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# Newsletter Fall 2025

◆  
August 19, 2025



## SCHOOL OF MUSIC, THEATRE & DANCE MUSICAL THEATRE UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

CYNTHIA KORTMAN WESTPHAL - CHAIR

### Welcome to our 5th Decade of Musical Theatre at Michigan!

Dear Friends of Musical Theatre,

Your incredible support in my first year as chair meant more than I can say. It's been a joy getting to know so many of you, and I'm eager to keep building those connections.

We have so many exciting happenings going on this year!

I'm delighted to share that the incomparable Linda Goodrich will be returning to work on *Cabaret* alongside faculty director, André Garner. Linda brings a unique legacy, having worked with the great director and producer Hal Prince on Broadway's first revival of the show in 1987.

We're also celebrating the creative contributions of our graduates! Emma Ashford will return to debut an exciting new work she has written, and Sean McKnight (along with Linda Goodrich) will come home to help direct and choreograph our students in the halftime show at the football game on September 13 as well as choreograph *She Loves Me*.

It is deeply gratifying to watch our alumni thrive, and then return to share their expertise with our current students. This is

truly one of the most magical parts of the Michigan MT Department.

We're also honored to host Tony-nominated Jane Lanier, a Fosse/Verdon Legacy teacher who worked directly with Bob Fosse for many years. She'll lead a two-week Fosse dance intensive and bring the iconic 15-minute dance piece, "Sing, Sing, Sing" to life with our students.

And while we look ahead, we're also pausing to honor one of our own: after 18 years of extraordinary teaching and mentorship, faculty member Lisa Mayer will be moving on to a new chapter. Later in this newsletter, you'll find a special tribute celebrating her tremendous impact on our students and community, as well as an introduction to our guest teachers for the year.

Your support continues to open doors--for guest artists, original works, and unforgettable student experiences. We simply could not do this without you.

Here's to another inspiring year! THANK YOU! And Go Blue!

#### In this newsletter you will find:

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Exclusive Friends  
Events

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Production  
Information

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News of Graduates

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Special Guest Bios an  
Faculty Tribute

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Additional Events  
of Interest

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Parking Maps

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# NEW WEBSITE

and welcome Gretchen Pleuss!

## **NEW WEBSITE:**

Ericka Bigelow and her team have built a new [Friends of Musical Theatre Webpage](#) just for us! This will be your go-to page for information. It will include current events, RSVP links, MT news, and photography from productions.

Also new this year, we will be collecting RSVPs via this website and should you have a question as to whether you have RSVP'd to an event or not, you can just click the link to RSVP and it will tell you if you have! And, it will send you a confirmation via email along with the ability to edit your response if you have change in status or guests.

## **NEW MANAGER OF ANNUAL PROGRAMS:**

We are thrilled to introduce you to **Gretchen Pleuss, our new Manager of Annual Programs and your contact for Friends of Musical Theatre.** Gretchen officially joins us on September 8, but we are excited to introduce you to her at the Welcome Back Friends Event on September 7. In the meantime, if you have any questions, please reach out to Ericka Bigelow at [ebigelow@umich.edu](mailto:ebigelow@umich.edu).

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# THANK YOU

**To celebrate your generosity, these special events are available exclusively for YOU.**

## **Welcome Back**

*September 7 at 2:00 PM  
Arthur Miller Theatre  
Reception to Follow*

Join students and faculty for a short program to introduce all of our MT students, and for a preview of this season's upcoming productions.

## **Cabaret Sitzprobe**

*September 22  
Time and Location TBA*

Back by popular demand, we're opening the doors to a pivotal moment in the rehearsal process—the first time where cast and orchestra meet. It's a rare chance to see the show take shape in real time.

## **Ben Ahlers Talkback**

*October 3  
Time and Location TBA*

Join SMTD alum and HBO's *Gilded Age* series regular Ben Ahlers as he hosts a special Friday Talkback at the Walgreen Drama Center.

## **Monday Lab with Andréa Burns**

*October 27 at 4:30 PM  
Towsley Studio*

Join MT students and faculty in welcoming Broadway and television actress Andréa Burns for a special Monday Lab in the Towsley Studio.

## **Natasha, Pierre, and the Great Comet of 1812 Sitzprobe**

Look for this in late March or early April. Details coming soon!

## **Special Faculty Lecture**

*Time and Location TBD*

If you joined Cynthia's *Carousel* Bench Scene lecture last year, you know what's in store! This is your chance to watch students work in real time with a faculty member on material they've been developing in class—a rare, behind-the-scenes glimpse into our pedagogical process..

## **Chat with the Chair**

*November 15 at 10:00 AM  
Earl V. Moore Building  
Conference Room 2235*

Join me for our second annual Chat with the Chair, an exclusive time for Friends to sit down and ask questions to learn more about the students, faculty, and alumni who make up this incredible department.

## **Lost in Ann Arbor**

*January 25, 2026 at 2:00 PM  
Walgreen Drama Center  
Stamps Auditorium*

Join us for our annual Lost in Ann Arbor concert, featuring songs selected by the students showcasing their vocal talents.

## **Tapestries**

*April 18, 2026 at 2:00 PM  
Walgreen Drama Center  
Stamps Auditorium*

Join us for the Working in Theatre Lab Series (WiTLS) "Music Theatre Voice" concert, a presentation by the Musical Theatre first-year students entitled "Tapestries: a colorful vocal exploration of where we come from and how we fit together."

Watch your email for additional events to pop up throughout the semester! And please invite *your* friends to join *OUR FRIENDS!*

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# PRODUCTIONS



October 2 - 7:30PM  
October 3 - 8:00PM  
October 4 - 8:00PM  
October 5 - 2:00PM  
October 9 - 7:30PM  
October 10 - 8:00PM  
October 11 - 8:00PM  
October 12 - 2:00PM

Lydia Mendelssohn Theatre  
911 N University Ave  
Ann Arbor, MI 48109



October 2 - 7:00PM  
October 3 - 7:00PM  
October 4 - 2:00PM & 7:00PM  
October 5 - 2:00PM  
October 9 - 7:00PM  
October 10 - 7:00PM  
October 11 - 2:00PM & 7:00PM

Encore Theatre  
7714 Ann Arbor Street  
Dexter, MI 48130



Writers Residency  
November 22 - 2:00 PM

The goal of the Writers Residency program allow creative teams time to create your piece, revise your piece, and develop your piece with students in the University of Michigan Department of Musical Theatre.

Walgreen Drama Center  
Towsley Studio  
1226 Murfin Ave  
Ann Arbor, MI 48109



January 11, 2026 - Time TBA

Bob Fosse's "Sing, Sing, Sing" is a tour de force of precision, style, and sheer theatricality—an electrifying blend of jazz, humor, and razor-sharp movement that has become one of his most iconic works. It will be performed alongside original student choreography from our Dance Workshop, showcasing both legendary artistry and fresh creative voices.

Lydia Mendelssohn Theatre  
911 N University Ave  
Ann Arbor, MI 48109

# PRODUCTIONS



February 19 - February 22, 2026  
Show times TBA

The New Works Festival provides a chance for students to develop and showcase new theatrical works. This festival provides a platform for playwrights to refine their work with feedback from directors, dramaturgs, and live audiences.

Arthur Miller Theatre  
1226 Murfin Ave  
Ann arbor, MI 48109



April 16, 2026 - 7:30PM  
April 17, 2026 - 8:00PM  
April 18, 2026 - 8:00PM  
April 19, 2026 - 2:00PM

From the celebrated composer Dave Malloy comes an electropop opera based on a scandalous 70-page slice of Leo Tolstoy's *War and Peace*.

Power Center  
121 Fletcher St  
Ann Arbor, MI 48109



May 3, 2026 - 4:00PM & 7:30PM

The annual Musical Theatre Senior Showcase is an unforgettable revue of performances by the graduating class of the Department of Musical Theatre.

Lydia Mendelssohn Theatre  
911 N University Ave  
Ann Arbor, MI 48109

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## Guest Faculty and Creative Team Members



**Tanya Birl-Torres**  
Guest Faculty; Choreographer,  
*Cabaret*

Tanya believes in telling stories that move us towards curiosity and connection. She has a passion and a vision to use her artistry to reach a diverse crowd and blur the lines between performer and audience, recognizing that we are all creative by nature of being born. She works at the intersection of art, justice and systemic change, teaching practitioners how to hold difficult conversations that come up in our homes and work lives and share how we enter into them while staying present and in our bodies. She believes the act of staying present and in the body is an act of justice. Using movement, yoga, creative/spiritual connection and curiosity as a means to ground, source and embody the truth of who we are.

Tanya is a multi-hyphenate artist and proud mother of two. Select collaborations include: The World Premiere of 'Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil' (Goodman Theater), How I Learned What I Learned (OSF), Peter and the StarCatcher (OSF), Twelfth Night (The Public Theater), The Red Letter Plays (The Signature Theater), As You Like It (The Guthrie Theater), 2024 Critical Breaks artist in residence, 2023 MAP fund and NoMAA grantee for her original choreo-play 'A Play in three Movements'. Tanya is a 2023 CitizensNYC NewYorker4NY honoree featured as "Women breaking glass ceilings & exercising their voice in NYC & beyond."

Coming up in 2025, The Broadway production of "Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil" and serving as the Social Practice Artist in Residence at The Shed for her new work 'The Zora Project' @sohumanity



**Jane Lanier**  
Guest Faculty; Fosse Legacy  
Instructor *Sing, Sing, Sing*

Jane Lanier has been in six Broadway shows: On Your Toes (dir George Abbott), Sweet Charity (Dir Bob Fosse), Anything Goes, Guys and Dolls (dir Jerry Zaks), Jerome Robbins' Broadway, and Fosse (Dir Richard Maltby Jr and Ann Reinking). Her regional credits include Bessie in Counsellor-at-Law (Ovation and LA Drama Critics Award), Cassie in A Chorus Line, Jane in The World Goes Round, and Kate in Michael John LaChuisa's The Wild Party. She danced with John Travolta in the film Michael and her last TV appearance was a guest star on Glee.

Her director/choreographer credits include: directing Valerie Harper in a stage reading of the new play Bad Dog, choreographing the independent film Not Your Time starring Jason Alexander and Valarie Pettiford, and her choreography for The Wild Party garnered her LA Weekly and Backstage Garland Awards, Ovation, and NAACP Award nominations. Last spring she choreographed Chicago at Drury Lane Oakbrook and recieved a Jeff Award normination for Best Choreography.



**Sean McKnight**  
Guest Choreographer, *She Loves Me*

SEAN McKNIGHT is head of Musical Theater at The Hybrid Agency, a highly regarded New York talent agency whose select roster of clients can be seen nightly on Broadway, on tour, and on stages across the world, as well as appearing in regular roles on television and in films. He is known for championing triple-threat talent and his hands-on approach in helping clients navigate the performing arts industry. Prior to switching his focus to representation, Mr. McKnight was a performer whose list of credits include roles in the Broadway and/or National Tours of: Anything Goes, Shrek, A Christmas Story, Curtains, The Producers, 42nd Street, Cinderella, Annie Get Your Gun, and many seasons of The Radio City Christmas Spectacular. He was also in the casts of New York City Center Encores! productions of Merrily We Roll Along, Girl Crazy, and Stairway to Paradise as well as the Kennedy Center productions of Ragtime, Carnival! and Mame. An Ovation! Award and LA Drama Critics Circle Award nominee for his choreography of the Los Angeles premiere of Hot Mikado, Mr. McKnight also directed the sold-out concert Broadway Classics at Carnegie Hall starring Carolee Carmello and Cheyenne Jackson. Other NYC choreographic credits include The Big Waltz at Lincoln Center, as well as several all-star charity events for Broadway Cares, including Carol Channing's 90th birthday celebration at Broadway's New Amsterdam Theater. A passionate educator who has served on faculty at Pace University, The New School, and as a guest artist at Victoria College for the Arts - University of Melbourne, Australia, he has also served as a director and/or choreographer for productions at The Juilliard School, Manhattan School of Music, Northwestern University, the University of Nebraska, Ohio Northern University, and at The University of Michigan where he also currently serves as co-director for the prestigious MPulse Musical Theater Workshop. Mr. McKnight holds a BFA in Musical Theatre from The University of Michigan and an MA in Arts Management and Entrepreneurship from The New School.

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**THANK YOU,  
LISA!**



After 18 years of extraordinary service to our department, **Lisa Mayer-Lang** will be stepping into a new opportunity as a full-time faculty member at the North Carolina School of the Arts. While I know that we will miss her greatly, I am filled with admiration and gratitude for all that she has contributed to our community during her time here.

Lisa has profoundly shaped the lives and artistry of generations of MT students through her expert teaching in Musical Theatre Styles and Ballet. (I'm sure many of our students remember the ballet combination she led them through during their UM auditions!) We are so grateful that our students had the privilege of learning from a mentor whose guidance reflects not only the highest standards of technical excellence, but also a deep understanding of the passion, discipline, and heart required for a life in the performing arts.

Lisa's career has spanned Broadway and beyond—in leading roles such as Belle in *Beauty and the Beast* (both on Broadway and at the Kennedy Center), in *Carousel* at Lincoln Center with Audra McDonald, as Sillabub and Victoria in *CATS*, in *Kiss Me Kate*, *Thoroughly Modern Millie* alongside Sutton Foster, and *Wonderful Town* with Brooke Shields. She's performed at Carnegie Hall in *The Leading Ladies of Broadway* concert with Julie Andrews, Liza Minnelli, and Barbara Cook, and starred opposite Patrick Wilson in *Barry Manilow's Harmony* at La Jolla Playhouse. She's even shared the stage with Gene Kelly and Willie Nelson—a testament to the range and depth of her artistry.

Before her Broadway career, Lisa's foundation was forged in the ballet world. She began dancing at age six at the Toledo Ballet under Marie Bollinger Vogt and Madame Velta Cernonok, and at just eight years old, was cast as Clara in *The Nutcracker*—the role that sparked her lifelong devotion to the performing arts. She went on to train with Larry Long in Chicago, with Ballet West under William Christensen, Toni Lander, and Bruce Marks, and earned a Toscanini Scholarship to study at Interlochen Arts Camp. She later toured the world as a ballerina, partnering with New York City Ballet's Gen Horiuchi.

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# NEWS OF GRADUATES

## BROADWAY (and West End) - Currently Running

**& JULIET** Ben Walker (WEST END - LONDON)  
**BUENA VISTA SOCIAL CLUB** Wesley Wray  
**BEETLEJUICE** Will Burton, Haley Hannah  
**CABARET** Karl Urban  
**DEATH BECOMES HER** Ximone Rose  
**DOLLY: A TRUE ORIGINAL MUSICAL** Joe Carroll  
**EVITA** Diego Rodriguez (WEST END - LONDON)  
**THE GREAT GATSBY** Alex Prakken  
**GYPSY** Sam Faulkner, Cole Newburg  
**HADESTOWN** Alex Puette, Max Kumangai  
**HAMILTON** Jen Sese, Rixey Terry  
**HARRY POTTER** Allie Re  
**JOHN PROCTOR IS THE VILLIAN** Maggie Kunst  
**JUST IN TIME** Erika Henningsen  
**THE LION KING** Cameron Jones, Andrew Arrington  
**MAMMA MIA!** Ethan Van Slyke  
**MASQUERADE** Anna Zavelson  
**MAYBE HAPPY ENDING** Helen Shen, Christopher Tamayo  
**MJ** Nick Daly, Jayden K. White  
**THE OUTSIDERS** Josh Strobl  
**THE QUEEN OF VERSAILLES** Nina White  
**RAGTIME** Marina Kondo, Kent Overshown, John Rapson  
**SIX** Taylor Marie Daniel  
**STRANGER THINGS** Jamie Martin, Neil McCaffrey

## NATIONAL TOURS - Currently Running

**BACK TO THE FUTURE** Zan Berube, Allysa Carol  
**BEAUTY AND THE BEAST** Caleb McArthur  
**BEETLEJUICE** Will Burton, Haley Hannah, Nevada Riley  
**HAMILTON** Paul Louis Lessard  
**HARRY POTTER** Timmy Thompson  
**KIMBERLY AKIMBO** Sarah Lynn Marion  
**LES MISERABLES** Mikako Martin  
**MOULIN ROUGE** Logan Saad  
**THE NOTEBOOK** Samantha Rios  
**THE OUTSIDERS** Nolan White  
**PARADE** Griffin Binniker, Oluchi Nwaokorie  
**THE SOUND OF MUSIC** Ian Coursey, Kate Loprest  
**SUFFS** Abigail Aziz  
**WATER FOR ELEPHANTS** Helen Krushinski  
**THE WIZ** Maya Imani

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## **TELEVISION SERIES**

**EMILY IN PARIS** Ashley Park

**THE GILDED AGE** Ben Ahlers, Celia Keenan-Bolger, Emilie Kouatchou, John Rapson

**THE FOUR SEASONS** Erika Henningsen

**THE RESIDENCE** Barrett Foa

**THE SEX LIVES OF COLLEGE GIRLS** Alyah Chanelle Scott

**ONLY MURDERS IN THE BUILDING** Ashley Park, Sophie Madorsky

**GUEST SPOTS** Many graduates! Check IG for the latest info

Our graduates are also working at regional theatres across the country and in episodic television and commercials. They are also teaching voice, acting, and dance to all ages; getting degrees in law, social work, and psychology; opening yoga and pilates studios; parenting children; and more. We are endlessly proud of everything they do!

Follow news of all our graduates on Instagram and Facebook.



<https://www.instagram.com/umichmusicaltheatre/>



<https://www.facebook.com/umichmusicaltheatre>

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# ADDITIONAL EVENTS OF INTEREST

## A GRAND NIGHT FOR SINGING

Sunday, September 21 at 4 PM  
Hill Auditorium

Join us for our annual vocal and choral tapestry concert highlighting all facets of singing! Featuring the Chamber Choir, Orpheus Singers, University Choir, Men's Glee Club, Women's Glee Club, Department of Musical Theatre, and Department of Voice & Opera.

## THE GREAT AMERICAN SONGBOOK: WHAT MAKES IT GREAT?

**Professor Emeritus Brent Wagner** and **Professor Tyler Driskill** will be giving three lectures and a concert this fall at Kerrytown Concert House.

Cole Porter Edition: Sunday, October 19 at 4 PM

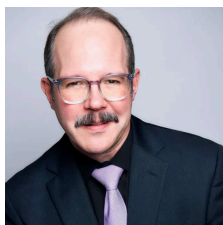
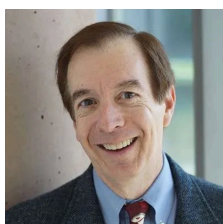
Rodgers & Hart Edition: Sunday, November 2 at 4 PM

Rodgers & Hammerstein Edition: Sunday, November 16 at 2 PM

Companion Concert:

What a Swell Party This Is?

Friday, November 21 at 7:30 PM



 734-769-2999  [kch@kerrytownconcerthouse.com](mailto:kch@kerrytownconcerthouse.com)



**KERRYTOWN CONCERT HOUSE**

WORLD-CLASS ARTISTS, UP CLOSE AND PERSONAL

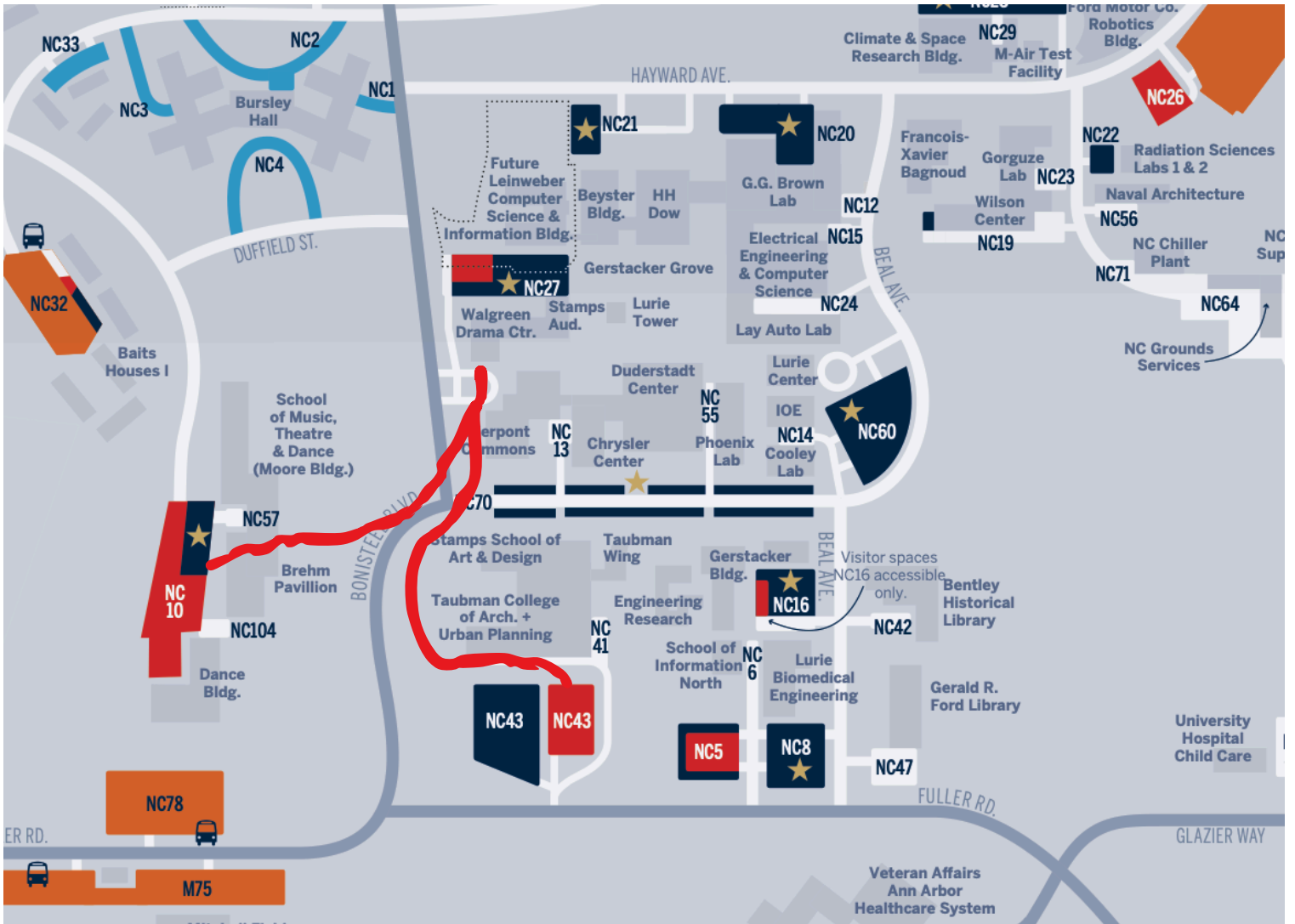
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# PARKING AND TRANSIT

**Parking for the Walgreen Drama Center can be a...drama! Here are four options. The best thing to do is leave yourself plenty of time!**

- 1. Walgreen Drama Center Parking Lot**, located behind the building. The least amount of walking involved, but limited spots available. Arrive early if you would like a spot here.  
**Labeled as NC27 on the map.**
  - 2. Art and Architecture Parking Lot**, located at 2000 Bonisteel Blvd. There is a lovely path from the parking lot through to the Walgreen. Walk to the left of the Art and Architecture Building. Gentle hills. Approximately a 7-10 minute walk.  
**Labeled as NC43 on the map.**
  - 3. School of Music, Theatre & Dance (Moore Bldg.) Parking Lot** located at 1100 Baits Drive. Walk through the building to get to the other side, and follow the path to the Walgreen. Gentle hills. Approximately a 7-10 minute walk.  
**Labeled as NC10 on the map.**
  - 4. Consider transit!** Many bus routes serve Pierpont Commons. Consult an app such as Google Maps, choose the “transit” icon, and input arrival and departure times to see if **AAATA service** or **free UM Blue buses** are an option for Walgreen events.
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[Click here for a link to the full North Campus Map](#)