

## Georgia College Theatre launches bold new season, against all odds

In many places, the performing arts have shut down—snuffed out, it seems, by a virus.

Even Broadway is closed. Stages are dark. Actors can't rehearse safely together. They can't perform in front of live audiences. Big-name plays can't be performed, because royalties exclude permission for virtual acting. Tickets can't be sold for locally-scripted productions that are largely experimental. Going online is costly, too, requiring specialized video equipment and training.

These challenges seem insurmountable.

Dr. Karen Berman, like many theatre chairs, faced these same obstacles. But—with typical gutsy grit—she forged ahead.

"I wasn't going to let COVID deter us," Berman said. "We decided we would go for a virtual season, which basically means we're either livestreaming a performance or pre-taping and creating film for the very first time in our shows."

"It's mind blowing, and it's been a lot of work," she said, "but I think it's going to be very rewarding."

At first, Berman feared student reaction. Her faculty was "devastated," when award-winning hits like "Little Shop of Horrors" got canceled. But, a bold new season emerged.

It's filled with original scripts and music by faculty, students and community members—a variety of 'what can we try' moments. The president, provost and dean provided Theatre and Music with \$20,000 each to buy new video cameras, lighting and sound equipment that enhance Zoom productions. Software programs were purchased, as were kits for students to use from home. Keith Bergeron, assistant director of Production Services, agreed to train students on equipment in personal tutoring sessions.

Every action and line in a play is filmed individually. Actors perform alone, usually in makeshift studios on campus or at home. Each clip is painstakingly pieced together by two recent graduates with certificates from the Georgia Film Academy, Harlee Pope and

Jeremy Colwell, as well as other film studies graduates.

But new problems lay ahead.

Theatre's first production—"Zoom [OUT]: An Experiment in Production" by former professor and Blackbird owner Iona Sun Holder—had to be re-filmed halfway through because of sound issues. Then, computers didn't have enough gigabytes. It took hours to download one minute of film. There was no money for costumes or to hire drama coaches and compensate guest artists. Theatre lost \$40,000 last spring when campus closed and shows were canceled. They lost another \$40,000 in revenue from community dance classes. Since all productions this season are free, Berman said, "donations will be more important than ever."

"This is scary for me. I'm way out of my comfort zone here. But it's also exciting," she said. "We're discovering the problems as we go. We're brand new to this. We're hitting all the bumps in the road, and we're facing them one at a time. We're trailblazing."

"Zoom [OUT]" portrays student pandemic experiences and how people connect during isolation. The film premiered outdoors this month on a 40-foot screen at Central State Hospital. Faculty and students watched from their cars. The film is now available for public viewing on YouTube at [www.GCGivingVoice.com](http://www.GCGivingVoice.com).

Senior theatre major Claire Hemenway acted in the play. At the beginning of the academic year, she wrote a letter expressing what Berman said "encapsulates the feelings of this new world." She acknowledged being upset at first, hearing of plans for online theatre. Despite the season not being what she originally expected, however, Hemenway said she's "having an amazing experience." She expressed pride that Georgia College didn't simply quit but continued to see possibilities and "make art."

"I was devastated and confused at first. I'm sure other faculty and students were, as well," Hemenway wrote. "But ... I am genuinely honored to be part of a program that is actively deciding to be a part of history. We are a part of redefining performing arts in a pandemic. Not many people get to say that!"

"This truly inspires me to continue in theatre, no matter what obstacles I face," she added.

Fall programming is a daring blend of virtual acting on film and livestream. FaceTime is being used as a platform, as well. The only onstage performance is an upcoming children's play, "Lions



Alumnus Sam Wilson (right) uses a ringlight during rehearsals with theatre and music double major Sophia Clark. Masks were removed briefly for photo purposes only.

in Illyria," based on Shakespeare's "Twelfth Night" that utilizes animal masks. It will be livestreamed online to audiences.

The big musical this fall is locally scripted with gospel music and Hip Hop. "Giving Voice" is about the Black Lives Matter movement and premieres original songs by two Georgia College students and Raymond Jackson, a musician for Beulahland Bible Church in Macon. Everyone on the 19-member cast and crew wrote their own scripts, based on personal experience. The play includes praise dancing, slam poetry, rap and monologues. Rehearsals were on Zoom—no easy feat, Berman said, because of time lapses. Each voice was recorded individually in a studio setting. All singing parts will be edited together for cohesion.

"We have to capture them visually, too, singing in sync from individual boxes on Zoom. It's madness," Berman said.

Despite the challenges, Theatre is showcasing a complete season. "The Nutcracker" will be modified and filmed in pieces, several dancers at a time. Student capstones will be made, including one about immigrants. Ten-minute original plays by two alumni are also being created and shown on YouTube.

Through it all, students are learning more than ever before—like senior theatre major Fran Smith of Stone Mountain, who studied how to add special effects and backstage scenes by computer. She's developing 3D designs to incorporate into film.

"We're giving our students new skills," Berman said. "I wrote the students in the summer and said, 'We're going to make you all film stars. We're going to teach you how to produce films, which is just going to increase your toolkit as you go out into the real world.'"



Izzy Lee rehearses for the upcoming virtual production.

## Georgia College faculty selected as Chancellor's Learning Scholars

Four Georgia College faculty were recently selected for the University System of Georgia's Chancellor's Learning Scholars Program.

- Dr. Scott Butler, Professor of Public Health
- Dr. James Schiffman, Associate Professor of Communication
- Dr. Jehan El-Jourbagy, Assistant Professor of Business Law,
- Dr. Stefanie Sevcik, Lecturer of English

These faculty members went through the nomination/application process and were selected for this statewide program.

As Chancellor's Learning Scholars, they will take part in faculty development opportunities related to online learning and high-impact practices with peers from all around the state.

They will then bring their experiences and knowledge back to Georgia College and lead faculty learning communities for their peers.

"It certainly speaks to the good work that GC faculty are doing," said Dr. Jordan Cofer, associate provost for transformative learning experiences. "GC is known for innovation in the classroom and these four are certainly deserving of this honor."



Top left Stefanie Sevcik, top right James Schiffman, bottom left Scott Butler, bottom right Jehan El-Jourbagy.

## Did you know?



Dr. Harold Mock, director of leadership programs and assistant professor of history, delivered a virtual lecture at the Institut d'études politiques de Strasbourg (Sciences Po Strasbourg). His lecture, "The Domestic Sources of U.S. Foreign Policy," addressed the connection between American domestic politics and the U.S. role in international affairs.

"The sources that motivate our foreign-policy decision-making are deeper than the politics of the day. Despite the punditry, in fact, U.S. foreign policy is often decades in the making," said Mock. "My talk challenged students to identify those trends and to consider their origins."

A specialist in international affairs and transatlantic relations, Mock's research interests include civil-military relations, particularly related to nuclear strategy and defense planning in western Europe. He is currently writing a book entitled "Dangerous Power: An International History of German Unification, 1969-1993."

Mock holds a Ph.D. in history from the University of Virginia, where he previously served as a Bradley Research Fellow. Additionally, he holds a master's degree in history from Virginia and bachelor's degrees in political science and history from Georgia College.

## Virtual concert this Thursday

Georgia College's Department of Music will present a virtual concert, "Wind Music of La République," Thursday, Oct. 15 at 7:30 from Max Noah Recital Hall.

Compositions are by 20th-century playful modernist Francis Poulenc and Romantic traditionalist Camille Saint-Saëns.

Featured faculty members are pianist Owen Lovell, clarinetist Rebecca Rowell Cooke and flutist Laurie Peebles.

Please follow the music department on [facebook.com/GCMusicDepartment](https://www.facebook.com/GCMusicDepartment) to view this live-steamed concert.

A \$5 donation is encouraged. Online donations can be made at [alumni.gcsu.edu/music](http://alumni.gcsu.edu/music).

All proceeds benefit music scholarships or the GC Department of Music through GCSU Foundation, Inc. For more information, please email [music@gcsu.edu](mailto:music@gcsu.edu) or call 478-445-8289.

DEPARTMENT OF MUSIC

# Wind Music of La République

Rebecca Rowell Cooke, *clarinet*

Laurie Peebles, *flute*

Owen Lovell, *piano*

Thursday,  
Oct. 15, 2020  
7:30 p.m.

Watch for this live-streamed concert on:  
[facebook.com/GCMusicDepartment](https://www.facebook.com/GCMusicDepartment)

An online \$5 donation is encouraged.  
Please use this link: [alumni.gcsu.edu/music](http://alumni.gcsu.edu/music)  
All proceeds benefit music scholarship or the Music Department through the GCSU Foundation, Inc. [music@gcsu.edu](mailto:music@gcsu.edu)

