By any measure, 2018 was an extraordinary year for the School of Communication. We welcomed visionary faculty, shaped new graduate curricula, launched exciting partnerships, and mounted the largest event in our history. CommFest 2018, held April 20 and 21, drew 2,800 friends to the Evanston campus for a weekend of learning, reunion, and celebration—culminating in “A Starry Night,” the alumni-packed variety show hosted by Stephen Colbert (C86, H11). The spirit of the weekend will reverberate for generations.

In the show’s opening number, Broadway standouts Stephanie D’Abruzzo (C93) and Ana Gasteyer (C89) sang “Comin’ Together,” an original song by Michael Mahler (C04) and Alan Schmuckler (C05). Backed by an enthusiastic student ensemble, that performance set the tone for the evening: friends old and new uniting to celebrate the good fortune of calling Northwestern our home.

The title is a fitting motto for the school and the past year, as everything seems to be comin’ together: cross-disciplinary collaborations in the communication sciences; advancements in our new-works creation programs; student leadership in the arts, as in last winter’s mainstage production of Vinegar Tom (above); and plans for our new MFA program in acting and the downtown Chicago media and performing arts center that will house it (stay tuned for updates). None of these achievements would be possible without the generosity and imagination of our School of Communication family. When we come together, we can accomplish anything.
TOGETHER IN MOVEMENT

Each year, dance program director Joel Valentín-Martínez assembles a new cohort of internationally recognized choreographers to work with students ahead of the program’s annual winter concert, Danceworks. “I like to find choreographers who bring poetics to the work but also challenge the dancers’ stamina,” says Valentín-Martínez. “For young up-and-coming dancers, especially in a university setting, you want to be able to give them a hint of what’s out there professionally.”

One such choreographer is Nejla Yatkin, who created “On the Eve of…” (above) for Danceworks 2018, @Hi-Speed. She set out to explore how societal constraints continue to impact women and how ownership of female narratives can fight oppression. To do this, Yatkin sought students’ vital input—starting with their journaling and leading to their creating movement together. “In the end, it was very collaborative choreography,” says Valentín-Martínez, “and that included listening to the voices of the performers.”

He adds that this thrilled the students, who loved Yatkin’s approach to the process. But she didn’t hold back on the technical and physical rigors the piece required.

“We ask the students to look at this work not as a hobby but as a precursor to what the dance world demands,” says Valentín-Martínez, “and to understand how the collaborative conversation triggers movement.”
The Northwestern University Center for Audiology, Speech, Language, and Learning opened its doors in January 2015 with a mission of serving the greater Evanston community through excellence in clinical care, cutting-edge research, and student development. Before its launch, NUCASLL’s services had been siloed in three independent clinics within the Roxelyn and Richard Pepper Department of Communication Sciences and Disorders: learning disabilities, audiology, and speech-language pathology.

“Pulling those areas together under one roof meant we could make a bigger impact both in the community and at Northwestern,” says Denise Eisenhauer, NUCASLL’s director of speech, language, and learning services. “The merger made the clinic a backdrop for all the research that’s happening in the department and paved the way for significant growth.” Today that growth encompasses more than 9,000 patient visits a year, involvement in studies and clinical assistance by nearly all tenure-track faculty, higher-caliber students matriculating, and a better infrastructure for disseminating translational research. More involved than ever in community building through free hearing screenings and partnerships with area care providers, the center serves patients of all ages (including children, such as those above with clinical instructor and lecturer Molly Aceves). “It’s been wonderful to see how NUCASLL’s multidisciplinary work and new partnerships have flourished since our opening,” says Eisenhauer, “and how our patients can thrive as a result.”
**COMMUNITIES GATHERING TOGETHER**

Playwright, actor, and Academy Award–winning screenwriter Tarrell Alvin McCraney (left) penned his play *In the Red and Brown Water* amid an emotional tempest. His mother had battled drug addiction and was sick as a result of HIV when McCraney was hoping to begin college. Despite agonizing reservations, he enrolled at DePaul University—and his mother died a month after he graduated. “I’ve always regretted that decision,” he says. “It’s haunted me my entire life.” Writing the play was his way of confronting the guilt.

McCraney experienced a catharsis last fall when he attended Northwestern’s mainstage production of the play as a guest of the 2018 Lambert Family Conference, “Black Arts International: Temporalities and Territories.” “What was so thrilling about seeing this play was that I had forgotten that was what caused me to write it,” he said in a discussion moderated by communication studies assistant professor Aymar Jean Christian (right). “Something in the way this incredible production came about just went to the root of that decision.” The student cast was equally thrilled to perform for McCraney, winner of a 2017 Oscar for *Moonlight*, the film he coadapted from his play *In the Moonlight Black Boys Look Blue*. The five-day conference gathered artists, scholars, researchers, and students from Northwestern and beyond to explore the culture of creation in black communities worldwide. It was organized by Carlos Montezuma Professor of Performance Studies E. Patrick Johnson and sponsored by the Lambert Family Conference Fund, established through a generous donation from the Lambert Family Foundation.

*Give every year, make a difference every day.*
EXPERIENCING TOGETHER

Productions at the Virginia Wadsworth Wirtz Center for the Performing Arts are typically directed by faculty, alumni, and guest artists. Yet a big perk for our undergraduate actors is working with MFA directing candidates, who are early enough in their careers to be relatable mentors but experienced enough to demonstrate sound creative judgment. This was the case for the students featured in last spring’s *Fairy Tale Lives of Russian Girls* (above), directed by Caitlin Lowans.

“I really wanted to tell a story about young women who were the age of the actors themselves and the heroes of their own stories,” says Lowans, who directed the show as a third-year graduate student and is now artistic director of Theatreworks at University of Colorado–Colorado Springs. “This campus is so rich in female actors, and I wanted to choose a story that showed them as strong and powerful and capable of shaping their own narratives.”

Meg Miroshnik’s play follows a young woman returning to her native Russia in the post-Communist era. Highly stylized and subversive, the story dances between folktale and reality to deliver a stark message about the female experience: it doesn’t always end “happily ever after.”

“As a director, I’m always responding to something,” says Lowans. “I love conversation, I love exchange, I love dialectic.” And in stagings of works both new and established, artistic give-and-take is essential for our students’ growth.
When theatre professor and director Rives Collins and senior lecturer and playwright Laura Schellhardt workshopped *Ever in the Glades* in summer 2016, its future was as uncertain as that of the scrappy teens at the story’s center. Schellhardt’s play was only half-written when she and Collins took part in the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts’ annual New Visions/New Voices new play workshop. Depicting five teenagers on a fictional Florida island and their quest to escape the clutches of alligators and their own insidious parents, the show was an early hit among the two faculty members’ theatrical peers. The Kennedy Center then invited Northwestern to return with a completed play starring undergraduate actors (from left, Mariah Copeland, Kori Alston, Ryan Foreman, Robert Cunningham, and Bryan Eng).

*Ever in the Glades* ran for one June 2018 weekend at the Kennedy Center’s Family Theater after premiering at the Wirtz Center in May. The experience was transformative for faculty and students alike, fostering opportunities for budding leaders to get a taste of life in professional theatre. For example, Allie Woodson (C18) codirected the production with Collins.

“It’s far more useful for students to actually develop—rather than just talk about—discipline, creativity, and stamina through active engagement in the profession,” says Schellhardt. “Many of these students will become my professional colleagues one day. It’s heartening to watch that process begin now.”
The Oscar-nominated documentary *I Am Not Your Negro* showcases the work of American writer and social critic James Baldwin. Directed by Raoul Peck (right), the film attempts to finish Baldwin's incomplete manuscript about the deaths of his friends Martin Luther King Jr., Malcolm X, and Medgar Evers. Yet, as Peck pointed out after an October 2017 screening at the Mary and Leigh Block Museum of Art, it’s as much about today as it is about the upheaval of the late ’60s. “In times of despair, it’s always good to go back to Baldwin,” said Peck, the School of Communication’s 2018 Hoffman Visiting Artist, “because you will always find a solution or a way forward.”

Peck had unprecedented access to Baldwin’s estate, which included letters and unpublished works that the filmmaker used to piece together a narrative—a process that took him 10 years. The film demonstrates Baldwin’s pre-science on matters of politics, popular culture, and shifting societal norms.

The Q&A was moderated by radio/television/film professor Miriam Petty (center), director of the screen cultures doctoral program, and Kyle Henry (left), associate professor and interim director of the MFA program in documentary media. The event was funded by a generous gift from Jane Steiner Hoffman and Michael Hoffman as well as former Graduate School dean Dwight McBride.

“It’s such a remarkable film,” said Petty during the Q&A, “It’s like a Baldwin text. Every time I see it, I see something new.”
TOGETHER ACROSS BORDERS

Being a theatre major at Northwestern has its fringe benefits. For the second year running, the American Music Theatre Project collaborated with the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland on two new thematically linked musicals that premiered at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe. Select students, faculty, and staff spent more than a month in the Scottish capital rehearsing and performing Legacy: A Mother’s Song and Legacy: The Book of Names, which both won praise from the local press. The shows featured a mix of Northwestern undergraduate and RCS master’s-level actors.

“Northwestern alumni Jonathan Bauerfeld (BSM16) and Casey Kendall (C16) wrote Legacy: The Book of Names, which examined a day in the life of immigrants at Ellis Island in the 1920s, a period of unsurpassed open immigration in the United States,” says AMTP producing director Brannon Bowers (C15). “The experience expands and fulfills AMTP’s and the music theatre certificate program’s missions by offering alumni writers a chance to develop professionally and present their own new musical, and by offering our students a unique international learning experience in how to be a creative performer.”

Through these and other increasingly commonplace professional collaborations, our students are discovering what it means to actively contribute to the creative marketplace. “More than that,” adds Bowers, “students learn to become better and more conscious citizens of the world.”

Give every year, make a difference every day.
Bonnie Martin-Harris, the Alice Gabrielle Twight Professor in the Roxelyn and Richard Pepper Department of Communication Sciences and Disorders and the School of Communication’s associate dean for academic affairs, is a leading researcher in dysphagia (swallowing disorders). This pervasive condition, often the byproduct of stroke and head and neck cancers, affects more than 1 in 25 adults annually. Martin-Harris’s standardized diagnostic tool for assessing dysphagic patients is now widely used to target interventions. In 2004, amid that research, she first invited an interdisciplinary group of experts to gather at what became the Charleston Swallowing Conference. In July 2018, the seaside met the lakeside when the two-day conference came to Evanston for the first time.

“Research communities can be insular, but this conference is designed to be interdisciplinary,” she says. “I’ve always been passionate about giving clinicians the access they need to make new discoveries, which will invariably lead to optimized outcomes in patients.” More than 800 dysphagia experts from 15 countries came to Northwestern, the conference’s biggest turnout yet.

Pictured on the screen behind Martin-Harris at the conference was the late Jerilyn A. Logemann, Northwestern’s pioneering dysphagia researcher and Martin-Harris’s former teacher and mentor. “I wouldn’t be doing this if it weren’t for Jeri,” says Martin-Harris. “Everything we do and achieve in the department can be traced back to her foundational work.”

Give every year, make a difference every day.
The art of puppetry is meant to disarm, to disrupt. Often associated with children’s entertainment, the medium has long been an effective tool for increasing audience awareness of topics in politics, history, and social movements. But for Northwestern students, puppetry is also a pivotal theatrical skill that engages them in writing, design, directing, and performance all at once.

“To be multiple things is really exciting for students,” says Dassia Posner, associate professor of theatre and of Slavic languages and literatures and the director of the interdisciplinary PhD program in theatre and drama. “It demonstrates that true collaboration and really paying attention to your material and to your performance partners can create life on stage.”

At Posner’s invitation, Tom Lee—a director, designer, and puppet artist who worked on Broadway’s War Horse—taught a spring-quarter puppetry class as 2018’s Wirtz Visiting Artist. The course culminated in a performance featuring student puppetry (above). “Getting to work with somebody who started out as an actor and went into puppetry, as Lee did, really showed students that you don’t have to be confined to one way of looking at theatre,” says Posner. Through collaborative exercises and creating their own puppets, students were “opened up to experiencing ideas that they might not otherwise have imagined.” The Wirtz Visiting Artist program is made possible by a generous gift from W. Rockwell Wirtz (C75) and Marilyn Queen Wirtz.
The Oregon Shakespeare Festival’s 2018 production of *Oklahoma!* was a glimpse into what might have been. Director Bill Rauch made the Rodgers and Hammerstein musical a celebration of diversity, eschewing a typical white, heteronormative cast as he filled the stage with people of color, transgender actors and characters, and same-sex couples. To costume the show, he tapped veteran designer and Northwestern theatre professor Linda Roethke.

“It was important to him that it be historically accurate,” she says. Oklahoma before statehood had been a refuge for black “boomers” from the South, Native Americans already living on the land, and East Coast cross-dressers in search of freedom. In joining the Union, the state became more conservative, thus losing some of its spirit of tolerance and inclusion. “Bill decided, ‘We are going to tell this story as if this change didn’t happen,’” explains Roethke.

The musical’s text was left largely untouched, save for some pronoun adjustments. What resulted was a buoyant celebration of identity, culture, and authenticity that resonated with audiences, especially young people yearning to see faces and stories that resembled their own.

“*Oklahoma!* was not anything I wanted to do—it was not on my bucket list—but you always have to ask, ‘Why now?’” says Roethke. “I didn’t realize until I was sitting in the audience how profoundly it would affect me. Seeing a genuine love story on stage that celebrated who I was—that was phenomenal.”
## TOGETHER IN NEW INITIATIVES

Inspiration can strike in interesting ways—and unlikely places. In 2015 Dean Barbara O’Keefe visited Abbott Hall on Northwestern’s Chicago campus, where the school’s Center for Communication and Health had just opened. Built long ago as a dormitory, Abbott had operated a large cafeteria on its second floor. O’Keefe happened to stop in and take a look. To her, the cavernous, unused space resembled something entirely different: a theater.

This year the school welcomes its first class of MFA acting students—a select cohort seeking advanced training through Northwestern’s innovative, experientially driven curricular model. The program is directed by Professor Anna Shapiro, the Marjorie Hoffman Hagan, Class of 1934, Chair of Theatre and the Tony Award–winning artistic director of Chicago’s famed Steppenwolf Theatre Company. And the old cafeteria, being converted into a state-of-the-art performing and media arts center, will soon be the program’s home.

For the past decade the school has strategically expanded graduate programs to equip students for success in a rapidly changing professional landscape. Adding an MFA acting program was a vital next step. Housing this program in Chicago, an international hub for bold, experimental theatrical storytelling, will attract new audiences and better position students for creative partnerships with city stakeholders. This MFA program and the Abbott Hall space represent the future of the School of Communication’s pedagogical mission—one that we’d never imagine achieving without you.

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