



The York University Magazine

Summer 2019

The Science of Claptrap

Joshua Quinlan slices through the baloney

PLUS

**York Theatre at 50
Red Planet Pee-ew
Kids with Benefits**



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The York University Magazine

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THE PRESIDENT



RHONDA L. LENTON
PRESIDENT AND VICE-CHANCELLOR

TIMES HIGHER EDUCATION – one of the world’s leading publications on universities – recently released its inaugural University Impact Rankings based on the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals. York University did very well, coming in fifth in Canada and 26th in the world on a list highlighting how the higher education sector is contributing to international efforts to build a more socially, economically and environmentally sustainable world.

The University did even better on individual indicators measuring our ability to build sustainable cities and communities (12th in the world) and deliver on climate action (14th in the world).

I am especially pleased that York performed so well in these two categories because they represent the urgent societal challenges that universities are ideally positioned to address. As institutions, we have the capacity to bring together experts, community leaders, policy-makers, and leaders in the public and private sectors to tackle tough issues like climate change, poverty, accessible health care and sustainable growth.

A powerful example of this type of multisector collaboration at York is the Making the Shift Youth Homelessness Social Innovation Lab (MtS), jointly led by York Professor Stephen Gaetz, head of York’s Homeless Hub, and the non-profit A Way Home Canada. This important project reimagines the way we approach youth homelessness through social innovation. It is a multi-year collaborative initiative with stakeholders spanning the national, provincial, Indigenous and local levels of government as well as the public, private and non-profit spheres. Significantly, Professor Gaetz and his team are advised by youth who themselves have been homeless.

I believe that York’s historical strengths and our vision to provide access to a high-quality and research-intensive university dedicated to the public good are uniquely aligned with the future demands that will be placed on universities. Large, multisector and community-connected research projects like MtS are one way that York maximizes our impact. But we also need to respond to emerging educational needs.

In the global knowledge economy, most new jobs will require a post-secondary credential. Up to 70 per cent of jobs that exist today will be disrupted by automation and artificial intelligence. We need to strengthen resiliency and adaptability in students – and the workforce in general – by instilling the knowledge and transferable skills needed for success in a rapidly changing world, and providing effective and flexible pathways for lifelong learning.

In response, York is focused on creating more experiential learning opportunities for our students, bridging their learning from the classroom to the workplace. We have created innovative new programs, like the new Dev Degree with Canadian tech leader Shopify. We are also growing our School of Continuing Studies to make sure we offer the credentials that allow lifelong learners to upskill and reskill as the economy changes. Like our multisector research, our pedagogical innovation is rooted in collaboration and partnership beyond the walls of the University.

By expanding multisector collaboration and educational flexibility, we are strengthening York’s vision for progressive and inclusive educational excellence. We view this work as not only an exciting opportunity, but a central part of our responsibility to the communities we serve.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY MIKE FORD

Hello Sunshine

SUMMER. It’s my favourite time of year by far. I love the season’s sense of expansiveness, its long days, languid evenings, limitless horizons. Even the heat I love, aware that summer’s glory is brief as a candle. Blink, and it’s winter again, which to a Canadian signals the end of paradise as experienced in flower beds and bird song.

As summer hastens us outdoors, we can’t but help experience a heightened awareness of the external world.

We see life in full bloom, colour anew. Even gazing dreamily at passing clouds can conjure things not discerned before – a nag in a nimbostratus; a castle in a cumulus. You get the picture.

Summer’s large blue skies loosen and extend the imagination, encouraging fresh ways of perceiving and thinking about things.

That ability to see potential in a momentary flash of inspiration is what I call a summer mindset, and it’s shared by many of the people you are about to read about here, in the summer issue of the award-winning *The York University Magazine*.

From established scientists producing breakthrough research to young entrepreneurs helming their first start-ups, they are fresh thinkers with strong connections to York.

They epitomize bright.

Among them are York grads Jay Klein, whose brilliant idea to sell sugar-free gum and mints to the world is giving a small local business a big presence in the multibillion-dollar global candy market (see page 44), and Shereen Ladha, one of YouTube Canada’s NextUp Creators who is shaking up the internet with her Bollywood dance videos (page 26).

We also have stories on the Canadian origins of the IMAX big-screen phenom (page 14) and on why hogwash has suddenly gone hog-wild (page 20), and why that’s worrisome.

Summer being a time of bounty, there’s more of course. The hope is that you find it all dazzling, much like the season itself. – DEIRDRE KELLY

EDITOR’S NOTES



The York University Magazine

THE ALUMNI MAGAZINE OF YORK UNIVERSITY



Volume 4, Number 3

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Publications Mail Agreement No. 40069546

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THE YORK UNIVERSITY MAGAZINE is printed and mailed to alumni and friends of the University once a year, in the fall. The summer and winter issues are available online only, at yorku.ca/magazine. Ideas and opinions expressed in

ON THE COVER



Joshua Quinlan
photographed by
Jeff Kirk

the articles do not necessarily reflect the ideas or opinions of the University or the editors. To get in touch, email yumag@yorku.ca



Kids With Benefits

Parents have more workplace perks, a new study says

PHOTOGRAPHY BY CHRIS ROBINSON



FOR CHRISTMAS LAST YEAR, Bruce D. definitely got the short end of a straw.

The fortysomething employee, who works in Toronto's financial district, ended up having to work through the holidays to cover for his absent colleagues who, unlike him, are married and have children.

"People with kids come before those of us who don't where I work," stated Bruce, who asked that his full name not be used in case even just mentioning this uncomfortable truth would get him in trouble with his employer.

"The thinking is that if I don't have a family to go home to, then I have no excuse but to fill in the time for those who do."

He's not alone in feeling that he isn't given the same perks and considerations as colleagues with dependents to support.

New research from York University's School of Human Resource Management finds that employees who don't have kids often feel they are less entitled to flextime than colleagues with children.

While many Canadian companies do have human resource (HR) policies in place that advocate work-life balance, workers with kids still appear to benefit most from those policies.

"You can work from home a couple days a week, telecommute, share work – but only if you have justification. Yet this same rule doesn't always apply to non-parents," says Galina Boiarintseva, a human resource instructor at York who studied work-life balance accommodations for her PhD dissertation.

Boiarintseva's study examined work-life balance perceptions and sentiments of dual-career professional couples without children across North America. It is the first of a series geared specifically to HR professionals in Canada and the U.S. Her findings have struck a nerve.

Since the release of her study in 2018, the former human resource manager increasingly finds herself invited to participate in national television and radio talk-show programs where she fields calls from Canadians without children who are unclear about their workplace rights.

"The study is unique in that it addresses an issue that has long been overlooked in the workplace, which is surprising given the response to the research," says Boiarintseva, herself a parent. "It really gives a voice to people without children."

Couples interviewed for this study said that because they don't have children, they often feel obligated to work longer than usual hours, and when asking for telecommuting opportunities or flexible shift scheduling, they feel their requests won't be taken as seriously as those made by their colleagues with kids.

"I had one person, an elite marathon runner, who said he had to lie at his workplace, telling his boss that he had to take his niece to the doctor every Thursday to cover up his weekly team marathon practice. He did so because he felt that by not having children of his own, he did not have a 'parental excuse' to take time off, and his training needs would not likely be considered legitimate by the employer."

HR policies that support families are designed to improve employee retention. Ironically, it appears they will have the opposite effect if they continue to ignore childless workers who feel those policies don't reflect their wants and needs.

Employees without children are bound to feel resentful, and may look elsewhere for work if they believe they are being discriminated against because they do not have children.

"An interviewee told me, 'The reason I joined my organization was because all my friends had been raving about how progressive their work-life benefits [are], but then I discovered it was me who would be paying for that flexibility as it became clear that I was expected to pick up the slack for the parents with children.' That comment has stuck with me. It sums up a general problem."

There is a solution that should satisfy everyone's needs: treat all employees equally, regardless of their parental status.

"An effective way of addressing this issue would be to reconsider how we create those work-life balance policies," Boiarintseva says. "Specifically, it seems prudent to take family status out of the equation to make it fair for everyone." ●

BLOODLINES

Connecting capillaries and health

DIABETES IS A SERIOUS chronic disease on the rise. An estimated 3.5 million Canadians were reported to live with diabetes in 2018, a number expected to grow to 4.7 million by 2028.

Worldwide, diabetes has reached epidemic proportions with approximately 422 million people afflicted with the disease.

Science has long been chasing after a cure as well as ways to prevent and treat diabetes.

Some of the latest research is coming out of York University's Faculty of Health where Tara Haas, a professor in the School of Kinesiology & Health Science, has found that improving blood vessel growth can help mitigate serious health problems arising from obesity, a common cause of Type 2 diabetes.

Her research finds that inhibiting specific proteins within blood vessels stimulates new blood growth, which in turn creates healthier fat (adipose) tissue and lower blood sugar levels.

It's a significant discovery.

"Blood vessels are the key to keeping you healthy and the smallest of these vessels, the capillaries, are the most vital – they form the core of every single organ in your body, providing cells with oxygen and nutrients," says Haas, who leads a team of York researchers in ongoing studies of angiogenesis, or blood vessel generation, inside the Life Sciences Building on the Keele Campus.

"When everything is working well, we don't even think about the jobs done by our blood vessels. But increasingly it's becoming obvious that many of the diseases we suffer from involve a dysfunction in those blood vessels. Looking at what regulates capillaries, particularly what causes them to disappear or to grow, provides a new strategic avenue to improving health."

Previously, research into angiogenesis has tended to focus on increasing the amounts of growth factors. The York University team takes a different approach, looking more at the inhibitors involved in the blood vessel growth process, or, as Haas puts it, "the brakes that might need to be taken off before the cells can respond."

By investigating specific proteins produced by the endothelial cells that make up capillaries, she and her research team have been able to hone in on one specific protein in particular – FoxO1 – that keeps cells quiet and less active in the presence of disease.

These results are useful for scientists who want to increase the FoxO1 protein when blocking angiogenesis in cancer tumours, for instance. But Haas and her team want to do just the opposite.

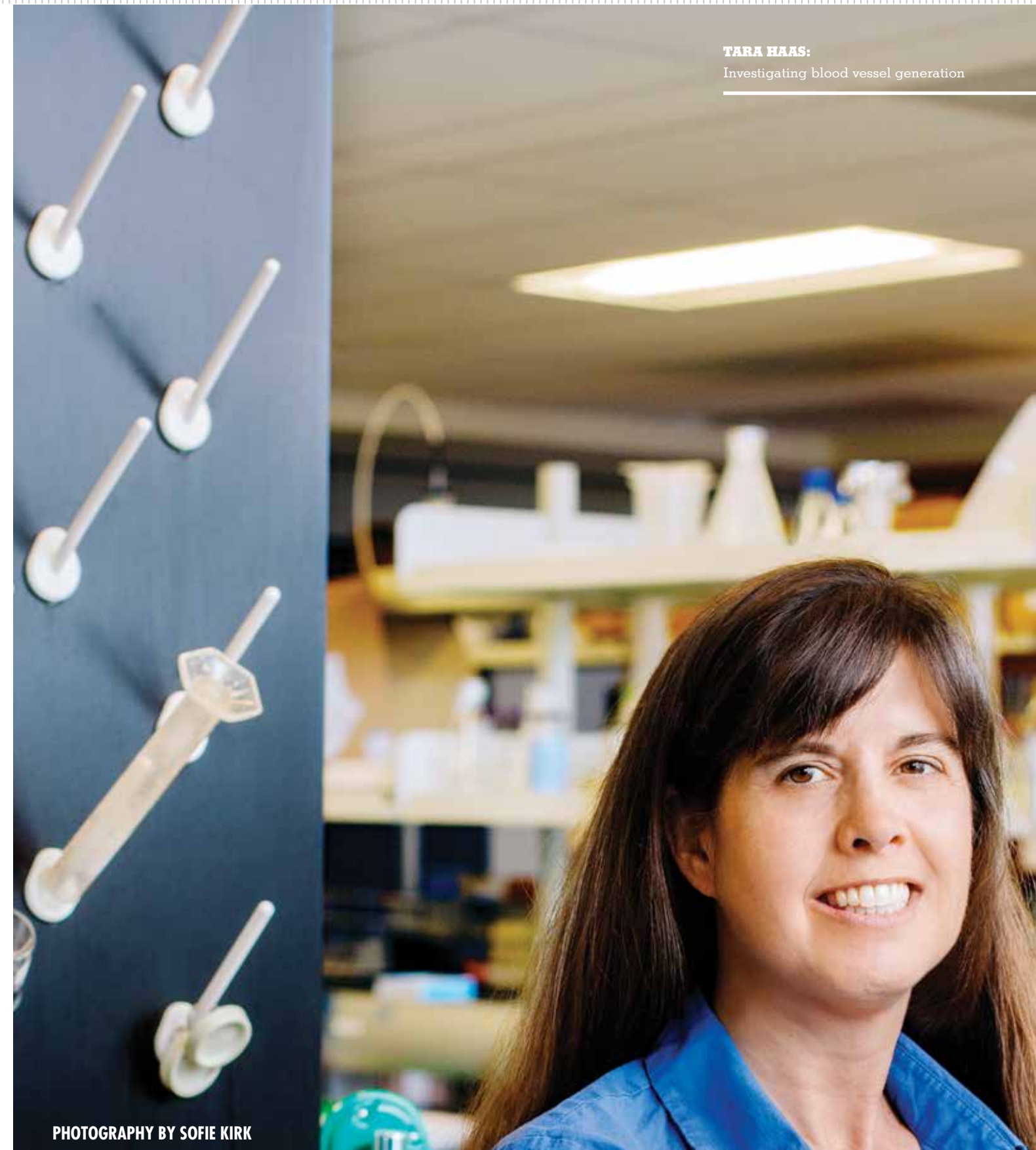
They want to lower the levels of the FoxO1 protein in pathologies where blood vessel growth is insufficient – as is the case with diabetes – to kick-start endothelial cells into reproducing.

By lowering levels of this protein, endothelial cells become more active, forming new capillaries. Fat tissue is also healthier and the overall ability of the body to handle blood sugar is improved, as observed in obese mice who eat a high fat diet.

"Diabetes is associated with a lot of problems in places like the muscles, the heart, the kidneys and adipose tissue, and part of that problem is because the disease is having a negative effect on blood vessels," Haas says.

"Our research indicates that if we can change the behaviour of blood vessels, we can improve the health of the cells in those organs. It won't take the diabetes away. But it will improve the health and overall well-being of those with the disease." ●

TARA HAAS:
Investigating blood vessel generation



PHOTOGRAPHY BY SOFIE KIRK

Primed to Succeed

*Using dance research
for mental health*

PHOTOGRAPHY BY
MIKE FORD



MEDICINE MENACE

Drug safety regulations lack consistency, new research says

ARE CANADIANS uninformed about the health risks of their medicines? A new international study showing that government warnings about potential drug safety risks vary significantly in different countries across the globe suggests yes.

Led by researchers at York University and the University of British Columbia (UBC), the study, published in *JAMA Internal Medicine*, examines how often drug regulators in four countries – Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom and Australia – issued safety advisories about the potential health risks of medications.

After analyzing 1,441 advisories covering 680 drug safety concerns over a 10-year period, the researchers found that regulators in these four countries were only consistent in the decision to warn 10 per cent of the time, highlighting a need for better consistency in communication of important drug safety notices.

“Around half the time, this harm is preventable,” says Joel Lexchin, an internationally recognized pharmaceutical policy expert and professor emeritus at the School of Health Policy & Management at York University who co-authored the study with primary investigator Barbara Mintzes, an affiliate associate professor at UBC’s School of Population & Public Health and associate professor at the University of Sydney in Australia.

“Right now, Health Canada spends three to four times more approving new drugs compared to monitoring their safety once they are on the market. We would like to see much more attention paid to ensuring that doctors and patients are informed of new evidence of harmful side effects of medicines, and what to do to prevent them that would require Health Canada to reorient its priorities.” ●

THE MENTAL HEALTH Commission of Canada (MHCC) has invited a York grad who studied performing arts student academic transition to share her doctoral research with them in the hopes of using her findings to help the general population.

Specifically, Jennifer Bolt (MA ’01, PhD ’16), an adjunct professor in York University’s Department of Dance and Faculty of Education, has been asked to contribute to the MHCC’s new two-year Post-Secondary Mental Health & Safety Standards project, an outgrowth of the National Standard of Canada for Psychological Health & Safety in the Workplace launched in 2013.

Focused on dance majors in the process of leaving high school to attend university at three of Canada’s largest dance degree-granting programs, Bolt’s academic work aligns with the youth-focused initiative’s goals.

“I identified key transferable skills that helped to make their transitions successful: persistence, resilience, internal motivation and excellence defined,” she says. “These values are at the core of Primed for Life Pedagogy, what MHCC has identified as a promising emerging practice.”

Bolt workshopped an educational model of Primed at the second Well-being Summit at York University this past January after sharing it with faculty and students at Randolph College for the Performing Arts, Canada’s National Ballet School’s Teacher Training Program and Peggy Baker’s Dance Educators’ Seminar, among others.

Presently, she is looking at how to expand its broader application to support transition, health and well-being with organizations associated with homeless youth, Toronto’s elementary and secondary school system, and Indigenous and veteran groups.

“I am overwhelmed – in a good way – about how well my educational model is being received,” says Bolt, a two-time nominee for a York University Excellence in Teaching Award.

“While its birth place lies in dancer transition research, it is resonating outside the dance studio to help even more people than I thought possible. It’s a happy surprise.” ●



Take a Whiff of Mars

Sniffing out an extraterrestrial mystery

A gas that smells like rotten eggs wafts over Mars, shifting with the seasons. Science has known about it for years.

But why the planet's methane levels vary with the seasons has never been fully explained – until now.

A York University planetary scientist conducting research at Gale Crater – the location of NASA's Curiosity rover – has uncovered a link between the surface rocks and methane in the Martian atmosphere, accounting for both the origin and oscillation of the strange odour.

“This study shows that the methane seen by the Curiosity rover likely originates in the subsurface of Mars,” says John Moores, an associate professor in York's Department of Earth & Space Science & Engineering who conducted his research in collaboration with NASA's Curiosity rover science and operations team.

“It helps to explain the mechanism that produces the seasonal cycle in methane levels that the Curiosity rover recorded on Mars.”

Previous research has shown that methane levels vary from season to season at Gale Crater, a site whose unique environment makes it easier to detect chemical seeps than elsewhere on the planet. It is now understood that there is more methane in the Martian atmosphere when it is warmer and less when it is cooler, a repeatable pattern Moores drew on for his own study.

To track the movement of methane through the planet's subsurface, Moores led an international team of researchers

in developing a computer model that could compare how much methane found its way into the Martian atmosphere to the amounts measured by the Curiosity rover's SAM-TLS sample analysis instrument.

Armed with this data, the researchers then adjusted the enthalpy of adsorption – a measure of how much methane was “stuck” on the planet's regolith (a soil made up of broken rocks) – until able to produce a match. The findings were startling.

“We expected these processes to operate in a similar way on Mars because they certainly happen on Earth, so that's not surprising,” Moores says. “But what did surprise us was how closely everything matched once we started to change how the soil and the methane interacted with one another.”

Methane emissions on Earth are the exhalations of life, rising from agricultural barns housing animals and from bacteria-laden swamps. Which begs the question: does the presence of the gas on barren Mars indicate there's life there after all?

Moores won't comment.

“Our study is agnostic about what is actually producing the methane. There are many models that don't require any biological activity at all,” he says.

“But those models that do have a biological origin to the methane typically need those organisms to be underground where they would be protected from the intense radiation environment, aridity and cold of the Martian surface. We still have more work to do for testing any hypothesis.” ●



PHOTOGRAPHY BY CHRIS ROBINSON

BIG SCREEN, EH?

A new project celebrates
a Canadian movie giant

PHOTOGRAPHY BY SOFIE KIRK



MAX'S CANADIAN CONNECTION tends to be hidden behind the giant screens that just over 50 years ago revolutionized the film industry.

But a postdoctoral researcher is hoping to change all that with her participation in a York University-led creative film project highlighting the Hollywood behemoth's local origins.

"IMAX is a Canadian invention," says Jessica Mulvogue (PhD '18), a graduate of York's film program whose research is being supervised by Lassonde professor and virtual reality/3D-vision expert Rob Allison.

"It's quite literally a very large piece of Canadian cultural history but a story not often told."

That story began in Cambridge, Ont., where IMAX inventors Graeme Ferguson, William Shaw, Robert Kerr and Ferguson's brother-in-law, Roman Kroitor, combined their various talents to launch a company – originally called Multi-Screen Corp. – that would project massive visual images onto enormous screens, providing viewers with a thrilling experience.

Inspired by his participation in a multiscreen film installation staged at Expo 67 in Montreal, Ferguson was an experimental filmmaker who was among the first in the world to use a multiprojector, multiscreen system for showing a film.

His prototype was cumbersome and technically too difficult to operate for it to be feasible on a large scale, however, prompting him to ask Shaw, an engineer, to modify and simplify it into a single-camera, single-screen system producing large-scale images.

These images, the partners were pleased to find, ended up being far more dramatic and impactful than a multiplex of smaller ones.

After three more years of experimentation, they renamed their company IMAX for the technique of widescreen cinematography that produces an image approximately 10 times larger than that from standard 35-millimetre film, debuting

JESSICA MULVOGUE:

A close-up view of IMAX

their large-scale camera, projector and domed screen system at the Fuji Pavilion at Expo 70 in Osaka, Japan.

More experimentation followed, with the company inventing other novel technologies, including the IMAX Dome and IMAX 3D. To accommodate them, purpose-built theatres popped up in science museums and galleries. Today, there are over 1,000 IMAX screens in 66 countries, with an additional 200 new screens being planned for China, reports the company that has been owned by U.S. investors since 1994.

But the first permanent IMAX projection system was back in Canada, installed at Ontario Place's Cinesphere in Toronto in 1971, where it remains in operation – screening immersive IMAX nature films and documentaries as well as reformatted Hollywood blockbusters like *Lawrence of Arabia* and the *Harry Potter* franchise through their movie business partner, Cineplex.

In recognition of this history, earlier this year Cinesphere served as the site launch for *XL Outer Worlds*, an ambitious original five-film project celebrating the 50th anniversary of the invention of IMAX.

Spearheaded by York cinema and media arts Professor Janine Marchessault in collaboration with True Frame Productions' Christian Kroitor, grandson of one of the original IMAX inventors, the large-format digital film shorts screened at Cinesphere alongside a selection of original IMAX.

The program debuted on April 18 and included works by Canadian experimental media artists Michael Snow, Oliver Husain, Leila Sujir, Kelly Richardson and Lisa Jackson.

XL Outer Worlds is now expected to tour other first-generation IMAX theatres across Canada, with stops planned for Montreal, Sudbury, Edmonton and Victoria throughout the remainder of the year.

The accompanying *XL Outer Worlds* catalogue, to be published in the fall, includes an interview with Ferguson, the only one of the IMAX inventors who remains alive.

For Mulvogue, it represents a coming home.

"We want to highlight the Canadian story and bring back that experimental feeling that was part of IMAX at the beginning," she says. "We want to honour that original spirit." ●

New research allows for earlier detection of a silent killer

the big

**BY DEIRDRE KELLY
PHOTOGRAPHY BY MIKE FORD**

CHUN PENG: Giving hope to cancer patients



**Lowering that level
can also help regulate
the tumour progression
and development,
potentially
resulting
in a cure**

FOR MANY women, late-stage ovarian cancer is usually an automatic death sentence. But new breakthrough research at York University may give hope to those afflicted by the deadly disease.

By honing in on the body's complex internal systems involved in the development of ovarian cancer, York Research Chair and Faculty of Science Professor Chun Peng and former grad student Mohamed Salem (PhD '18) have uncovered the pivotal role played by a small tumour-promoting molecule in those patients with the disease.

"Our study provides strong new evidence to support a tumour-promoting role of miR-590-3p in ovarian cancer," says Peng, who supervised the research investigation that focused specifically on epithelial ovarian cancer (EOC), the most common and deadliest form of the illness.

"We also identified a gene, FOXA2, as a target of miR-590-3p, providing several important lines of evidence to support the idea that FOXA2 inhibits tumour growth in ovarian cancer."

A microRNA, miR-590-3p naturally exists in our cells. However, its increased presence in the body may indicate that ovarian cancer has struck, explains Salem, who collaborated on the five-year study with researchers from York University, the University of Ottawa and the American University in Cairo.

Funded by the Canadian Institutes of Health Research and the Canada Foundation for Innovation/Ontario Research Fund, the findings were recently published in the peer-reviewed scientific journal *Cancer Research*.

Significant is the discovery that "miR-590-3p levels are higher in the blood of ovarian cancer patients when compared

to women with benign gynecological disorders," says Salem, adding that the level of this microRNA is higher in more aggressive tumour tissues compared to less aggressive ones.

"Measuring the level of miR-590-3p could potentially allow for early detection of the disease without the need for invasive procedures like surgery. Lowering that level can also help regulate the tumour progression and development, potentially resulting in a cure."

While more work still needs to be done, the importance of this discovery cannot be underestimated.

Ovarian cancer is a leading killer of women with gynecological cancer in the developed world, having a five-year survival rate of just 44 per cent.

The mortality rate is high mainly because ovarian cancer is often hard to detect at an early stage. Symptoms generally are vague and elusive, and advanced screening tests tend to be inconclusive or non-existent. That's why so many women continue to be afflicted.

An estimated 2,800 Canadian women will be diagnosed with ovarian cancer this year, and approximately 1,800 of them will die, according to the latest statistical data released by Ovarian Cancer Canada.

But despite ongoing research to find a cure, early detection and effective treatments at later stages of the disease remain the only means for a long-term remedy to ovarian cancer.

"The privilege of working in one of the York University labs, with cutting-edge advanced technology and a solid commitment and determination to make changes in people's lives, lie at the core of our work," Salem says. "The aim of our original research is to net results to benefit many." ●



A LOAD OF BULL

JOSHUA QUINLAN: Confronting the nonsense

The science of claptrap

**BY ALANNA MITCHELL
PHOTOGRAPHY BY JEFF KIRK**

JOSHUA QUINLAN AND I are at Voodoo Child, a coffee bar on College Street in downtown Toronto, talking about bullshit. And not just regular bullshit. But the pseudo-profound variety.

Quinlan, with his dark beard, wire-frame glasses and black shirt, could pass for a café-au-lait-drinking philosopher on Paris's Left Bank. But in reality, he is a PhD candidate in social-personality research at York University who hails from Newfoundland and has both a master's degree in absurdist humour and a fondness for muffins.

He also happens to be an expert in balderdash.

For a moment, as we chat, I start to wonder whether he's pulling my leg. Pseudo-profound bullshit? Social-personality research? Absurdist humour? Voodoo Child? What if this conversation is just part of a sophisticated joke? Can bull really be a real topic of scientific research?

In fact, it is. Quinlan quite earnestly explains that a whole field of research has emerged in the past few years tracking people's susceptibility to statements that purport to be meaningful but are actually nonsense.

It all started in 2015 with psychologist Gordon Pennycook, then

Humans tend to seek meaning in an inherently meaningless universe

a PhD student at the University of Waterloo and now an assistant professor of behavioural science at the University of Regina. Pennycook began tracking statements that he could see were specifically designed to impress even though they were total gibberish. Rather than imparting useful information, these sentences were aimed at entertaining or just catching attention.

Pennycook dubbed it pseudo-profound bullshit, saying it's at the extreme end of the nonsense spectrum, and published a paper on it.

It was the first empirical investigation on the topic, and it won the 2016 Ig Nobel Prize, an eccentric international award doled out by Nobel laureates at Harvard University to celebrate the year's most improbable, if entertaining, scientific research.

As he was investigating the phenomenon, Pennycook wondered whether the truncated form and broad reach of some social media platforms, particularly Twitter, makes it easier for these meaningless assertions to masquerade as meaningful. In fact, some of the baloney statements he was then examining showed up verbatim on the feed of an influential celebrity.

"With the rise of communication technology, people are much more likely to encounter more bullshit in their everyday lives than ever before," Pennycook writes.

But encountering bull is one thing. Taking it as profound is something else altogether. Which led Pennycook to wonder: what predisposes someone to swallow ridiculous and vague statements whole?

That original 2015 paper, based on four studies Pennycook and his team conducted, linked heightened receptivity to pseudo-profound bullshit to lower verbal and numerical intelligence. Those more apt to find meaning where none exists also showed a greater likelihood to buy into conspiracy theories, hold non-traditional religious beliefs and paranor-

mal ideas, and to endorse complementary and alternative medicine.

In other words, the willingness to be a critical, analytical and skeptical thinker protects one against being susceptible to pseudo-profound bullshit.

This is where Quinlan, at York University, picks up the trail.

Under the direction of Tim Bainbridge, a PhD candidate in the School of Psychological Sciences at the University of Melbourne, he began to wonder what type of personality characteristics make one more receptive to bull and so created a survey combining bullshit research and personality science. Quinlan and Bainbridge ran two studies, analyzing responses from 140 University of Melbourne psychology students and 157 undergrads at York. (Students got a course credit for participating.)

At this point, sitting in Voodoo Child, I'm wondering exactly what pseudo-profound bullshit looks like. I ask Quinlan and he says that the answer lies in the supplementary materials appended to the paper he published with Bainbridge last year in the *European Journal of Personality*.

Here are a few gems:

The future explains irrational facts.

Your movement transforms universal observations.

Orderliness is mirrored in cosmic possibilities.

And this pearl:

Today, science tells us that the essence of nature is joy.

To be sure, once you're alerted to the fact that these are nonsense sentences – generated by computers, no less, and fitted into a proper syntactical structure – it's pretty easy to see through them.

But, as Quinlan points out, humans tend to seek meaning in an inherently meaningless universe, which is why such statements tend to fly. We're wired that way.

That means under normal circumstances, we expect statements to contain meaning. We're charitable with them,

Being too open-minded can lead one to reject factual evidence

believing that if we have enough faith in a sentence, its meaning will reveal itself. Most of us are not looking to be duped.

"People navigate the world on the assumption that information is both meaningful and truthful," Quinlan says.

Not only that, but many pseudo-profound statements contain words we're trained to consider important: "intrinsic," "universal," "transform," "neural," "science," "cosmic."

In their study, Quinlan and Bainbridge tossed in buzzwords like "quantum" and "infinite" to heighten the appearance of profundity.

Further testing their participants' credulity, they also mixed bullshit statements with others that truly were profound, as well as some that were true but banal.

Among the profound:

The creative adult is the child who survived.

A wet person does not fear the rain.

The banal:

Some people have poor taste in clothing.

Many things can be done with computers these days.

In addition to ranking the statements' profundity, or lack of, the York University and Melbourne students answered questions about their own personalities. Their answers enabled the researchers to link personality characteristics to perceptions of profundity.

The findings, explains Quinlan, are that intuitive, reflexive thinkers are more receptive to bull, while reflective thinkers are not. Being receptive to bunk is linked to some types of personality openness, his research shows. Intelligence can serve as an antidote to believing in bullshit. But being too open-minded can lead one to reject factual evidence.

A few decades ago, before the internet connected the world and before algorithms so mercilessly parsed one's habits,

these peddlers had a much tougher time finding an audience, Quinlan adds.

Today, it's easy to spread hogwash around. And in our baffling age of misinformation, having a strong bullshit detector seems like a mandatory requirement for getting through one's day.

For Pennycook, the fast-spreading phenomenon of fake news has become a new field of study. The title of a paper he and some co-authors published this year in the *Journal of Applied Research in Memory and Cognition* reveals some of his findings: "Belief in Fake News is Associated with Delusionality, Dogmatism, Religious Fundamentalism, and Reduced Analytic Thinking."

As Pennycook says: "Bullshit is much harder to detect when we want to agree with it."

He knew early on that it would be easy to laugh off the whole idea of pseudo-profound bullshit. But he defends the research. Bull is now rampant, he says, and it's important to be able to identify it. Others think so too. Today there's even a course on how to spot bullshit offered by the University of Washington. It uses Pennycook's 2015 paper, among other materials, as part of the curriculum. The synopsis reads: "Our world is saturated with bullshit. Learn to detect and defuse it."

Indeed, our culture is now filled with masses of false information spread with the explicit intent to mislead: advertising, politics, talk shows, tabloid headlines, faith cures, psychic healers, spiritualists, anti-vaxxers. Their claptrap is no joke.

In the case of anti-vaxxers, for instance, people's very lives may hang on the ability to separate the meaningful from the meaningless.

"There's a lot of information in the world and often that information is given in bad faith," Quinlan says. "You're given the impression that they have something to offer when they don't. They're grifters." ●

TWENTY YEARS BEFORE #GIRLBOSS was trending, former York University Board of Governors member Hana Zalzal (MBA '92) left the corporate job she loathed to start Cargo Cosmetics, a company on a mission to make the beauty counter a more empowering place.

Canadian women today are following in Zalzal's pioneering footsteps in record numbers, choosing to forgo traditional corporate ladder climbing to instead forge a professional path all their own. According to Statistics Canada's annual labour force survey, approximately 1.1 million (37 per cent) of Canada's business owners were female in 2018, up from 701,000 (33 per cent) in 1995 when Cargo launched. And the Government of Canada is determined to double the current tally by 2025 with the help of its \$2-billion Women Entrepreneurship Strategy introduced in last year's budget.

The three York graduates profiled here demonstrate just a few of the many ways millennial women are embracing an entrepreneurial future.

SHE MEANS

Young entrepreneurs on the rise

BY LINDSAY MACADAM



BUSINESS\$\$\$



MY BOSS WILL SAY, “HERE’S A UNICORN IN THE INDUSTRY WHO HAS AN MBA AND IS A YOUTUBE STAR”

SHEREEN LADHA

DON’T CALL IT A SIDE HUSTLE

PHOTOGRAPHY BY MIKE FORD

IT WAS THE SPRING of 2016 when Schulich School of Business grad Shereen Ladha (MBA ’15) realized she had struck gold with her Bollywood YouTube channel, dancewithSL. After experimenting with the video sharing site for a mere eight months, her remix of the popular Justin Bieber song Sorry went viral, quickly generating hundreds of thousands of views and getting picked up by media outlets like BuzzFeed, the Huffington Post, CBC and *Teen Vogue*, to name a few. “I felt like I’d conquered YouTube,” confesses Ladha, selected that same year as one of YouTube Canada’s NextUp Creators, which gave her access to exclusive resources and opportunities to help her channel thrive. “I wanted to bring Indian culture to Canada in a really relevant way, and I think with that video I did.”

Born and raised in Richmond Hill, Ont., to African immigrant parents of Indian descent, the now 30-year-old has been an over-achiever for as long as she can remember. As a child, she attended the academically elite University of Toronto Schools by day and spent her evenings in the dance studio. By 15, she was scouted for a professional Bollywood company called DK Dance Pak for which she performed every weekend until her early 20s, even while pursuing her business degree at McGill University in Montreal.

As a new grad, Ladha moved back to Toronto and worked briefly in PR and marketing analytics before embarking on her MBA at Schulich, an experience she credits for helping launch her YouTube channel and teaching her the strategic thinking she now relies on in her multipronged career.

Today, the self-confessed workaholic happily juggles a demand-

ing day job as a senior strategist at advertising agency McCann Canada and a rewarding dance career. If tempted to call it a side hustle, don’t. “It’s very much a business for me,” Ladha insists. “It’s my second full-time job.”

Her two careers are inextricably linked. “McCann hired me because of my personal brand,” explains the winner of the 2019 *Strategy Magazine* New Establishment Innovator Award, recognized for her modern approach to career. “My boss will say, ‘Here’s a unicorn in the industry who has an MBA and is a YouTube star.’ He’ll give both things equal importance and that’s the reason I’m working there.”

To date, this unicorn has racked up over 100,000 YouTube subscribers – a big milestone, earned through four years of hard work and learnings as the platform evolved and the competition multiplied. “In 2015, I was one of the first Bollywood YouTube channels,” she says. Now there are thousands.

But growing her online fan base is about much more than just the numbers. “I always said I would use my channel to teach and inspire,” says Ladha, “but from a business perspective it’s to gain the popularity so I can perform around the world as myself.”

And her plan is working, with a solo performance in Lisbon, Portugal, and two cross-Canada stage shows among her list of recent accomplishments, plus an installation she produced that’s running until July 28 at the TIFF *Picture Palace* exhibit in Toronto.

“YouTube is not an end goal for me,” she says, “but it’s absolutely a means to do the things I want to do.”

**IT WAS CLEAR TO MYSELF AND MY EMPLOYERS
THAT I WAS AN ENTREPRENEUR AT HEART**

SKY MCLEAN

SKI TOWN TAKEOVER

PHOTOGRAPHY BY DAVEY LIESKE

S **KY MCLEAN** (iBBA '06, MBA '12) approaches her real estate business the same way she does her adventure sports: fearlessly.

The Richmond Hill native, who grew up mountain biking and downhill skiing, was summoned westward immediately after graduating from Schulich's International Bachelor of Business Administration program in 2006, quickly landing a job in Calgary as a sales representative at confectionery company Cadbury.

McLean spent five happy years enjoying the Alberta lifestyle before deciding to pursue her passion for real estate by enrolling in the MBA in Real Estate & Development at her alma mater.

"My parents would drag me around to open houses as a kid, and that really piqued my interest," says the now 34-year-old CEO and owner of Big Moose Realty and Basecamp Resorts over the phone from her Canmore, Alta., home. "I found great frustration in watching them look at properties and never buy them."

The MBA program did for McLean exactly what she hoped it would: it allowed her to confidently change her career trajectory and eventually go into business for herself.

After finishing up at Schulich, she headed back out west and worked for three real estate developers over the next three years. But after her postgraduate studies, McLean felt she never really fit into an organization again. "It was clear to myself and my employers that I was an entrepreneur at heart," she says.

McLean dreamed up her concept for Basecamp Resorts – 32 self-contained suites of various sizes, each having their own kitchen, washer and dryer – while working for a Calgary developer and managing two nightly rental condo units in Canmore on the side with much success.

As luck should have it, the perfect piece of land went up for sale shortly after. And without funding lined up or past experience to guide her, she went for it.

The biggest challenge in the beginning was the financing, especially as a young female with no track record in a male-dominated industry. "Getting my first deal off the ground was almost impossible," admits McLean. But through perseverance and an unwavering belief in her vision, she eventually secured the investors and financing she needed.

Construction on the first Basecamp Resorts began in November 2016 and the business opened in August of the following year. Since then, McLean has been adding to her development portfolio at hyperspeed, first with the Residences at Basecamp, followed by Basecamp Lodge and the Lamphouse Hotel, all in Canmore.

In progress are Basecamp Suites in Canmore and two new Basecamp Resorts in Revelstoke and Golden, B.C. Different investors are involved in each property, but they're all part of the same hospitality brand that this humble hotelier is both building and managing.

"Our main criteria for expansion is year-round tourism," explains McLean. "And I think the suites model is the way of the future."





**BEING AN ENTREPRENEUR ISN'T GLAMOROUS OR FUN.
I ONLY DO IT BECAUSE I FUNDAMENTALLY
BELIEVE THAT WE SHOULD HIRE DIFFERENTLY**

CAITLYN NGU

REINVENTING THE HIRING PROCESS

PHOTOGRAPHY BY MIKE FORD

YOU MAY HAVE seen Glendon grad Caitlyn Ngu (BA '13) pitching her tech startup, HireUp, on CBC's "Dragon's Den" late last year and walking out with a \$250,000 deal.

But what you didn't see is what it took to get there.

The 30-year-old entrepreneur grew up in downtown Toronto in a middle-income family with a mother who was a district manager for a retail chain. "She was very business driven," Ngu tells me between sips of iced coffee, in the financial district lobby we've settled into, "so I definitely learned a lot from her."

Thinking she wanted to be a French teacher, Ngu enrolled in the French Studies program at York University's Glendon Campus. But needing to pay her own way, she strategically crammed all her courses into two days a week to allow for a full-time job. Talk about experiential education.

After graduating with more real-world experience under her belt than most, Ngu attended a professional development event at the MaRS Discovery District one evening and found herself wishing she could speak to the person presenting. "Something clicked, and I thought, there should be a way for me to pitch an employer on hiring me," she remembers of the instant her startup idea was born. "I went home and registered a business that same night."

Unlike most small business owners, she hadn't dreamt about being her own boss. Instead, she was driven by what

she saw as a broken hiring system. "Being an entrepreneur isn't glamorous or fun," Ngu insists. "I only do it because I fundamentally believe that we should hire differently."

Her solution, HireUp, is the first centralized, searchable database of video resumés that can only be viewed by verified employers. It introduces hiring managers to suitable candidates on demand and gives job seekers the freedom to interview anywhere, anytime.

Once the business was registered, the eager Ngu began taking jobs at fast-growing tech startups where she could learn. She did endless research and took workshops on everything from legal and finance to UX and design – all outside of office hours. Then, once she felt she had prepared enough, she invested her hard-earned savings into hiring a development team to bring her vision to life.

Today, HireUp is officially up and running, albeit still in its early stages, and Ngu now has a five-person team to help her as needed.

"I'm hoping HireUp will become the new hiring norm in the next three to five years," says the optimistic founder, who plans to expand into the U.S. by 2021, followed potentially by Europe.

"My objective is to change the way we hire, which is a very big task," she says.

"But I figure it'll keep me busy for the next 10 years." ●

Singular SENSATION

York theatre at 50

BY MARTIN MORROW
PHOTOGRAPHY BY MIKE FORD

IT WAS THE SUMMER of the first moon landing and Woodstock. The Beatles had just recorded their last album and a young Bryan Adams had – or so the song goes – bought his first real six-string at the five-and-dime. The hippie movement had taken over Broadway with the “tribal love-rock musical” *Hair*, which would soon rock Toronto as well. But it would not be the only disruptive offspring of the 1960s counterculture about to shape – and shake up – the city’s theatre scene.

Springing to life on York University’s Keele Campus in August of 1969, the Program in Theatre, as it was initially called, represented a watershed moment.

Joseph G. Green, a gruff former theatre professor at New York’s Hunter College, had come north to set up the program – part of the then 10-year-old university’s new fine-arts component. But while armed with a PhD in theatre, he did not want to just teach dramatic theory. The University of Toronto was already doing that. What Green wanted instead was for York – and its students – to be different. Under his direction, the department would put theory into practice by means of a proactive dramatic arts program that would not only feed into Canada’s burgeoning professional theatre but would help to create and define it.

“We said we want to be judged on the number of theatres our students started or would be running,” recalls Professor Emeritus Don Rubin, a fellow New Yorker who was Green’s first faculty hire. “That was the goal from the start.”

That goal has since been reached many times over throughout the York Department of Theatre’s 50-year history.

From the get-go, the department has produced students determined to make

MARLIS SCHWEITZER: Leading Canada’s premier theatre program





YORK THEATRE: Disrupting the status quo



their mark. Companies founded and nurtured by York alumni now dot the Toronto – and indeed, the Canadian – cultural firmament: Buddies in Bad Times Theatre, Crow’s Theatre, the Musical Stage Company, Necessary Angel Theatre, Obsidian Theatre Company, the Blyth Festival.

York alum have also helmed some of the country’s major theatre organizations, including Soulpepper, the National Arts Centre, the Tarragon Theatre and Theatre Calgary.

“We seem to do quite well with artistic directors,” acknowledges Department of Theatre Chair Marlis Schweitzer with a laugh.

True, but York also has an enviable reputation for turning out many of the country’s top actors, designers, playwrights and theatre scholars.

Celebrated alumni include Hollywood actress Rachel McAdams (BFA ’01), “Kim’s Convenience” actor and playwright Ins Choi (BFA ’98), “Queer as Folk” co-star Thea Gill (BFA ’92), and David Hein (BFA ’97) and Irene Sankoff (BA ’99), the husband-and-

wife writers of the hit musical phenomenon *Come From Away*.

In all cases, their York training has been informed by a department philosophy that emphasizes social justice issues.

“We’re not interested in producing actors that don’t have thoughts,” says Schweitzer during an interview in her cozy third-floor office at the Centre for Film & Theatre. “We want really intelligent, informed, socially committed artists, teachers, critics and scholars, who, when they leave York, can make real changes in the arts community and in the broader community as well.”

As Toronto has grown so has the program. The first graduating class, in 1972, had 17 students. The Class of 2019 has 75 and counting. This past academic year saw 472 undergrads, 38 graduate students in the MA and PhD programs, and 18 MFA students. And a department that started out with just five faculty members in 1969 now has 23 full-time professors, as well as numerous sessional instructors.

The first hires came from south of

the border and included Robert Benedetti, an early member of Chicago’s the Second City and a revered acting coach who became the department’s second hippiesque Chair in 1970.

Green, who died in 2017, wanted a department made up of theatre professionals. Canada did not have many at the time, but a lot of the important ones ended up at York: Charlottetown Festival and St. Lawrence Centre founder Mavor Moore (who chaired the department from 1973 to 1974) and Vancouver avant-garde instigator John Juliani, who helped develop York’s theatre graduate program, the first of its kind in Canada, among them.

“Joe not only hired people with professional connections,” says Professor Emeritus Ron Singer, a professional actor from Montreal with film and TV experience who came to York at Benedetti’s request in 1967. “He wanted us to help the students by bridging that step from the University into the profession.”

IN SEPTEMBER of 1971, the fledgling theatre program’s nine faculty members held a retreat at the Terra Cotta Inn in bucolic Caledon, Ont. They weren’t there to take in the fall colours but to survey another landscape – Toronto’s and, by extension, Canada’s theatre scene.

Buoyed by a wave of nationalism following the country’s 1967 Centennial, a new indie “alternate theatre” movement had taken root across the country. Companies devoted to new, homegrown work – among them Theatre Passe Muraille, Factory Theatre, Tarragon Theatre – were emerging. York’s new Theatre Department wanted to harness that energy, use it to create a distinctive presence on the nation’s developing theatre scene.

Armed with idealism and a zeal for change, the York profs drafted what they called the *Terra Cotta Manifesto*, which declared their intention to help students find their own vision of theatre, to create theatres “in their own image.”

Many have since done that.

The hunger to do things was pretty great. We were always making stuff, even when it wasn’t assigned. It was very much part of the culture – it was what you did

In the 1970s, budding playwright Sky Gilbert (BFA ’76) concocted his own cabaret series at York, which sowed the seeds for Buddies, his landmark LGBTQI+ company. At the same time, aspiring director Richard Rose (BFA ’78) – the future long-serving artistic director of Toronto’s Tarragon Theatre – formed the Necessary Angel collective with some fellow classmates as soon as they graduated from the program. Jillian Keiley (BFA ’94) didn’t even wait for her degree.

With Chris Tolley (BFA ’94), she started the Artistic Fraud company at York in 1993, producing an original musical farce with the snappy title *In Your Dreams, Freud*.

Later, in Keiley’s native St. John’s, the company morphed into the innovative

and critically acclaimed Artistic Fraud of Newfoundland.

Keiley, who just finished her seventh season as artistic director of the National Arts Centre’s English Theatre, remembers such student-initiated projects were typical of York’s theatre program.

“The hunger to do things was pretty great,” she recalls. “We were always making stuff, even when it wasn’t assigned. It was very much part of the culture – it was what you did.”

IT’S A RAINY Saturday afternoon at the end of March and an audience has gathered in York’s plush Sandra Faire & Ivan Fecan Theatre for a matinee



SHOWTIME AT YORK: A snapshot of stories told

Things that worked for us 10 or 20 years ago maybe don't work anymore. We're asking how we can respond to that so our students can live healthier lives

performance of *Orlando*, Sarah Ruhl's adaptation of Virginia Woolf's classic gender-fluid novel. The stage is dominated by a towering oak tree, seemingly formed out of twisted, crumpled, scrawled-upon sheets of writing paper. Beneath it, the lively student cast in 16th-century attire dance, flirt, swagger and even skate. Young women play men, young men play women – including a hirsute Brandon Pereira as Queen Elizabeth I.

Directed by MFA candidate Lindsay Bell, *Orlando* is part of Theatre @ York's 2018-19 season, which, in honour of the program's radical roots, is called "Disruptors."

Productions range from Jean Genet's revolutionary fable *The Balcony* (alter-

nating in repertory with *Orlando*) and *rochdale*, a new play about the 1960s Rochdale College experiment, created by York students in collaboration with the Governor General's Award-winning playwright David Yee and Factory Theatre artistic director Nina Lee Aquino.

Performance has always been central to York's theatre program. In its first year, Green himself directed a double bill of Tennessee Williams one-acts to kick things off.

Today, there is a dizzying amount of theatrical activity throughout the fall and winter semesters.

Mainstage productions like *Orlando* represent only a small part of it.

Offerings include the student-produced playGround festival, and the springtime Shakespeare Projects. There are also studio shows for third-year and graduate acting students, and for those studying playwriting, dramaturgy and design.

The number of performance venues has also grown. Where the department once produced in the Burton Auditorium (no longer in use), it now has a variety of spaces at its disposal. In addition to the Faire-Fecan, a traditional, 360-seat proscenium theatre in the Accolade East Building, there is the Joseph G. Green Studio Theatre, a flexible black box in the Centre for Film & Theatre with seating for up to 120, in addition to a variety of other studio spaces in both locales.

The program continues to evolve as well. This year, it introduced a new BFA in Performance Creation to accommodate students who want to create multidisciplinary hybrids, such as dance-theatre. It also initiated an artist residency in conjunction with Sensorium, York's research centre for digital arts and technology, to foster new performance projects.

Beyond creative trends, the department has begun responding to the #MeToo movement with a focus on intimacy coaching for actors and is also addressing the issue of mental health with a rethink of traditional theatre practices.

"Working in theatre is intense; it's long hours into the night," Schweitzer says. "Things that worked for us 10 or 20 years ago maybe don't work anymore. We're asking how we can respond to that so our students can live healthier lives."

TERESA PRZYBYLSKI knows all about the balancing act. This summer, the multi-award-winning designer and York theatre prof is back at Canada's Stratford Festival where she has created the set for a rare revival of the 18th-century German classic *Natban the Wise*. Working alongside her, creating the costumes, is Michelle Tracey (BFA '13), one of her former students and now an in-demand designer herself.

"I'm incredibly lucky, I work a lot

with my students now," says the Polish-born Przybylski, who joined the department in 2000. She has alternated teaching with a successful design career for many years and thinks that's an essential part of her York job.

"It's important for the students to see that you have professional connections," she says. And, she adds, it also gives them an idea of what it's like to work on contract in the theatre. "Maintaining a busy life with crazy schedules is part of what I teach."

York has always had ties to the professional theatre, but in recent years the University has gained a higher profile thanks to its mentorship collaboration with Canadian Stage. Launched in 2011, it has MFA-directing candidates working at the flagship Toronto theatre and undergraduates participating in its summertime Shakespeare in High Park season.

To date, eight MFA graduates have been through the process, most of them already working professionals seeking to break into, or build upon, directing careers. "It's allowed us to

attract some really exciting directors to our program," Schweitzer says.

The mentorship, overseen by master director Peter Hinton, includes an opportunity to direct one of the theatre's main-season shows and culminates with a production for Shakespeare in High Park, which serves as a thesis project.

Canadian Stage artistic director Brendan Healy says the collaboration is a win for his company as well as for York. "For us, it's an opportunity for artistic renewal," he says. "We benefit from the new ideas and new perspectives that younger artists bring to the table."

But one thing hasn't changed: just as their predecessors did 50 years ago, York's theatre professors are still looking to turn out students who not only contribute to the theatre but disrupt the status quo.

"Our students have to know that they are the future," Przybylski says. "I tell them that they have to rebel – even against our own teaching. They have to find their own voice and use it." ●

Encore! Encore!

A York grad's next act

BY MARTIN MORROW

PHOTOGRAPHY BY MCKENZIE JAMES



WEYNI MENGESHA (BFA '05) is the great, great granddaughter of former Ethiopian emperor Haile Selassie I. Today, she wears her own crown as the reigning queen of Canadian pop theatre.

In her impressive career, which began even before she'd graduated from York University's theatre program, Mengesha has piloted two wildly popular comedies that have subsequently been turned into successful TV series: "Da Kink in My Hair" and "Kim's Convenience."

She has also directed a variety of other work, from Shakespeare at Canada's Stratford Festival to contemporary plays at Toronto's Tarragon Theatre. An audience and critics' favourite, it's no surprise then that she was named the new artistic director of Soulpepper Theatre in 2018.

It's one of Toronto's top theatre jobs. Not bad for someone who initially came to York clueless about the profession.

"I grew up in Scarborough and was never exposed to it," Mengesha says from her Soulpepper office in Toronto's Distillery District.

"My first year at York was an intense eye-opener."

Encouraged by a high-school teacher who saw her dramatic potential, she first enrolled at York to study acting. But midway through her first year she realized she wanted to direct and write more than act.

The eureka moment came courtesy of the theatre program's Surprise! Surprise! series in which first-year students are given a handful of tickets to Toronto shows. Mengesha took advantage of the initiative and remembers seeing Daniel Brooks and Guillermo Verdecchia's haunting *Insomnia*, a work that made a huge impression.

"That play just blew my mind," she says. "I remember thinking, *That's what we can do in the theatre!*"

Mengesha credits several York theatre professors with giving her the skills and the leeway to become a director and find her own path, notably Ron Singer's directing class and Mark Wilson's in collective creation.

"From Ron, I got this big toolbox with which to process a script," she says. "And Mark sharpened my instincts. Those two things together form the backbone of the way I direct today."

Mengesha also did a lot of work off-campus, from directing "Da Kink" to writing and producing her own sci-fi play.

"There was a lot of encouragement to create," she says. ●



SORRY, SO SORRY

Apologize like you mean it



BY DEIRDRE KELLY PHOTOGRAPHY BY CHRIS ROBINSON

WHEN FASHION designer Karl Lagerfeld died earlier this year in Paris, the flood of editorials that flowed from his demise all basically touched on the same thing – that the Chanel *übermensch* was an outspoken genius and a trailblazer whose passing truly represented the end of an era. Besides an unparalleled talent for turning chiffon and satin into one-off covetable clothes, Lagerfeld had become infamous by never allowing himself to ever say sorry.

His refusal to accept blame – even as he openly insulted everyone from Adele to Angela Merkel – truly set him apart.

“He never apologized,” noted fashion reporter Vanessa Friedman in the *New York Times*. “In all the hagiography that happens after a death, it should not be glossed over. Not just because it was part of who Mr. Lagerfeld was, fully resplendent and sometimes ugly humanity, but because it is part of what marked him out as belonging to a different time.”

Ironically, for a fashion designer, Lagerfeld was decidedly off-trend on this one. Today, everyone everywhere is now apologizing for everything. Governments, corporations, school boards, the Catholic Church, you name it. Admitting wrongdoing – even when it’s not really your fault (see Toronto Maple Leafs owner Lawrence Tanenbaum’s open letter to fans apologizing for the team’s seeming inability to score goals) – has become the socially sanctioned thing to do.

Apologizing is now so ingrained in the culture, it’s practically *de rigueur*, a knee-jerk response to everything from the tragic to the trivial. The internet is awash in websites offering instructions on how best to grovel and show remorse for those – *sorry* – too stupid to figure it out for themselves. (OK, we’ll tell you: act sincere.)

Lagerfeld might have gotten away with it. But in recent months, luxury brands like Burberry, Gucci and Dolce & Gabbana have had to apologize for committing (wittingly or not) acts of cultural insensitivity in the public domain. These companies immediately and without hesitation got down on bended knee to apologize to consumers whose loyalty they need to ensure if they want to stay in business.

In today’s world, trust and transparency are the twin mantras that keep economies and their institutions humming. Companies without an apology plan in place as a part of those policies will sooner or later find themselves begging for forgiveness. That’s practically a given, says marketing expert Alan Middleton (MBA ’77, PhD ’97), an adjunct professor at the Schulich School of Business.

“If companies today have any brain at all, they’d realize that there’s nothing in this world that we do as a human activity that can’t have a potential downside – as Boeing is now just discovering with its 737 Max aircraft issue. Public relations houses call it crisis management. But I wish they’d change the title of that because this is all about reputation management, and it’s really about your corporate culture, how transparent and trustworthy you want to be for the consumer.”

But apologizing is far more than just good business practice. For countries with human rights abuses on their record it’s the moral thing to do. Officially saying sorry for historical grievances is seen to advance a nation’s global profile while providing the people with a way to move forward from past trauma. It’s why so many nations are now outdoing themselves with apologies in a bid to advance both status and credibility on the world stage.

Last year, France apologized for tortures and disappearances that took place in Algeria in the 1950s and Holland took responsibility for the Srebrenica massacre of some 350 Muslim men in Bosnia-Herzegovina in 1995. Meanwhile, Germany apologized for crimes against homosexuals during the Nazi era, and the United Kingdom for its callous treatment of the so-called Windrush generation of Caribbean migrants who came to Britain in 1948 and were denied medical care and threatened with deportation for not having adequate proof of citizenship – which wasn’t their fault.

Not to be outdone, in the House of Commons last year, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau apologized for a past government’s refusal to allow a shipload of Jews and other refugees fleeing Hitler’s Europe to land on Canada’s shores in 1939, a decision provoked by the country’s then “none is too many” anti-Semitic policy. All passengers on board the St. Louis luxury ocean liner were eventually sent back to their port of origin.

“Of course, an apology can never repair the original damage. Nor will it bring back needlessly lost lives,” said immigration and refugee lawyer and Osgoode Hall Law School Professor Sean Rehaag in a *Toronto Star* op-ed piece co-authored with Sharry Aiken last May. “But it may provide some comfort to the families and communities affected. And, if done properly, it will help shine light on a part of Canadian history that does not get the attention it deserves.”

The apologies just keep on coming. As widely reported, Trudeau has issued at least five other official apologies since taking office in 2015: for the execution of Canadian soldiers

during the First World War, for turning away a shipload of immigrants from India in 1914, for the harm done to Indigenous Peoples from the residential school system and to the residential school survivors in Newfoundland and Labrador who were (accidentally) left out of that original apology, and for the state-ordered discrimination of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender Canadians.

Before him, prime minister Brian Mulroney issued the first apology to a racialized group when in 1988 he apologized to Japanese Canadians for their internment during and after the Second World War. In 2006, prime minister Stephen Harper apologized to all Chinese Canadians affected by the 1885-1923 head tax and the 1923 amendment to the Chinese Immigration Act, which banned all people of Chinese ancestry from entering Canada.

But it all begs the question: does saying sorry with such frequency truly help matters or does it trivialize the gesture, turning an apology into a clichéd phrase signifying nothing? As Rehaag and Aiken noted in their editorial, “For an apology to be meaningful there must be a sincere commitment not to repeat the offence.” It’s a conundrum in which York University graduate Angie Wong (MA ’14, PhD ’18) has invested a lot of thought.

A newly appointed professor of women’s studies at Lakehead University, Wong recently published a paper on the overall function, purpose and authenticity of state-sponsored apologies, focusing in on Canada and its past treatment of its Asian minorities and Indigenous Peoples.

“When someone apologizes, there’s an implication that they’ll never commit the same injustice again,” says Wong. “But if a country like Canada is continually apologizing but without seemingly doing much to correct a past wrong then those apologies ring hollow, as the continued over-policing of Black and Indigenous bodies would suggest.”

Or maybe the prime minister, like other Canadians, just can’t help himself. Saying sorry is something of a national habit.

A 2018 national poll found that 39 per cent of respondents said they apologized at least daily, with 18 per cent admitting to apologizing hourly. Another 19 per cent said they apologized three to five times a week, while 17 per cent said they apologized just a few times a month. Only six per cent claimed to never apologize, which, sorry to say, suggests that they aren’t really Canadian at all.

But saying sorry isn’t all that simple, says C. Ward Struthers, a professor in the Department of Psychology in the Faculty of Health at York University who studies victims of transgressions and their willingness to forgive or hold a grudge.

“Sorry is one component of a larger interpersonal mecha-

nism, an apology, that we sometimes use to mend the damage we cause when we commit transgressions,” Struthers says. “An apology has several components, including acknowledging the wrongdoing, taking responsibility for it, showing remorse to the victim, saying sorry, trying to remedy what you did and doing this on your own volition. So, sorry is essentially the verbal response of an apology.”

But while apologizing may come natural to at least some of us, to others it’s a stance to avoid, especially when a potential lawsuit is involved.

Lawyers typically hate apologies, as they are often interpreted as an admission of guilt. Saying sorry makes you vulnerable, the legalists argue, and potentially puts you on the hook for millions of dollars in damages.

But Middleton has at his fingertips several examples of where defying the lawyers ended up paying dividends for brands that fessed up when they went wrong. Saying sorry enabled companies in the public eye to save face and survive in a culture where everything has come under scrutiny, including the ability to make amends.

In his classes, Middleton frequently cites Maple Leaf Foods as a test case example of when saying sorry was not just a good business decision but the right moral and ethical thing to do.

In 2008, the Canadian sliced meats company was linked to a strain of bacteria found in their Toronto processing plant that left over 20 dead.

At the time, lawyers strongly urged CEO Michael McCain not to apologize for the crisis, fearing the lawsuits that would ensue once he did. But McCain ignored their advice, giving a heartfelt apology that ended up ensuring the future of the company.

Post-apology, the customers came back and the stock price didn’t just return to normal. It went way up, fuelled by renewed shareholder confidence. Profits soared to over \$50 million after plummeting \$12.9 million, or 10 cents per share, in the immediate aftermath of a nationwide product recall linked to the deadly listeria bacterium.

For taking reparative action and apologizing, the brand regained credibility.

“I have had students work for Maple Leaf Foods and they all say they were not surprised,” Middleton says. “The apology spoke to the inside of the brand, its core values. But it went beyond that. It forced the company to take steps to ensure that nothing like that would ever happen again. Saying sorry made it stronger. It was not an admission of weakness. It was the other way around.” ●

I HAVE HAD STUDENTS WORK FOR MAPLE LEAF FOODS
AND THEY ALL SAY THEY WERE NOT SURPRISED.
THE APOLOGY SPOKE TO THE INSIDE OF THE BRAND,
ITS CORE VALUES





Chew

A York grad's sweet success

BY DEIRDRE KELLY
PHOTOGRAPHY BY MIKE FORD

JAY KLEIN (BA '02) IS A NEWLY MINTED Top 40 Under 40, a prestigious Canadian business award he earned for making, well, mints in addition to fat-free popcorn and sugarless gum, everyone's favourite chewable.

"We've kicked the aspartame in the gum market," Klein says, flashing a Chiclet smile. No tooth decay here.

"We've built a brand that connects all over the world."

A former York University international student who studied communication and political science while living in residence at Vanier College in the late 1990s, the 38-year-old American-born entrepreneur launched PUR in Toronto in 2010 for the simple reason that he wanted a bite of the global multibillion-dollar candy market.

According to the latest research, non-chocolate candy sales generated US\$11 billion in sales in 2018, a figure expected to grow to US\$12.42 billion in 2023. Klein understands why.

"Everyone loves candy," he says. "It's a social consumable. You share it."

Able



Our growth strategy is double-double, which is double distribution and double consumption

At PUR headquarters, located about a 10-minute drive south of the Keele Campus in an industrial park, a ton of shareable candy is packaged into brightly coloured boxes to be shipped to the 50 countries where PUR is now sold.

In 2016, after experiencing a five-year growth of 5,500 per cent, PUR appeared on PROFIT 500's top 10 list of fastest growing Canadian companies and took the No. 1 position in manufacturing and distribution.

Expansion continues at a speed that would make even Willy Wonka feel dizzy.

"Our growth strategy is double-double," says Klein, "which is double distribution and double consumption, which gives four times annual growth."

Schulich School of Business co-director of entrepreneurial studies Chris Carder calls it a winning formula.

"PUR Gum and Jay Klein are not only a York story, they are a true Canadian success story," Carder says.

"To make it to 50 countries worldwide in eight short years and to define a category like they have, it's just remarkable and a story we should all be proud of. He's one of the few truly powerhouse food startups that has broken beyond Canada's borders. He has much to teach this sector."

Klein's warehouse/office comes loaded with awards (in addition to candy-pink furniture and spearmint-patterned wallpaper): Canada's Best Managed Company, an EY Entrepreneur of the Year and a National Nutrition Award, all

prominently displayed in glass cabinets in the sunlit foyer.

The latest honour is the Canada's Top 40 Under 40, a national leadership awards program celebrating high achievers from a broad spectrum of industries. For Klein, it is the sprinkle on top.

"It's not gender specific, it's not industry specific, it's not based on impact," explains Klein, "it's 360-degree assessment of each candidate's contribution in their field."

Elan Pratzter, a managing partner at Caldwell Partners, which administers Canada's Top 40 Under 40, says that Klein stood out because he took a food group that might not be considered benign and turned it into a positive.

"He won because he conceived of a great idea, he executed on that idea, he built a serious business and he employed and led people, and at the same time he managed to be a whole person in terms of his family life and in terms of his social life, a social giving life. That's why he was awarded the honour of being a Top 40 Under 40."

Not surprisingly, Klein is already building on all that sweetness.

"Jordan is the most recent country we have entered," he says, brandishing that smile again, "and later this year we're going into Suriname, a tiny country in South America."

Whatever could be next?

"Antarctica," he says, not missing a beat. "Except there I don't think they'll need to chew the gum. They'll just shiver it." ●

Alumni



Runway Renegade

Meet Canada's fashion disruptor

BY LEANNE DELAP
PHOTOGRAPHY BY MIKE FORD

IT'S NO SECRET the fashion industry is often perceived as snobby. But the days of a privileged few determining what we all should buy are numbered.

Or so believes Jodi Goodfellow (BFA '99), a fashion tech startup innovator who is the founder and executive director of Startup Fashion Week (SFW).

Her Toronto-based platform brings together creative, educational and mentoring opportunities for fashion and tech startups from coast to coast trying to break into the industry.

"My goal is to disrupt the system," says Goodfellow. "I only went to Toronto Fashion Week once. It struck me as confusing and impenetrable."

Launched in 2014, SFW is a week of conferences, forums and meetups, all culminating in a runway show featuring designers of anything from winter coats to 3D-printed jewelry, maternity wear and bespoke tailoring. In other words, introducing new labels that normally wouldn't find any traction in a "traditional" fashion week.

New wave garments like LED dresses, jackets and capes often light up the SFW runway, drawing attention to the growing field of wearable technology. Goodfellow is a big supporter of what she calls the future of fashion.

Over the past six years, she has helped more than 30 fashion tech startups get exposure, including Tap2Tag, a Canadian company that makes bracelets capable of storing medical information, allowing paramedics, doctors and first responders to easily access patients' profiles through their smartphones.

Goodfellow has also thrown her support behind Ashley Chloe, maker of wireless earbuds for women, and, more recently, Inlighten, a new wearable tech startup whose light-emitting fabric can be customized through a smartphone app.

These techno-fabrics and more will form the focus of SFW's annual events taking place in Toronto each October and in Montreal in July.

With the goal of expanding her concept across Canada,

Goodfellow is presently planning an inaugural one-day splash scheduled for Vancouver in August.

Her supporters are as enthusiastic as she is.

City of Toronto Economic Development Officer Nina Gesa sees the intersection of design and tech as the way of the future and encourages SFW in its efforts to incubate entrepreneurs. She is especially impressed with Goodfellow's track record of jobs created, attention to diversity and growth in this new space.

"SFW is now in three major Canadian cities, which is a huge achievement by any measure," Gesa says. "Breaking into the fashion industry is tough, but Jodi doesn't let that stop her or her clients – she perseveres and pushes boundaries and has created a valued brand in SFW."

Given her success, it might be surprising to know that Goodfellow came into fashion technology through the back door.

For the past 19 years, she has worked as a high-school arts teacher who has used her nights, weekends and indeed every spare second to helping fashion startups make it to the next level.

"I was learning as I went," she says, "but my classroom skills translate very well. I'm pretty good at logistics, from running proms, staging art showcases and arts nights."

And Goodfellow knows the pitfalls of entrepreneurship intimately. Back in 2010, she had her own million-dollar idea, a "Kijiji-like" app called Fashion Forward for selling unused clothes online.

"I thought it would be easy and I would get rich quick," she laughs. She didn't. But she did see the power in networking, and realized her superpower was hosting the events that would help make startup dreams come true for others.

"There's often a lot of fakeness in the fashion world," she says, "and often I felt that some people in the industry wanted to see me fail." Yet she has persevered.

Success, she says, "does not come from five minutes of fame and glory." It comes from making connections. ●

Classes



TREVOR SALLOUM (BA English '78) studied literature. But most of the courses he took while at York were in music, which is why, after graduation, he ended up playing percussion in Toronto clubs. Quickly disillusioned by the late-night musician lifestyle, however, Trevor relocated to British Columbia and enrolled at Okanagan College. From 1982 to 1986, he attended the National College of Naturopathic Medicine in Portland, Ore. Moving to Kelowna, B.C., he practised naturopathic medicine for the next 20 years. In 2006, Trevor retired from medicine to return to music, specifically jazz, Afro-Cuban and Middle Eastern drumming.

1978



TIIDUS, PETER
(BSc Health, MSc Health '81)
After graduating from York's Health Science

program, Peter pursued a career in academia. In 2000, he completed a PhD in kinesiology from the University of Waterloo before joining Wilfrid Laurier University where, for the next 26 years, he held positions as a professor and department Chair for both Kinesiology and Health Sciences. In 2015, he left Wilfrid Laurier to take on the role of dean of health sciences at Brock University, the position he holds today. Peter is married to fellow York grad **ANN TIIDUS**, née Westall, (BA Geography '77, BA Health '80). They have two grown children, Erik and Thomas, and a year-old grandchild. They live happily in the Niagara Region.

1984

KHAN, FAREED
(BA Political Science)

Fareed has spent more than 30 years using his knowledge and insight into advocacy, strategic communications, stakeholder engagement and public policy development to advance a wide range of public policy causes at all levels of government. He is passionate about issues and policy areas that impact human rights and civil liberties, combat racism and support broader issues of social justice. Recently, Fareed

initiated a national grassroots campaign to seek justice for the Rohingya ethnic minority in Myanmar – a people the UN called “the most persecuted minority in the world.” He is now working with other human rights activists to convince the Canadian government to invoke the UN Genocide Convention about the Rohingya genocide.

1990

ROMA YAREK, CHERYL
(BA Hons. Psychology)

After graduation, Cheryl spent five years working in supportive housing before moving on to Trillium Health Centre (now Trillium Health Partners) as a peer support worker in mental health. Eventually rising to the position of case manager, Cheryl left the organization in 2018, after 17 years, to publish her memoirs, *Worst Thing Best Thing*, with Christian Faith Publishing.

1993



SHARMA, RAJEEV
(BA Hons. Political Science, LLB Osgoode '97)
Since 2001, Rajeev has

taught Economic Analysis of Law at Glendon College. Along with his father, he owns Sharma Lawyers in Vaughan, Ont. – specializing in corporate, health-care/regulatory and real estate law.

1994

CORNELL, HEATHER
(BFA Dance)

Heather is an innovative and accomplished tap dancer, choreographer, teacher and co-founder of Manhattan Tap, a company the *New York Times* once called “one of New York’s leading tap ensembles.” Recently, she participated in a recorded interview for the New York City Public Library for the Performing Arts at Lincoln Center. The interview will be included in the library’s oral history department this spring as part of a new series featuring leading international tap dancers. Since founding her company in the 1980s, Heather has received numerous grants and awards, including the 2009 Living Legend award from Vancouver’s West Coast Tap Dance Collective for her excellence in teaching, choreographing, performing, directing and mentoring the international tap community.

1997

TOPPERMAN, CAROLINE
(BFA Film and Video)

Following graduation, Caroline danced professionally in Toronto before moving to Vancouver to continue her career. While in Vancouver, she pursued different interests, including opening and operating a Pilates studio, working in real estate and blogging. After 14 years, on a whim, Caroline left Vancouver and moved across the world to Poland, where she continued to grow her blog, *styleontheside.com*, and pursue her passions for writing, dance and travel. In Poland, she worked with startups and wrote several books,

MONICA GIBBS (BA German '97) is the director of recruitment services at Everest Management Network Inc. With over 20 years of diverse international recruitment experience, Monica specializes in recruitment, retention and wellness in the workplace. In 2014, she launched Monica Gibbs Wellness, going on to speak at various HR events, conferences, seminars and team building events. She is passionate about health and wellness, educating others on personal development, goal setting and finding balance.



CAROLINE TOPPERMAN
(BFA Film and Video '97)



Classes



GABRIELLE MOSER
(MA Art History '09, PhD Art History and Visual Culture '14)

including the fitness guide *FitWise* and a family memoir. Caroline recently returned to Canada and published her latest book, *Tell Me What You See: Visual Writing Prompts for the Wandering Writer*.

1998

PEEL, SARAH
(BES)

Recently, Sarah went from a career in environmental education focused on food and community building to one centred around sustainable fashion. A sustainability educator, social entrepreneur and self-taught stylist, for close to a decade she has worked at the social enterprise Fashion Takes Action, managing a team of workshop leaders and teaching the My Clothes My World program to over 9,000 students in the Greater Toronto Area. Since 2018, she has been running her own fashion startup, Citizenne, which

brings together her love of sustainability, style and personal/community development.

2000

CALVERT, MICHELLE
(BFA Dance)

Originally planning to move to New York City following graduation to dance with the Isadora Duncan International Institute, Michelle ended up instead in Los Angeles, where she promptly fell in love with the city. Once there, she decided to take a year away from dance and do a postgraduate degree in multimedia and marketing. It proved to be a more career-worthy move. In 2003, she launched Lucid Communications to do public relations work for brands as well as bands. After a few years, she moved back to Toronto to continue to build her company in her hometown. Today, with offices in both Toronto and L.A., Michelle specializes in promoting

sustainable fashion, beauty, health and wellness brands. Outside work, she enjoys cardio dance, practising yoga and spending time outdoors in nature with her rescue dog, Iggy Pop.

2003

GUISTINI, SEAN
(BEd History, MEd Education '08, PhD Education '15)

In 2015, Sean moved to Nunavut to develop Nunavut Arctic College Media (NAC Media) – a division of the Communities & Learning Program department at Nunavut Arctic College that publishes books, learning materials, and media products to enhance understanding of Arctic and Inuit culture, history and language. In just four years, NAC Media has become Canada's most northerly scholarly press. It also supports the creation of films, oral histories, web-based media and a digital archive of Arctic and Inuit cultural

holdings. Sean is currently a scholar in the Fulbright Arctic Initiative.

2007

BORON, LUCAS
(BA Film and Video, BA Spec. Hons. Film and Video '09)

Lucas is the executive producer and in-house director at Lucas Boron Productions, a full-service video and media production company based in Ontario's Kitchener-Waterloo area. Previously, he worked as a production co-ordinator on two films for the Canadian Film Centre. One of them, *Life on Juniper*, was nominated for Best Short Film at the Yorkton Film Festival. The other, *What Doesn't Kill You*, received the Short Cuts Award for Best Canadian Film at the Toronto International Film Festival in 2014. Over the years, Lucas has published internationally on the topic of film theory. His third and most

recent academic article was published in the *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* by Routledge Press.

D'URZO, MIKE

(BA Communication Studies)
Since graduating from York, Mike has gone on to become an international award-winning magician and mentalist. As the founder and creative director of Mega Magic, he performs in hundreds of shows annually for some of the world's largest corporations, theatres, theme parks, festivals and television networks. Recognized as one of the Top 10 Magicians Worldwide by the Wedding Industry Experts Awards, Mike is also a six-time recipient of the Performer of the Year award presented by Festivals & Events Ontario. His unique style of modernized magic has been featured on the Comedy Network, Disney, Global TV, CTV, MTV and more.

2008

FAROOQI, NAEEM
(BBA Schulich)
A global bus expert, Naeem is principal consultant at management services firm WSP, where he oversees the company's Canadian transit advisory group. In 2018, he was named one of *Mass Transit's* Top 40 Under 40 for his leader-

ship in public transit infrastructure and innovation. In 2019, he was recognized as one of the Clean50 Emerging Leaders for his work in the creation and deployment of sustainable technologies in public transit infrastructure. Heavily invested in nurturing new talent in the industry, last year Naeem taught a graduate business course on infrastructure for the Master of Real Estate & Infrastructure and MBA programs at York's Schulich School of Business. He also provided books to schools and organized professional workshops in emerging markets outside Canada.

2009

MOSER, GABRIELLE
(MA Art History, PhD Art History and Visual Culture '14)
Gabrielle is a writer, educator and independent curator based in Toronto. Since graduating with two art history degrees, she has gone on to a tenure-track teaching position at OCAD University, where she specializes in curatorial studies, contemporary art and the history of photography. She has published widely in publications including *Artforum*, *Canadian Art*, the *Journal of Visual Culture*, *Photography & Culture* and *Prefix Photo*. In 2019, her first book, *Projecting Citizenship: Pho-*

tography and Belonging in the British Empire, was published by Penn State University Press. Gabrielle has held fellowships at the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art, the Ryerson Image Centre and the University of British Columbia, and in 2017 was a Fulbright Visiting Scholar at Brown University.

In Memoriam

FAIRE, SANDRA
(Supporter)

Sandra Faire, award-winning television producer, writer, business leader, philanthropist and mentor, was a great friend to York University. A trailblazer with a profound love of the arts, Sandra and husband Ivan Fecan spent their time and money sponsoring artistic and philanthropic causes, people and institutions, including at York University. In 2006, York's 350-seat performance space in the Accolade East Building was named the Sandra Faire & Ivan Fecan Theatre in recognition of the couple's patronage. In 2008, Sandra received an honorary doctorate from York. In 2012, she was awarded a Queen Elizabeth II Diamond Jubilee Medal for her support of Canadian culture and arts. She passed away at home in Toronto on Feb. 27.

TANNAM, FATHER GERRY
(Founding Catholic Chaplain)
Father Gerry Tannam was born on May 22, 1923, in Dublin, where he became a priest of the Spiritan order with a doctorate in liturgy. He taught English in Nigeria and was jailed when his order resisted a blockade of humanitarian aid. He was later released during the civil war in 1970. Father Tannam went on to serve his order in Rome, then teach future missionaries in London before arriving in Canada in 1974 to become the founding Catholic chaplain at York University, where he served for a decade. Simply called "Gerry" by everyone who knew him, he was loved for his innate hospitality, listening ear and compassion for all. He passed away of natural causes at the age of 89 on Nov. 28, 2018.

YASHINSKY, PALOMBA
(Professor Emerita)

A lover of literature and painting, Palomba was a professor emerita of 19th-century French literature in the Department of French Studies at York University. Originally from Bucharest, Romania, she left her home country after the Second World War, eventually settling in Canada by way of Detroit. Palomba began teaching at York University in 1968 and continued to teach after her retirement. She passed away on Jan. 7 at the age of 89.

(compiled by Kisha Powell)

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Noteworthy



BLACK BOOKS

Writing the diaspora

BY DEIRDRE KELLY
PHOTOGRAPHY BY JOY VON TIEDEMANN

DAVID CHARIANDY (PhD '02) was born in the week of the first moon landing, prompting his doubly amazed parents to want to call their newborn Apollo in recognition of the NASA command module carrying three moon-bound astronauts in the summer of 1969.

The original Apollo is the Greek god of poetry, art and music. Given that Chariandy would go on to forge a career in the literary arts, emerging as one of Canada's most awarded fiction writers, the name, while ungainly, would have fit.

But imagine the lifetime of teasing that would have ensued. *Hey! So you think you're a god? Let me crown you!* Chariandy, a professor of postcolonial literature at Simon Fraser University in Vancouver, certainly has.

"Luckily for me, they thought better of it," he says of his immigrant parents who directly and indirectly have served as inspiration for his award-winning books, among them *Brother*, a recent recipient of the Windham-Campbell Prize for fiction, one of the world's most prestigious – and, at nearly a quarter-million Canadian dollars, most lucrative – literary awards. "I might have had an entirely different life with a name like that."

Named instead for the giant slayer of biblical fame, Chariandy started that life nearly 50 years ago in Scarborough, Ont., the east-end Toronto neighbourhood that even the denizens call Scarberia for its unremitting blandness and distance from downtown Toronto.

Chariandy's parents had immigrated there from Trinidad in the 1960s, joining other families from the Caribbean diaspora and elsewhere who had resettled in a rough and tough area that boasted affordable housing and easy access to parks, shops, schools and wide-open spaces where imaginations, given the right stimuli, could grow.

From an early age, Chariandy's main stimulation was sci-fi and fantasy literature, which offered him a true escape from the mundanity of his upbringing. His father, who is of South Asian descent, worked in a factory and his mother, who is of African ancestry, as a nanny.

While they might not have indulged themselves in their son's love of books, they imposed no barriers. Chariandy, who has a brother, went on to become the first in his family to get a post-secondary education.

He studied literature as an undergraduate at Carleton University in Ottawa, doodling around with writing literature of his own on the side. He wasn't sure he had the writer's gift and so concentrated on moving through the ranks of academe.

After completing his BA and MA in English at Carleton, Chariandy moved back to Toronto in 1996 to begin a doctoral program in postcolonial literature at York University, lured by the institution's reputation for scholarly excellence, innovation and accessibility.

"York had a reputable name for the study of literature – critical, theoretical and marginal minority literatures in particular," says Chariandy on a recent visit back to Toronto to meet with his editors at Penguin Random House Canada to discuss his next novel, involving three different stories exploring the complicated relationships between people of African and South Asian descent, as he described it.

"It also had a constellation of scholars that would and could

support a project on Black Canadian literature, a very unusual subject for a dissertation but York backed it all the way."

"York has an innovative gene," affirms Leslie Sanders, a professor in the Department of Humanities and who supervised Chariandy's thesis on Black Canadian writers, past and present.

"It's the first university in the country to take Canadian literature seriously and that's back to its founding as a centre of strong Canadian literary scholarship. David has inherited that legacy," she continues, "and seeing him getting recognition for it is so very satisfying."

But besides an intellectual education, York also gave Chariandy a sense of community, what he often writes about in his books.

"His fiction and non-fiction reveal the latter-day, latent Creole genius, brooding brilliantly over the Black-&-Tan Atlantic, and never obsequious, never doctrinal, but waving off imperialists' ruins with singing cataracts of ink," says the Canadian novelist, playwright and parliamentary poet laureate George Elliott Clarke, whose writing has influenced Chariandy's literary works.

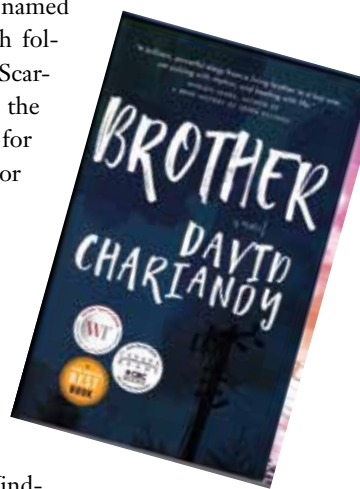
They include his debut novel, *Soucouyant*, named for a Caribbean malevolent spirit, which follows a family from Trinidad to Toronto's Scarborough Bluffs with heartbreaks along the way. Published in 2007, it was nominated for 11 literary prizes, including the Governor General's Literary Award.

Perhaps more noteworthy is Chariandy's second novel, *Brother*, about the sons of Caribbean immigrants who explore issues of race and masculinity in the hot Scarborough summer of 1991. It won the 2017 Rogers Writers' Trust Fiction Prize and the 2018 Toronto Book Award in addition to the 2019 Windham-Campbell Prize to be given out at the Yale University literary festival in September.

More recently, Chariandy, a married father of two, published *I've Been Meaning to Tell You: A Letter to My Daughter*, his memoirs in epistolary form. Like his fiction, the book explores race and family history.

"I come from a cultural and socioeconomic background where the idea of going to university, never mind a PhD, is in and of itself not a given. It's far from being automatic," he says.

"Having that privilege has shaped my gratitude for the work done at a university and given me a heightened sense of the work still to be done." ●



Text Made Textile

A York grad connects the threads

BY DEIRDRE KELLY
PHOTOGRAPHY BY MIKE FORD

SHABNAM K. GHAZI (BFA '09) keeps spools of thread, balls of wool and what looks like lengths of silken fabric stretched out on a pristine working table in her downtown Toronto artist's studio. They look like dressmakers' tools. But in reality, they are artworks made of paper on which Ghazi has written Persian poetry in miniscule calligraphic Farsi script, over and over and in various directions until the page became legible as a piece of abstract design. Ripping the paper into shreds, she interlaces the shadowy strips into text-rich textiles meant to resemble the Gabbeh carpets (traditionally crafted by women) with which Ghazi grew up in her native Iran.

"I am weaving new stories from old stories," says the 47-year-old multimedia artist who trained privately with art masters from a young age in Tehran. She formalized her studies at York University after relocating to Toronto in 2001. "The method is like a meditation. It allows me to remember the things I had and did back in Tehran."

Memory and the creative act are dominant themes in *Once Upon a Time in Tebran*, a work that debuted last year at Toronto's Olga Korper Gallery and went on to reap critical acclaim at the 13th Havana Biennial, which took place in Cuba in May.

The textile-rich artwork draws on a variety of traditions, including Islamic talisman shirts where religious text – sometimes the whole Qur'an – is calligraphed all over a simple garment to be worn into battle for protection, observes British culture critic and textiles expert Victoria Horwell, a fan of Ghazi's art. "Memory protects our identity, so she's in the words-textile-talisman tradition: memory is thread; memory as thread." Some of those memories are personal and poignant.

On the wall of Ghazi's "ascenseur" studio (so-called because accessible by elevator) is a piece composed of real bullets tipped in 24 karat gold. "I grew up in war," explains the artist, who was raised by intellectual parents during the revolution. "I make nice things out of really ugly things."

She also draws connections with nature. *The Astonishing Story of Us in a Scarcity of Time*, a continuation of a project conceived at York University and presented at Manhattan's Edward Hopper House in 2016, uses video of city dwellers (the footage was shot in Toronto, New York and Tehran), audio of scurrying footsteps and an invasion of tiny sculpted ants to create a fictional world where urban and non-human worlds collide. Inspiration for the piece came from a Persian poem about migration whose line, "Wherever you go the sky is the same colour," Ghazi writes and rewrites into her evocative compositions.

"It's my diary," she says. "It reveals what is hidden." ●





THIS IS GLOBAL HEALTH

[OPEN YOUR MIND]

IN 1994, Aaron Woodley (BFA '96) was a 23-year-old York University film student who had turned his mother's Toronto house into a movie set for his thesis film, *Pipe Dreams*, a murder mystery about a hallucinating insom-

niac accused of killing someone while sleepwalking.

To document the moment of a first-time director making his movie debut, a crew member snapped some artsy photographs in between takes: a table piled high with dirty dishes and cigarette butts; a pool of blood on the floor next to a gun, next to two seemingly lifeless bodies.

The images make Woodley look like he knew what he was doing. But despite having filmmaking in his blood – his uncle is acclaimed Canadian director David Cronenberg – he was still very much full of nerves.

“It was my first proper short film and the first time I’d worked with real actors,” says the now 48-year-old writer and director from his home in Victoria, B.C.

Since then, Woodley has built a successful career in the movie biz peppered with awards and collaborations with some of Hollywood’s biggest stars. His latest film, computer-animated comedy *Arctic Justice: Thunder Squad*, is scheduled for a November release. York made it happen.

“Here I am, 25 years and six feature films later,” he says, “still doing it.” ●

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