

March 18, 2022

**Lewis Center for the Arts’ Program in Theater presents**

**The Hello Girls**

***Musical about the intrepid women telephone operators on the front lines of World War I with music and lyrics by Peter Mills and book by Peter Mills and Cara Reichel, directed by Princeton senior Kate Semmens and featuring seniors Molly Bremer and Violet Gautreau***

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**Photo Caption:** Members of the cast of the Lewis Center for the Arts’ production of the musical, *The Hello Girls*. Top: Grace Zhao, Left to right: Violet Gautreau, Molly Bremer, BT Hayes, Bottom: Charlotte Kunesh

**Photo Credit:** Jon Sweeney

**Who/What:** From New York to Paris, from ragtime to jazz, *The Hello Girls* chronicles the story of America’s first women soldiers. These intrepid heroines served as bi-lingual telephone operators on the front lines, helping turn the tide of World War I. They then returned home to fight a decades-long battle for equality and recognition, paving the way for future generations. Music and Lyrics by Peter Mills, book by Peter Mills and Cara Reichel, both Princeton alumni. Directed by Princeton senior Kate Semmens and featuring seniors Molly Bremer and Violet Gautreau, alongside a company of 12 student actor-musicians. Funding for this production has been provided in part by Princeton University’s Gender and Sexuality Resource Center.

**When:** Friday, March 25 and Saturday, March 26 at 8:00 p.m., and Sunday, March 27 at 2:00 p.m.

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

**Admission:** Tickets are $12 in advance, $17 purchased day of performances; $10 for students at McCarter Box Office at mccarter.org. All guests are required to be fully vaccinated against COVID-19 to the maximum extent, which now includes a COVID booster shot for all eligible to receive it. Guests to McCarter Theater must wear a KN95 mask and are also required to show proof of vaccination and a photo ID at the door (Princeton students, faculty and staff only need to show their PU ID card). The actors will be unmasked while performing on stage.

**Accessibility:** The Sunday, March 27th performance will be live captioned. The venue is wheelchair accessible, and an assistive listening system is available. Guests in need of other access accommodations are asked to contact the Lewis Center at LewisCenter@princeton.edu at least one week prior to the event date.

**For more information:** <https://arts.princeton.edu/events/the-hello-girls/2022-03-25/>

PRINCETON, NJ – The Lewis Center for the Arts’ Program in Theater at Princeton University presents *The Hello Girls*, with music and lyrics by Peter Mills and book by Peters Mills and Cara Reichel, both Princeton alumni. From New York to Paris, from ragtime to jazz, *The Hello Girls* chronicles the story of America’s first women soldiers. These intrepid heroines served as telephone operators on the front lines, helping turn the tide of World War I. They then returned home to fight a decades-long battle for equality and recognition, paving the way for future generations. The production is directed by Princeton senior Kate Semmens and features seniors Molly Bremer and Violet Gautreau, alongside a company of 12 Princeton student actor-musicians. Performances will be on Friday, March 25 and Saturday, March 26 at 8:00 p.m., and Sunday, March 27 at 2:00 p.m. in the Berlind Theatre at the McCarter Theatre Center, 91 University Place.

Tickets are $12 in advance, $17 purchased day of performances, and $10 for students at McCarter Box Office at [mccarter.org](https://www.mccarter.org/season/2021-2022/PDP/thehellogirls/). All guests are required to be fully vaccinated against COVID-19 to the maximum extent, which now includes a COVID booster shot for all eligible to receive it. Guests to McCarter Theater must wear a KN95 mask and are also required to show proof of vaccination and a photo ID at the door (Princeton students, faculty and staff only need to show their PU ID card). The actors will be unmasked while performing on stage.

In 1918, the U.S. Army Signal Corps sent 223 women to France to work as switchboard operators during World War I. Affectionately known as “Hello Girls,” these bi-lingual women were integral to facilitating communication between the U.S Army and Supreme Allied Commander Ferdinand Foch’s French-speaking forces. The U.S. Army discharged the last Hello Girl in 1920, the same year Congress ratified the Nineteenth Amendment granting women the right to vote. However, when the women returned to the U.S., they discovered they would not receive any veterans’ benefits and began what would become a 60-year battle to earn these benefits and recognition as veterans of World War I. The musical is mainly based on Elizabeth Cobbs’ book *The Hello Girls* but takes some liberties to create a fictionalized version of the true story. *The New York Times* described the musical as a story that “fills in an important blank: showing an adventurous female presence in the war story we thought we knew.”

Princeton seniors Kate Semmens, Molly Bremer, and Violet Gautreau are all pursuing certificates in theater and/or music theater from the Lewis Center in addition to their major areas of study. To complete their certificate, Semmens, Bremer, and Gautreau jointly proposed directing and performing principal roles in *The Hello Girls*.

Semmens, Bremer and Gautreau were determined to find a musical that had complex and challenging roles for women and a large ensemble cast. After sorting through a number of possibilities, they landed on *The Hello Girls* (2018), a musical by Princeton alums Peter Mills ’95 and Cara Reichel ’96, founders of Prospect Theatre Company in New York City. The seniors appreciated that the show had five leads for women and was at once historical and relevant to contemporary conversations about gender equality and women in the workplace. The trio approached the show from their perspective as college students and embraced the idea of a group of young people coming together to tell a story from the past. Through found artifacts and instruments, the cast journeys into history to discover how far women's rights have come, and more importantly, how far they still need to go. The producers decided to utilize the show’s original actor-musician format to contribute to the effect of the actors creating the whole world of the show from scratch. The cast, then, both acts and plays the instrumental score to accompany themselves. Within the cast, multi-talented actors play piano, accordion, guitar, violin, trumpet, glockenspiel, upright bass, and cello.

**Kate Semmens** is a history major pursuing certificates in theater, music theater, and American studies. She grew up in Brooklyn and attended LaGuardia High School as a drama major. Her previous directing and choreography credits include *Sweeney Todd* at the Hangar Theatre (assistant director), *Phedre* at the Berlind Theatre (assistant director), and *The Mushening* at Princeton University Players (choreographer). Semmens has acted in several Lewis Center productions including *A Little Night Music* and *Fun Home*. She served as vice-president, cast manager and dance captain of The Princeton Triangle Club, where she performed in *Night of the Laughing Dead*, *Once Uponzi Time*, *All Underdogs Go to Heaven* and *Singin’ in the Train*. She has also served as business manager of Princeton University Players, show runner for *All-Nighter*, and as an Orange Key tour guide and campus visiting ambassador in the Office of Admissions. *The Hello Girls* is her first solo directing project; she notes, “It has been incredibly rewarding to collaborate with such a wonderful group of artists to tell the story of this group of brave young women.” After graduation this spring, Semmens plans to pursue acting and directing professionally.

**Molly Bremer**, playing Grace Banker, is an English major and pursuing certificates in theater, music theater, and creative writing. She shares, “I am thrilled and honored to partake in telling a story as socially and culturally significant as it is heartfelt and joyous, and especially to do so with such a magnificent cast and such brilliant creatives.” The significance of representing an historic figure onstage is not lost on her, adding, “I’m also thrilled to play a woman in musical theater who is a brave, smart leader, concerned more with friendship, courage, connection, and faith than with marriage or romance.” Bremer’s professional credits include The Hangar Theatre’s *Sweeney Todd*, *The Police*, and *Elephant and Piggie’s: We Are in A Play!*; being featured in The Comeback Cabaret at Don’t Tell Mama NYC, regularly starring at Feinstein’s 54 Below in New York City in the 54 Sings Broadway’s Greatest Hits! concert series, as well as virtually in Scott Siegel’s Great American Songbook concert series. She also is featured in Rebecca Shoptaw Films’ upcoming *Patience on a Monument*. Her Princeton credits include the title role in Princeton Opera Company’s *Cendrillón/Cinderella*, LAMDA’s *Tis Pity She’s a Whore* and the title role in *Macbeth*, and the Lewis Center’s productions of *A Little Night Music*, *Hotel on Fremont* and *Mother Courage and her Children*, as well as directing, producing, choreographing, and performing in *Who’s That Woman?: Women of the Musicals of Stephen Sondheim.* Bremer is a Behrman Fellow, a Lewis Center Student Advisor teaching dance classes, and the recipient of The Shapiro Prize for Academic Excellence, The Ward Prize for Creative Writing, The Class of 1870 Prize in English, and an Outstanding Undergraduate Presenter award for Princeton Research Day, the highest award conferred on an undergraduate research presentation in that program.

**Violet Gautreau**, playing Suzanne Prevot, is an English major pursuing certificates in theater, music theater, and American studies. She is from Chappaqua, New York. She was drawn to *The Hello Girls* because of its focus on “criminally under-celebrated women from history, as well as the beautiful score,” adding, “I feel privileged to have the opportunity to tell this important story alongside such capable, talented, and caring women.” Her previous work with the Lewis Center includes performing in *Legally Blonde* and assistant stage-managing *Macbeth*. Her work with student theater groups includes *Singin’ in the Train*, *Once Uponzi Time*, and *McCosh Me If You Can* with Princeton University Triangle Club; *Spring Awakening* and *God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater* with Princeton University Players, and two annual productions of *The Vagina Monologues* with Princeton University Wym’ on Stage. Alongside her theatrical endeavors, she sings with her a cappella group, the Princeton Katzenjammers.

Mills and Reichel graduated from Princeton in 1995 and 1996, respectively, and founded Prospect Theater in 1998 along with fellow Princeton alumni Melissa Huber and Tony Vallés. Prospect is dedicated to developing and producing new works, envisioned and implemented by emerging artists in a range of genres and styles inspired by history or classic works of literature and with an interest in re-inventing the art form of musical theater for the 21st Century. Mills is the recipient of a Donna Perret Rosen Award from Second Stage Theatre, a Kleben Prize for lyrics, a Fred Ebb Award for emerging songwriters, a Cole Porter Award, a Richard Rodgers new Horizons Award from the ASCAP Foundation, and a grant from the Jonathan Larson Performing Arts Foundation. Reichel is the recipient of an Innovative Theatre Award for Outstanding Director, a Lucille Lortel Award for Emerging Women Artists, and New Directors/New Works Grants from the Drama League. She has directed works at the O’Neill Theatre Center and the National Alliance for Musical Theatre’s Festival of New Musicals. Additionally, Reichel has participated in the Goodspeed Musicals Johnny Mercer Writers Colony, the Weston Playhouse Artists’ Retreat, the Rhinebeck Writers’ Retreat, and received a Bogliasco Fellowship.

The rest of the actor-musician cast includes seniors Grace Zhao, BT Hayes, and Matt Gancayco; juniors Asher Muldoon, Matthew Weatherhead, and Gaea Lawton; sophomores Charlotte Kunesh, TJ Rickey, Jr., Alan Lin, and Jay White; and first-year students Alison Silldorff and Faith Wangermann.

Professional artists on the production include Solon Snider as music director and Minjae Kim as sound designer. Students in key production roles include Regan McCall as set designer, Cecilia Zubler and Aliha Mughal as co-lighting designers, Tanaka Dunbar Ngwara as costume designer, Juliette Carbonnier and Leyla Arcasoy as assistant directors, Kate Short as assistant music director, and Gabriela Veciana as stage manager with Lev Ricanati and Violet Prete as assistant stage managers. Faculty advisors include Stacy Wolf, Vivia Font, and Lawrence Moten.

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To learn more about this event, the Program in 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](https://arts.princeton.edu/).

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