Halfway Home

The first semester has just ended. There were many highlights along the way. Sit back and enjoy.

Merrily We Roll Along

by Itamar Greenfield, Aidan Gaul and Benjamin Park-Kouh

What does success mean to you? Is it fame and fortune? Doing what you love most?

This question is the core of *Merrily We Roll Along* by Stephen Sondheim, this year’s fall production at The Hudson School. The cast gracefully and professionally executed the choreography -- some audience members confessing they wanted to dance along -- and they wowed the audience with the complex and emotional Sondheim songs.

The protagonists, Franklin Shepard and Charley Kringas, portrayed by Gabriel Hernandez and Adam Sentoni, performed their roles with incomparable zeal. In this semi-autobiographical production of Sondheim’s life, these men were the best of friends since childhood. They had been writing and producing shows together well into their adulthood. Until, that is, they had a falling out.

Franklin’s greed and obsession with money caused significant conflict and disagreement between them. The play displays their journeys together not only as partners, but as brothers, and shows how their friendship slowly declines. *Merrily* shows that money can corrupt even the most abiding friendships.

The play progressively goes back in time, unpeeling the characters before their falling-out, and ending with the moment Franklin and Charley met their soon-to-be best friend, Mary Flynn. The play not only shows the deterioration of Frank’s and Charley’s friend-

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Mock Trial Results

Quarter Final Champs!

The Hudson School Mock Trial Team 2015 stopped for a quick shot on their way to the Hudson County Courthouse in Jersey City. The team performed exceptionally, finishing in the quarterfinals of the county competition.

(Standing row): Myles Zhang, Avery Olah-Reiken, Seun Akande, Lynn Horowitz, Meryl Kurland, Jack Dorfman, Grace Castillo, Sean Flanagan, Charle Kraft and Youssif Hassan.

(Seated row): Smera Bhatia, Jaelyn Stewart, Rabi Odumosu, Eliza Leal and Carolina Jimenez. History Department Chair Harriet Fitzpatrick coached the team for several months to prepare for the competition.
My "real twin" showed up at the Dodge Poetry Festival at the New Jersey Performing Arts Center: Billy Collins. He might be older than I am, but we are definitely twins. ("Sorry, Ross, my biological twin.")

Collins spoke at the “Making a Life in Poetry” seminar, a conversation with Rita Dove. While Rita Dove is a poised and sophisticated poet extraordinaire, Collins plays the comedian. From the start, his humor was evident. His bantering nature was clear when he thanked the audience for clapping until he and Dove sat down. The poets were introduced by a festival coordinator who described Collins as a Pulitzer Prize winner. Collins, in a jovial manner, corrected the coordinator’s faux pas.

“I can’t let him lie anymore,” said Collins, a former Poet Laureate of the United States. “I haven’t won a Pulitzer Prize... and I don’t know why either.”

Dove, also a former Poet Laureate of the United States, actually won a Pulitzer. Like the rest of the audience, Dove was humored by Collins’ response.

My ribs were breaking one by one from laughing. Collins’ sarcastic nature, as well as his satirical poetry, resonated with me because I never thought poetry could be used in such a manner. Sitting close to the stage in Prudential Hall at NJPAC, the aura in the room was reverential, as Collins and Dove recited their poetry.

Collins acknowledged the fact that it is hard to make a living as a poet. He quipped that as a poet who happens to be a college professor, universities are not bad places to hang out because, “You get this sort of slow morphine drip of money.”

Collins knows what it is like to teach students. He said he imagined all of his students -- none of whose names he could remember -- populating a small town. In his poem “SCHOOLSVILLE,” Collins joked that students will flock to you years after they have graduated.

Once in a while a student knocks on the door with a term paper fifteen years late or a question about Yeats or double-spacing. And sometimes one will appear in a windowpane to watch me lecturing the wallpaper, quizzing the chandelier, reprimanding the air.

Collins and I have the same mentality. Why would a student come fifteen years after graduating for a question or a grade? Are we this narcissistic?

When I was younger I used to write poetry. I did not use humor. Before the festival, I was unfamiliar with Collins’ poetry. Seeing how Collins tackles inner emotions with a droll manner, I felt admiration for his style, which deeply expresses his thoughts and feelings.

To find out more about Rita Dove, ask her poised and sophisticated secret twin, Grace Berntson.

To see the interview with Billy Collins and Rita Dove, click here. For those reading a print version of the paper, go to https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZSiGhAemJlQ. Or search Dodge Poetry Festival 2014 on YouTube.
Life in Amman

by Sean Riller-Miltner

In the fall, I returned to life in the States following a six-month journey to the Middle East. I had left New Jersey halfway through the school year to join my mother who was working for the UN refugee agency with Syrian refugees in Amman, Jordan.

It didn’t take long for me to really feel like I was a part of the city rather than a tourist. From the small conversations with taxi drivers, using the little Arabic I picked up, to hanging out with my friends at a shisha café just outside school, I became more and more involved in Jordanian culture. I went to an international school with kids coming from all around the world.

Life is quite different in a city that doesn’t speak your language and has a completely different feel to it compared to daily life at home. But after a while, it becomes your home. It was probably the most enjoyable six months I have ever had. And now that I am back in the States, I feel almost homesick for Jordan.

There was always a sense of freedom of movement in Amman. After school my friends and I could take a taxi anywhere around the city for one or two Dinars or walk to the nearest café. However, now that I am back home the sense of freedom seems to be gone. The conflict between my life here versus my life over in Jordan stems from this lack of freedom. Coming back to the suburban life that I used to love, I am now confined to bus and train schedules.

While in Jordan, I didn’t have access to a proper TV set or video game system and I could never really find a good spot to skateboard since traffic in Amman is suicidal. However, not doing the things I would normally do on a weekend gave me the chance to go out more and meet new people. Participating in the Dead2Red, the annual relay marathon from the Dead Sea to the Red Sea, made me run with people I had never met before all through the night into the rising sun along the desert highway. Trekking in the riverbeds of the breathtaking wadis, rappelling down waterfalls or following the footsteps of Lawrence of Arabia in the famous Wadi Rum desert, whatever I did, Jordanians and expatriates entered my life. Every weekend or so a student would throw a party where I met more people from literally all over the world. I would come into school the next Sunday, with friends from places like Denmark, Australia, Holland and Ethiopia. Knowing people from around the globe is great, but bonding with them, going to school with them and becoming good friends with good memories is something spectacular.

Jordan definitely became a part of me and this was an experience that I will never forget.
In Memory of Andy Stapp

Andy Stapp spent his whole life roiling against injustice. He taught as he lived and this legacy was borne out most beautifully and emotionally during his memorial service at The Hudson School on Tuesday, November 25, 2014.

At 6:45 pm, the vestibule of The Hudson School began filling up with parents, graduates, teachers, Andy’s friends and relatives. Hugs, tears, laughs and stories made it almost impossible to herd the group into the theater to begin the service.

Suellen Newman stood on the bare stage lit dramatically from above. As she read a short memory of Andy, Anthony Bez played a plaintiff melody of his own composition in honor of Andy on the guitar. Sue then announced that this memorial service for Andy would be run as a Quaker prayer meeting. That is, silenced until one is moved by the spirit to speak.

The room was eerily silent. The clock ticked. Suddenly, one by one, folks stood to speak about and to Andy.

The first was a former student who was so articulate and so moving that I worried it would be an impossible act to follow. But follow they did. Another student stood and uttered one word, “compassion.” She then went on to tell a story of how Andy counseled her to return home to her parents’ house after she had run away. He gave her money for bus fare to commute to school from a relative’s house and eventually convinced her that her parents were hurting without her and she did return home. She shared that she is grateful for her parents and to Andy for understanding and looking out for her real best interests.

Teachers spoke of sharing ideas and anecdotes with Andy, not sparing discussion of his special dress code – plaid shirt, wool cardigan, corduroy trousers and his signature cigarette hanging from the side of his mouth.

The most touching moments, however, had to have been when students praised Andy for changing their lives. Many of them had come to the memorial service directly from marching to protest the treatment of Michael Brown. It was then that Hudson’s Gabe Hernandez replied that, if Andy were in the room, he would be laughing at all of the words spoken and would urge us to rather discuss what was happening in Missouri or Staten Island.

Andy would be glad to know that his teaching actually accomplished what every educator yearns to do: make a difference.
Merrily We Roll Along...  

Merrily We Roll Along, a Sondheim musical directed by Adam Sentoni.

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ship, but also Mary’s descent into rock-bottom alcoholism and heart-break.

The Sondheim score did not fail to deliver. From jocular to melancholy, the songs shed a different light on many situations, including Franklin’s marriage to Beth, which broke Mary’s heart. Mary, played by the astounding and hilarious Maia Kamil, had been in love with Franklin since they were in college, though Fred Huntley’s portrayal of Beth won Franklin’s heart. Until, the manipulative Gussie Carnegie -- acted with great gusto by Ali Gilman -- charmed her way into Franklin’s arms.

Another poignant song that transformed the emotions of the characters and the audience was Franklin Shepard, Inc. When Charley sang this song on live television, it humiliated Franklin. This song pretty much marked the end of their long-time friendship. Then, in the very next scene, we are shown a more optimistic side of their friendship and professional partnership as the play moves backwards in time.

Overall, the show was incredible in just about every aspect. The talented cast perfectly executed the songs and scenes. The staging, music and lights dramatically complemented the performances. A job well done, cast of Merrily We Roll Along.

(Top picture) Cast members including Angela Smith, Seun Akande, Tova Silverberg-Urian, Gabe Hernandez, Maia Kamil and Avery Olah-Reiken. (Hidden in back, Truce Jack.)

(Lower picture) Ali Gilman as Gussie Carnegie.
Going Into the Mines

by Devon Neville and Hannah Altberger

On this year’s annual sixth grade pilgrimage to the Sterling Hill zinc mine in Ogdensburg, the current sixes were put to the test: identifying basalt, marble, sandstone, coal and garnet. If that weren’t enough, the day included a scavenger hunt, during which the students were spying for an assortment of metals and minerals.

By the end, it was just another phosphorescent day.

The November day began in the 1,300-foot underground mine deciphering stones. The grade collected and identified rocks. They found samples and, after being approved by mine staff, were able to take them home as mementos.

While inside the mine, the sixth grade got a crash course in all things mining. They learned about miners and their jobs, how mines were built and used, and the dangerous situations miners encounter. During the tour, the sixth grade hand picked their own williamsite or calcite, both of which are phosphorescent, allowing them to glow under a black light, also known as ultraviolet light.

As part of the tour, the sixth grade went to the Sterling Hill Mining Museum. While at the museum, the sixth grade was asked to find various items scattered in the vicinity, including 5,000 tin cans and a magnetic rock. They also had to determine the difference between real gold and fool’s gold, also known as pyrite.

Finally, the grade toured sections of the mine, including the popular tourist attraction: the Rainbow Tunnel. The tunnel features brightly fluorescent zinc walls exposed in the mine walls. Illuminated under ultraviolet light, the walls glow bright green and red.

Here is a piece of trivia: Did you know that people can get married in the Rainbow Tunnel?
The Hudson School Presents:
Our Winter Concert

From 5th graders through high-schoolers and a faculty quintet, Hudson singers filled The Community Church of Hoboken on January 15 with beautiful sounds. The students played to a packed house.