Vanessa Cepeda’s April 25th Performance: Echoes
On April 21st, the stacked Methods of Film Studies and Film Authorship courses hosted an open-to-the-public, big-screen presentation of the 2021 feature film *Bergman Island*. After a dozen weeks of studying motion pictures by Swedish director Ingmar Bergman, a public screening of a new film about the artist’s impact on contemporary filmmakers was a special way to end the semester for these students and for members of the larger campus community. *Bergman Island* is the creation of young French director and screenwriter, Mia Hansen-Løve. It tells the semi-autobiographical story of a film-making couple, Chris (Vicky Krieps) and Tony (Tim Roth), who voyage to the island Fårö, off the coast of Sweden, where Bergman lived and worked for forty years to take part in an artist’s residency program. They travel around the island, soaking up inspiration for their own work, but later ambivalent feelings about family and career collide.

A few days later, on April 26th, students and the campus community enjoyed a follow-up Zoom discussion with Cristina Jardim Riberio, Head of Operations at Bergman Center on Fårö. Ms. Riberio provided context and first-hand information about this world-famous director and how her organization and others serve to maintain the memory of Bergman and his work. To begin, she discussed Bergman Week, an annual festival mounted by Bergman Center devoted to the spirit of Bergman, with five days of film screenings, discussions, lectures, and dramatic and musical performances. She shared the story of a visit to Fårö by a well-known filmmaker who stopped at the entrance of Bergman’s house and said, “I don’t deserve to enter!” She also discussed the fact that in Sweden, Bergman is better known for his scandalous personal life than his art, although this is starting to change with younger generations of Swedes beginning to join the rest of the world in appreciating this challenging creator’s cinematic output. Perhaps the most interesting point that Ms. Riberio made was that actors who worked with Bergman are rarely in thrall of the filmmaker in the way others are. They are simply professional actors who rose to the challenge of working with this very strict director and perfectionist and saw him as a nothing more or less than a collaborator and a human being. It was exciting to hear so many inside stories about the world of Ingmar Bergman (Zoom attendees were told one particular anecdote they are not allowed to repeat) from a top professional keeping his legacy alive in the Twenty-First century.
2022’s PERF 481 capstone class presented eleven projects, ranging from installations to films, papers, performances, lectures, and workshops that focused on identities, cultures, art, and the impact that internal and external factors have on our lives.

Two installations elicited nostalgia in their viewers through physical objects and settings: Joshua Carley’s *Dear Genius* was a walk-through experience centered around the work of children’s book editor, Ursula Nordstrom. Grace Harmon’s *Wrong Generation* transformed a small classroom space into a 1970s living room designed to both comfort and intrigue.

Riley Cameron created an education and outreach tool through the abstract film, “Untitled,” which leveraged layered visuals, quick cuts, and disjointed audio to recreate a feeling of dissociation. Ben Douglas presented a short film, “The Inner Workings of Ordering a Latte while Neurodivergent.”

Two projects used ethnographic observations to guide their content. “Cushion,” a film by Hannah Bryant and Harrison Daniels, was inspired by the awkward jump from friendship to romance. Alex Cordova designed and led a tabletop roleplaying game that became “Vlei Leer: A Real Play Podcast of a D&D Game by and about Texas A&M Students.”

Phelan Duplessis’ lecture “Playing the Score: A Ludomusicological Analysis of Video Games” took a player-first approach to explore the effects music has on the gaming experience. Andy Carter investigated the efficacy of punk music as a political statement in his lecture, “The Politics of Punk: A Case Study of Two Bands.”

Workshops invited attendees to participate by, first, designing a lighting scheme in Elena Krawczyk’s “Learning Lights: A Lecture and Workshop on Stage Lighting,” and then enacting critical adaptations in Andrea “Angie” Moore’s “(Un)Creating Successful Stories: An Improvisational Devising Workshop.”

“To the Moon and Back: A Theatrical Conversation with Georges Méliès’ ‘Le Voyage dans la Lune’” by Olivia Parker was a devised performance exploring gender, race, colonialism, and identity in conversation with the early film, “A Trip to the Moon” (1902).

Having completed their Performance Studies major, the graduating seniors hope to continue following their dreams by working in graphic design, publishing, and at museums; becoming educators, recording technicians, and children’s theatre directors; and attending graduate school for Library Science, Acting, Contemporary Performance, Public Management and other fields.
WE ARE HIRING

Media, Communications, and Event Management Assistant

Part-time position: 8-10 hours a week @ $10/hour

Job Description:
Assist with event management and communications needs in the Department of Performance Studies. Duties may include updating the website; writing briefs about departmental announcements, events, and faculty/student/alumni news; overseeing logistics for events such as ticket distribution; using audio-visual equipment to document events; creating posters and other promotional materials to advertise courses and events; assisting with the production and distribution of a student/faculty/alumni newsletter; and devising creative ways to increase the visibility of the department and its events.

Qualifications:
Strong writing skills; ability to independently manage multiple work assignments; ability to communicate professionally with students, faculty, and alumni; website management skills; ability to create graphic designs and flyers; basic audio-visual technology skills. Preferred: prior logistical experience managing events; familiarity with the mission of the Department of Performance Studies.

How to Apply:
Go to https://jobsforaggies.tamu.edu/.

Go to Students - Find a Part-time Job.

Sign in to access the job board.

Search for Job ID 193827.

Provide a cover letter that explains why you are interested in this position and how you are qualified to assist with the media, communications, and events needs of the department as listed in the job description. Please also submit a writing sample of at least 500 words. Ideally, this would be a journalistic writing sample (a feature about a particular person, event, or topic that one might find in a newsletter or newspaper), but could also be a short paper or essay written for a class.

If you have questions, contact Dr. Kim Kattari at kkattari@tamu.edu
Performance Studies offers endless opportunities and possibilities for the students who choose it as a major, minor, or for graduate study. A passion for the arts flows throughout this department, into virtually everyone who takes part. One of the many inspiring artists who impacted and was impacted by it is Brandon Kempf, who graduated with his Master of Arts in Performance Studies in the Spring of 2019. He describes Performance Studies as “more than academia... It begs you to be aware of your surroundings and be conscious of what is going on, creating a different lens to view life [through].”

After finishing a BA in Milwaukee, Brandon was introduced to the Performance Studies program here at Texas A&M by happenstance. He was a bit unsure of what Performance Studies actually was until he arrived in College Station, but as soon as he took the leap and immersed himself in the program, he grew as an academic and an artist. Kempf cites a special connection with the Perf professors, especially his thesis advisor, Kim Kattari, who nurtured his growth in both musical performance and academics.

He continues to use the knowledge he acquired in the department in both his career and in everyday life. Currently, he is the music director of the School of Rock in College Station. School of Rock is a performance-based music educational program, where Brandon is inspired to keep finding “revolutionary ways for kids and new musicians to learn and also connect with [music] in a performative way.” He aims to transform students from “learning the scales and chords” to understanding the history and relating to their musical pieces, which creates a deeper appreciation of their own artistic journey. Kempf believes that “for kids, [this approach] broadens the scope for all aspects of performance.”

Brandon Kempf inspires younger generations of artists with a positive outlook and creative mindset that he first began to nurture in Performance Studies. He believes that this approach contributes to the creation of a sustainable community of artists. He challenges others to find their passion and let that be their driving force.
Focusing on composition and computer music, Jacob C. Alford García (Class of 2008) graduated from A&M with a BA in Music through the Department of Performance Studies. Working closely with professors Andrea Imhoff, Jeff Morris, Martin Regan and Judith Hamera (who now teaches at Princeton University), Jacob credits his time in Aggieland with launching him on what has become an exciting and adventurous career.

After graduating from A&M, Jacob moved to China to study the guqin (a seven-string tabletop slide-zither.) He was awarded a four-year scholarship to pursue advanced studies in Beijing at the Central Conservatory of Music, where he studied under guqin master Zhao Xiaoxia. Jacob has performed solo recitals in both Beijing and Shanghai, and has been invited across China to share his guqin music. Beyond traditional works, he also performs his own compositions. Jacob previously held a lecturer position at the Central Conservatory of Music, teaching a doctoral course on American music and literature.

Jacob is currently a member of the distinguished faculty at the FaceArt Institute of Music in Shanghai, where he teaches composition and theory. In conjunction with Jill Zheng and jazz pianist Chad Higgenbottom, he also recently launched a new tri-annual, six-week workshop bringing artists from different disciplines together to produce a sound-art concert of six collaboratively composed works. Jacob recently talked with Associate Department Head Daniel Humphrey via Zoom about his time in the Department of Performance Studies. Here are excerpts from that conversation, edited for brevity and clarity.

Dan: Tell us about your current position.

Jacob: I teach at the FaceArt Institute of Music in Shanghai. It’s led by contemporary pianist Jenny Q. Chai and Peter Thomas—he’s a Bach specialist. The students range from six years old all the way to master students, so we teach all ages. Most are people who are preparing to study abroad, wanting to go to advanced conservatories.
Dan: What are some of your fondest memories of your time in the Brazos Valley?

Jacob: Dr. Hamera was a guiding light for me when she was department head during some of my toughest years. [Laughs] I spent a lot of time in the office with her and she helped me set a path. She was the one who encouraged me to do the TAMU in Tokyo program with Dr. Regan which ended up changing my entire life trajectory because I became focused on traditional Asian music. I took piano lessons and musicianship with Professor Imhoff. She also encouraged me to embrace narrative in my music making, which has continued to be a central method to my practice.

Dan: Tell me about your study abroad experience.

Jacob: Sure. We learned so much so fast and we got to experience so many different kinds of performance and to see them where they are meant to be performed. I’d seen quite a good amount of stuff through the Performance Studies Program, as they brought in so many guest artists. I really cherish some of those concerts, still vividly remember them. When I finally got to [Asia] to hear the music there, it just blew my mind, to have had those experiences in College Station prepare me for that. [In my study abroad] I experienced Taiko drumming [for the first time] which was pretty cool. We also were given enough free time to experience the city on our own, and so I ended up getting embedded with a shakuhachi group, which is the Japanese flute that Dr. Regan plays. A guy there helped me carve my own shakuhachi which was terrible sounding [laughs] but I learned how to blow it at least and I learned how to make a sound out of it. I ended up taking that thing with me to China, when I moved there, and after quite a few years I built up my level, where I was able to even perform when I went to the conservatory my own pieces on the instrument, so that was cool.

Dan: Do you still play it today?

Jacob: No, because my focus shifted in the conservatory towards the guqin which is now my primary instrument, but I mean all of that was the seed that the Perf Studies professors planted in me. You know the first time we heard shakuhachi music was when Dr. Regan brought it in, I remember the class, and he played for us and compared it to a Japanese painting and showed us these ideas of space, “ma” inside of the art, inside of music. All those inform my compositional choices today....

Continued on next page
Dan: What are some of the more unique things the Department of Performance Studies, with its multi-disciplinary focus, offered you? Does anything come to mind?

Jacob: I never find it weird to be cross collaborating with different people from different backgrounds. That was facilitated by Dr. Morris presenting cross collaborative art to us in a way that seemed very natural. Pretty much all the work that I did at A&M [was] cross collaborative. The big pieces that I did involved people from different departments doing different things. It wasn't until I got to China that I found out that that was a bit unique. You know, especially in the conservatories people kind of stick to their own medium and are, especially here in China, hesitant to step outside those spaces. So that's something that I always look back at [during my A&M years] and am kind of thankful for. When I taught a while back in Beijing, I would ask my students, “why don't you involve like... a dancer for this program, bring a dancer on the stage,” and they just looked at me like I was nuts. [Laughs] Like “No, this is a music concert... we're playing piano right now.” So it was tricky to convince the students that they should involve these other art forms inside their work. There's always going to be a couple of students who are just, like, shut down, like: “I can't do that. No.”

But a majority really opened up their thinking. It took a semester, but by the end they started saying, “Okay, maybe, there's something to this.” I hope that we instill that in them.

Dan: Anything else stay with you from your undergraduate days?

Jacob: I had some extremely memorable times in the Performance Studies Department, and I think that really has made me who I am as an artist, but also as an educator and so I'm always, always thankful for that and [I'm] hoping to go back to see how this department's doing someday but I'm stuck here until [the end of] COVID! [Laughs]
Q: What are your post-graduation plans and goals?

A: My post-grad plans are to apply to local libraries in my hometown, and gain work experience until I [am ready to] apply to graduate schools in order to pursue a Master’s degree in Library Science.

Q: What is your main creative/performance interest and/or research area of interest in Performance Studies, for instance, a particular mode of performance, musical focus, or academic topic?

A: I constantly have multiple creative interests, in both Performance Studies and English. Currently, I am interested in how literature and performance intersect and impact each other.

Q: What did you do for your capstone project in PERF 481?

A: My Capstone project for Perf 481 was called (Un)Creating Successful Stories. The project was a devising workshop, where participants were asked to create short scenes that were (unknowingly to them) adaptations of other works. For example, one group of participants were told that one character is the sole provider of individually-wrapped candies, and that the other characters either wanted the candies as well, or were protective of the candy-provider. The group was asked to perform a five-minute scene that sought to achieve each character’s objective. At the end of their scene, I revealed to everyone in the workshop that the group performed a new adaptation of the book Lord of the Flies by William Golding. It was a very successful and informational workshop for all who participated.

Q: What is your favorite memory from something you did or experienced in the Department of Performance Studies?

A: My favorite memory from my time in the Department of Performance Studies was devising a performance around the theme of “Memory” for my Intro to Performance Studies class. I remember that my groupmates and I all agreed that it was one of the best... projects we had ever worked on, and we were all so proud of what we created together. The project included live music, chanting, choreography based on ritualistic dance, and even a cake that we smashed on the ground!

Q: What Performance Studies research or creative work did you do that you are you most proud of?

A: I am actually proud of most of my work here in Performance Studies. I [feel] like the entire program allowed a lot of room for me to explore all of my interests, even if they are not often considered “performance”. For example, I once wrote an essay that looked at how a scientific experiment on biotechnology in our oceans can be seen as a performance. I was also encouraged to dive into every project with as many ideas as possible, and to never limit myself to what others... think is “correct”. I believe that my projects in my Performance Studies classes had more freedom and true creativity within them due to this encouragement.

Q: Do you have a favorite performer (actor, singer, performance artist, etc.) or a favorite play or movie that has motivated you as a student in the program? If so who or what and why?

A: I fervently love the arts. I believe that everything I watch, perform in, experience, and create impacts me as an artist. I don’t know if I could ever choose just one influential artistic piece or performance. However, I will say that one of the first performances I attended here at Texas A&M was the Royal Osiris Karaoke Ensemble: The Art of Luv show that visited us in Fall, 2019. It was a very weird and interesting performance! Also, because there was limited seating, I truly felt more connected to my Performance Studies peers and professors who attended the show as well. While Royal Osiris didn’t necessarily inspire my work in the Department, it felt more like a symbolic beginning to my studies and classes here!
Q & A

Department of Performance Studies Grant Winners

Two current graduate students in the department, Devante Love and Vanessa Cepeda Rivera, were awarded highly competitive grants from the College of Liberal Arts Summer Grant Program. We asked them to fill us in on this accomplishment and their plans:

Devante Love

Interviewed by: Bethany Soukanya

Q: Can you describe the research you’ll be doing this summer and how the funds will help you?

A: I will be traveling to Santa Fe, New Mexico to observe a theater company called Sacra, which puts on avant-garde performances that feel raw and vulnerable [and that] inspire the same in their audience.

Q: How does this research fit into your work here in the Department of Performance Studies?

A: I studied martial arts for 16 years and have integrated it into my spiritual practices. My research now tries to reexamine martial arts through other lenses than violence and combat, and Sacra uses martial arts practices in their storytelling in order to encourage actors to new means of expressions. I try to imagine martial arts [in terms of] rituals, healing, and identity development.

Q: Is this the first research grant you’ve received? What advice do you have for other graduate students and future graduate students regarding writing a successful grant application?

A: Yes. It’s my first grant at this university. The biggest piece of advice [I can think of] is to practice talking about your research and grant proposal with people who know nothing about your field, so they can tell you what’s interesting and what needs work to become more clear.
Q: Can you describe the research you’ll be doing this summer and how the funds will help you?

A: I will be going to Columbia to work with [the] Tente Theater group. They are a group of women from rural areas of Columbia between 55-75 years old who have lost relatives due to conflict and have created a play to [help them] keep the memories of those they have lost alive. I am interested in their artistic project and their personal journeys, from the traumatic experience of having their relatives disappear [due to political violence], to ultimately becoming creative bodies bearing witness. The grant [will help me] travel... to do ethnographic research and archival research. I will be interviewing [members of the theater group] and their relatives and the organizations that have been with them through the artistic process. The [in person] trip is important because of where they live--they don't have the technological advances [allowing long distance communication]. I’ll also be doing archival research. In the play they use certain objects called “artifacts of memories” like pictures and clothes of those that they have lost. I want to see these up close, see the rooms they have filled with objects, and read the diaries they have filled with experiences and processes.

Q: How does this research fit into your studies here in the Department of Performance Studies?

A: My research is interested in the body as a place of memory, creation, and healing and in the concept of embodiment concerning gender roles. Both themes come from my experience in performance studies.

Q: Is this the first research grant you’ve received? What advice do you have for other graduate students and future graduate students regarding writing a successful grant application?

A: No, I’ve received grants in the past. Three important ideas to remember would be:

- Balance your interests with the logistics that are needed to develop the research
- Gather advice from colleagues and from professors; allow them to give feedback.
- Trust your research and believe in its validity.
Fall 2022 Class Spotlight:

**AFRICANA FILM: FILM 398**
Instructor: Grace Uchechukwu Adinku
Monday/Wednesday 5:45pm - 7:00pm

With focus on Sub-Saharan Africa, this new course explores the history of cinema in Africa from its modest beginning in the late 1950s—when most African nations gained independence from colonial occupiers—to the vital present, with special critical attention focused both on films by native Africans as well as films offering imaginative representations of Africa. It will broadly examine the multiple ways in which African filmmakers project local, national, and regional issues onto global screens.

**HISTORICAL PERFORMANCE - RELIGION, SPIRITUALITY, AND PERFORMANCE: PERF 451**
Instructor: Donnalee Dox
Tuesday/Thursday 11:10-12:25

This class will explore performances understood to be infused with spirit, that emerge from a sense of a numinous, divine, or ineffable presence. We’ll consider how to interpret those performances today, when in current thinking, lines between secular, religious, and spiritual are not always obvious.

**SEMINAR IN FOLKLORE: PERF 461**
Instructor: David Donkor
Tuesday/Thursday 3:55-5:10

This seminar class explores folklore as a “performance” in different contexts: from that in everyday life and cultural events, to the theatrically and/or digitally staged. This course will pay special attention to the folkloric practices of people of African descent in the United States, other parts of the “New World,” and on the African continent itself.

*All 300-400 level FILM courses can be taken as Performance Studies electives.*