

# Arts for All

A new Institute for Performing Arts aims to bring the arts to all students.

By Kathleen McGarvey



**T**he theater in Todd Union is a familiar home to students in the International Theatre Program. And musicians are well acquainted with the stage of Strong Auditorium.

But the performing arts are essential to students from every major, whether they opt for a place on the stage or a seat in the audience.

That's the thinking behind the creation of the Institute for Performing Arts.

"We're trying to make the performing arts and the humanities available to every student," says institute director John Covach, professor in the School of Arts & Sciences' Department of Music, a professor of music theory at the Eastman School of Music, and founding director of the University's Institute for Popular Music.

"A majority of students participating in performing arts on the

River Campus are non-majors," says Gloria Culver, dean of Arts & Sciences. "We hope the institute will make the entry into performance, collaboration, and the creation of new work even easier for a greater number of students, as well as provide new resources and space for students and faculty to develop their artistic interests."

The institute's long-term aims include collaborations with the Eastman School and the Memorial Art Gallery.

Within the first year, Covach says, the institute will work to meet several goals: raising funds so that every student can attend all events sponsored by the music department and the theater and dance programs without a ticket charge; providing additional funding to cover the cost of students traveling to and attending performances put on in the community by arts groups with which the institute has entered into a partnership—including the Rochester Broadway Theatre

STAGECRAFT: Theater students perform the climactic final scene of Federico Garcia Lorca's *Yerma*, directed by guest artist Gisela Cardenas.



League, the Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra, Geva Theatre Center, and Garth Fagan Dance; beefing up trips to the Stratford Festival in Ontario, Canada, and perhaps adding trips to the Shaw Festival, also in Ontario, and to New York City; and installing informational kiosks on campus to heighten the visibility of the performing arts.

In the longer term, Covach hopes to improve the performing arts facilities on the campus, to allow for more ambitious performances.

"The Institute for Performing Arts is an advocate for the performing arts," he says. "We don't control what performances get put on. My job is to facilitate cooperation and to make sure everybody is aware of what's happening and we get as much student participation as possible." He also works with the surrounding area's arts community.

It's a matter of turning the spotlight on a performing arts scene that is already "vital and exciting," he says. **R**

## International Theatre Program

The heart of the theater program is "learning through doing," says Nigel Maister, the Russell and Ruth Peck Artistic Director of the International Theatre Program. Through it, all undergraduates in the University have the opportunity to work with professional artists in theater in staging ambitious and challenging dramatic works. But for students who want to explore theater without being in a production, an increasing range of classes is also offered.

**HISTORICAL HITS:** Kurt Li '18 and Jeremy Staffa '18 (far right) perform as part of the Rock Repertory Ensemble, a group for guitarists, bassists, drummers, keyboard players, singers, and sometimes wind and brass players.



## Gospel Choir

In 1976, Campus Ministries created the UR Gospel Choir. Forty years later, it's still going strong. Now a credited ensemble in the music department, the choir that began with just eight students has a membership of 35 singers. The group performs spirituals, hymns, and gospel songs frequently on campus and in the Greater Rochester community. Thomas Green has directed the choir for the past year.



## Rock Repertory Ensemble

Established in 2009 by John Covach, professor of music, and directed by Christopher Meeker, adjunct instructor of music, the ensemble performs historical rock music, with an emphasis on music from 1955 to the early 1990s. Students perform each song as it was recorded, and everything is learned by ear. The selected songs broadly represent rock history. “We want to push [students] out of their comfort zone and challenge them musically,” Covach says.



**SPIRITUAL SONGS:** Director Thomas Green (opposite) leads a rehearsal of the Gospel Choir in Lander Auditorium.



**IN MOTION:** Students in the course Contemporary Dance: Context and Practice (also below right, opposite) learn technique and theory as well as dance history and current trends. The dance program offers a robust guest artist residency series and an annual public dance festival.



**ALL TOGETHER:** Darius Colson '17 plays his violin as a member of the Chamber Orchestra (left), which performs music from the baroque to contemporary periods in four concerts each year.

## Chamber Orchestra

The chamber orchestra—led by David Harman, professor of music and director of orchestral activities—features musicians from the River Campus who are selected each year through competitive auditions. They come from a wide variety of majors, and many are in the sciences. Over the past 20 years, the orchestra has toured Chile, Italy, Canada, Jamaica, and the Cayman Islands. The Department of Music also sponsors a 100-member symphony orchestra, whose membership is drawn from River Campus students and the wider Rochester community.



## Program of Dance and Movement

The Program of Dance and Movement provides experiential and theoretical study of dance, emphasizing dance's many facets: a form of art, creative process, and community building; a dimension of self-awareness; and a contemplative practice. Faculty, led by director Missy Pfohl Smith, draw on practices and techniques from around the world.

