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SPOTLIGHT

Behind-the-scenes of the first student-written and directed musical to take the Mount Union stage

BY: PEYTON ZAMARELLI '22



Siv Street '22 (left) and Abigail Collinworth '22 are the writer-director tandem behind "Beau: The Musical"

“No one needs to be fixed, they just need to be accepted,” shared Siv Street ’22 (they/them). Street, along with co-writer D. Nite, serves as official writer and musical director of “Beau: The Musical,” the first student-written show to ever be performed at Mount Union.

“Beau,” which debuted to four sold-out performances in April, shares the story of a nonspeaking 17-year-old teen who is raised in a group home. While the titular character struggles with his reality that granted him natural struggles, he finds himself on a journey over summer vacation, meeting individuals who inhabit differing traits than his own. Through his own trials and tribulations, along with other characters with whom Beau interacts, he realizes the importance of radical acceptance for others.

“As an adolescent, I dealt with several mental health issues. I was diagnosed with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, anxiety, and depression at age 14,” shared Street. “I had been going to therapy for years, but when I was 16, I was told taking medication would be the next option to try because ‘therapy had done all it could for me at this point.’ Finding mental health help for youth is difficult, and I wanted to share the reality of that through this story.”

The ideas behind “Beau” have been in the making since Street’s junior year when they began creating this compelling story. Street is excited to combine their passion for writing and the art of theatre to share this staged production as their senior culminating experience (SCE). Not only is this production completely new and has never been performed anywhere, but writing, directing, and performing the musical from scratch is an innovation on the Mount Union campus actualized by Street and directing partner Abigail Collinsworth ’22 (she/her).

“While an SCE may contain some self-written material, Beau is unique in that it is a complete script, that the department feels has potential for subsequent professional productions,” said Kevin Kern, associate professor of theatre.

“I am truly ecstatic that I get to dive into my passions and know that I have the ability to do something no one has done before,” Street stated. “Hopefully, it will encourage other students in the program to expand their horizons and think about the endless opportunities the University has to offer.”

Street, of Streetsboro, Ohio is a senior with majors in writing and theatre performance. On campus, Street is heavily involved as an active member of the Mount Union Players and president of Gender Equity Matters (GEM).

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-Siv Street ’22



As an active playwright and thespian, Street believes this is the perfect SCE to allow them to reach their career goals after graduation.

“Writing plays and musicals is something I want to do professionally once I leave my collegiate career,” said Street. “While writing has always been a grand love affair for me and storytelling is in my blood, theatre is such an intense medium because it brings the creative ideas of so many people together to create something truly unique.”

Street believes that they could not actualize this story without the creative partnership with Collinsworth, a senior theatre performance major with a focus in musical theatre of Westerville, Ohio. On campus, Collinsworth, who is also a member of the Mount Union

Players, serving as treasurer, was thrilled to take part in leading this first-ever production.

“I knew I wanted something along the directorial line,” Collinsworth stated. “When Siv presented ‘Beau’ to me, I simply couldn’t resist.”

Collinsworth believes that Mount Union offered multiple windows of opportunity for her to thrive in her degree program. Specifically, she believes she earned a solid education in gaining the skills to practice several different theatrical skills such as singing, dancing, technical work, acting, and directing.

“The directing class Mount offers was certainly one that helped prepare me for this project,” shared Collinsworth. “The acting classes were also really beneficial because it helped me think about the characters motivations, goals, and intentions. It is my hope that by working on this show and expanding my directing abilities it will open the door for me to be able to continue directing shows in the future.”



Leaders of Meaningful Work

Non-profit work can sometimes be grueling, thankless, and daunting in scale, regardless of the size of the population affected. Despite that demand, these three Purple Raiders are just a sample of the alumni who have devoted their careers to making a difference in their communities.



Brandon R. Scarborough '02 | Founder, Executive Director, Dreams Academy

The phrase “like father, like son” is not something that **Brandon R. Scarborough '02**, founder and executive director of Dreams Academy, initially thought represented him until very recently. His father, a pastor at the New Zion Baptist Church in Alliance, often brought Scarborough to the Carnation City as a child, and the Akron native became ingratiated with the community and Mount Union.

After Scarborough graduated from Mount Union, the self-proclaimed “mama’s boy” admitted to being more like his father than he ever imagined in running Dreams Academy, an Akron-based organization described as, “an excellence incubator for young African-American men ages 10 to 15 that offers programming in career guidance, financial literacy, problem solving, and soft skills.” Dreams Academy is in its sixth year, with Scarborough creating Queens Academy, an extension program for young women of the same age group, in 2021.

“Dreams Academy is my life assignment,” Scarborough said. “What it means to me is providing a glimmer of hope to young men and women and helping them find their own purpose – that is what wakes me up in the morning.”

Building on the foundation of success with these programs, Scarborough is working with Ron Holden, assistant dean and director of diversity and inclusion at Mount Union, to bring a summer program to campus for middle school students to continue to build relationships between campus and community.



Alex Koehler '10 Regional Volunteer Services Officer - Central and Southern Ohio Region, American Red Cross



Alex Koehler '10 wears several different hats for the American Red Cross. So, when his five-year-old nephew asked what he did for a living, he summed it up simply as, “We help people help people.” That description is just a microcosm of Koehler’s journey to now organize thousands of volunteers for the Red Cross every year.

Koehler, a significant presence in any room – Zoom rooms included – came to Mount Union as a football player with dreams of one day coaching the sport. An injury early in his college tenure put his football career in jeopardy, but Koehler was already thinking about ways he could make a bigger impact than on the sidelines.

“Before coming to Mount Union, my grandfather passed away, and there was a line of people out the door to pay their respects, mostly as a result of how much he gave back to his community,” Koehler said. “I knew then that I wanted to lead a life as impactful as my grandfather, which was a life of service.”

Graduating with a degree in physical education, Koehler still uses the principles of leadership he learned both in the classroom and in being president of Mount Union’s chapter of Phi Kappa Tau. In mobilizing volunteers for home emergencies and natural disasters across 47 different counties, especially as hurricane and wildfire seasons approach, he often thinks about the personal ways in which the Red Cross has helped him and his family, making it easier to garner support for the organization’s efforts.

“My family has benefited directly from the Red Cross’ Hero Care Network, and it just makes me believe in what I do even more,” Koehler said. “I love that you can go anywhere in the world and see that red cross icon and know it is a symbol of hope and refuge.”



Joy (Kunkel '84) Banish Executive Director, Greater Cleveland Volunteers



For nearly three decades, Joy (Kunkel '84) Banish has strived to make the Cleveland area better through her work as executive director of Greater Cleveland Volunteers (GCV), an organization she describes as, “connecting people who want to help with community needs.”

Though she stumbled into non-profit work after a few years of post-grad retail management, the communications graduate credits Mount Union for preparing her for a long and successful career.

“I really enjoy writing and it’s a big part of my job in communicating to the public or grants to secure funding,” Banish said. “Whether it was a journalism class, working at WRMU, or writing for The Dynamo, I feel like everything I learned has been relevant for everything I do now.”

While Banish has been involved in countless efforts over the past 29 years, she takes great pride in her involvement in securing funding and helping facilitate the American Association for Retired Persons Foundation’s Experience Corps Program. The program, which began in 1997, connects seniors ages 50 and older with students in Cleveland and Euclid schools to help bolster their literacy and even adapted virtually throughout the pandemic.

Banish has also been an integral member of Mount Union Women ever since she received her degree. Serving as president multiple times, she is a staunch advocate for the organization and the opportunities it provides, illustrating her steadfast commitment to both non-profit work and Mount Union.

