

Performance The **POWER** of

Innovation doesn't just happen in the quiet confines of a science lab, book-filled office or art studio. It also takes place before a live audience, in a way that will never occur exactly the same way again. Meet six Boise State faculty who share their talents on the stage or in front of the camera.



CARRIE QUINNEY PHOTO

Gordon Reinhart ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF THEATRE ARTS

“There is no performance without an audience – it’s like the proverbial tree in the forest.”

A truly great performance doesn't start when the curtain goes up, nor is it born in the shadows of the wings. For Gordon Reinhart, preparing for his very best performance begins much earlier – 10,000 hours earlier, to be exact.

Reinhart, a professional actor and director, is a proponent of the ideas espoused in Malcolm Gladwell's book, *Outliers: The Story of Success*. The theory is that it takes 10,000 hours of practice and sacrifice to excel at something.

“The way we talk in society, it's a gift from the gods. Either you are endowed with creativity or you are not,” Reinhart said. “But artists are

about discipline. What is the spark? It's the thing that makes you go into the practice room.”

Part of that practice involves becoming familiar enough with the script to become, and not just play, the character.

“Musicians pay attention to the notes, a dancer to the choreography, the actor to the text,” he said. “But it doesn't give you everything you need. It can't set the performance. Shakespeare may have said, ‘To be, or not to be, that is the question,’ but there are choices. How do you say it? What does it mean?”

In the end, all that preparation has its rewards. From the moment Reinhart steps on stage – whether as Brutus in the Idaho Shakespeare Festival's “Julius Caesar,” or as Renfield in “Dracula” or Peter in Edward Albee's “At Home at the Zoo” at Boise Contemporary Theater – he comes alive and time ceases to have the same meaning.

“Performance is a non-intellectual, non-choice-making moment,” he said. “You build a slide, slide down it and don't think about the construction. You've done all the preparation and now you have to be brave enough to let it go.” – **Kathleen Tuck** ◆

Linda Kline Lamar

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF VIOLA AND MUSIC THEORY

“Performing makes me a better viola instructor. It helps me relate to my students in new ways.”

Linda Kline Lamar plays a difficult passage from a Hindemith sonata with the ease of a virtuoso, her fingers flying over the strings, her viola resonating with each perfectly placed note. The sound is rich, deep and filled with emotion.

“It speaks to my soul,” Lamar said of her chosen instrument. “The viola is pensive, it has a dark quality at the lower end of its register. It is my primary means of expression.”

An accomplished artist, Lamar has played with orchestras and chamber groups across the country, as well as with the Boise Philharmonic, with the Boise State faculty ensemble Les Bois Chamber Players, and in solo recitals. Performing onstage without even a pianist to accompany her is a challenge Lamar has particularly relished. “It is very freeing, because it’s just me, so I can control what I do,” she said.

Lamar works to connect with her audience on a personal level. “Sometimes I’ll pick out someone in the first row, and I’ll play just for them,” she said. “You develop an intimacy with an audience, no matter its size, and you feel its energy.”

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Rigorous preparation undergirds every performance. Lamar practices slowly until every note is perfect, then gradually increases her tempo as her technical proficiency builds. Once the notes become muscle memory, Lamar can concentrate on expression and nuance. She eschews listening to recordings of the piece she is preparing to perform in order to hone her own interpretation.

Onstage, viola in hand, Lamar feels focused, confident and joyful. She loves the spontaneity that comes with live performance, the sense that every concert is a new and unique creation. The thrill stays with her long after the audience applauds and the lights dim. “It’s exhilarating,” she said. — **Janelle Brown** ◆

Heidi Reeder

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF COMMUNICATION
CARNEGIE FOUNDATION IDAHO PROFESSOR OF THE YEAR, 2007

“I think about who my audience is and what I have to say that they’ll appreciate most.”

Sitting across the couch from Katie Couric and Al Roker on NBC’s “Today” show or being interviewed by regional or local media personalities would make most people nervous. Heidi Reeder stays calm and collected by using the skills she’s developed as an award-winning educator.

“I think about the TV audience as my students, only the class is a little larger,” said Reeder, an expert on male-female interactions such as friendship. She finished that thought with a laugh as she realized that her “Today” show “class” had about 6 million students. “I’m comfortable talking to my students, so why should talking with a larger group of people about something I know really well be any different?”

Reeder’s dynamic style, coupled with her ability to summarize lengthy research articles on relationship issues in a few succinct sound bites, has landed her numerous media interviews, including an appearance a few years back on the “Today” show and on the nationally syndicated show “Life & Style.” She also has been featured on a Seattle-based National Public Radio program and on local television, including an ongoing program that focuses on relationships.

CARRIE QUINNEY PHOTO



Preparation – the key to any performance – is what puts Reeder at ease and makes her so effective.

“The first thing I want to know is exactly what the producers want me to talk about,” said Reeder. “That allows me to really focus on key points that I want to get across.”

She distills her ideas down to several key thoughts that can be delivered in just a few moments, the likely duration of even the lengthiest of television interviews. With her prep work done and her clothes, makeup and demeanor calibrated for the bright lights, Reeder said it’s easy to be genuine, even conversational, once the cameras start rolling.

“It gives me so much energy,” she said. “I’m glad I’ve had this opportunity.” — **Mike Journee** ◆

Janet Holmes

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF ENGLISH
EDITOR, AHAHTA PRESS

“Thinking about performance has changed the way I write poetry. It makes me aware that I need to choose words that can be spoken and conveyed.”

There is power in words. Poet Janet Holmes also puts faith in powerful delivery.

“Every poem, every book of poetry, requires a different set of performance skills,” she said. “I borrow from theater and from music, even from visual arts, to convey emotion.”

As she prepares for a reading, Holmes asks herself: Do the words on the page echo? Are they lyrical, humorous, harsh or tense? These explorations help her bring her poetry to life. Her performances may be billed as poetry readings, but she hardly sits and reads.

Holmes often displays her poetry visually during a performance so her audience can see the relevance of how it’s placed on the page. The title of her latest book is derived from erasing and skipping some of the letters in *The Poems of Emily Dickinson* to get the sequence of words, *The ms of m y kin* (Shearsman Press, 2009). This title can be read as “the manuscript of my kin,” an artistic riff on Dickinson that illustrates the unseen connections between both poets and poetry.

Holmes celebrates the link between poetry and music



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in her collection, *Humanophone*. In live performances, others often read with her and speak the words on pitch, thereby emulating a humanophone, a musical instrument made up of individuals, each singing only one pitch.

Performance helps Holmes make breakthroughs in her teaching, where attention to sound, rhythm and pacing contributes to the critique of student poetry. Holmes frequently quotes poems in class from memory. “I don’t memorize something I don’t deeply care about,” she said.

In addition to penning her own work, Holmes has edited Boise State’s award-winning Ahsahta Press since 2000, and her graduate students in the master of fine arts program in creative writing help select finalists for the press’ Sawtooth Prize. Ahsahta Press will publish its 100th book of poetry this year. – **Sherry Squires** ◆

Jim Jirak

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF VOICE AND CHORAL MUSIC EDUCATION

“That’s why we have music, so we can experience the indescribable.”

Standing before a choir, baton raised to the ready, Jim Jirak experiences a flood of thoughts and emotions. As music drifts up from the orchestra, he focuses on the mood, rhythm and meaning of the piece. He concentrates on when to bring in the altos, what is happening with the violins and how to allow himself to be swept up with emotion and still be present enough to make music.

Through it all, one feeling rises above the rest, crowding out all other thought. “I find myself in a state of thankfulness,” said the longtime choral conductor and performer. “I feel so privileged to be a part of live music-making.”

Jirak, a talented vocalist who also plays the piano, clarinet and saxophone, has been conducting since accepting his first teaching job more than 30 years ago. He has directed youth and adult singers in groups ranging from quartets to full choirs, as well as orchestras. All these years later, he still thrills at a live performance beautifully done.

“It’s what jazz musicians call being in the groove,” he said. “I know I am in it when everyone is so focused on the music that it becomes contagious. The audience feels the one-



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ness of the intent and that’s when it comes full circle.”

Finding that groove requires intense discipline and precision. Jirak practices conducting as he reviews his music, cuing invisible tenors, soloists and accompanists. He visualizes his movements and those of the performers, taking note of each gesture and musical nuance and focusing on diction and clarity. He performs stretching exercises, so he can be physically as well as emotionally ready.

In the end, the preparation more than pays off.

“When music is beautifully performed, there are times I am overwhelmed with emotion,” he said. “These are the moments we desire.” – **Kathleen Tuck** ◆



Marla Hansen

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF DANCE

CO-ARTISTIC DIRECTOR OF IDAHO DANCE THEATRE

“Dance isn’t just a passion and whim. There’s so much more behind the movement.”

When a dancer extends into full arabesque, the body impossibly balanced, Marla Hansen sees more than beauty.

“You have to be inspired and passionate, but you can’t just freeform,” she said. “You have to ask, how is this movement connecting the idea to the music; what is it communicating? It requires critical thinking.”

Hansen knows from experience. She performed professionally for 25 years as a principal and soloist for companies such as Portland Ballet Company and American Festival Ballet, her talent extending from the stage to the studio to the director’s chair.

In Boise State’s Department of Theatre Arts, she oversees the dance emphasis and is co-artistic director of Idaho Dance Theatre, the university’s professional company in residence. Despite the thrill of performance, she expresses herself just as richly through choreography.

“It always ends up relating to my life – present, future, memories or dreams,” Hansen said. “Pieces start either as a desire to communicate these ideas or as one element that informs and inspires meaning. The concept evolves in the creative process, and it’s exciting because you never know what it will be.”

Finding out might involve observing patterns in nature, journaling about an experience, poring over Kerouac’s poetry, playing with the imagery of a routine, or listening to a Chopin prelude until the melody is unforgettable.

“It’s constant experimentation and discovery; that’s what choreography is. I try to stay totally open to what’s possible, to the subconscious coming through. Once I have a kernel of an idea, then I step back and really analyze what I’m doing,” Hansen said. “It requires sincere reflection and a willingness to fail. When I try something and it’s right, I get chills. So much of it is kinesthetic awareness. All of a sudden you feel it.” – **Erin Ryan** ◆