

May 14, 2020

**Elena Araoz Named Producing Artistic Director of Princeton University’s**

**Theater and Music Theater Season**

***Expanded programming led to creation of this new position working in collaboration with Program in Theater Director Jane Cox to realize the annual theater season and more***

 

Photo caption 1: New Producing Artistic Director of the Lewis Center for the Arts’ Theater and Music Theater Season at Princeton University Elena Araoz

Photo credit 1: Courtesy of Elena Araoz

Photo caption 2: Photo from the spring 2020 Princeton Program in Theater all-female production of Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* directed by Elena Araoz, with set by Milan Eldridge '20, costumes by Christopher Vergera, lighting by Reed Leventis, sound by Allison Spann '20.

Photo credit 2: Courtesy of Elena Araoz

(Princeton, NJ) Princeton University’s Lewis Center for the Arts named Lecturer in Theater Elena Araoz, an award-winning theater and opera director, writer and actor, as Producing Artistic Director of the Theater and Music Theater Season. In this new position, Araoz will oversee all aspects of realizing a growing and diverse season of productions, workshops and new play development readings, while Director of the Program in Theater Jane Cox, who previously also managed this portfolio, refocuses her attention on expanding and clarifying curricular needs and building collaborative partnerships both on-campus and in the larger theater community. The position will also work in collaboration with the Program in Music Theater, directed by Stacy Wolf. Araoz begins her new position in the fall.

“Elena has brought her brilliance and creativity to the theaters, classrooms and virtual stages of Princeton University for five years,” said Cox in making the announcement. “In this new position she will be able to make a broader contribution to the Lewis Center. It's an auspicious moment as we have reconsidered many aspects of our theatrical practices, and as the number of students proposing theatrical projects continues to grow, to have a fresh perspective and new leadership for our multifaceted season. As a theater-maker, researcher and scholar, Elena is a role model who will encourage our students to integrate their art-making and their scholarship, using theater as a lens to explore and investigate the world.”

The theater and music theater season typically presents five or six theater and music theater productions, ten to twelve workshop productions and theatrical explorations, numerous developmental readings of student and fellows work, along with guest artist commissions, workshops, events and masterclasses. The producing artistic director has access to support from the Roger S. Berlind ‘52 Playwright-In-Residence fund to nurture collaborations between living writers and students onstage and in the studio.

A research-driven mission guides the theater and music theater production season, working from the principle that rigorous artistic practice is a form of innovation, discovery and intervention. The two programs award certificates, similar to a minor, rather than a major in theater or music theater. Students have substantial opportunities to study all aspects of theater, to explore ideas from their other studies through the lens of theater, and to think of theater as a living, breathing art form. The annual season is student-driven and constructed largely from proposals students in the program present in their junior year for implementation during their senior year. Proposals might include development or reading of an original work they have written or composed; directing, producing, music directing or designing a production (lighting, scenic, costumes or sound); curating a small festival; translating a play; exploring a theatrical form through intensive improv or devising; creating a song cycle or a stand up comedy set; or performing or reinterpreting a particular role. Students are encouraged to experiment and take creative risks. They work alongside professional collaborators and mentors on productions presented in the Roger S. Berlind ’52 Theatre at the McCarter Theatre Center, and in the black box Wallace Theater and Drapkin Studio in the Lewis Arts complex, as well as in other traditional and nontraditional venues on campus.

In addition to teaching, Araoz works internationally, Off-Broadway and across the country including her upcoming productions of the national tour of *Sugar Skull!*, a Day of the Dead musical, which will begin another 30-city tour when safe; the new opera *I Am A Dreamer Who No Longer Dreams*with Resonance Works Pittsburgh after its acclaimed world premiere with White Snake Projects at the Paramount Theatre in Boston; the commercial musical *Havana Music Hall;* and the audio play *Nightfall* by Marisela Teviño Orta for Audible. Her recent directorial work also includes *Original Sound* at Cherry Lane Theatre, Mac Wellman’s *A Chronicle of the Madness of Small Worlds* at New York Theatre Workshop Next Door, *The Migration Plays* at McCarter Theatre, *Sweat* at People’s Light, *Romeo and Juliet* at Shakespeare Festival St. Louis, *In Between* at Walnut Street Theatre, and theatrical events for Anna Deavere Smith and the Institute on the Arts and Civic Dialogue, PEN America, and The Cathedral of St. John the Divine. Her international credits include the world premiere *The Power* in Beijing and *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* for Prague Shakespeare Festival. Opera productions she has directed include *La traviata* for New York City Opera and *Falstaff* for Brooklyn Philharmonic, both at BAM’s Howard Gilman Opera House, and the choreography for *Latin Lovers*at Glimmerglass Opera and for Sir Jonathan Miller's *La traviata* at Vancouver Opera.

The Latinx Theatre Commons named her creation of *Two Arms and a Noise* as one of "thirty-six plays and writers that everyone should know;” the piece most recently played in Bucharest, Romania. *The New York Times* has praised Araoz's productions at various times as "striking, primal, wild, stirring, and refreshingly natural;" *The Boston Globe* as "riveting, dreamy, and vivid;” and *The New Yorker* as “refreshing.” *Time Out New York* mentions, “Elena Araoz is a director with deep wells of imagination; she seems drawn to magical realist work.” She is a New York Theatre Workshop Usual Suspect and the Drama League’s inaugural Beatrice Terry Artist-In-Residence.

This past year Araoz has directed a number of virtual productions under the aegis of the Innovations in Socially Distant Performance (ISDP) research project, which she initiated at the start of the COVID pandemic. The project has spent the past year during the challenges of the pandemic studying the aesthetics, philosophies, tools, and artists who are transforming the fields of virtual live performance and socially distant productions. The project’s website — [www.sociallydistantperformance.com](http://www.sociallydistantperformance.com) — has been updated continually as a place to create community, share information, inspire invention, and document the expanding art form, with an emphasis on sharing the tools and techniques of a reimagined trade. ISDP has been selected to be archived by the U.S. Library of Congress in the Coronavirus Web Archive of select web-based evidence to document the effect of the coronavirus pandemic on every aspect of American life and communities. A “Notes from the Field” about ISDP’s discoveries is forthcoming in the academic journal *Theatre Topics,* and Araoz has had numerous speaking engagements about the future of theater-making after the surge of virtual productions during COVID. ISDP and the Lewis Center are partners with McCarter Theatre, Princeton University Health Services, and The 24 Hour Plays on *The Manic Monologues,* which brings to life true stories – experiences submitted by resilient people across the world living with mental health challenges – and what they have to say about struggle and pain, and also triumph and joy. The project, conceived and directed by Araoz, has recently been nominated for a Drama League Award. Currently, Araoz and ISDP’s students are conceiving of a new bilingual Spanish and English experience with Boundless Theatre Company. Araoz leads the ISDP project with Princeton researchers Miranda Allegar, B.T. Hayes, Minjae Kim, Reed Leventis, Katharine Matthias, and Kate Semmens.

Araoz has also directed a number of virtual productions this year including *a farm for meme* by Virginia Grise with Cara Mia Theatre, allgo, and a todo dar productions, which was Howlround Theatre Commons’ most watched production. In addition, she directed the world premiere of the virtual CGI opera *Alice in the Pandemic* by composer Jorge Sosa and creator and librettist Cerise Lim Jacob, which was selected for the Library of Congress’ Performing Arts COVID-19 Response Collection, and she will direct the new virtual CGI opera *A Survivor’s Odyssey* by composer Mary Prescott and creator and librettist Cerise Lim Jacobs .

Araoz, who is from Hartford, Connecticut, and now resides in Montclair, New Jersey, will also continue to teach courses in acting, directing and theater-making in addition to her duties as producing artistic director.

“I am thrilled to enter into this position having experienced the extraordinary leadership of Jane Cox in this role,” said Araoz. “I hope to continue her efforts so that the work we produce with students is not simply a culmination of their training but is the beginning of personal journeys and social provocations. It is that Princetonian ethos which has allowed me to conceive of and direct some of the work I am most proud of at the Lewis Center for the Arts. I’m excited to grow our producing season and Theatre and Music Theater Programs with greater creative collaboration throughout Princeton University’s departments and its international scholarly community, and further partner our students with the boldest-thinking and adventurous theater and music theater artists in the field. As a Latina and first-generation college graduate, I am devoted to wide ranging types of performance, more bilingual and multilingual productions, translations, transmedia, newly devised experiments, and processes and productions which scrutinize and newly imagine our relationships and communities.”

Cox, a Senior Lecturer in Theater, has expanded the Program in Theater since becoming director in 2016. She has increased courses, events and production around original theater and music theater works by both students and guest artists and, as a professional Tony Award-nominated lighting designer, has increased opportunities for students in theatrical design. Cox has focused on improving equity and inclusion in the theater program, by redefining theatrical structures and practices within the theater-making season, by supporting student, faculty and guest artist work that is in conversation with movements for racial justice, and by leading students in classes, conversations, theatrical projects and external research focused on anti-racism efforts. Her efforts have also increased opportunities for students to build skills through co-curricular workshops and masterclasses, and to connect students to working theater professionals in the field.

Cox’s rededication to partnerships and collaboration made possible by this new structure will build on current campus partnerships, such as those with the Department of Music and the Council on Science and Technology, collaborative relationships with campus student theater groups, and community collaborations including the Trenton Youth Theater Project of the Trenton Arts at Princeton, a relatively new initiative of the Lewis Center, Department of Music and Pace Center for Civic Engagement that fosters outreach and engagement between Princeton students, faculty and staff and Trenton youth. Expanding and creating new partnerships with the wider professional theater world has included multiple collaborations with McCarter Theatre; a new partnership with Maestra Music founded by composer/lyricist and music director Georgia Stitt to give support, visibility, and community to the women who make music in the musical theater industry; an ongoing collaboration with The Public Theater in New York City that provides opportunities for Princeton theater students; and a partnership that launched this year with CLASSIX, a New York City-based collective of theater artists and scholars dedicated to expanding the classical theater canon through an exploration of dramatic works by Black writers.

To learn more about the Lewis Center for the Arts and the Programs in Theater and Music Theater visit [arts.princeton.edu](https://arts.princeton.edu/).

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