the distinction between

the teachers and the students,” Burke says. And, of course, they need to be instrumentalists.

“It’s so hard to find kids who play guitar and drums and bass at the level we need,” she says. “We try to emphasize that we like to see kids who are in bands or who go to music schools. For anyone going into the arts, skills like playing an instrument are great to build upon, because that’s always going to make you stand out.”

The casting directors also consider children’s personalities, maturity and ability to interact with others. “That’s hugely important,” Burke says. “So much of their job during the rehearsal process is keeping focused while they’re getting direction and learning tons of new things. All the while, they’re going to be surrounded by their friends, but they need to be paying attention.”

“School of Rock” is not an easy show, she says. “There are many set changes, and sometimes the floor opens up and a big drum set comes up through a hole. So we need kids who are really going to pay attention and who aren’t going to get too distracted.”

Contract terms for the kids vary. “Generally, they start at six months,” Burke says. “But if they grow very quickly or their voice changes, sometimes we need to replace them sooner than we planned.”



"SCHOOL OF ROCK" NATIONAL TOUR PHOTO BY EVAN ZIMMERMAN-MURPHY/MADE

30_BROADWAY

Usually, newly cast child actors rehearse for about four weeks before they actually start performing, Burke says. Even then, they often have rehearsals during the day, especially if a cast member is also an understudy for another part.

“Sometimes, they’re playing the role of Zach at rehearsal, and later that night they’ll go onstage and play the role of James,” she says.

But the tour is not all business, and there are strict rules about how many hours a child actor can work, Burke says.

“They still have time to have a lot of fun,” she says. “They take advantage of their free days to visit museums in each city and go sightseeing.”

The production will pay for one parent or guardian to travel with each child actor; other family members may accompany the kids at their own expense.

“It’s really up to the families, and each family does it differently,” Burke says. “There’s one kid in the cast right now whose entire family – both parents and his three little brothers – is on tour with him.”

Some child actors continue to work in theater after outgrowing “School of Rock.” Others go home after the tour, finish high school and perhaps go on to college, Burke says. “It really depends on what they want to make of it afterward. Certainly this is a good foot in the door if they want to pursue a career in the arts.” ■

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STAND OUT.”

Claire Burke



Theo Mitchell-Penner

'DREAM CAME TRUE' BEFORE AGE 12

At age 12, Theo Mitchell-Penner, of Haddonfield, N.J., already has a performing arts resume that includes appearing in dance recitals and regional productions. He had just finished a stint portraying one of the Lollipop Guild in "The Wizard of Oz" at the Walnut Street Theatre in Philadelphia when he and his mother saw the hit musical "School of Rock" on Broadway.

"As I was watching it, I said, 'I want to be Lawrence in this show,'" Mitchell-Penner recalls. "Five months after seeing it, my agent called. My dream had come true."

His background in singing, dancing and acting helped him win the role of Lawrence, the nerdy keyboardist, but his "quadruple threat" — experience in keyboarding — sealed the deal.

"I am classically trained in piano, and have been playing since I was 5," Mitchell-Penner says.

Now he's on tour with "School of Rock," performing eight shows a week and keeping up with schoolwork with the help of a tutor and his mom's home schooling. It's exciting, he says, to perform every night in front of a live audience. "I love feeling how the energy goes back and forth. I am so grateful and humbled to be part of the 'School of Rock' family," he says.

Mitchell-Penner also has had the opportunity to visit NASA and sing the national anthem at a San Francisco Giants baseball game.

"I like seeing all the different places," he says. "I like big cities, so I really liked Chicago. I really liked Las Vegas because of the lights. I felt like I was living in a theme park."

Still, Mitchell-Penner says he feels like an "ordinary kid."

"I don't feel like I'm missing out on anything because I am surrounded daily by my 'School of Rock' brothers and sisters," he says. "I've made friends that I will keep forever."

The young actor acknowledges that he felt a little homesick at first. "I miss my grandfather and friends, but this is an adventure," he says. "I really couldn't be happier. Honestly, there is nothing I would rather be doing than playing Lawrence, and there is no place that I'd rather be than on this tour."

Mitchell-Penner plans to continue to play Lawrence on tour for as long as he can.

"Afterward, I want to continue my artistic training," he says. "I have an interest in composing and conducting. I will definitely go to college, but I am not set on what I would study — probably musical theater or piano. I'm also very interested in science, but I no longer want to be a doctor." ■



Josh Sparrgrove, drama director at Forest City High School, says engagement with DMPA programs has been a valuable resource for his students.

“THE FACT THAT ANYONE CAN BE ANYTHING WHEN ONSTAGE PROMPTED MY INTEREST IN CONTINUING TO BE ONSTAGE.”

Josh Sparrgrove

MISSION MOMENT

JOSH SPARRGROVE

Once shy and reserved, future drama director learned that onstage ‘anyone can be anything.’

Josh Sparrgrove discovered the thrill of performing when he was an elementary student. Drafted by his parents, he participated in small performances to kick off a school reading challenge.

“As a shy and reserved child, I enjoyed that being onstage gave me the ability to be loud and boisterous,” he says. “The fact that anyone can be anything when onstage prompted my interest in continuing to be onstage.”

Now drama director at Forest City High School, Sparrgrove recognizes the impact Des Moines Performing Arts has had on his department since it first participated in the Iowa High School Musical Theater Awards in 2015. His students have attended DMPA classes and have hosted a workshop at their school through DMPA’s traveling artist program. Sparrgrove also has joined sessions for educators.

“The summer directors’ retreat was awesome,” Sparrgrove says. “It was so much fun interacting with other directors and hearing what they are doing at their schools. It was also great to work with professionals from DMPA to discover ways to enhance our program, look at what we’ve been doing and learn how to improve on it.”

Sparrgrove says he gleaned ideas for involving more students in the theater experience, including assisting with costume design, makeup, lighting, stage management and publicity.

“Some students have no interest in being onstage, but they have other talents they can use in the theater setting,” he says. “We decided to push those students into being in charge of those aspects – especially because of the opportunity for them to be recognized at the IHSMTA Showcase.”

Instruction from DMPA workshops also helped sharpen his personal directing skills.

“It made me consider the deeper themes and motives at work in a piece,” Sparrgrove says.

Forest City High School has a strong tradition of putting on quality musicals, and the school’s involvement with DMPA’s Iowa High School Musical Theater Awards elevates students further, Sparrgrove says. Students receive adjudication feedback to see how they can improve, and they attend the annual Awards Showcase to discover what other schools are doing. They also witness what it takes to be a “triple-threat” participant – someone who can sing and dance as well as act.

“This lights a fire in them to improve,” Sparrgrove says. ■

34 DANCE SERIES



Top professional dance troupes perform in the Dance Series, including the contemporary artistry of Ballet British Columbia, based in Vancouver.

PHOTO BY WENDY D

VERSATILE AND VIRTUOSIC


In performing evocative new works, world-renowned Ballet British Columbia strives to have a 'conversation' with audience members.

During its 2018-2019 season, Ballet British Columbia will dance across stages throughout Canada, as well as in Luxembourg, Spain, Germany and Israel. Then, on May 21, at the Des Moines Civic Center.

"Ballet British Columbia is a world-class dance company," says Des Moines Performing Arts CEO Jeff Chelesvig. "We're proud to present this level of talent to our audience."

Emily Molnar, artistic director for Ballet British Columbia, says the company works with agents to select worldwide performance destinations. "It's the first time the company will



A photograph of three dancers in a dark, atmospheric setting. The dancers are wearing dark, sleeveless, vertically striped dresses. They are positioned in a diagonal line across the frame, from the top left towards the bottom right. The dancer at the top left is leaning forward, the middle dancer is leaning over the first, and the dancer at the bottom right is lying on their back on a reflective floor. The background is dark with numerous small, out-of-focus white particles, resembling dust or snow, creating a dreamlike or ethereal atmosphere. The lighting is soft, highlighting the contours of the dancers' bodies and the texture of their dresses.

be there [in Des Moines], and we're super excited," she says.

The 35-year-old Ballet British Columbia earned its "world-class" moniker for several reasons, including an extraordinary level of talent in its dancers, Molnar says. "What makes us

distinct is that we are a contemporary ballet company," she says. "And we primarily are creation-based, so a lot of our work is new. We take that risk."

The company also works with choreographers from all over the world, and it tours internationally seven to 10 weeks a year. "We're having a global conversation," Molnar says.

Each of its performances is a "triple bill" consisting of three separate programs. In Des Moines, the company will perform "Enemy in

“PEOPLE
WHO KNOW
NOTHING
ABOUT DANCE
OFTEN DON’T
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PHYSICALITY.”

Emily Molnar

the Figure,” with choreography by William Forsythe, whom Molnar calls “a master choreographer.”

“The work is a phenomenal piece of dance and one of the great works of the 21st century,” she says. “It pushes the performers to an extraordinary reality. The whole piece is lit with one light. It’s a wonderful relationship between set design, music, choreography and theatrical composition.”

A second program, “Solo Echo,” choreographed by Crystal Pite to the music of Johannes Brahms, explores recurring themes of acceptance and loss. The final program will be a new work choreographed by Molnar to celebrate her 10th season as the company’s artistic director.

“The performance will be very versatile, very virtuosic, dynamic, engaging expressive dance,” she says.

Ballet aficionados will appreciate the diversity of Ballet British Columbia’s work in addition to the level of talent of the dancers, Molnar says. But the performance will also appeal to audience members who perhaps have never seen a dance program.

“People who know nothing about dance often don’t realize the physicality,” she says. “They get excited about the music, the way we’re using space,

and the sophistication of the expression of the body.”

Commitment to dance as a performing art is key for Ballet British Columbia dancers, and their “conversation” with audience members is crucial, Molnar says.

“Their intention is so deep and so committed that the audience feels it,” she says. “It makes the performance more real and alive. For the company, it’s not just what we’re making, but how we’re making it. As soon as the curtain goes up, you feel something. It may not even be something you’re aware of; it’s just something you’re feeling.”

The goal of the dancers is to create an experience for the audience, Molnar says.

“It can be the thrill of watching these incredible dancers go out there and dare to do something, which then allows you to feel like you can dare to do something in your own life,” she says. “It can be feeling incredibly moved, which helps break open something emotionally. It can be that you just have a great time. We want to use dance as a vehicle to create meaning, to feel, to enjoy and to help move the art form forward.”

Ultimately, dance is about community, Molnar says. “That is first and foremost why we do it.” ■



Dancer Kirsten Wicklund
soars in a performance with
Ballet British Columbia.

40 BOARD OF DIRECTORS AND STAFF

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A shared bow, responding to the applause of an audience, has a powerful and enduring effect on youth who summon the courage to perform on stage.