



DEPARTMENT OF
**THEATRE
& DANCE**
CENTRAL MICHIGAN
UNIVERSITY

FIRST NIGHTERS

NEWSLETTER

June 2026



CMU President Neil MacKinnon (center) poses with director Keeley Stanley-Bohn, and the cast of *Cymbeline* during the show's fight call.
Photo: Lance Gascho

IN CYMBELINE, COMBAT TAKES CENTER STAGE

This past spring's production of one of Shakespeare's final plays, *Cymbeline*, gave our students the opportunity to learn special skills in broadsword, bow, and hand-to-hand stage combat. In order to pull off the show's huge battle scenes, detailed fight choreography was taught to the actors.

"Fight choreography is not just a display of flashy violence or fancy swordplay," says Department Chair and Stage Combat professor, Keeley Stanley-Bohn, "it is a vital form of physical storytelling and should always move the story forward by revealing more about the characters in some way. Illuminating the inner struggles of the characters through combat raises the emotional stakes and results in some of the best storytelling on stage."

Stage combat is also an important component of a Theatre major's education. Senior Acting/Directing BFA student, Jordan Perkins, took on the role of Fight Captain for *Cymbeline*. "The role of Fight Captain helped me expand my knowledge in the process of stage combat," says Perkins, "and it helped me learn more about myself and my capabilities."

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A MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR



Greetings, First Nighters!

The 2025-2026 was an exciting year for University Theatre and the Department of Theatre and Dance. We had another season of remarkable productions and exciting experiential opportunities. We again welcomed guest artists to our department, providing our students with enriching experiences and unique training. The year also featured a trip to Nagoya, Japan for 10 of our impressive Dance students as they represented CMU and performed in Masashi Action Machine's 35th Anniversary Dance Concert. An incredible journey for our dancers and the fourth such collaboration between Masashi and CMU University Theatre Dance Company in our ongoing international cultural exchange. (More details on page 4.)

TAD awarded \$20,000 in scholarships to 17 students at the annual Mask and Hammer event in late spring. These scholarships are based on a student's contributions to University Theatre over the past year and offer crucial support to our majors and minors. Your generous First Nighter scholarship is an important part of this encouragement to our students, so thank you! (See this year's recipients on page 6).

We look forward to seeing you at the theatre for our 2026-2027 season. Our predominant theme is the examination of expectations – societal, historical, and personal – and what becomes possible when the unexpected is embraced rather than feared. We begin with *Discus*, the boldly reimagined queer love story of Apollo and Hyacinth that challenges us with its powerful themes of class, power, justice, accountability, and change. Then an improbable hero rises up to save the world with his power of optimism in *The SpongeBob Musical*. In the new comedy, *Irishtown*, we explore the commercialization of culture while experiencing the fragile creative process and the potential collapse of a collective. Our second musical offering, *Urinetown*, offers a terrible water shortage in a Gotham-like city that has led to draconian bans by the government. Amid the oppressed people, a hero decides that he's had enough and plans a revolution to lead them all to freedom. The ever-impressive work of our University Theatre Dance Company will round out the year with its April concert. All this and our two Summer Theatre shows which will open the season in August with the classic *A Year with Frog and Toad*, a Theatre-for-Young-Audiences musical, and *Shivaree*, a romantic comedy about a belly dancer and a hemophiliac.

Our programs continue to thrive with your support, and we appreciate you and your commitment to our students. A happy and safe summer to all!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Keeley Stanley-Bohn".

Keeley Stanley-Bohn, Department Chair

OUR MUSICAL THEATRE BFA CONTINUES TO GROW!

You may notice something different about our season this year – we are producing two musicals on our main stage season!

The reason for this change is an exciting one: our Musical Theatre program has grown by 115% over the last two years, from 20 students in 2024 to 43 students in 2026! Retention in the program has also grown, with 100% of our Musical Theatre students returning next fall.

With the increase in students, the department has added a second musical so that the students will have enough opportunities to receive onstage training.



ABOVE: Acting/Directing BFA, Reginald Wilson, dances on stage in *The Drowsy Chaperone*



2026/2027 SEASON ANNOUNCEMENT

DISCUS

By Becca Schlossberg

Directed by Elaine DiFalco Daugherty

October 8-11, 15-18, 2026 | Townsend Kiva

This heartbreaking and candid contemporary reimagining of the Greek myth of Apollo and Hyacinth explores powerfully relevant themes of class, power, justice, accountability and - above all - change.

THE SPONGEBOB MUSICAL

Conceived by Tina Landau, Book by Kyle Jarrow,

Based on the Series by Stephen Hillenburg

Directed by Carson Cerney, Choreographed by Anne McAlexander, Music Director TBD

November 6-8 & 13-15, 2026 | Bush Theatre

When the citizens of Bikini Bottom discover that a volcano will soon erupt and destroy their humble home, SpongeBob and his friends must come together to save the fate of their undersea world!

IRISHTOWN

By Ciara Elizabeth Smyth

Directed by Keeley Stanley-Bohn

February 4-7 & 11-14, 2027 | Theatre-On-The-Side

Irishtown is a hilarious and searing new comedy that explores the commercialization of culture, inviting audiences to experience the fragile creative process and the potential collapse of a collective.

URINETOWN

By Mark Hollman and Greg Kotis

Directed and Choreographed by Anne McAlexander

March 18-21, 2027 | Bush Theatre

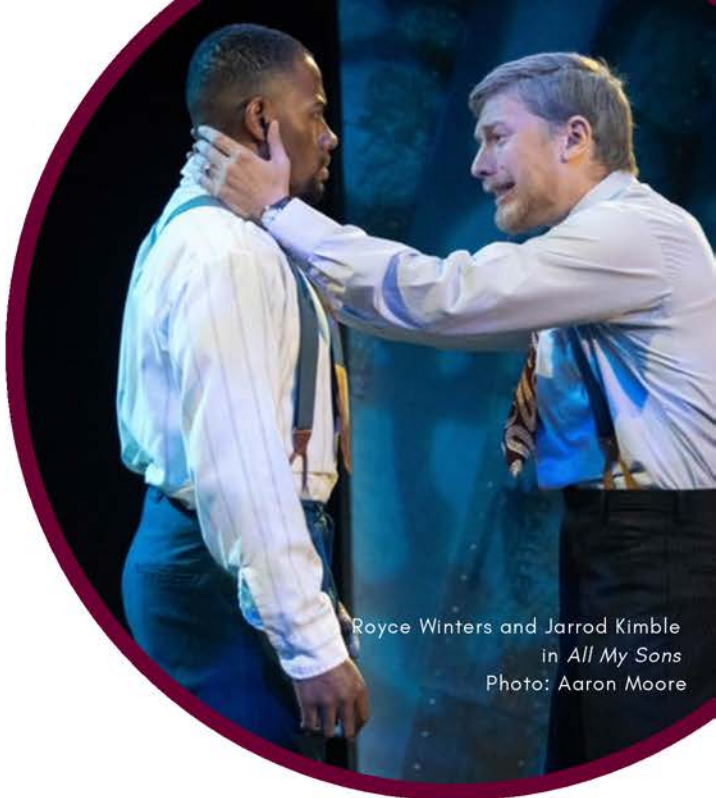
A terrible water shortage has led to a government-enforced ban on private toilets. The citizens must use public amenities, regulated by a single malevolent company that profits by charging admission for one of humanity's most basic needs. Amid the people, a hero decides that he's had enough and plans a revolution to lead them all to freedom!

UNIVERSITY THEATRE DANCE COMPANY CONCERT

Heather Trommer-Beardslee, Artistic Director

April 23-26, 2027 | Bush Theatre

Showcases faculty and student choreographed works including jazz, tap, contemporary ballet, and much more! Join the UTDC dancers as they tell stories through choreographed movement and rhythm on the Bush Theatre stage!



Royce Winters and Jarrod Kimble
in *All My Sons*
Photo: Aaron Moore



SCAN HERE
or call 989.774.3045

**SEASON
TICKETS**

GO ON SALE

AUGUST 1, 2026

Scan the QR code to purchase
your season tickets online
through Ticket Central!



Lucas Colbatzky and Odessa Watson
in *You're a Good Man, Charlie Brown*
Photo: Aaron Moore

CMU DANCE TRAVELS TO JAPAN!



Photos: Dancers visit Inuyama Castle (the oldest surviving castle in Japan), enjoy dinner at a popular student hangout in downtown Nagoya, and pose for a photo on campus in their concert attire.

The Department of Theatre and Dance has a long-standing professional relationship with Masashi Action Machine, a professional jazz dance company based in Nagoya, Japan. Masashi Action Machine first visited Central Michigan University in 2019 as part of a week-long international residency which ended with an invitation for CMU dancers to travel to Japan in 2020.

Masashi Action Machine visited CMU's campus a second time, in 2023, and extended an invitation for a return trip to Nagoya to perform dances choreographed by Heather Trommer-Beardslee in Masashi Action Machine's 35th anniversary dance concert in December of 2025. Ten dancers, along with faculty members James Wallace (Dance) and Maiko Bronson (World Languages - Japanese) made the nearly 24-hour journey to Japan in late 2025.

"The trip to Nagoya was an amazing educational experience for the dancers and Masashi Action Machine was the perfect host," says Wallace. "The students learned so much from observing and performing with the professional company and experiencing a new culture helped them grow in countless ways. The many meals, tea ceremony, the castle and gardens trip, and meeting the expectations of a professional dance company, allowed the dancers to absorb and embrace the cultural differences and similarities."

The trip was a life-changing experience for Dance Studies junior, Hannah Beardsley. "The trip challenged me as a dancer to think on my feet, despite the language and cultural barriers in place," says Beardsley. "Learning a dance in Japan pushed me to improvise with limited time. Personally, I was challenged to work with my group and push through all of the challenges that came up, both while in the United States and once we reached Japan."

We are grateful for the support we received from the College of the Arts and Media, the CMU Offices of the President, Provost, and Research and Graduate Studies, and Masashi Action Machine to make this trip possible for our students. "The dancers performed beautifully and I was so proud of their professionalism and respect for our hosts," says Wallace. "Overall, I would say this was a life-changing trip for all of us!"

Photo: Shelby Griswold.



LOIS ELLISE

Class of 2020, BFA Musical Theatre

Actor, &Juliet National Tour

Exciting news, First Nighters! Lois Ellise, who you may have seen on the CMU stage in many roles including Sarah in *Ragtime* and Mrs. Muller in *Doubt: A Parable*, made her Broadway debut in *&Juliet* on May 1, 2026!

Lois has been performing with the *&Juliet* National Tour as Susanna and as a Juliet understudy since 2024, but was given the opportunity to cover the role of Nell/Lady Capulet in New York this spring.



Photo: Lois Ellise

In addition, Lois has performed for the Oregon Shakespeare Festival, and on Norwegian and Royal Caribbean cruise lines. To keep up with Lois' career, follow her on Instagram @_loisellise.

KOLLIN GONSER

Class of 2022, BFA Musical Theatre

Performer, Walt Disney World & Universal Studios

What do you love about your job?

The impact my job at both Disney and Universal has on families from around the world is something truly so special. Being a performer at both places allows many to escape reality in such a special unique way that can't be replaced.

How did CMU prepare you for your career?

I think a big thing CMU did to prepare me for this career is through the audition process. Having the skills to be able to pick up choreography quickly and or tell a story through movement or improv as well as being prepared is something professors such as Heather, Elaine & Keeley have taught me and is something I will forever continue to use in this career.

Photo: @ryanphoto



SCHOLARSHIP AWARDS

Congratulations to all of our students who were awarded scholarships at the annual Mask & Hammer Ceremony on May 3, 2026.



First Nighters' Endowment Scholarship

Marjolein deZwaan & Reginald Wilson



The Bettisworth Endowed Scholarship in Directing

Mackenna Kofahl & Erika Thorson



The William E. Valle Design and Technical Theatre Award

Shaylee Moomey & Kat White



Adam Sauerbrun Award

Elicia Shadrake & Emma Gibbons



The John Genette and Andrea Dickey Genette Award

Chloe Newton



The Louise A. Williams Award

Leah King & Danielle Curtis



The Jean Mayhew Interdisciplinary Scholarship in Theatre & Dance

Rachel St. George



The Gavin J. Smith & Mary C. Mertz-Smith Endowed Scholarship in Technical Theatre

Ari Shiel



The Riecker Interpretive Award

Paige Trionfi



Doris J. Ramsey Scholarship

Riley Fox



Marie Donner and Fred R. Bush Scholarship

Katie Boyd



The Irvine N. Smith Scholarship

Caroline Carlisle

THEATRE FOR YOUNG AUDIENCES



THE VELVETEEN RABBIT

This spring Senior BFA Acting/Directing student, Emily Tanner, directed a studio production of *The Velveteen Rabbit* as our third annual Theatre for Young Audiences offering. This project served as Tanner's capstone project and included a curriculum guide which teachers could use in the classroom to teach theatre etiquette and the themes of the story. The department welcomed over 300 students from local elementary schools to see *The Velveteen Rabbit* free of charge, many of them experiencing live theatre for the first time!

"Theatre for Young Audiences is important to me because we all had to start somewhere," says Tanner. "I think it's a learning opportunity for both collegiate and elementary students and provides a palpable sense of community. I am so grateful for this process and wouldn't change it for anything."

Elle Briggs (foreground), Mackenna Kofahl, and Kayla Sak (background) perform in the April production of *The Velveteen Rabbit*.

Congrats GRADS!



Congratulations to all our 2026 graduates! The staff and faculty of the Department of Theatre and Dance are so proud of your achievements, and can't wait to see what your future holds!

ABOVE: Dance Studies Major, Emma Gibbons



BACK (L to R): Finnley Norman, Emily Tanner, Jordan Perkins, Lucas Colbatzky, Miliyana Grujic, & Claire Hartigan
FRONT (L to R): Amanda Stokes, Jayce DeBoer, Olli DiBenedetto, Madeline Gibb, Elicia Shadrake, & Odessa Watson



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BECOME A FIRST NIGHTER!

Central Michigan University Theatre has the remarkable ability to transport us to another time and place, evoking tears, laughter, and joy while inspiring new ways of thinking.

Beyond the stage, CMU Theatre fosters a strong sense of belonging and collaboration that leaves a lasting impact on everyone involved. Students build confidence, creativity, and lifelong friendships as they work together to create each performance.

Even though your time with CMU Theatre may have passed, you can still be part of the magic it creates. Make a gift of any size and become a First Nighter, and help support CMU Theatre for generations to come.

First Nighters enjoy benefits such as special event invitations, annual newsletters, opportunities to meet the cast, and more!

Thank you!

