

October 27, 2016

**Lewis Center for the Arts’ Programs in Theater and Music Theater present the Tony Award-winning musical *Once***

***The musical tale of a Dublin street musician on the verge of giving up on his dreams who unexpectedly meets a girl fascinated by his haunting love songs makes its Princeton-area debut***

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Photo caption: Seniors Sam Gravitte and Maddie Meyers in rehearsal for the Lewis Center for the Arts’ production of the musical *Once*

Photo credit: Graham Phillips

What: *Once*, the Tony-Award winning musical, tells the gripping tale of a Dublin street musician who is on the verge of giving up on his dreams, when he unexpectedly meets a girl who is fascinated by his haunting love songs.

Who: Presented by the Lewis Center for the Arts’ Programs in Theater, and Music Theater, directed by Princeton senior Graham Phillips and featuring seniors Sam Gravitte and Maddie Meyers

When: November 11, 12, 17, 18 and 19 at 8:00 p.m.

Where: Berlind Theatre at McCarter Theatre Center, 91 University Place, Princeton

Tickets: In advance of show date -$12 general admission/$11 students and seniors; box office on days of performances -$17 general admission/$15 students and seniors. Tickets are available at the McCarter box office, by calling 609-258-ARTS (2787) or online through [arts.princeton.edu/once](http://arts.princeton.edu/events/once/2016-11-11/)

(PRINCETON, NJ)—The Lewis Center for the Arts’ Programs in Theater and Music Theater at Princeton University will present the Tony Award-winning musical *Once*, directed by senior Graham Phillips and featuring seniors Sam Gravitte and Maddie Meyers, on November 11, 12, 17, 18 and 19 at 8:00 p.m. in the Berlind Theatre at McCarter Theatre Center.

*Once* tells the gripping tale of a Dublin street musician who is on the verge of giving up on his dreams, when he unexpectedly meets a girl who is fascinated by his haunting love songs. Performed in the show’s characteristic actor-musicianship style — in which the characters play the accompanying instruments as the show’s band — *Once* is subtle and sincere in both its themes and aesthetic, breaking from the traditional Broadway boy-meets-girl romance, and is a testament to the power of music to bring people together.

*Once* is a musical stage adaptation of the 2007 film by John Carney, with the new book written by prominent Irish playwright Enda Walsh. Music and lyrics of the show are by the same team who wrote the film’s original music — Academy Award-winning duo Glen Hansard and Markéta Irglová. Hansard and Irglová won the Oscar for Best Original Song from a song from the *Once* film, “Falling Slowly.” The musical premiered on Broadway in 2012, won eight Tony awards including Best Musical, Best Actor and Best Book for Walsh and only recently closed in 2015. The show also toured nationally from 2013 through May of 2016.

“I believe we are the first non-professional production of the show,” notes Phillips. “Therefore we are the first team to have the opportunity to imagine the show in a new way with a new set and new costumes.”

Gravitte and Meyers first approached Phillips about directing *Once* as their senior theses after the three of them workshopped the song “Falling Slowly” in John Rando and Ethan Heard’s course “Musical Theater Acting and Directing “ last spring. All three are also sharing their interest in musical theater in a course with Broadway director John Doyle, “Luminaries of the American Musical Theater,” which has been bringing major figures to campus for public talks about musical theater legends such as Stephen Sondheim, Michael Bennett, and Bob Fosse.

Phillips, a senior in the Department of History from Laguna Beach, California, has been a professional performer since he was ten years old. He is an actor with experience in film, television and live theater, although *Once* will be his first time directing for the stage. Phillips was in the original Broadway production of the musical *13*, starred as Zach Florrick for seven seasons on the award-winning CBS show *The Good Wife*, and has acted in films such as *Goats*, *Staten Island Summer* and most recently, the Netflix original movie *XOXO*. Phillips is also the co-founder of the nonprofit theater company Grind, along with Princeton alum and *13* co-star Eamon Foley, Class of 2015.

Phillips notes that his perspective as an actor has greatly informed his directorial approach, and he has been working to make *Once* a truly collaborative process. Phillips’ *Once* will be more stripped down than the original production, going for the look and feel of a memory piece.

Gravitte is a senior in the Department of Anthropology pursuing certificates in theater and the new Program in Music Theater, and Meyers is a senior in the Department of Art and Archeology pursuing certificates in theater, music theater, gender and sexuality studies, and American studies. They will appear in this production as part of their theses in the Program in Theater. Meyers and Gravitte are both active members of Princeton’s theater community and have been in the a capella group Shere Khan together for the last four years.

Gravitte was born in Los Angeles, but now lives in Redding, Connecticut. He has been in the Lewis Center productions of *Spring Awakening* and *Annie & Rose*, is a residential college adviser in Mathey College, and a member of Princeton’s varsity men’s lacrosse team. This past summer, he participated in a six-week Global Seminar on French theater in Paris and Avignon. Gravitte comes from a family of professional actors and singers and plans to pursue acting after graduation.

Meyers is from the Bronx, New York. She has appeared as Wendla in the Lewis Center production of *Spring Awakening* and stage managed *Madman Robertson*, acted in shows produced by both Princeton University Players and Theater Intime, and is a writer on All-Nighter, Princeton’s first late-night talk show. She first studied the work of Enda Walsh, who wrote the book of *Once,* through a Global Seminar in Ireland during the summer of 2014. She currently works as a research assistant for Princeton Theater Professor Stacy Wolf, who directs the Program in Music Theater, and also plans to pursue acting and writing after graduation.

Gravitte will be playing the role of Guy, an Irish, down-on-his-luck musician who plays his heartbreaking songs on the streets of Dublin. Gravitte notes that he was drawn to *Once* and the guitar-wielding character of Guy because he wanted to explore the actor-musicianship style of performance, which he studied in another Lewis Center course taught by Doyle. “Guy provides the musical challenge and character depth that I wanted to tackle for my senior thesis,” explains Gravitte.

Meyers will be playing the role of Girl, a Czech immigrant and adept pianist whose complicated history has taken her to Dublin, where she falls for the bittersweet songs of heartbreak that Guy plays. Meyers learned how to play piano for the show and notes, “I’m not usually drawn to traditional female roles in musical theater but *Once* has an incredible book, the story is interestingly unconventional for musical theater, and Girl is a complicated and nuanced female role.” Meyers will also be writing and acting in a separate one-woman show in January as another part of her thesis in the Program in Theater.

The cast also includes Ross Barron ‘17, Victoria Davidjohn ’19, Alicia Ejsmond-Frey, a graduate student, Evan Gedrich ’18, Lachie Kermode ’18, Kieran Murphy ’19, Meaghan O’Neill ’17, and Elisa Steele ’17. “There was no difficulty in finding multi-talented artists at Princeton,” notes Phillips.

The show’s costumes and set are designed by recent graduate Wesley Cornwell ’16, lighting design is by Simon Weisbard, sound design by Joanna Staub, choreography by Alex Quetell ’17, and the show is stage managed by Magda Stankowska ’18.

The Lewis Center’s resident musical director and composer, Vince di Mura, is musical director for the show and will also be taking on the role of one of the characters in the production. Similarly, the entire *Once* team stretched themselves with this production, exploring facets of performance that they may have never attempted before. Some the cast members are experienced musicians, acting for the first time, while others are seasoned actors, working diligently to hone their dance skills or musicianship to play instruments on stage.

One of the focuses in this production will fittingly be crafting the music as a central character. On breaking with the typical “boy meets girl, they fall in love’” structure of traditional musicals, Meyers notes that *Once* is different in that music is truly what ties the plot together: “The main characters fall in love with music, experience a conflict with music, and then resolve the plot through their music.”

Tickets for *Once* are $12 general admission and $11 for students and seniors when purchased in advance, and $17 general admission and $15 for students and seniors purchased the day of performances at the McCarter box office. Tickets are available through McCarter Ticketing, which offers online ordering and print-at-home tickets. To purchase tickets over the phone, call 609-258-ARTS (2787). To purchase tickets online visit: [arts.princeton.edu/once](http://arts.princeton.edu/events/once/2016-11-11/)

For more information about this production, the Programs in Theater and Music Theater, and the more than 100 events offered each years by the Lewis Center, most of them free, visit: [arts.princeton.edu](http://www.princeton.edu/arts).

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