

Alumni share stage in 'Pippin' National Tour

Deirdre Kronschnabel

Contributor
@kronschn

The "Pippin" opening number is a huge reveal — circus artists, illusionists and dancers twirl on stage in an organized chaos of feathers, hoops and lights.

"I just don't think there's anything else like it," said Elon University alumna Savannah Sprinkle '15, who plays the role of Catherine in the 2017 National Tour of "Pippin." "Everyone is just blown away."

Sprinkle and her former classmate Mara Lucas '15 performed alongside each other in McCrary Theatre in "Crazy for You" and "Ragtime" while in the same musical theatre class at Elon. Now, the two alumna are spreading the magic to stages across the United States in the 2017 Pippin National Tour.

Sprinkle received a callback for Catherine, Pippin's love interest, but after no further contact, assumed she hadn't gotten the role. Three months later, the producer called Sprinkle to a meeting. At the time, Sprinkle was playing Mary Poppins in her hometown of Atlanta.

"I had a crazy day," Sprinkle said. "I left at 6 a.m., got to New York at 8 a.m., did my audition and then right after that I left and flew back to Atlanta. I did Mary Poppins that night."

Sprinkle's wish for the role was granted, but the excitement had only just begun.

In February, while Sprinkle was on tour, Lucas began subletting her apartment in New York.

It was a Friday when Lucas received an email from Prather Entertainment Group looking for an immediate replacement for an injured Pippin dancer. By the following Monday, she had been offered the job.

"I had a week to pack up my stuff in New York, and I joined the tour that Sunday," said Lucas, ensemble member and understudy to the Leading Player. "I learned the show in a week and a half, and I've been doing it since."

Sprinkle had no idea the company was going to ask Lucas to submit.

"It's so nice to have someone there who you went to school

with and you shared a lot of growing up experiences together," Sprinkle said. "It's like you're connected to the past but also you're doing something that will forever bond you to the future."

For Lucas, Sprinkle made her national stage debut a little less daunting.

"Joining a tour in the middle is sort of like switching high schools in the middle of the year," Lucas said. "Everybody already knows each other and you're the new kid. It was just nice to know there would be someone I was

comfortable with."

Still, a national tour conjures up other struggles. Almost two years post-graduation, the alumna have had to adapt to fewer resources and more difficult roles.

"It's hard when you're in a collegiate program because you have to cast entire shows with very young people," Sprinkle said. "I ended up playing a lot of older roles when I was at Elon [University], which was incredible, but sort of confusing when I left school. I was trying to figure out, 'What can I play now?'"

The quirky and endearing Catherine has challenged Sprinkle to tiptoe a fine line between comedy and drama.

"That was one of the things that I had the biggest trouble with," Sprinkle said. "Finding the really funny bits and moments, but making them truthful and sincere so that she reads to the audience as a very relatable character."

Linda Sabo, associate professor in the Performing Arts department, is familiar with the genuineness that sparkles from Sprinkle on stage.

"She does the work not because she has stars in her eyes, but because she loves it and would do it no matter what," Sabo said. "She is truly a performing artist."

Lucas and Sprinkle encourage current students to take advantage of resources. Notes from professors and copies of sheet music might not seem critical now, but they will become luxuries once off campus.

"Really think about your time while you're in school, and use that time to take advantage of all you're given, so that you can go into the real world with confidence," Sprinkle said.

And above all, to always get back up.



PHOTO SUBMITTED BY MARA LUCAS
Mara Lucas '15 and Savannah Sprinkle '15 are sharing the stage again on National Tour of "Pippin."

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SAVANNAH SPRINKLE
ALUMNA '15

"There are going to be times when you're going to feel like no matter what you do, you're being pulled back," Sprinkle said. "But you're going to be launched into something great."

Regardless of what obstacles may stand in the way of their next adventures, both women are testaments that with dedication and determination, dreams come true.

"I always had an aunt who would say things like, 'Are you sure you don't want to get a minor in business?'" Sprinkle said. "Then she came to see the show and she goes, 'I understand now. I get it. And I think it was worth every bit of it.'"



SOPHIE ZINN

Majors: International Studies and Political Science

Minor: Interreligious Studies and Middle East Studies

Mentor: Brian Pennington



JOCELYN PIETRO

Majors: Public Health and Psychology

Minor: Interreligious Studies and Human Service Studies

Mentor: Amanda Tapler



KRISTINA MEYER

Majors: Religious Studies and Mathematics

Mentor: Toddie Peters



STYRLING ROHR

Majors: Religious Studies and Anthropology

Minor: Asian Studies

Mentor: Amy Allocco



KANNON HALL

Majors: Strategic Communications and International Studies

Minor: Interreligious Studies and Middle East Studies

Mentor: Shereen Elgamal



SAMANTHA CROSIER

Majors: English and Political Science

Minor: Jewish Studies and Interreligious Studies

Mentor: Geoffrey Claussen

MULTI-FAITH from cover

of the program.

"I think that our society has stigmatized religion as something that's private and something that shouldn't be talked about," Zinn said. "However, because we have suppressed our religious identities in our country, we haven't been able to interact on more personal levels with each other."

Amy Allocco, associate professor and director of the program, said that the goal of the program is to be interdisciplinary. It stretches across the whole university, and its first cohort is composed

of students with a variety of majors, backgrounds and research topics.

"We are privileging students who are not otherwise cohorted," Allocco said. "This is a great opportunity for students who wouldn't otherwise have a research platform to get involved in this."

A requirement to be admitted to the Multi-faith scholars program is to be a religious studies major or interreligious studies minor. Though its first cohort ranges from students majoring in public health, English, strategic communications, religious studies and international studies.

"Students who have multi-faith interests will have the opportunity to pair classroom learning and a closely mentored undergraduate research experience with engagement outside of the university, with our local communities and use those three building blocks intersectionally," Allocco said.

Sophomore Kristina Meyer, who is in the program's first cohort along with Zinn, says she chose to apply to the program not only because of her interest in doing research with interfaith organizations, but also because she finds building relationships with her cohort as a valuable aspect of her experience.

"We each have different research topics," Meyer said. "But the fact that we are engaging in multiple religions and engaging with people of multiple religions, we will be able to challenge each other and offer each other different perspectives."

This two-year program requires the selected scholars to pursue their projects closely with faculty mentors. It also requires the students to engage with the local communities to promote multi-faith learning and diversity. During their first year, the scholars will work with their mentors to plan global engagement opportunities as well as research

experiences that will assist in broadening their development as multi-faith leaders. During their senior year, they will take leadership roles on campus within different departments and lead educational events focused around religion.

Zinn hopes to gain a wider perspective of individual experiences, not only from her cohort, but also from those she engages with in the community.

"I think a lot of the times it's easy to associate different religions with particular belief systems or practices," Zinn said. "But when it becomes more personal, I think that people's convictions of others religions deteriorate."

For Meyer, learning from other religions has made her more compassionate.

"I found that studying other religions and studying how people interact has strengthened my own faith," Meyer said.

Meyer and Zinn are excited to see the expansion of the program and learn more about what they will be doing with their cohort and in their individual research projects.

Allocco hopes for the scholars to bring the communities they engage with outside of Elon back to campus to facilitate conversations within the student body. She wants to see increased communication between religious communities at Elon, and believes the scholars can change the conversation about religion at Elon. Her first meeting with the cohort will be Thursday, May 4. She hopes this meeting will serve as the "launching pad" for the cohort that she is looking to build.

"I hope we support one another in the challenging kinds of projects," Allocco said. "Share resources and cheer one another along and ask hard questions to one another as we dig into these research projects and topics."