

February 22, 2018

**The Lewis Center for the Arts’ Programs in Theater and Music Theater present**

***Picnic at Hanging Rock***

***New musical based on the popular Australian novel***

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Photo caption: Seniors Jared Brendon Hopper (left) and Allison Light in rehearsal for the Lewis Center’s production of the musical *Picnic at Hanging Rock*

Photos credit: Justin Ramos

What: *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, a new musical with book, music and lyrics by Daniel Zaitchik, adapted from the popular Australian novel by Joan Lindsay. On Valentine’s Day, 1900, three Australian schoolgirls from Appleyard College wander off during an afternoon picnic at the famed geological formation Hanging Rock. The wilderness is seductive, the girls are enraptured, and the mystery begins.

Who: Presented by Lewis Center for the Arts’ Programs in Theater and Music Theater, directed by senior Nico Krell and featuring seniors Jared Brendon Hopper, Meagan Raker, Allison Light, and Emma Watkins with music direction by Stephanie Tubiolo.

When:  March 2, 8, 9 & 10 at 8 p.m., and March 3 at 2 p.m.

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

Tickets: $12 general admission in advance of show dates, $8 for students, $12 seniors, and $17 general admission purchased the day of performances at the box office

(Princeton, NJ) The Lewis Center for the Arts’ Programs in Theater and Music Theater at Princeton University will present the new musical *Picnic at Hanging Rock* with book, music and lyrics by Daniel Zaitchik, adapted from the Australian novel by Joan Lindsay,on March 2, 8, 9 and 10 at 8 p.m., and March 3 at 2 p.m. in the Berlind Theatre at McCarter Theatre Center on the Princeton campus. The production is directed by senior Nico Krell with music direction by Department of Music faculty member Stephanie Tubiolo, and features seniors Jared Brendon Hopper, Meagan Raker, Allison Light, and Emma Watkins.

The musical, like the popular and critically acclaimed 1967 Australian novel and the well-known 1975 film directed by Peter Weir, takes place on Valentine’s Day, 1900, when three Australian schoolgirls from Appleyard College wander off during an afternoon picnic at the famed geological formation Hanging Rock. The wilderness is seductive, the girls are enraptured, and the mystery begins. Though the events depicted in the novel are entirely fictional, it is framed as though it is a true story, corroborated by ambiguous pseudohistorical references. The novel’s irresolute conclusion has sparked significant public, critical, and scholarly analysis, and the narrative has become a part of Australia's national folklore as a result. The novel’s 50th anniversary in 2017 has sparked renewed interest in its story.

Zaitchik has been working on this stage musical adaptation for several years. The piece was developed at Lincoln Center Theater as part of the 2009 Eugene O’Neill Theater Center's National Musical Theater Conference. While the musical has had at least one prior college production in 2014 and a staged reading at Goodspeed Opera House’s Festival of New Musicals in January 2017, the work has continued to be developed and reworked. Zaitchik is a singer-songwriter, theatre writer/composer, and has appeared off-Broadway. His musicals also include *Ula* (book/music/lyrics) and *Darling* *Grenadine* (book/music/lyrics), and he is collaborating with playwright Jordan Harrison on *Suprema*. He received a 2017 Kleban Prize for most promising musical theater lyricist.

Recordings of songs from the haunting score were what originally attracted Krell to the musical. He contacted Zaitchik about mounting a full production at Princeton as his senior thesis project in the Program in Theater. The composer has attended a number of rehearsals and has further refined the show, redefining some of the characters and looking at a slightly different ending.

It was this opportunity to be part of the ongoing development of a new work that led Krell to propose directing the production as his senior project. He has directed shows with a number of Princeton student theater groups, through classes, and with Princeton Summer Theatre, directing *The Crucible* last summer. Last year he directed the Lewis Center’s production of Caryl Churchill’s *Mad Forest*. Krell notes the influence of a directing course with the late Director of the Program in Theater Tim Vasen and a number of courses with Broadway director John Doyle.

The opportunity to work on a play in development was also what led Hopper, an English major, to join the project in the role of Michael Fitzhubert. He was struck by the unique tone of the piece and thought Krell was a perfect match to direct the show. Hopper is both a Program in Music Theater and Program in Theater certificate student and has performed in a number of recent Lewis Center productions, including *Into the Woods*, *A Dream Play*, and *Spring Awakening*.

By coincidence, Raker, a history major, had also heard the score and was thrilled to join Krell and her fellow cast members in exploring the show as their senior project. At Princeton, Raker is a performer with the Triangle Club has performed in shows with the Program in Theater and Princeton Summer Theatre, as well as with the student theater groups Princeton University Players and Theatre Intime. Some of her favorite roles have included Cinderella in *Into the Woods*, Wendy in *Peter Pan*, and Mary Warren in *The Crucible*. She will play the role of Marion Quade.

Light, who is majoring in Spanish, decided to pursue a theater thesis in order to play the role of Irma Leopold. On campus she has served as artistic director of Quipfire! Improv Comedy, head writer for the Triangle Club, and host of Princeton’s live late-night talk show, *All-Nighter*.

Watkins, an English major with certificates in the Programs in Theater, Music Theater, and Environmental Studies, will play the role of Miranda. She notes that she has enjoyed learning and developing *Picnic* alongside its composer and librettist, a creative process that has informed the writing of her own original musical play, *Trailing Rhiannon*, which will premiere at Princeton's Lewis Center in May.

The cast of Princeton undergraduates, in addition to the four seniors in featured roles, includes seniors Kaitlin Demarest, Ankita Ghoshal, and Claire Jones; juniors Jessica Bailey, Carly Maitlin, Justin Sansone, and Anna Zabel; and first-year students Tyler Ashman, Peter Foster, Mariana Corichi Gomez, and Haydon John.

Professional costume designer Sarita Fellows has designed the period costumes with professional sound design by Jessica Paz. Set design is by junior Annabel Barry and lighting design by junior Megan Berry. Pianists joining musical director Tubiolo include junior Bill Huang and first-year Maddie Wu; junior Amber Lin assists Tubiolo. Junior Justin Ramos serves as stage manager, assisted by sophomore Kateryn McReynolds and first-year Rosie Vasen. Professional and faculty advisors on the project include Suzanne Agins, Elena Araoz, Tess James, and Lawrence Moten.

Tickets for *Picnic at Hanging Rock* are $12 general admission in advance of show dates, $8 for students, $12 for seniors, and $17 general admission purchased the day of performances at the box office. Tickets are available through the McCarter box office online at https://www.mccarter.org/tickets-events/ or calling 609-258-2787, and through University Ticketing online at tickets.princeton.edu or calling 609.258.9220, or stop by the Frist Campus Center or Lewis Arts complex ticket offices. Tickets will also be available at the door prior to performances.

To learn more about this event, the Program in Theater, and the more than 100 other performances, exhibitions, readings, screenings, concerts, and lectures presented by the Lewis Center, most of them free, visit [arts.princeton.edu](http://www.princeton.edu/arts).

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