

November 20, 2019

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

***Water Play***

**A new musical by Princeton senior Allison Spann**



Photo caption: Princeton senior Allison Spann, writer and featured performer in *Water Play*

Photo credit: Veronica Spann

What/Who: *Water Play*, a new musical written by Princeton senior Allison Spann, tells the story of a voice violently ripped out of her body following a moment of trauma as she fights her way back to reconnect with herself. Featuring music for piano, voice and looping pedal with an eclectic score of ballads, jazz standards and soundscapes. Directed by theater alumnus Nico Krell and presented by Princeton University’s Programs in Theater and Music Theater. Due to the show’s themes of sexual assault, this production may not be suitable for all audiences.

When: November 22 at 8:00 p.m., November 23 at 5:00 p.m. & 9:00 p.m., and November 24 at 5:00 p.m.

Where: Wallace Theater at the Lewis Arts complex on the Princeton campus

Free and open to the public, however tickets are required

(Princeton, NJ) The Lewis Center for the Arts’ Programs in Theater and Music Theater at Princeton University will present *Water Play,* an unconventional new musical written by Princeton senior Allison Spann that tells the story of a voice, violently ripped out of her body following a moment of trauma, as she fights her way back to reconnect with herself. The new work features music for piano, voice and looping pedal with an eclectic score. The production is directed by Princeton alumnus Nico Krell. Performances will be presented November 22 at 8:00 p.m., November 23 at 5:00 p.m. and 9:00 p.m., and November 24 at 5:00 p.m. in the Wallace Theatre at the Lewis Arts complex on the Princeton campus. The show is free and open to the public, however tickets are required, available through [University Ticketing](https://tickets.princeton.edu/Online/default.asp). Due to the show’s themes of sexual assault, the production may not be suitable for all audiences.

Spann wrote the music, book and lyrics for this new work, asking: In a moment of trauma, where does “I” end, and where does “You” begin? The voice, separated from her body after a sexual assault, wakes up lost, alone, and thirsty. She must fight her way back across deserts and through memories to reconnect with herself, connecting on the journey with other characters to find healing through togetherness, including Mom, represented by sound, and Dad, represented by light. In addition to creating the new work, Spann is one of the performers.

Spann’s music for the new work includes ballads, jazz standards, church hymns, and soundscapes. The soundscapes are created using a looping pedal that extends and overlaps voices, creating a sound that, Spann explains, can be heard as both cacophonous and healing. She experimented in composing music for looping pedal as unconventional percussion this past summer in a production by Princeton Summer Theater of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream,* in which she also performed as Puck.

Spann is majoring in music in Princeton’s Department of Music and pursuing certificates in the Lewis Center’s Programs in Music Theater and Theater; this project represents her theses in the two former programs. She will design sound for a February production of an all-female production of *Macbeth* as her thesis in theater, as well as compose original music for fellow senior and collaborator Jhor van der Horst’s thesis in the Program in Dance.

Arriving at Princeton as a seasoned performer, Spann had considered a conservatory route for college but was interested in both jazz and classical music, and she desired to combine work in music with her interest in theater, a range that most conservatory programs do not offer. At Princeton she has been a member of the Program in Jazz’s Creative Large Ensemble as a vocalist, where she notes she learned how her voice can function as an instrument and where she participated in a variety of experimental works. She has been a member of the Glee Club and had the opportunity to compose an original piece workshopped with the award-winning vocal ensemble Roomful of Teeth. In addition, she studied classical voice with David Kellet and performed operatic roles in her sophomore and junior years, including a performance during a guest artist concert by Bobby McFerrin. Spann performed as a first-year student in the major role of The Witch in the Lewis Center’s production of the musical *Into the Woods*, directed by faculty member Ethan Heard.

All of these experiences and others led to the development of *Water Play*. Following her composition for Roomful of Teeth, she continued writing and developed the musical *Masquerade,* produced last spring as a competitively selected artist-in-residence at Richardson Auditorium on campus. She also was thinking about a personal trauma she experienced between her first and sophomore years and considering a musical response to it. During the junior seminar for theater certificate students, she discussed this project idea with faculty member and Broadway director John Doyle and her peers in the course. She knew she wanted to work with van der Horst as choreographer, she was intrigued by conversations led by theater faculty member Brian Herrera on consent and the dynamics of interaction with an audience, and she was interested in working with Krell and in his ability to take abstract ideas and help to distill them down to their essence and his work as a director in the rehearsal room. She notes how critical Krell’s contributions have been to shaping the piece and honing the work during the rehearsal process. Her faculty advisors on the new work have been opera/music theater composer Andrew Lovett, playwright Nathan Davis, and director Ethan Heard.

“Allison is doing brave work as a playwright, composer and performer,” said Krell.

Krell is a member of Princeton’s Class of 2018. He directed the production of a new musical, *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, as his senior thesis and had the unusual opportunity as a junior to direct a Program in Theater production, *Mad Forest* by Caryl Churchill. After graduation, Krell moved to Brooklyn and is working as a director in New York City. He has served as assistant director under Heard working with his opera company and on a Halloween drag opera, worked with Soho Rep, and has directed readings and workshops and contributed to work on new scripts. He has returned to Princeton as part of Theater Alumni Day to counsel students and to present a workshop on directing for current students.

The all-student cast, in addition to Spann, includes fellow senior van der Horst, who is also choreographing, and first-year student Julien Alam. Senior Jenny Kim is lighting designer and created the role of Dad, and junior Katharine Matthias is sound designer and created the role of Mom. Other students taking on production roles include junior William Griffith as costume designer and sophomore Jacqueline Pothier as stage manager. Sarita Fellows advises on set and costume design, Tess James on lighting design, and Karin Graybash on sound design.

Admission to *Water Play* is free and open to the public; however seating is limited and tickets are required with advance tickets recommended.

To learn more about this event, the Programs in Theater and Music Theater, and the over 100 performances, exhibitions, readings, screenings, concerts, and lectures presented each year at the Lewis Center, most of them free, visit [arts.princeton.edu](http://arts.princeton.edu/).

###