

Stellar theater and dance performers to visit APSU this year as Acuff Chairs

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CLARKSVILLE, Tenn. – For more than 50 years, Chicago's famed Second City Theater and School of Improvisation has produced some of the country's most beloved comedic talents. Its alumni – consisting of luminaries like Bill Murray, John Belushi, Steve Carell and Tina Fey – have gone on to successful careers in movies and television shows such as Saturday Night Live and the Daily Show with Jon Stewart.

At 7:30 p.m. on Oct. 7, the group's touring company will visit Clarksville to perform its hilariously original works on the Austin Peay State University campus.

"They were here four years ago, and the students loved them," Darren Michael, chair of the APSU Area of Theater and Dance, said.

The Second City performers are a big draw for this community, but they are only one of a handful of internationally renowned theater and dance performers visiting APSU this year as holders of the University's Roy Acuff Chair of Excellence in the Creative Arts.

Established in 1985 by the legendary "King of Country Music" Roy Acuff, the chair is an endowed professorship designed to bring regionally and nationally acclaimed artists together with students, faculty and community members in a creative environment. The chair, administered through the Center of Excellence in the Creative Arts, rotates each year between different creative arts department at APSU, with the Area of Theater and Dance hosting it this year. But rather than settling for one person to act as the chair holder, the area opted to split it up among several key performers.

"Having that diversity on both sides, theater side and dance side, is important," Marcus Hayes, associate professor of dance, said. "Every time we have the opportunity to host the Acuff Chair, we're allowing the campus community and our students specifically to see what's happening out in the wide world of theater and dance performance. These are professional people doing what our students hope to be doing one day. It's a great opportunity for them to interact."

In most cases, the performers will visit campus between three and five days to meet and work with students. Many will also either host public performances of their work or contribute to a show that will be open to the public.

On Sept. 17, Rachel Keebler, an instructor at Cobalt Scene Painting Studio in New York, will stop by as the first Acuff Chair to lead a two-day intensive residency on scenic painting for APSU theater students. A week later, Sarah Hass, co-founder of EcoDance, will start her weeklong residency on creating mobile dance performance spaces. She'll end her stay with a public performance on Sept. 30 featuring her and APSU dance students.

"Sarah is current and uses improvisation as her basis," Hayes said. "She is traveling with a trailer that hitches to the back of a truck. It transforms into three performance spaces that can be moved around. She's going to set up the structure on campus and have students working with her all in this space. I'm excited. She's going to be great."

On Oct. 7, the Second City Touring Company will visit for a residency with students and a public performance. Then, on Oct. 23, Taiwanese freelance dancer and choreographer Peiling Kao will visit the University to teach dance technique courses and create a piece of original choreography for APSU dance students. That piece will be performed at the Sixth Annual Spring Dance Concert in March.

"She's a top notch contemporary dancer," Hayes said.

The performance artist Tim Miller will hold the Acuff Chair on Nov. 1, and give a performance of his latest solo work, "Glory Box" at 7:30 p.m. on Nov. 2 in the Trahern Theater. Miller was one of the "NEA Four" – a group of performance artists in the early 1990s who lost their National Endowment of the Arts grants because of the subject matter. The artists eventually received their grant money after a well-publicized court case.

Nashville hip-hop choreographer Keith Fitzpatrick will visit the APSU campus next for an Acuff residency. He'll work with students and also compose an original work for the Spring Dance Concert.

On Nov. 16, the APSU Area of Theater will kick off its season with the restoration play "Beaux Strategem." Anne Marie Duggan, a theater lighting expert, will provide guest lighting design for the show

as an Acuff Chair holder. She'll also meet with students to discuss the intricacies of theater lighting.

"We would like to build our lighting design area," Michael said. "We're bringing her in, and it's going to be great for our students to work with her."

The final Acuff Chair holder of the semester, actor Anthony Zerbe, will stop by to work with both theater and English students. Zerbe has an extensive resume in film and television, appearing in movies such as The Matrix trilogy and shows such as Judging Amy and Colombo.


"He's been in many well-known Hollywood films and television shows," Michael said. "We'll be doing two workshops with him. One with theater students and one with English students because his one-man show, 'It's all Done with Mirrors,' is based on the poetry of e.e. cummings."

Zerbe will give a public performance of his show at 7:30 p.m. on Nov. 30 in the Trahern Theater.

"The Austin Peay State University fine arts departments continue to re-envision how to use the Roy Acuff Chair of Excellence endowments to benefit our students and at the same time provide an amazing array of arts experiences for the community," Christopher Burawa, director of the Center of Excellence for the Creative Arts, said. "We are delighted to have as our corporate sponsors again this year F&M Bank and Beachaven Winery, and our new corporate sponsor State Farm Insurance—Sharon Patterson's office."

For more information about the Acuff Chair, contact the CECA at 221-7876 or the APSU Area of Theater and Dance at 221-6767.

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