

# Applause

Volume 27, Number 1    School of the Arts, North Charleston, SC    September 2025



## DIAMOND

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The Kazley Family  
The Landis Family  
SOA Parent Teachers  
Student Association (PTSA)  
The Wolf Family

## EMERALD

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Chandler Jenrette  
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The Sherman Natkin Family  
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Lorelei Williams  
Wimberly Design  
George Younts

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Lila Hayes rocks! <3 Ms Vcd  
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Kendra Lancaster  
Josie Oakley  
Callum Rennie  
Kyle Wells



From the Editor

Dear Readers,

Welcome back everybody! With a new school year comes a new volume of *Applause*, and here we are with our first issue. I am thrilled to be taking over as Editor-In-Chief for this year, and I am joined by a completely new group of ten staff writers, but in just the month we’ve been in school, everybody has put in a lot of hard work to deliver this paper to our loyal readers.

You can meet our new staff on pages 16-17 as well as SOA’s new faculty members on pages 25-28. Also included in this issue an interview with SOA Theater Alum turned international humanitarian Theo Anastopoulo (pg 10), a feature on vocal student Ava Davis, who is currently touring the country in *The Sound of Music* (pg 4), and so much more!

We would like to thank our generous patrons, advertisers, and of course you, our readers! It is with your help that we plan to release ten issues this year, so we hope you enjoy the first!

Your Editor,  
  
Luciano Cusatis



SOA Calendar

by Trinity Collins

**Tuesday, 9/16:** HS Vocal concert, *Fly on the Wall*, Vocal rooms, 6 PM  
**Wednesday, 9/17:** HS Fall STUCO Elections, 9 AM-3 PM  
**Thursday, 9/18:** An Evening of Greek Theatre, Grade 6, Black Box Theater, 4-7 PM  
**Thursday, 9/18:** MS Orchestra, *Fly on the Wall*, MS Strings room, 5:30 PM  
**Tuesday, 9/23:** SOA grad Ryan

Graudin, best-selling author, visit the RMMT, 8:30-10 AM  
**Wednesday, 9/24:** JR Beta Club Induction Ceremony, RMMT  
**Monday, 9/29:** *Cafeteria Times*, 7th grade Theatre, Black Box Theater, 4 & 6 PM  
**Tuesday, 9/30:** *Cafeteria Times*, 7th grade Theatre, Black Box Theater, 4 & 6 PM  
**Tuesday, 9/30:** Fall MS/HS Orchestra Powwow, RMMT, 5:30 PM  
**Tuesday, 9/30:** MS Vocal Concert, *Fly on the Wall*, Vocal rooms, 6 PM

**Monday, 10/6:** Theatre Presents *Nicholas Nickleby*, RMMT, 4 & 6:30 PM  
**Tuesday, 10/7:** Theatre Presents *Nicholas Nickleby*, RMMT, 4 & 6:30 PM  
**Wednesday, 10/8:** 9th Grade Theatre presents *Ekphrasis*, Black Box Theatre, 4-7 PM  
**Wednesday, 10/8:** HS Band Concert, RMMT, 6 PM  
**Thursday, 10/9:** *The Fabulous Faculty Fashion Show*, Cafeteria, HS Lunch  
**Friday, 10/10,** October issue of *Applause* arrives!

Applause

since 1999, the official student publication of  
School of the Arts

*Founded in 1995 by Rose Maree Myers*

**Dr. Shannon Cook, Principal**

**Editor-In-Chief:**  
Luciano Cusatis

Staff Writers:

Frankey Coakley	Sheridan King
Trinity Collins	Ellis Richards
Dante Criscitiello	Fletcher Seminaroti
Cannon Gibbs	Sage Stoner
Lila Hayes	Rachel Wheelon

John Cusatis, Ph.D., Advisor

Charleston County School of the Arts  
5109-B West Enterprise St.  
North Charleston, SC 29405

**soa-applause.com**

**Cover by sophomore Callie Jones**



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In This Issue

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by Luciano Cusatis

**Skateboarding with Senior Amelia Counts**

by Ellis Richards

**Where Are They Now? Theo Anastopoulo**

by Luciano Cusatis

## Why The Long Point Waffle House Is The Best Place Around

by Fletcher Seminarioti

Many people argue that breakfast for dinner is unorthodox, sloppy, and reminiscent of a caveman's diet. I disagree.

If I were to meet any of these people, I would ask them, "Have you ever been to Waffle House?" Obviously not. Specifically, the Waffle House off Long Point Road. Walking in there on a late Saturday night feels like home. The stress of the previous week is behind you, and all you can think about is the smell of waffles and hash browns accompanied by the sizzle of the grill. You shut the glass door behind you, out of respect for the establishment, and are immediately welcomed by a smiling server behind the counter, who is running around, providing excellent service to customers of all shapes and sizes.

Now that we are on the topic of service, two people stick out like a shining beam in the night. Ms. Debbie and Mr. Carl are both nothing short of absolute beasts behind the pen and pad. Thursday through Sunday, you can find Ms. Debbie at Waffle House, always with her sharp glasses and black apron, prying orders out of unresponsive teenagers and delivering the best chocolate milk in Charleston.

I have had many opportunities to speak with this hero. She ended up sitting down with me and my friends and told us about her career and how she came to be such a server. Ms. Debbie has been working in the Waffle House business for almost thirty years! Now, at the young age of sixty-eight, that means she began back in her thirties. Can you imagine the stories she could tell? She is happily married with one son, and works the night shift from seven to seven, to support her husband's medical treatments. After a very lively concert performed by Thomas Rett, we had an emotional moment where she opened up to one of her favorite customers, me, while she was taking our orders. When I came back the next week, she greeted me with a pack of brand Waffle House arms sleeves, just my size! Ms. Debbie is not "just" a server; she is a strong and independent woman who keeps cool under pressure and pours a mean milk.

Moving on to Mr. Carl, what isn't to love about him? Whether it's posing with his fans, dancing to the music on the digital jukebox, or providing excellent customer service, he always keeps a smile on his face. On a busy Friday night, my friends and I were starving, with nowhere to go. So, we went to the only place we knew, Waffle House. The line to sit was almost out the door, as people clamored to eat the food they had been dreaming about all week. When we finally sat down, all six of us squeezed into a booth, and our drinks almost immediately appeared on our table. I ordered a patty melt, double hash browns, and a chocolate milk, while my friend ordered the holiday special, a strawberry waffle. I was confused at first, too. How would they make the waffle? Would there be cut strawberries, or would the waffle be bright pink? To my surprise, the waffle was normal; it looked the same as the plain one my other friend had ordered. We raised our hands to ask Mr. Carl what made it strawberry, and before we even said anything, he apologized, whisking it off our table and returning with a mound of pink, red, and white toppings.

When driving by, the Long Point Waffle House may not look like much. A little lit-up box, the windows fogged up in the night humidity, and a row of trucks in the grass facing the street. But if you were to take



**Fletcher Seminarioti (left)**

Provided

a moment from your drive to stop and grab something to eat, you too would stop and learn to appreciate the magical workings of 609 Long Point Rd.

## The Case Against Labubus

by Lila Hayes

Everyone has, at some point, come across Labubus. Collectible plush monster toys on which the internet can't seem to decide their opinion. If by some small miracle you haven't, there's likely an equivalent that's floated across your screen.

Stanley cups, for example, became wildly popular a few years ago, and various aesthetics pop up and disappear faster than I can count them. Are the water bottles functional? Sure, and some people stick with their purchases long past the lifetime that social media decides on (my well-worn Sambas can attest to this). But others buy multiples of reusable products, items meant to negate the need for repeat buys. And in six months, when they're no longer deemed cool or trendy by social media, they head straight to the landfill.

Microtrends like this contribute heavily to the 15.8 megatons of textile waste that the United States alone produces annually, and that's only part of fast fashion's environmental impact. Producing one pair of jeans requires 2,000 gallons of water, and 35% of all microplastics come from the washing of artificial textiles such as polyester and nylon.

Instead, shop small businesses, thrift stores, and online second-hand stores like Vinted, Depop, or eBay. Because in a year, when Labubus aren't on anybody's minds, they'll be sitting in a landfill and waiting to be broken down into microplastics.



**Lila Hayes**

Provided

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# Vocal Star Reprises Role on the National Stage

by Luciano Cusatis

Last year, in the SOA Vocal production of *The Sound of Music*, then Sophomore **Ava Davis** gave a fantastic performance as Louisa, one of the seven Von Trapp children. Now Ava will share her talents with a much larger audience as she was cast to play Louisa in the upcoming North American tour of *The Sound of Music*.

"It was truly one of the best moments of my life," commented Ava, recalling the ordinary summer day at the pool that was interrupted by a phone call delivering the news she had gotten the role. "I found out about the open casting call through Instagram and sent in a tape at the end of May." The reality of being cast still resonates with Ava.

"Every second I find myself incredibly honored for this to be real life."

Though the result has been euphoric, it didn't come without a lot of hard work. When *Applause* interviewed Ava last year in anticipation of SOA's production of *The Sound of Music*, she commented, "I've been working on my lines since the literal day I got the book. I'm a perfectionist when it comes to that stuff; I always want to make sure I get the tone right." However, she clearly took a smarter, more mature approach to this audition. She told *Applause*, "Last year I worked very hard, but I think the idea of being a perfectionist was put to rest while preparing for this role. This project helped me realize that the most important part is not only to do the job well, but to have fun doing it." However, Ava credits the SOA show with preparing her for the larger audiences that await.

"My experience playing Louisa in SOA's production definitely helped me build the confidence to send in a self-tape for the open casting call of this tour, for which I am forever grateful."

Getting the opportunity to play Louisa in both of these productions has resulted in substantial growth for Ava as a performer, which has always been her dream. "If I could be in one place for the rest of my life it, would be on a stage. My passion for performing has helped me push through to where I am today, even when it felt impossible."

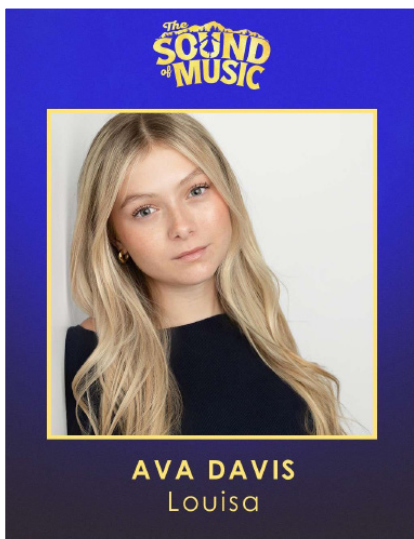
Ava has made her biggest dream come true, but this is only the beginning. "I plan to go to college for Musical Theatre! In a dream world: NYC and a life on Broadway. I would also love to eventually release my own music. Songwriting has been another passion of mine for a while, so that is definitely a bucket list item."

Last year, Ava and fellow vocal major Beckett Carrington, who



**Ava (right) as Louisa last year**

Kent Mackey



**Ava's official cast announcement for the tour**

Provided

played Georg Von Trapp, the father in *The Sound of Music*, founded *Whistle Notes*, the official student podcast of SOA, where together, alongside a team of many other dedicated students, they produced five popular episodes with a variety of special guests. "She is one of the hardest working people I know, Beckett told *Applause*. I don't know how she has the energy to balance everything she does." While Beckett is proud of Ava's latest success, he will miss her, he says.

"It's going to be hard to continue *Whistle Notes* without her this year because she was such an integral part of making it all happen, but we are all so proud of her and know she is going to do great things!"



**Ava and Beckett promoting Whistle Notes at club day last year**

Provided

The upcoming tour of *The Sound of Music* had its opening show on Friday September 5 at Stanley Theatre in Ithaca, New York. The show runs until August 2, 2026, traveling to twenty-seven cities, and many famous venues, such as the Kennedy Center in Washington, DC, the Pantages Theater in Los Angeles, and even the Performing Arts Center here in North Charleston. *The Sound of Music* will be at the PAC for eight shows across six nights, November 4-9, so I would definitely recommend going to see one of SOA's very own on stage!

"I'm obviously very excited to return home for our shows in Charleston," Ava said, "but I'm also excited to check out new places such as Toronto, Canada!"

Ava offers her SOA peers with two pieces of advice: "Never stop chasing your dreams. When I sent in this self-tape, I completely forgot it existed because this project seemed too good to be true for me," she said. "However, it is never impossible if you believe it is never impossible."

"Secondly," she added, "you HAVE to come see this show. *The Sound of Music* is such a classic! From the timeless score by Richard Rogers and Oscar Hammerstein, the wonderful book by Howard Lindsay and Russel Crouse, to the brilliant direction of Jack O'Brien... you cannot miss it."

You can get your tickets now at [soundofmusicontour.com](https://soundofmusicontour.com).





## What's SOA Listening to?

by Ellis Richards

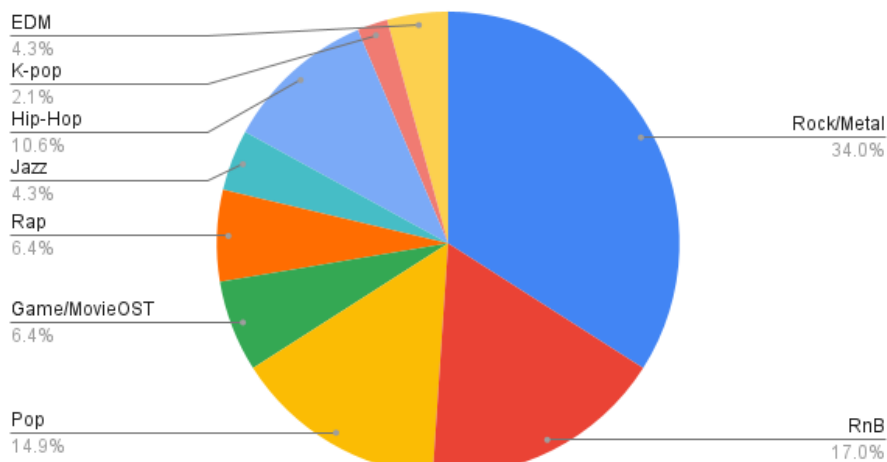
SOA students were polled regarding their music taste, and the results are as follows...

The most popular genre on campus is Rock! RnB came in second with Pop close behind it, but our student body can't be defined that simply.

Students also had the option to list there favorite sub-genres not listed on the poll. These ranged from Yacht Rock to Bluegrass to Femme Punk and everything inbetween.

Make sure to follow @soaapplause on Instagram so you can participate in next month's poll!

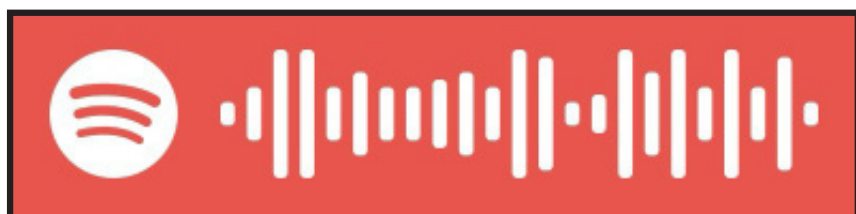
### Count of Genres:



## September Spotify Playlist

By Lila Hayes

Here's the perfect playlist to match those back to school vibes!



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**MONDAY: CLOSED**

**WEDNESDAY: 11:30AM - 9:00PM**

**FRIDAY: 11:30AM - 9:00PM**

**TUESDAY: 11:30AM - 9:00PM**

**THURSDAY: 11:30AM - 9:00PM**

**SUNDAY: 11:30AM - 8:00PM**

## SOA Tours Europe Over Summer

Two SOA tour groups visited Europe this past summer.

First, a group of students led by Ms Bednarczyk traveled to France, Germany, and Switzerland. "For me personally, I was so excited to see Notre Dame since its restoration. It was so beautiful!" Ms Bednarczyk told *Applause*.

Second, Mr Colie traveled to Italy with a group of eight visual artists. "Riding the Funicula up to Montecatini Alto and taking in a Tuscan Sunset were definitely among the highlights," Mr. Colie said. "However, the best part of the trip was watching the artists from different grades become a tight knit group while traveling together."



The Lion Monument in Lucerne, Switzerland



The Leaning Tower of Pisa



## Dr. Wydra to Release New Book

by Cannon Gibbs

Resource Specialist *Dr. Ryan Wydra who last year earned a doctorate in education, will soon be releasing his first book, Teaching Academic Seminar with Purpose. Staff writer Cannon Gibbs interviewed him about his career and this new milestone.*

**Cannon Gibbs:** What motivated you to become a teacher?

**Ryan Wydra:** Growing up, I experienced what it felt like when teachers and administrators didn't always believe in me. I was once told I would be better off building boats instead of taking higher-level math courses. Those moments left a mark. They also gave me a mission—to be the kind of teacher who never lets a student feel underestimated. I became a teacher to be the voice I never had, to empower students, and to show them they are capable of more than they realize. I chose special education because too many students with exceptionalities are counted out before they're even given a chance. I know in my heart that all students can learn when we provide the right opportunities, the right support, and the right people in their corner.

**CG:** Who have been the biggest influence on your career in education?

**RW:** I've been fortunate to learn from incredible mentors at every stage of my journey. Roland Lewis, one of my earliest principals, believed in me when few others did—he gave me a scholarship to start college and my very first job in special education. His wisdom—"It is better to build children than to repair men"—still guides my practice today.

I also carry lessons from my first principal in South Carolina, Trevor Strawderman, who trusted me with my first classroom here and taught me the power of discipline and high expectations paired with care. My tenth-grade science teacher, Diane Mahoney, modeled what it means to go above and beyond for students—she fundraised tirelessly to take us on a life-changing trip to Yellowstone. And mentors like Dr. Lisa Rosner and Dr. Brian Yates pushed me academically, showing me how to combine research with real-world practice. Even now, I'm influenced daily by my colleagues at SOA. Working alongside such talented educators and administrators inspires me to grow—not just as a teacher, but as a person.

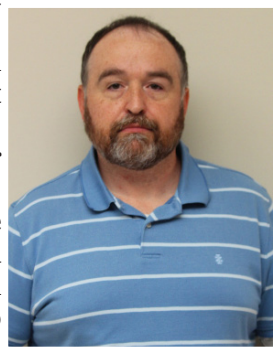
**CG:** Can you give me a brief rundown of your book.

**RW:** *Teaching Academic Seminar with Purpose* is a guidebook for educators who want to reimagine the Resource Room—not as a study hall or catch-all period, but as a powerful space where students with disabilities thrive. It covers everything from building executive functioning skills, goal setting, test prep, and remediation, to co-teaching, family partnerships, and transition planning. The book is filled with practical strategies, ready-to-use tools, and real stories from my classrooms—designed for teachers, paraprofessionals, administrators, and even parents who want to see what a purposeful, high-impact Academic Seminar can look like.

**CG:** What inspired you to write this book?

**RW:** For years, students, parents, teachers, and administrators asked me to share what I'd learned from nearly two decades in education. From my first experiences as a paraprofessional in New Jersey to my doctoral research, I've collected strategies, stories, and lessons that could help other educators avoid the mistakes I made early in my career. This book is my way of giving back—to share hope, practical tools, and a vision of what's possible when we get Academic Seminar right.

**CG:** What is the central message or theme you hope readers take away?



Dr Wydra

Cannon Gibbs

**RW:** Every child has the ability to learn. What they need is the right team, the right environment, and the right belief system in place to unlock their potential. And more than any curriculum or program, relationships matter most. As I often say, you can't be great without the greatness of others. When we empower each other—teachers, students, parents, and leaders—we all rise.

**CG:** You said you drew on personal teaching experiences?

**RW:** Yes—nearly every chapter is built on real stories from my classrooms. I share examples of students who went from feeling lost and disengaged to mastering high-level coursework, building independence, and even coming back to tell me about their success in college. Those stories keep the book grounded in reality and remind readers that these strategies don't just work in theory—they change lives.

**CG:** Were there any challenges you faced while writing or researching the book?

**RW:** Plenty. Balancing time, managing responsibilities, and staying persistent were constant challenges. But I kept reminding myself—this book isn't about me. It's about the students whose lives can be transformed when teachers have the right tools. That purpose kept me going (along with plenty of coffee!).

**CG:** How do you think your book contributes to the current conversation about education?

**RW:** Right now, education is grappling with big questions—how to make IEPs more effective, how to truly prepare students for life after high school, how to support diverse learners, and how to make co-teaching a genuine partnership instead of just a label. My book contributes by offering real, actionable strategies for those exact issues, grounded in both research and lived classroom experience.

**CG:** Is there anything in the book that is especially meaningful to you?

**RW:** The most meaningful parts for me are the stories of transformation. Watching a student who thought they'd never pass Algebra II walk across the graduation stage, or hearing from a former student who is thriving in college—that's why this book exists. Those moments remind me that when we believe in students and give them structure and support, the results are life-changing.

**CG:** How do you think education will change in the next ten years, and does your book address that?

**RW:** Education will look very different a decade from now. Technology will play a bigger role, testing will evolve, more students will pursue remote or hybrid learning, and active, hands-on learning will grow in importance. I also believe exclusionary discipline will decrease as schools embrace restorative practices, and AI will continue to shape how we teach and learn. My book addresses these changes by focusing on the timeless skills that will always matter—executive functioning, self-advocacy, collaboration, and independence. Those skills prepare students to succeed no matter how the landscape shifts.

**CG:** If you could summarize your book in one sentence, what would it be?

**RW:** This book is a blueprint for transforming Academic Seminar into a purposeful, student-centered space where challenges become opportunities and every learner can succeed.

**CG:** Outside of teaching and writing, what are some of your personal interests?

**RW:** I'm a lifelong Philadelphia Eagles fan—I've been bleeding green since I was nine years old! I also love music; I've played guitar for over twenty years. I own a Gibson Les Paul, and my playlists run from The Beatles to Metallica. I'm happiest outdoors—whether it's driving my Silverado up into the mountains to camp or exploring historical landmarks like Monticello and Montpelier. And when I'm relaxing at home, you'll probably catch me watching shows like *Cobra Kai*, *Friday Night Lights*, or *All American*.



# Skateboarding with Senior Amelia Counts

by Ellis Richards

*SOA has so many students with incredible talents outside of what they do in their major. One clear example is Senior Visual Artist Amelia Counts who has been skateboarding competitively for many years. Staff writer Ellis Richards interviewed her about her passion for skating.*

**Ellis Richards: When did you start skating and what inspired you to?**

**Amelia Counts:** I skated on and off throughout elementary school and early middle school. I didn't fully commit to skating until I was thirteen, making this year my fifth. My dad first introduced me to skating in elementary school, and we would skate together after school at the old Folly Park. My cousin is the one who got me hooked on skating when I went to visit him the summer before eighth grade and now I skate every day.

**ER: What was your first trick? Do you have a favorite one?**

**AC:** My first trick was an Ollie and my favorite trick is a front noseslide.

**ER: Who are your skating idols?**

**AC:** My idols are mostly any girls who are successful in skating.

I'm usually a lot more motivated when I see another girl land something as opposed to a guy. My favorites are Nelly Morville, Secret Lynn, Paige Heyn, Shiloh Catori, Georgia Martin, The whole Frog skate team, and my old counselor at skate camp, Olivia Torres.

**ER: Have you gotten injured skating?**

**AC:** I've had a lot of different injuries but the one that put me out of skating for the longest was when I tore the muscles in one of my ankles. I was skating the green bowl at SK8 Charleston, and I fell flat straight onto my ankle. My friend Leo and my dad had to pull me out of the bowl. It was horrible and I couldn't skate for months after.

**ER: How do you feel about how skating is depicted in the media? Is it accurate?**

**AC:** Skating is often depicted in the media as something rebellious and usually affiliated with negative things, but lately skating has evolved into more of a mainstream sport, which has shifted how people and media view it. Because it was added to the Olympics, it has gained the status of other respected sports. I don't really agree with either of these depictions.



Amelia skating at the Santa Monica Pier



Amelia grinding a rail at SK8 Charleston

I think skating is a creative sport that builds community. Skating is life changing; it shows you how to look at the world through new eyes. I feel like it can make you a better person if that makes sense. But skating can be whatever someone makes of it. It can be rambunctious or it can be athletic and rigorous, but that's what I make of skateboarding.

**ER: What was the hardest trick you've ever learned?**

**AC:** The trick that was the hardest for me to learn would probably be a fakie tre flip. It took me like a year and a half, I rolled my ankles like five times trying to land it.

**ER: What's your favorite skating attire?**

**AC:** I personally like skating in super baggy jeans like Polar Big Boys, Southpoles, and Pelle Pelle, or anything I can find on Depop. In the summer I wear tank tops and tee shirts, but in the winter I love to skate in hoodies. I also wear pretty chunky high top shoes because my ankles are prone to rolling. My favorite shoes have been the Adidas Forum 84 ADV.

**ER: What's your favorite skate park?**

**AC:** My favorite park to skate is Woodward Skate Camp in Pennsylvania. There are eighteen parks there and they are built perfectly to skate. I've been there the past two summers and I plan on becoming a staff member this summer.



Amelia at Woodward Skate Camp







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# Where Were They Then: Ms Cipolla

by Sheridan King

*Curious about her life before SOA, staffwriter Sheridan King sat down with school counselor Ms. Anne Cipolla to discuss her childhood, education, and more!*

**Sheridan King:** Where were you born and raised? What was your childhood like?

**Anne Cipolla:** I was born in Charlotte, NC, and moved around to Columbia, SC; Knoxville, TN; Indianapolis, IN; and finally Charleston. I am the youngest of three, with an older sister and brother, and we had a lot of fun and a lot of arguments growing up. My favorite thing about my childhood was being on the year-round swim team and attending summer camp in the mountains of North Carolina.

**SK:** Where did you attend college and what did you study?

**AC:** I studied Elementary Education at the College of Charleston and later earned a master's degree in Clinical Counseling and Secondary School Counseling

**SK:** Where was your first counseling job? Did you enjoy it?

**AC:** My first school counseling job was at CE Williams Middle School in West Ashley before they became two campuses. I loved my job at CE, but it

was a BIG learning curve for me. Middle school drama is real.

**SK:** Were there any major lessons you learned in college or your first job that have helped you throughout your career?

**AC:** I learned both in college and at my first job that asking for help is not a sign of weakness but a sign of strength and self-awareness. I also learned that seeking out a few people at work that you can not only trust but laugh with is essential to having a positive work experience.

**SK:** What led you to SOA?

**AC:** I worked for many years as a school counselor on the middle school level and was ready to try something new. I also did a deep dive into the college application process when my own student entered high school, and found that I loved learning all I could learn about the college admissions process and wanted to share my knowledge with students and families.

**SK:** So far, what is your favorite memory at SOA?

**AC:** I have only had one full year at SOA, but I loved attending prom and seeing all the creative and amazing outfits. It is always fun seeing students dressed up and having a good time!

**SK:** Is there any advice you would like to give to the students



Ms Cipolla and friends at her high school graduation, 1993



Ms Cipolla at a summer camp

of SOA?

**AC:** I would say my best advice is to ask for help when you need it. Teachers, counselors, and admin are here to support students, and we want you to be successful and reach your potential.

# Where Are They Now: Theo Anastopoulos

by Luciano Cusatis

*Theo Anastopoulos was an SOA Theater major and Applause staff member. When he graduated in 2015, he was the recipient of The Rivers Award, the highest and most distinguished award given to an SOA senior. He was also named "Most Outstanding History Student." Applause Editor, Luciano Cusatis caught up with Theo, who recently began work on a doctorate at Princeton.*

**Luciano Cusatis:** You were named "Most Outstanding History Student" of the SOA 2015 graduating class. Ten years later you are enrolled in the PhD program in the Department of History at Princeton University. When did your interest in History begin to develop, and how did SOA influence or assist your future career?

**Theo Anastopoulos:** I have always carried a sense of my origins. The turbulent and violent history of 20th century Greece forced my family to flee as refugees, first from land that is now Turkey, then when the Nazi occupation of Greece created a devastating famine, then when the fratricidal Greek Civil War erupted thereafter. Before her death at the age of 109, my great-grandmother reminded my family that we are "never too far from the boat." I took that to mean respecting the immense historical sacrifices it took for me to live this life. The English, History, and Theatre Departments from my time at SOA (2008-2015) were integral in fostering my interests in the humanities. My teachers from that time were as good as any college-level faculty, and I owe everything to Mr. Brehm, the late Ms. Cimballa, Mr. Clark, Dr. Cusatis, Ms. Link, Mr. Reece, Mr. Smyth, Mr. Younts, and others for building a strong foundational knowledge in ethics, history, and rhetoric. I also credit the Math Department from that time for ensuring my interests remained in the humanities.

**LC:** As a History major at Clemson your area of concentration was Modern Africa, and the focus of your thesis was South Sudan. What sparked your interest in Modern Africa, and how did your time at Clemson enhance your career interests?

**TA:** More than 40% of enslaved Africans shipped to North America through the trans-Atlantic slave trade entered via Charleston Harbor. With that as my starting point, I have always carried an interest in Africa and the cultural significance of Lowcountry traditions linked to the continent (Gullah Geechee culture par excellence). My interests specifically in South Sudan began when, in Ms. Drennan's AP English Language class, I was assigned Dave Eggers' and Valentino Achak Deng's



Theo in Mozambique with the Peace Corps



*What is the What?* While I find it somewhat cringe to read nowadays, at the time it was an eye-opening account of the South Sudanese “Lost Boys” and their harrowing experiences surviving the Second Sudanese Civil War (1983-2005). At Clemson, I broadened these interests with courses focusing on African history before and after the slave trade. My thesis built on what I knew about South Sudan, and its final title was a nod to my time at SOA: “The What That Wasn’t: Authoritarian Politics and the State in South Sudan.” Only because I had the support and counsel of Clemson’s Department of History was I able to spend an entire year pursuing this thesis at the expense of my European history course requirements. Other experiences teaching English to African refugees in Greece, as well as a stint with the Peace Corps in Mozambique, guaranteed me a life of learning from and researching Africa.

**LC:** You earned a Master of Arts in Law and Diplomacy from Tufts University in 2023, focusing your master’s thesis on “Genocidal Famine in the 20th Century.” What do you value most about your two years at Tufts?

**TA:** The name of that degree is just a fancy way to say, “international relations.” But to answer your question, what I valued most from my time at Tufts was the intellectual openness that closely mirrors SOA’s own approach to studying the arts and humanities. It was Descartes and subsequent Enlightenment thinkers that glorified the unique capacity of the human mind to create. Academic openness, natural curiosity, and free speech are some of foundations of a liberal arts education that foster that creativity, and these foundations made my time at Tufts (and I hope our readers’ time at SOA) one of great personal progress and discovery. The intellectual openness to which I’m referring should not be taken for granted. Having traveled and lived in many places where oppressive economies and politics stifle such thinking, it is a tragedy that not everyone can pursue their creative interests. That may not mean much to your middle school readers, who are more concerned with the fundamentals of a basic education. But for those in high school who have more lived experiences and interests beyond the classroom, I would remind them that it is their civic duty to apply their creative passions for the betterment of our community and country.

**LC:** After graduating, you traveled to East Africa to do humanitarian relief work, complementing your strong academic background with hands-on efforts in Kenya and Somalia. This must have been a highly challenging but deeply rewarding experience. How did it come about and in what ways has it further shaped your career and your life?

**TA:** Without getting too deep into the ethics and philosophy of sympathy (but if you’re interested in that, read the work of 18th century philosopher David Hume), all humanitarians must act under the principle of shared humanity. What does this mean? Before all other objectives, even those that attempt peace, fairness, or other noble causes, humanitarians must recognize that helping people in and of itself is the ultimate goal. With that principle in mind and a degree in my hand, I went to Kenya and Somalia



Theo at the Blue Mosque in Turkey

Provided

to work in areas experiencing extreme food insecurity. For centuries, pastoralists in this region of Africa have survived, managed, and thrived during periods of drought, colonialism, crop and cattle failure, and conflict. In this context, however, six consecutive failed rainy seasons were pushing pastoralists into hitherto unknown levels of malnutrition. So, this was an ideal chance to learn directly from local experts in the specifics of humanitarian crisis management. Along the way I heard directly from Kenyan pastoralists experiencing the damning impacts of climate change, drank the finest coffee south of the Mediterranean, roved the Kenyan National Archives, ate camel, hippo, and McDonald’s, and learned basic Swahili. I guarantee your readers know at least one Swahili word: safari (journey), hakuna matata (no worries), and jenga (to build, like the game) are just a few! You are right to say the experience was both challenging and rewarding. The humanitarian industry is full of highs (namely making friends all over the world) and lows (namely gastrointestinal infections). In Somalia, especially, there were very serious security challenges, ethical dilemmas, and operational setbacks. Despite similar challenges, humanitarians have nonetheless achieved remarkable empirical success in alleviating human suffering. You typically see our failures in the news, and I will be the first to admit there are many – Sudan and Gaza are the two examples that probably come to mind. What isn’t given as much limelight, however, is the monumental progress we’ve made helping billions of vulnerable people, day in and day out. Halting the spread of AIDS, malaria, and other diseases, in particular, rank among the greatest scientific and political feats in human history. While teaching English to Afghan refugees in Athens, Greece, I will never, never forget the words one man shared with me: “We fled because we were being hunted by the Taliban.” The verb this man used, “to hunt,” should stir in everyone visceral appreciation that we live in a free and open democracy where humanitarian assistance is not required for the majority of the population.

**LC:** Wasting no time, you returned to the classroom at Princeton. What led you to pursue a doctorate and what are your goals during and after your doctoral studies?

**TA:** It is in Princeton, already drowning in a metric ton of assigned reading, where you now find me! Unlike a bachelor’s degree, where students attend classes, take exams, and write term papers, a PhD is focused primarily on conducting a book-length piece of original research. I have just begun, so apart from something to do with humanitarian action during famine in Africa, I’m unsure



Theo at a leather tannery in Fez, Morocco

Provided

where these next few years of research will take me. I made this decision to attend Princeton for several reasons. First, humanitarian careers are no longer possible owing to our country’s current political discourse. Second, and in light of this, this experience will contribute to the field of African history while informing more effective humanitarian action during periods of extreme food insecurity. Third, and most importantly, I am in no way smart enough to do a PhD in English, like Dr. Cusatis.



**LC:** Your LinkedIn page, where I turned for most of my research on your career, candidly states, “I am absolutely thrilled to announce that I am happy.”; This is great news. To what do you most attribute your happiness?

**TA:** I posted that as a joke after my advisor begrudgingly granted me a summer-long extension on that genocidal famine thesis you brought up before. The email I sent him asking for permission went down as legendary at Tufts, and I will share the story here with readers as a lesson in self-deprecating meekness. Otherwise, my happiness is attributed to my supportive and patient mother and father, who instilled in me a deep sense of justice and thrift. I also derive happiness from attending the one true Catholic Church (that being the Eastern Orthodox Church, of course).

**LC:** Your passion and love for learning is very evident. Any advice for SOA students regarding their future careers?

**TA:** Two bits have served me well. First, you’re probably not as great as you think you are. Second, never tie your ego so close to your position that if your position falls, your ego goes with it.

**LC:** Finally, do you look back on your time at SOA much? What stands out?

**TA:** Yes, in fact SOA is my Roman Empire. Important lessons were learned to which I owe a deep roster of teachers thanks. But three lessons stand out. First, I learned how to read under Dr. Cusatis. Second, I learned how to improvise under Mr. Younts. Third, I learned how to just be comfortable in what I am under the late and much beloved



Theo speaking with civillians in Kenya

Ms. Cimballa. Should there be students at SOA interested in studying history or international relations at the college-level, please contact me at ta9360@princeton.edu for advice and encouragement.



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## SOA Slang

by Fletcher Seminaroti

**6-7:** Said at random moments for comedic effect but has no real meaning. Derived from a line in the hit song “Doot Doot” by Skrilla. Also, NBA player Lamelo Ball’s height.

Ex. “Dallas, how many freshmen have you helped to class today? Like six, seven?”

**Melting:** The process of attempting to appear as if you’ve liquidated yourself.

Ex. “Louisa, you’re trying too hard to melt, please stop, you’re gonna pull a muscle.”

**Mustard:** Based on the infamous DJ Mustard’s producer tag, screaming in awkward situations, “MUSTARDD” can often be viewed as comical.

Ex. “Canon, you need to do your homework... MUSTARDDD”

**Yarty:** Yarty is a contraction for “you already know”.

Ex. “Bryce, can you pass me the mustard? Yarty.”

**Slime:** An enemy or opposition (opp), also could be used as a verb, meaning to attack.

Ex. “Stop melting and lock in, bro, slime is around the corner.”

**Clanker:** Originally a term for a cheap car, then pocketed by the Star Wars series, now mainstream on TikTok, it can be used to talk about AI or other modern technology.

Ex. “This clanker microwave won’t warm up my food.”

**Chopped:** To appear unattractive compared to other people. It can also be used to describe an activity, replacing the word “bad”.

Ex. “Yo bro, did you do that Algebra test? Yes, bro, it was so chopped.”

**Twin:** A term of affection used towards friends and family.

Ex. “Drive safe, twin, text me when you get back to your house.”

**Performative:** Used to describe someone who dresses over the top, often can be seen reading with matcha.

Ex. “Caleb, you look super performative today, bro, where’s your matcha?”

**41:** The new 67.

Ex. “Elsie, why are you still throwing around 67? We’ve moved on to 41.”



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# Celebrating Nearly Two Decades of SOA's Deaf and Hard of Hearing Program

by Sheridan King and Lila Hayes

The Deaf and Hard of Hearing program has been at SOA for seventeen years, and they have made a colossal impact on all aspects of SOA and the innumerable lives they have touched. DHH students have worked with every major in some way, whether collaborating with dancers to incorporate sign into their interpretive dance, signing a Grimms' Fairy Tale show with the theatre majors, or filling the Gaillard Center with tears with their moving rendition of "Silent Night" at the Strings/Vocal Holiday Extravaganza. And they have modeled courage, resourcefulness, and good humor in our academic classes.

When they first came to SOA during the 2009-2010 school year, after Charlestowne Academy closed, DHH occupied a trailer on the old campus. In the current facility, they settled into what is now the AMHS conference room until their rooms were finished. Then, they moved to the large classrooms in the Visual Arts hall designated for them when the new school was planned. The number of middle and high schoolers in the program has grown as high as eighteen, with some students staying until they turned 21. As the program is being dismantled after this year, the two remaining seniors have been moved to a classroom at the entrance

of the high school building. **Teachers of the Deaf Kathy Amick, Tracy Duffy, and Dean Walters tour the new SOA campus under construction** Ms. Duffy, a Teacher of the Deaf, told Applause that SOA has been a community. "American Sign Language has integrated so nicely into the arts" over the years, Ms. Duffy commented.

A day-to-day look at the program consists of attending mainstream classes with an interpreter, followed by a return to the classroom for support services. "They really are just typical SOA students," Ms. Duffy said. Some have attended vocational classes at Cooper River Center for Advanced Studies. In the past, students have gone to job sites to train and work, as well.

Students who have gone through the program have gone on to college. One returned to work as a teacher assistant.

After an incredible seventeen years, SOA's deaf students will attend the schools they are zoned for, beginning next school year. *Applause* will continue to celebrate the program's exceptional service to SOA, the students, and the community in forthcoming issues.



Provided



Deaf students in a trailer classroom at the old campus, 2009

# Music Recommendation of the Month: Porcupine Tree

by Dante Criscitello

In the early 90's a powerhouse in the progressive rock community was born, Porcupine Tree. They used complex time signatures, rhythms, and melodies that will make your head spin, but their best trait is how diverse they are among many musical styles. The mastermind behind it all is Singer/Guitarist/Bassist Steven Wilson, rooted in a childhood interest in his parents' diverse record collection, which extended from Pink Floyd to Donna Summer.

Wilson always felt like an outcast in his youth. He started experimenting with the guitar at age eleven, even practiced with multi-tracking on tape recorders, which ended up being a big part of his sound. Porcupine Tree performs not only metal and progressive rock, but they also experiment in pop/funk/electronic music.

Personally, my favorite song is "Arriving Somewhere But Not Here." The song starts off with an eerie vibe, then an angelic acoustic guitar comes in, followed by a beautiful, soaring melody followed by a hard rocking metal section that hits hard. I highly recommend for everyone out there to listen to this twelve minute epic.

Another one of my favorites is "Trains." It's a timeless song, about overcoming personal struggles, and tells of a time when Steven Wilson escaped to his cousin's house over summer and met his first love. I highly recommend this as a gateway song into Porcupine Tree.

These two are only the tip of the iceberg. Songs like "Dark Matter," "Stranger By The Minute," and "Lazarus" are all incredible in their own unique way and definitely worth checking out.

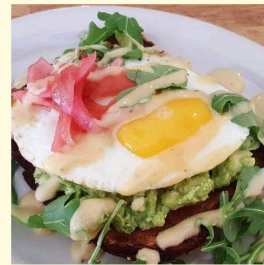
Porcupine Tree is a band that may not click for everyone upon first listen, but everyone should give them a try because they are truly like no other.



Porcupine Tree

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# Hit or Miss? SOA Responds to New Carpets

by Rachel Wheelon

The simple change from tile to carpet has had complex consequences, and people aren't keeping their opinions quiet. When asked to rate their perspective of the carpet, 33% of students answered with a strong dislike, and another 11% claimed they hated it. In terms of the band room, one sophomore wrote, "it's a little bit gross because brass empty their spit on it sometimes." Estee Yu, a senior strings major, was also concerned about the carpet's cleanliness, writing "they trap dirt, debris, and all kinds of germs inside of them that I don't like to even imagine."

Shelby Miller, senior theater major, said "I know some people are going to forget about their frappuccinos and coffees, and they are going to spill. How are you going to clean all the milk from the carpet that is absorbing it?" Stains aren't the only concern, as Ms. Gomez wrote that the dark rectangles make dust and paper much more noticeable in the media center.

Science, creative writing, and band rooms were said to be the most out of place with the carpet along with Mr. Verone's room and the library. However, there were a select few classes that people believed were upgraded by the carpet — Valeria Simancas, senior creative writer, said that it "brought some color" to Mr. White's room, and many are admiring it in Dr. Cusatis' class. Estee wrote it made his room "cozier," and Dr. Cusatis himself agrees: "I love it. You smell the fresh carpet when you enter the school. It feels so good to walk on, and it gives the classroom an inviting, finished look."

However, some wish that the money spent on the new carpeting was spent on paying teachers more, fixing the girls' bathrooms, new

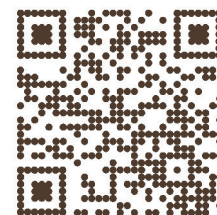
vending machines, or updating breezeway seating and the Pegasus Garden.

Maybe it will just take time to get used to, or maybe the disappointment about your favorite class no longer allowing food will only get worse as the year progresses.



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Teacher Cadets line up in front of the "Wall of Fame" celebrating their "Through the Eyes of a Friend" assignment. Check back next month for more on Teacher Cadets!



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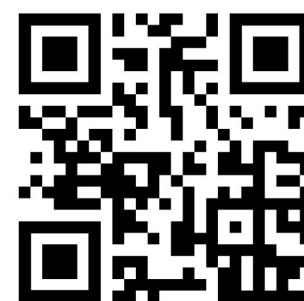
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# Meet Your 2025-26 *Applause* Staff!

Photos by  
Luciano Cusatis



**Frankey Coakley**  
*Sophomore Visual Art major*

**Sleep:** Deprived  
**Time:** not enough  
**Work:** Still not done



**Trinity Collins**  
*Sophomore Strings major*

**Loves:** Ralph Macchio & blondes  
**BFF:** Samare Promanee  
**Six:** Seven



**Luciano Cusatis**  
*Senior Strings major*

**Favorite Beatle:** Paul  
**Weaknesses:** Ping Pong, Ice Skating  
**Dreams:** for the Trailblazers to be good again



**Dante Criscitello**  
*Junior Band major*

**Occupation:** Scroller  
**Favorite fruit:** Mangos  
**Favorite Condiment:** Mustard



**Cannon Gibbs**  
*Junior Piano major*

**Frat:** ΣΑΣ  
**Venmo:** Cannon-venmo7204  
**J\*b:** N/A





**Lila Hayes**

*Sophomore Creative Writing major*

**Listening to:** Bob Dylan  
**Bank account:** empty  
**Concert tickets:** purchased



**Sheradin King**

*Sophomore Band major*

**Listening to:** Cody Fry and Noah Kahan  
**Number of people who have the same DNA as me:** 1  
**Loves:** Reading, winter



**Ellis Richards**

*Junior Creative Writing major*

**Hates:** my photo  
**Lost In:** Silent Hill  
**Fave-Color:** Gray



**Fletcher Seminaroti**

*Junior Creative Writing Major*

**Frat:** legend  
**Favorite Food:** Waffle House  
**Profession:** Pizza slinger



**Sage Stoner**

*Sophomore Vocal major*

**Always:** Tired  
**Ready to:** Go home  
**Might:** Be lazy



**Rachel Wheelon**

*Senior Creative Writing major*

**Married to:** Charles Leclerc  
**Ur girlie needs:** a man  
**Dreams of:** sleeping





Junior Band major Cylis Brake caught a monster largemouth in Charleston over the summer.



English teacher Mr. Patrick Martin ventured back to college to begin work on a Doctorate in Education at the College of Charleston.



Middle School English teacher Ms. Paeschke went backpacking in the Red River Gorge!



Aurelia O'Brien visited Mexico City and the ruins of Teotihuacán.



Junior Dance major Lucie Parham-Battle competed in a National Dance Competition in Savannah, Georgia.



Senior Strings Major Luciano Cusatis and Senior Band major Niko Mackie visited Paris!



Sam Smyth (top left), sophomore Vocal major, went to St. Augustine, Florida, with YMCA Camp Greenville.



Senior creative writer Riley Brockman adopted a cat, visited NYC, and got her first tattoo.



High School science teacher Mr. Short and his daughter, Olivia, ran into a few celebrities, including TV and movie stars Josh Henderson and Jesse Metcalfe, in Dallas, Texas.



Caroline Rush, a sophomore Band major, went to Interlochen summer camp for oboe.



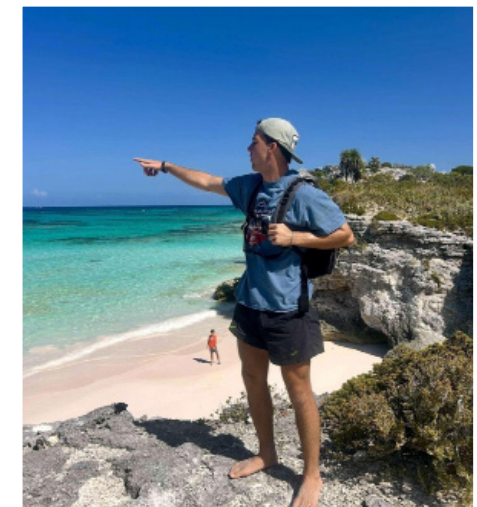
Scarlett McInvale, junior Strings major, went scuba diving off the coast of Saint Martin in the Caribbean.



Madie Fletcher, senior Band major, went to UNC to study statistics!



Senior creative writer Maddie Leluc went skydiving!



SOA junior vocal major Caleb Parrish traveled to the Bahamas for mission work with his JWUMC to spread God's word and help the community

# What did SOA do over the summer?

by Applause Staff



## Eighty SOA Athletes Kick-Off Fall Sports Season

by Morgan Barron and Fletcher Seminaroti

With the new school year comes a new fall sports season, and SOA is well represented on the football field, the volleyball court, the tennis court, the cross-country course, in the swimming pool, and on the sidelines cheering on the Raptors or the home school teams of our dozens of SOA athletes.

Multiple SOA athletes are participating on the Magnet football team: **Mukisa “Muki” Donaldson, Omari Wynn-Ferrel, Jacob Freligh, Simon Halberda, Kai Kanapauz, Jonah Karen, Cameron Leach, Bryce Lee, Collin Mills, Caleb Parrish, Aedyn Pawlyk, Samuel Smyth, Lucas Turner, and Noah Turner.**

The Raptors are off to a great start this season, with a record of 2-1 as of presstime. After a shutout 14-0 Jamboree match against North Charleston High School and a massive win against Military Magnet, the Raptors are cruising for a fantastic season. I had the opportunity to speak with a couple of players, such as our very own junior Bryce Lee, who is a starting wide receiver for the Raptors. When asked about his favorite moments from summer workouts, he recalled spotting AMHS Will Slenzack on a squat PR in the weight room. The first time Slenzack attempted, he couldn't lift it, but with Lee's encouragement, he did. Bryce's motto that got him through the hot summer workouts was former Gamecock coach Lou Holtz's advice: “Stay hungry, remain humble, and get better today. No one ever drowned in sweat.”

Six SOA high schoolers and middle schoolers are participating this year on the swim team: **Keith Aikman, Reid Aikman, Brayden Knauer, Eryk Kuprel, John Leon, and Nathan Wright.** So far, the Raptors are 1-1, beating Oceanside but falling short to West Ashley High School in a close battle. I spoke to freshman Reid Aikman, who competes in the breaststroke and the 200 Individual Medley. Reid explained how the team's atmosphere is almost like a family, but they can “lock in” when needed. Come October, the Raptors will swim in the state meet up in Columbia. Wish them luck.

The Raptor boy's volleyball team has officially kicked off its season, with an SOA athlete contributing to the squad: **Sam Bundy**, a right-side hitter who is playing his first season with Magnet after two years of experience in the sport. When reflecting on his favorite memory so far, Sam recalled a thrilling moment in a game against Hanahan when their setter, Finn—standing just 5'5”—jumped up and blocked one of Hanahan's much taller hitters. “The entire gym went crazy,” Sam explained, adding that it's a story the team still celebrates at practice. Sam also praised the strong dynamic of the group, noting coaching staff and captains have set a positive tone where mistakes are seen as opportunities to reset and move forward. With energy like that, the boys' volleyball team is set for an exciting season ahead.

The Raptors cross country team is already off and running this fall, with both SOA middle and high school athletes putting in the miles. SOA's harriers are **Parker Blessinger, Katherine Crean, Zoey Gebhart, Lucille Harper, Sarah Lewis, Saylour LoVallo, Lillian Pastre, and Verde Vasilevski** are all strong members of the



**Junior Vocal Major Bryce Lee, after catching an impressive 40-yard pass in AMHS' loss to Stall on September 5**

team, cutting mile times left and right. The team has been training hard through the Charleston heat, preparing for a slate of upcoming meets across the Lowcountry. Known for its blend of endurance and strategy, cross country requires consistent effort and team support, and this year's Raptor squad is building momentum with every race. With their eyes set on regionals and ultimately the state meet in Columbia later this fall, the runners are determined to keep pushing their limits. Keep an eye out for them as the season unfolds—they're sure to make Magnet and SOA proud.

With courage and commitment, the AMHS Raptors girls swim team is launching into the season. The following SOA girls are on this year's roster: **Sophia Barden, Finley Bowers, Priya Cardella, Katie Childers, Mia Esposito, Moxie-Jo Galvin, Isabel Gregg, Kendall Grimsley, Arlyn Hibler, Pluma Hyatt-Eakes, Emma Klingsham, Anita Merin John, Sara Mojica, Eleanor Soler, Elizabeth Sprouse, Opal Sullivan, Judith Suttle, Isabella Traxler, and Elin Trezies.** In addition to concentrating on teamwork and encouragement both inside and outside of the pool, each swimmer is practicing their strokes, increasing their endurance, and improving their race times. Judith Suttle says, she's “growing a lot in swimming, especially mentally” and that her goal is “to win state!”

The AMHS Raptors cheerleading squad is bringing spirit and energy to a whole new level this season. The team includes ten SOA students: **Sammantha “Samy” De La Cruz, Lily Bilbrey, Leland Erickson, Emma “Reese” Erickson, Cyniah Green, Emilia Hall, Louisa Seminaroti, Alexa Waters, Ava Wolf, Rose Wolf.** Each is working their hardest to perfect stunts and jumps, while also creating new chants and cheers to bring spirit to the crowd. Right now they are preparing for halftime routines, and showing dedication both on and off the sidelines. “To practice for performances, I try to focus on my jumps and timing,” says sophomore Dance major Sammantha De La Cruz.

With perseverance and hard effort, the AMHS Raptors volleyball team is prepared to spike their way into an entertaining season. **Emma Hollowell, Sydney King, Laney Tucker, Ava Unterreiner, and Josie Meloeny** are the six SOA students on this year's roster. During practice, these players have been working harder, concentrating on serves, sets, and developing effective communication skills. To represent the Raptors with pride, they are also getting ready for the upcoming games and competitions. Raptor Volleyball is preparing for a memorable season!

Displaying effort and focus, the AMHS Raptors tennis team is prepared to compete this season. Four SOA students are included on the roster: **Charlotte Grass, Reese Erickson, Bella Billew, and Celia Abney.** As they contribute to the JV squad, each player has been putting in a lot of effort to hone their serves, volleys, and footwork while also developing great teamwork abilities. They are currently studying new Raptors tactics and getting ready for their next games.

Other SOA students are competing for their home school this season. Junior Theater major **KamRyn Frazier** is a defensive end for the West Ashley Wildcats, who are 1-1. KamRyn, who's played



**Isaiah and Elijah Liu (2nd and 5th from the left) at a meet with their teammates**



competitively since he was seven years old, formerly played for Hanahan High. Kam says his goal for the current season is “just getting better by working more.”

In addition, SOA Strings majors, senior **Elijah Liu** and sophomore **Isaiah Liu** run cross country for North Charleston. Both have been standouts in track and cross country for several years. Elijah, whose personal best on the 5K (3.1 mile) course is 16:54, says what draws him to the sport is “the ability to push yourself in every race to be better than you were before.” Isaiah says he “enjoys the team environment.” His PR so far this season is 19:05.

Good luck to all our SOA fall athletes!

## SOA Celebrates Club Day

photos by Applause Staff

This year’s annual Club Day featured more than thirty clubs, offering a wide range of variety for student involvement! Pictured are representatives of the Dungeons and Dragons Club and the OURS (Opportunity, Unity, Responsibility, Service) Club.



## 2025 Rose Maree Myers Scholarship Winner Chasing His Dream

by Luciano Cusatis

During intermission at the second performance of *Viva La Vida: Songs of the Early 2000s* in May, Dr. Cusatis presented senior band major Cameron Barnett with the 16th Annual Rose Maree Myers Scholarship for Artistic Excellence. At the time, Cam was uncertain whether he would attend college in the fall or just continue playing gigs around time. However, when Full Sail University in Winter Park, Florida, took an interest, Cam applied for a scholarship from the school, submitting an essay about his musical journey, which began in his church and has led to high profile gigs around the area. Cam was informed that he had earned the highest available scholarship, \$25,000, from the university. “I just want to make music,” Cam told *Applause*. Cam will major in music production in hopes of making composing songs for television, movies and “for SOA students to play.” Cam’s biggest influences are Gospel singers and songwriters, and his goal is to give back to that genre with his own original music. “I want to record my own full album,” he says. We look forward to hearing it. Congratulations, Cam!



Cameron Barnett

## Welcome Back SOA!



Ms. Derrickson photo-bombs a group of unsuspecting students on their first day of school

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Madison Edwards, 11th



Brooklyn Kleinschmidt, 11th



Elsa Vander Zee, 6th



Carson Godwin, 11th



Blake Brunson, 8th



Karuna Rivers, 6th



# SOA Alums Perform with Chamber Music Charleston

by Luciano Cusatis

*Chamber Music Charleston will be beginning their 20th anniversary season with a concert entitled “Tango Meets Classical” (see ad for details). The concert includes two SOA Strings graduates. Peter O’Malley, class of ‘24 cellist now at McDuffie Center for Strings, and Elaina Gable, class of ‘23 violinist now at the Peabody Institute of Music.*

**Luciano Cusatis:** How has working with CMC affected your development as a musician?

**Peter O’Malley:** I first began playing for Chamber Music Charleston in the middle of my sophomore year (2020-2021), when I joined their CMC TWO program and played as the cellist in a string quartet. In the years that I played for CMC TWO, I studied quartets, trios, and quintets under the instruction of Chamber Music Charleston musicians, and really grew to love chamber music. Additionally, I played as a member of the CMC TWO fellowship program, where I and three friends played quartets in elementary schools around Charleston. I remember, during the Spring semester of my junior year, having a full schedule of rehearsals for Dvorak Piano Quintet, Beethoven Eyeglasses Duet, and quartet rehearsals with the fellowship quartet. That really taught me a great deal about managing my time and practicing efficiently.

**Elaina Gable:** CMC TWO was my first experience being coached in the techniques of chamber music. Prior to joining CMC, I had no familiarity with the beauty of the genre and its repertoire. With the guidance of Ms. Sandra and the rest of our coaches, my quartet and quintet were able to experience things I had never dreamed of - a lesson with Charlton Singleton on his own composition, a masterclass with the legendary violinist Midori, and performing at many venues throughout Charleston to large audiences. CMC helped me challenge myself to not only improve my individual musicianship, but become a contributing team member and collaborator.

**LC:** What are you most looking forward to in this performance?

**PO:** I’m really looking forward to working again with Francisco Fullana, who’s been a part of my chamber music life since I was at SOA. This summer I played a late Mozart quartet with him while pursuing a fellowship at a chamber music festival that he directed in San Antonio, Texas, and it was one of the most rewarding musical experiences I’ve had. I’m also really excited about the program, where I’ll play Cello 2 on the Mendelssohn Octet. The start of the last movement has a big (and really hard) solo that sounds almost like a lawnmower, so I’ve been practicing that since I first heard I was playing the piece. It’s going to be an amazing concert!

**EG:** I am extremely excited to return to Charleston and play alongside many of the teachers and mentors who helped nurture my love for chamber music growing up! I’m especially looking forward to working with Francisco Fullana, since I have great memories of his residency and concert with the Sinfonietta my senior year. I’m so grateful to CMC for giving me this opportunity to perform with such an incredible group of musicians, and I know the experience will be truly memorable.



Elaina and Peter in a previous CMC performance



## CHAMBER MUSIC CHARLESTON TANGO MEETS CLASSICAL

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 28, 2025 AT 3PM

BACH Brandenburg Concerto No. 3 in G Major, BWV 1048  
PIAZZOLLA Four Seasons of Buenos Aires  
MENDELSSOHN String Octet in E-flat Major, Op. 20



St. Matthews Lutheran Church 405 King Street  
Student/Parent/Teacher tickets: \$10 (Section B)  
WWW.CHAMBERMUSICCHARLESTON.ORG



# Sign of the Month:

## “Where did you go this Summer”

by Frankey Coakley  
Demonstrated by Marquis Larry



1. Summer- Put your index finger across your forehead and pull it in towards your palm

2. Go- Hold your hand out with two fingers in a claw

3. Keep this hand shape and move it down to your hip

4. Where- Stick up your index finger and wiggle it

# therapy without all the fluff.



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## Meet SOA’s Newest Faculty!

*This year SOA welcomes six new teachers and staff to the campus. A few of our talented writers interviewed them, along with Mr. Martin’s new student teacher, on their childhood, education, and more.*

### Ms. Amanda Evans, Dance

by Ellis Richards

**Ellis Richards:** What classes will you be teaching this year?

**Amanda Evans:** I will be teaching 7th grade dance!

**ER:** Are you from Charleston? Out of state? Out of country? If not, where did you grow up and what brought you here to SOA!

**AE:** I am originally from Dallas, Texas but moved to Charleston in 2018 to pursue my career in classical ballet. During my time as a professional dancer, I was able to guest teach and choreograph for the dance majors at SOA a number of times and always had a tremendous experience here. This year when I retired from the ballet company, I had my sights set on a permanent teaching role and the timing couldn’t have worked out better.

**ER:** Where did you go to college? What degrees did you earn?

**AE:** I went to The University of Oklahoma where I earned a degree in Classical Ballet Performance. During my time at OU, I danced pre-professionally with Oklahoma Festival Ballet and Contemporary Dance Oklahoma and was able to study choreography, pedagogy, stagecraft, costume construction and more!

**ER:** How did you go down the path of education? How long have you been teaching?

**AE:** This is my eighth year teaching dance. When I began my professional career out here in Charleston, I picked up a few classes a week at a local school to make a bit of extra cash. I quickly realized teaching was much more than a side gig for me. Working with students on their goals and seeing them reach their potential was as gratifying to me as any performance I had ever given personally. And thankfully, I happened to be pretty good at it. I always knew my professional dance career would be limited, and teaching became a way for me to find fulfillment in the art form I love and contribute to its preservation and advancement in our community.

**ER:** Where did you work prior to SOA?

**AE:** Prior to SOA, I danced for Palmetto City Ballet and Unbound Ballet Project and taught for a number of local schools. I also served as a resident supervisor for American Ballet Theatre in Austin, Texas from 2015-2018 and gained amazing experience working with the students and staff in that program. Presently, I continue to dance and choreograph for Unbound Ballet Project and teach at Ballet Academy of Charleston, Creative Edge Dance Center, Dance Conservatory of Charleston, and Dance Lab.

**ER:** Anything you liked or disliked about your own early education?

**AE:** I loved my education and the dance training I received from early childhood through adulthood. I trained with The Ballet Conservatory in Lewisville, Texas and was able to study at American Ballet Theatre, Boston Ballet and The Joffrey Ballet during my time as a student. The training and support I received in these settings helped me refine my technique, establish my work ethic and build the self-confidence I needed to pursue ballet in higher education and later as a professional career. I would also say the years I spent at The University of Oklahoma were invaluable to me. We worked with incredible faculty and guest artists and were held to the highest standards of excellence. This kind of environment pushed me to be the very best version of myself both inside and outside of the studio and has helped me achieve my biggest goals in life.

**ER:** What was your first job? Any important life lessons learned from it?

**AE:** Funny enough, my first job was working with young children at a summer camp. This job taught me a lot about leadership, classroom management and patience (ha!). I also learned the importance of finding my own joy when working with kids! If you’re not having fun, neither are they. I think of this



Ms. Evans

every day, especially when teaching classical ballet. It is such a demanding art form, so it’s important to stay spirited and find the little moments of silliness and camaraderie when we can.

**ER:** Have you ever had a moment/interaction with a student that charmed you in a “this is why I do what I do kind of way?”

**AE:** Every. Single. Day. Never underestimate yourself as a student- you bring your teachers so much happiness just by being YOU!

**ER:** What should students expect to get out of your class?

**AE:** Quality training, nurturing instruction and hopefully a couple well deserved laughs! I want you to leave my class feeling proud of the work you did. If you aren’t a stronger, more confident dancer by the end of the year I don’t believe I’ve done my job to the best of my abilities.

**ER:** Any interests outside of the subject you teach? What do you do to satiate them?

**AE:** I love cooking meals and spending time with my friends and family. We get together for dinners most weekends and try to get to the beach as often as we can. My fiancé and I are also obsessed with home projects. You can find us working in the garage or out in the yard pretty much any day of the week. Currently, I am working on restoring antique chairs for our dining room and Luke is attempting to dig a drainage ditch in the front yard. Lord help us both.

**ER:** What books, movies, games or other media really mean something to you? What do you like about them?

**AE:** I love reading, movies and standup comedy. For me, I really think it’s all about exposing myself to unique perspectives and experiencing life through someone else’s eyes or imagination. It’s pretty incredible we have the gift of creativity as human beings and I want to surround myself with as many creative people and ideas as I possibly can.

**ER:** Any fun facts or tid-bits about yourself you’d like to share here?

**AE:** I just really love my job and am thrilled to be here. Thanks for the warm welcome and chance to introduce myself!

### Mr. Christian Giudice, English

by Lila Hayes

**Lila Hayes:** What classes will you be teaching this year?

**Christian Giudice:** I’ll be teaching English 1, English 1 Honors, English 3, and AP Lang,

**LH:** Where did you grow up, and what brought you to Charleston and SOA?

**CG:** I grew up in South New Jersey in a town called Haddonfield. We moved to Charlotte, North Carolina in 2007, and I started teaching there. I taught at two different public schools in Charlotte. My wife had gotten a job in Charleston, and then we moved here last month.

**LH:** Where did you attend college and what did you study?

**CG:** I majored in English at Villanova and graduated in 1997. I then earned a master’s degree in journalism at Temple in 2003. Around 2001 or 2002 I started writing for newspapers. I worked as the sportswriter for a local paper.

**LH:** How did you become involved in education, and how long have you taught?

**CG:** This is my eighteenth year. I was a little bit unsure about what I wanted to do after college. I planned on going into broadcast journalism, but I started substitute teaching for a while, and I really enjoyed the interaction. I’m more of a people-person, so I wanted to gravitate toward that field and work with kids. Subbing isn’t generally like teaching, but it does allow you to see what the interactions in a typical school are like, your expectations, those types of things.

**LH:** What are a few of your favorite books to read or teach?

**CG:** I’ve read *Nickel Boys* recently. I really like that. I like John Green’s *The Anthropocene Reviewed*.

**LH:** Yes, I read that for my AP Lang class, as well.



Mr. Giudice



**CG:** I don’t know if I would always like that style, but I do like how he writes. I like teaching *Gatsby*. I love teaching *1984*. I love poetry. Terrence Hayes. There’s a poet named Ross Gay, a friend of mine, who I really enjoy reading.

**LH:** I really like Ross Gay’s work. I’m not super familiar with it, but I’ve read pieces of it. You’ve obviously done a good bit of writing of your own. What’s your favorite book that you’ve written?

**CG:** I’ve written four books, one on Roberto Duran, the other ones on Alexis Arguello, Wilfredo Gomez and Hector Camacho, all Latin boxers. I think the last one was probably the one I’m most proud of. I think it was probably the strongest one, just because the emotional element was there that may not have been in the others. That was probably the one that the publisher put the most into; they had multiple editors. It was a process, although Covid slowed down the promotion process because no one was going outside. So a lot of the promoting was done online through Zoom. The book is about a boxer who ended up dying because he was in the wrong place at the wrong time. He had lived his life in a way that was so reckless. I think he realized at the end of his life that if he’d changed the way he lived, he could have been in a better place when he turned 50 or 51. He realized, “I lived this life, and now I have to face the consequences.” And I think a lot of boxers face that. You’re the peak of the sports world and then, for some reason or another you ... maybe education was just not a priority, right? Because you probably grew up in a poor area, and boxing was your way to live a better life. No one really took time to say, “Okay, beyond this, you have to live your life, after you’re 29 or 30 years old. He was the representation of that type of mindset, which leads not only to an interesting story, but also, I think I did a nice job of telling that story.

**LH:** Your book on Roberto Duran has a biopic based on it. What was that experience like, having that made and watching it be created?

**CG:** That was really interesting. So, just a little back story. The boxer didn’t really give me credit for the book. That was a little bit of a letdown. It was hard because I saw some of the things that I did in my book were evident in the movie, some of the lines. So that was a little bit of a difficult moment for me. It would be neat to be able to see that world exist and to see it come to fruition. They took parts of my book, but they didn’t give me credit for it. My other books may be turned into biopics, so I don’t know, but I’m still crossing my fingers on that.

**LH:** Is there anything else you’d like SOA students to know about you as the year begins?

**CD:** I want to be completely immersed in everything that’s happening at this school, although I don’t like the traffic. But I love teaching. I’m very passionate about teaching. You’ve got great students here, so I feel fortunate. I would just say you have a teacher who’s going to try to make learning engaging and fun. I like to make my classes feel like a community, a family, so that we’re all working together.

**LH:** Thank you for taking the time to do this interview.

**CD:** Thank you.

**Ms. Jadyn Lawrence, Math**  
by Frankey Coakley

**Frankey Coakley:** What classes will you be teaching this year?

**Jadyn Lawrence:** Geometry and Statistics

**FC:** Are you a native of Charleston, if not, where did you grow up, and what attracted you to Charleston? And why SOA?

**JL:** I grew up in Kingsport, TN and moved to Charleston in 2019 to go to The College of Charleston to major in marine biology. I ended up at SOA because I student taught here last fall with Mrs. Roff. Once I graduated in December of 2024 I got offered to stay at SOA as a math interventionist and then this spot fell into my lap and I got to stay!

**FC:** Where did you attend college and what degrees did you earn?

**JL:** The College of Charleston where I majored in middle grades education with a concentration in



**Ms. Lawrence**

math and science.

**FC:** How did you become involved in education as a career and how long have you taught?

**JL:** I did YoungLife in high school and became a leader in college and discovered I wanted to continue helping kids navigate through school and all the changes that seem to be constantly happening. This is my first year teaching!

**FC:** Where did you work prior to coming to SOA?

**JL:** I coached gymnastics part time.

**FC:** What did you like or dislike about your own early education? and how does this affect your teaching?

**JL:** Once I got to middle school and on, it seemed I was having to always teach myself math and never really had a teacher invested in me. I seemed to just pass by and go through the motions and just happened to end up fine.

**FC:** What were some of your earliest jobs? What did you learn from them?

**JL:** My first job was as a host at a restaurant. I then worked at Urban Outfitters for a summer. I also worked in the ER at MUSC on night shift as a medical scribe for about a year. I then went to coaching gymnastics which is what I have been doing the past 3 years.

**FC:** Is there any moment or story you’d be willing to share that stands out to you as one of those “this is why I do what I do” moments?

**JL:** I don’t have a specific story, just the overall stereotypes about being “a math person” and the stereotypes around people who are typically good at math. I want to get rid of those in the minds of my students and be that one person that someone has to cheer them on, not just in math.

**FC:** What do you most want students to take away from your classroom?

**JL:** Struggle is good, struggle is how you grow. Sit in the uncomfortable and persevere through it and you are amazed of who you will be on the other side of it. I just want to give them confidence and kindness that they can share with the world around them.

**FC:** What interests do you have inside or outside the subject you teach, and to what degree are you able to pursue them?

**JL:** I love science as well, and still enjoy the medical field. I was in nursing school for a semester before deciding to switch to education. Right now I am not pursuing anything in that direction, but I do know in the back of my head that the medical field will always be there.

**FC:** What books, movies, or musical acts have meant a lot to you? What do you like about them?

**JL:** *Mama Mia* is definitely my favorite movie, musical, acts, you name it I LOVE IT. It just reminds me of my relationship with my mom and just reminds me how much she means to me.

**FC:** Lastly, is there anything else you’d like SOA to know about you as this year begins or any advice you’d like to offer students?

**JL:** To my students I want to say take it one day at a time, and know I am always going to be in your corner!

**Mr. David Loar, Theatre**  
by Cannon Gibbs

**Cannon Gibbs:** Are you native to Charleston? If not, where did you grow up, and what brought you to Charleston? Why SOA?

**David Loar:** I grew up in Richmond, Indiana. I first fell in love with the ocean when my family vacationed in Garden City, SC, back in 1966, and I kept coming back to the South Carolina coast throughout my life. My wife and I finally moved to James Island in 2012, and I don’t plan on leaving—I’m only 10 minutes from my favorite place, Folly Beach. I came to SOA because Mr. Younts, whom I’ve known for 22 years, invited me to teach a 10th-grade class this year. I’ve known about SOA’s outstanding reputation for a long time, so it’s an honor to finally be here.

**CG:** Where did you attend college, what degree did you earn, and why did you choose your path?

**DL:** I earned a BA in English Composition from DePauw University and an MFA in Creative Writing from the University of Massachusetts-Amherst, where I wrote a novel for my thesis. I originally wanted to become a university English professor and novelist. But after teaching college English for three years, I



realized I wasn't happy in that career. Around that time, I auditioned for a Shakespeare play, and from the first rehearsal, I was hooked on acting.

**CG:** Did you have any prior careers before teaching?

**DL:** Plenty! I spent over 15 years waiting tables in cities like New Orleans, Boston, New York, and Charleston. I've done office temp work, taught English at high schools, and even worked as an editor and writer for an arts magazine—whatever I needed to do to keep going while pursuing acting.

**CG:** Do you have any teaching influences?

**DL:** Definitely. My biggest influence was my Advanced Freshman English professor at DePauw, Walker Gilmer. He taught Socratically—asking questions, pushing us to think deeply, and keeping the discussions exciting and fast-paced. He inspired how I teach today.

**CG:** Why do you teach what you teach?

**DL:** Because theatre feels natural to me. After years of performing Shakespeare and teaching Shakespearean workshops, I was offered a high school theatre teaching position in Arizona in 2008. I felt more at home teaching acting than I ever did teaching English because I truly knew the craft.

**CG:** What got you interested in theatre?

**DL:** Once I started acting in college, I never looked back. The rehearsal process, the connection with audiences, the storytelling—it all grabbed me, and it hasn't let go.

**CG:** Why do you teach theatre?

**DL:** Theatre is where I feel most at home. After years of performing Shakespeare and teaching acting workshops, I knew I had something real to offer. Teaching theatre allows me to share what I love while helping students grow as artists.

**CG:** Is there anything else you'd like SOA to know about you as this year begins, or any advice you'd like to offer students?

**DL:** I've had a wide-ranging life—I was a starting quarterback and shortstop in high school, I've biked tens of thousands of miles (including a 1,000-mile ride from North Myrtle Beach to New Orleans to raise money after Hurricane Katrina), and I've spent decades working in the arts. I'm thrilled to be at SOA, teaching students who are passionate about acting. My advice to students? Keep going. Don't quit when things get tough—just keep going.

**Mr. Steven MacLaren, PE**  
by Sage Stoner

**Sage Stoner:** Where did you grow up?

**Steve MacLaren:** I grew up in Rochester, NY, and went to College in Brockport, NY.

**SS:** What drew you to Charleston? Why SOA?

**SM:** I moved to Charleston specifically for a teaching job, and there was some family already living down here. I have taught in elementary schools for 16 years, and I wanted a change/ new challenges as a secondary teacher. SOA had an opening, so I applied and was offered a job. It was an easy decision to accept the offer for me because of the great reputation SOA has.

**SS:** Where did you work before SOA?

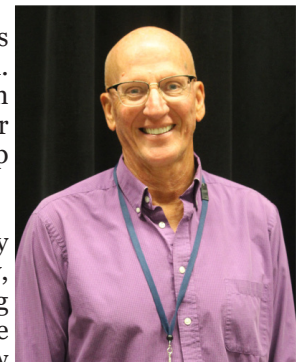
**SM:** I have taught in all Elementary schools for 16 years. I started teaching in Rochester, NY, then Fayetteville, NC, and finally in Charleston/ Berkeley County.

**SS:** What were your earliest jobs, and what did you learn from them?

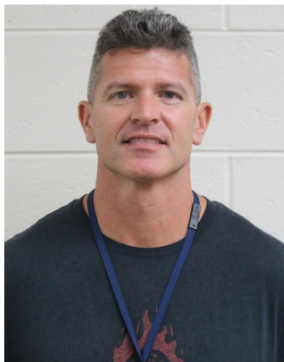
**SM:** My very first job was busing tables at a local restaurant when I turned 16. I remember saying, "I'd better go to college to get a better job than this," cause I did not like it at all.

**SS:** What movies have meant the most to you?

**SM:** Some of the most meaningful movies I have watched are *Finding Forester*,



Mr. Loar



Mr. MacLaren

*Good Will Hunting*, and *Braveheart*.

**SS:** What interests do you have inside or outside P.E, and to what degree are you able to pursue them?

**SM:** Currently, being a good dad and husband is what consumes my attention outside of work.

**SS:** Is there anything else you would like SOA to know about you?

**SM:** I am a San Francisco 49er and New York Yankee fan!

**SS:** Favorite Joke?

**SM:** I had a quiet game of tennis today.... There was no racket.

**Ms. Kellie Otwell, Resource**  
by Sheridan King

**Sheridan King:** Are you a native of Charleston? If not, where did you grow up, and what made you want to come to Charleston? And why SOA?

**Kellie Otwell:** I am not a native of Charleston. I grew up in a small town in South Alabama. My family came to Charleston for its beauty, its charm, and the educational opportunities for my daughter.

**SK:** Where did you go to college and with what degree?

**KO:** I attended Auburn University, where I earned my Bachelor of Science in Education with a focus on behavioral and learning disabilities.

**SK:** What is your favorite memory from college?

**KO:** All of the traditional things that come with being a student on Auburn's campus. On some days during the afternoons, you could watch the trainers with the eagle- it was beautiful. On Fridays, my roommates and I would go to Toomers lemonade- my Dad would reminisce every time my family visited me because that store was there when he was a student. And, most importantly, rolling Toomer's Corner with toilet paper after a big win!!!! War Eagle!!!

**SK:** What are some of your hobbies?

**KO:** Loom knitting, watching new Netflix series.

**SK:** Where did you work before SOA?

**KO:** Meeting Street Middle School at Brentwood



Ms. Otwell

**Ms. Liv Bonnet, Student Teacher**  
by Cannon Gibbs

**Cannon Gibbs:** Are you from here? If not, where are you from?

**Liv Bonnet:** I am originally from Atlanta, Georgia, but I moved to Charleston when I was 14. My dad grew up on James Island, so when we had the opportunity to move to Charleston, we took it!

**CG:** Where did you go to school, and what did you study?

**LB:** I attended Wando High School (go Warriors!), and now I'm a student at the College of Charleston. I'm a double major in Secondary Education and English with a minor in Linguistics, and I've already completed my B.A. in English.

**CG:** What inspired you to become a teacher?

**LB:** There are many reasons, but my biggest inspiration has been my little sister. Her freshman year of high school was especially difficult because our dad passed away. During that time, I saw how much her math teacher supported her, not only as a student but also as a person. I already had some exposure to the field of education, but witnessing the difference that teacher made for her inspired me to do the same for future students.

**CG:** What subject or grade level do you specialize in?

**LB:** I'm working toward a certification in Secondary English, which means teaching high school English classes, grades 9–12.



Ms. Bonnet



**CG:** Have you taught anywhere else before coming here?

**LB:** Yes! I've gained experience through my education courses, teaching lessons at Military Magnet Academy and Lucy Beckham High School. I also worked as a substitute teacher during the Spring 2025 semester, teaching in both middle and high schools across Charleston and Berkeley Counties.

**CG:** What were your first impressions of our school?

**LB:** My first time at School of the Arts was on PowderPuff day in February 2025! I remember being so impressed by the energy and enthusiasm of the students. It was clear that the students were comfortable to be themselves, which made me feel more comfortable to be myself.

**CG:** What goals do you have for yourself as a student teacher?

**LB:** My main goal is to learn as much as I can, in every way possible. I especially want to learn from the students—what they enjoy, what challenges them, and how their experiences can be brought into the classroom. And on a more practical note, I just learned how to use the copier, and I've heard that's a rite of passage for every teacher!

**CG:** What do you enjoy doing outside of teaching?

**LB:** I love listening to music and building very specific Spotify playlists. I also love watching movies and nerding out over them.

**CG:** Did you have a favorite teacher growing up? What made them special?

**LB:** I've had many amazing teachers, but one who stands out is my Algebra I teacher at Wando, Ms. McGuffin. She would let me help grade work after school when my ride home was late, and she always made me feel included and valued as part of the class.

**CG:** Where do you see yourself in 5 years?

**LB:** I'm not exactly sure, but I hope to be teaching in the classroom. At the same time, I know life can take unexpected turns, so I'm open to wherever the path leads me.



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## 2025 Grad Ava Borrelli Competes in Oratorical World Championship

by Dante Criscitello

"I stumbled over my words, shook incessantly, and my heart pounded like crazy," Ava Borrelli told *Applause*, recalling the first time she recited her speech in public, one of four competitors in the West Ashley Optimist International Club local level competition in the Bonds Wilson Library last April. She did not win.

But her second place finish was enough to move her to the South Carolina Regional Contest on Pawley's Island and allow more time to develop her presentation, the theme of which was "How Optimism Has Guided Me Through Trying Times." While Ava had a few weeks to memorize, internalize and continue to master her speech, she still did not come out on top, taking second again, this time not losing to an SOA peer, but to a senior from Myrtle Beach. But again, the top two moved on, this time to the State Championship in Columbia.

Ava continued to work on her mannerisms, gestures, and phrasing, reciting the speech to herself at work, at home, in front of her AP English classmates, and at lunchtime with Dr. Cusatis who provided guidance and feedback.

"Repeated practice really helped increase my confidence and improve my speech," she recalls.

In Columbia she faced the state's top eight competitors, including the Pawley's Island champ, and her work paid off. Ava was named South Carolina's State Champion, given a \$2,500 scholarship and was off to an all-expenses-paid trip to St. Louis University to compete for the US Southeast Regional title in mid-July. During the three months that lapsed, she continued mastering her speech, which focused on the role of optimism in overcoming severe childhood depression.

"The competition was an opportunity for me to express something



**Ava at the World Championship**

personal that I was vulnerable about, as well as an opportunity to face my fear and potentially motivate others while doing it."

On Thursday afternoon, July 17, Ava took the stage at St. Louis University representing South Carolina against the winners from eight other Southern states. The next morning, when the winners of the Region competitions were announced, she learned that she took first place, earning a \$5000 scholarship. That morning she gave her speech final time, competing as one of nine international finalists. Although she did not win the world title, she says, getting to it was well worth it.

"Participating in the World Championship was such a cool experience," she says. "I met others from across the country, and although I did not win a trophy, the well-wishes and compliments from the other contestants, their families, and the staff were even more valuable to me, as was the support from my family and Dr. Cusatis."

What is her advice to anyone considering entering the contest this school year?

"Absolutely do it. Write and speak with passion. The truer you are to yourself and your beliefs, the more people connect with you on a deeper level."

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## Classic Movie Review: *Gremlins* (1984)

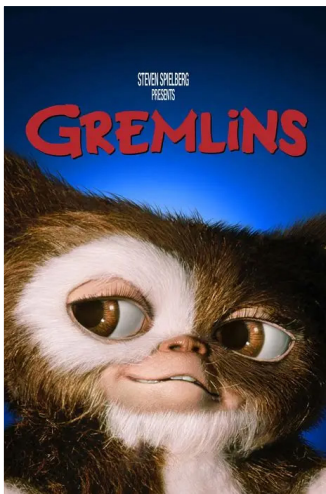
by Frankey Coakley

*Gremlins* raised the bar for popular films in the 1980's, when sci-fi, fantasy, and horror were at an all-time high, with *Gremlins* comprising all three!

Sitting during Christmas, watching these silly green creatures causing havoc must have been a big highlight of that year, truly memorable.

The ominous setting, combined with the slow-blooming comedy, always made this movie pop out. The start of the movie presents a fun, family friendly movie. A kid receiving a wholesome gift that makes the movie feel like E.T., then BAM! It goes straight down South. The movie goes from wholesome turned to "hole in your psyche" kind of evil, and an evil turned hilarious as the movie progresses. Gizmo is SO CUTE!! and just him alone makes this movie worth watching.

I love how even though you can tell how it will go, its still so fun and filled with different anticipations! This movie is one of my favorites, and I would definitely recommend it!



## Contemporary Movie Review: *F1* (2025)

by Rachel Wheelon

The sport of F1 has been overwhelmingly underappreciated since its start in 1950. Though its high intensity, complex nature, and neverending drama is something any audience would crave, this European sport didn't start gaining popularity largely until 2018 when Liberty Media expanded coverage, and Netflix's hit docu-series, *Formula 1: Drive to Survive* was released. However, the new *F1* movie has caused a record breaking increase in viewership of live races. But how much of the movie was accurate? What was altered for Hollywood?

Here's what it got right: the significance of media. F1 has a heavy reliance on media to increase fanbases, and more importantly, earn money. The



cost to pay for the cars, materials, workers, drivers, and travel is possible only through sponsorships, which only gain attention through social coverage. The movie does a great job at showing just how much pressure drivers are under to increase their following. For example, Damson Idris' character, Joshua Pearce, being told to post and engage with the press by his manager is something every F1 driver can relate to.

And the dislike of the press, such as that expressed by Brad Pitt's character, Sonny Hayes, is also accurate. Max Verstappen, four-time world champion for Red Bull Racing, isn't afraid to show his dislike of media, often handing out snappy remarks and fine-worthy answers (holds record for most penalty points on his license due to behavior outside of the car).

Competition. With only twenty spots available (soon to be twenty-two), drivers start very young to move up in the ranks, and even with years of experience, a seat still isn't guaranteed, so the competition is high. Your teammate being your biggest competitor builds Hayes and Pearce's relationship, and many currently on the grid. The McLaren drivers, with only a few points separating them from World Champion, are often going against each other for a P1 finish.

This brings us to what the movie does wrong: also competition. The likelihood that Javier Bardem's character, Ruben Cervantes, would have offered Hayes the seat is very low given his past actions and injury in the sport. It's more likely that a reserve driver or a racer from F2 would have fought for a spot.

Driving strategy. While having a plan just for "combat" made for intense conflict and action-packed scenes, it wouldn't do so well in an actual race. All the damage Hayes caused to other cars would have placed him under investigation by F1's governing board, the F.I.A., and he would've received numerous penalties.

For those just getting into F1, the movie is great, but die-hard fans, be warned. This is not a completely accurate, followed-all-the-rules, did-everything-right film. Much of it would never happen under F.I.A. guidelines. However, Hollywood definitely kept the edge-of-your-seat feeling present in the film, and while the plot wasn't accurate, it was still entertaining and worth the watch with an open mind.

## Classic Album Review: *Revolver* (1966)

by Trinity Collins

When you're trying to find a playlist to match your ever-changing mood, *Revolver* by The Beatles is definitely the album for you! The coolest thing about this album is that every song is different, probably matching every mood you're in. The album came out in 1966, but most of the songs don't sound dated at all. The Beatles were already hugely famous at this point, but this album showed they weren't just writing simple love songs anymore; they were trying new things and making music in ways people

hadn't heard before.

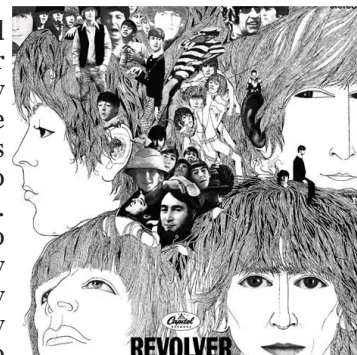
The first song on the album is "Taxman," in which George Harrison sings the lead. Usually, on the first song on Beatles albums, Paul or John sings the main part, making this one stands out. This song comes across as very aggressive, featuring an amazing guitar solo by Paul McCartney (the best Beatle).

The second song is "Eleanor Rigby," which is my favorite song on the album. It features only strings, no guitar or drums. When I listen to music, lyrics barely play a part in my head; it's the way they're sung. I also might be biased because Paul McCartney is my favourite Beatle, but the way he sings the lyrics just feels right.

Other songs stand out in different ways. "Here, There and Everywhere" is soft and sweet, and sounds like the classic Beatles, while "Tomorrow Never Knows" is the complete opposite. This track is full of weird sounds and loops that make it feel like you're in a dream.

Compared to earlier LPs like *Help!* or *Rubber Soul*, this album feels like a big step forward. They stopped touring around this time, so they had more space to experiment in the studio, which is why you hear all the backwards guitars, layered vocals, and new effects.

I think what makes *Revolver* so good is the variety, yet also the unity, that characterizes this record. Some songs are catchy, some are sad, and some are just weird. It shows how much The Beatles were growing as artists. So kids, maybe instead of listening to Taylor Swift, you should give The Beatles a try!



## Contemporary Album Review: *Pilgrim* (2025)

by Lila Hayes

Jesse Welles' *Pilgrim* isn't an easily defined album. You can be reliably certain I'm telling the truth, coming from someone who's spent the last week or so trying and failing to define it. But what it is, rather than easily defined, is an album with complex, topical lyrics about our society and current events, but also one that is deeply introspective.

The folk singer-songwriter released *Pilgrim*, his fourth studio album, on July 4, and in it 11 urgently important songs. The second song on the album and one of my favorites—though I could say that about any one of them—is "Change Is In The Air." It features Welles' trademark cigarette-soaked rasp and acoustic guitar, but more importantly a voice singing about impending change and bleakly unconvinced of his own words that promises



He includes a nod to Bowie’s “Changes” with his own stuttered “Ch-ch-changes,” a song about a constantly evolving world being referenced in a song longing for those adaptations.

If you’re not looking for a politically engaged song—first of all, you’re probably in the wrong place if you’d really like to avoid politics— you might prefer “Wild Onions,” the last and easily one of the best songs on *Pilgrim* with its expertly woven and rawly personal lyrics, a warmer song compared to the dripping cynicism of “Philanthropist.”

Welles, with his Woody Guthrie and Bob Dylan-esque protest songs and voice, sings to a disoriented audience in a stirring political climate. His voice may be rough, but his intricate songwriting makes his songs flow like the stream of time that he sings about in “Pilgrim,” the title track on the album.

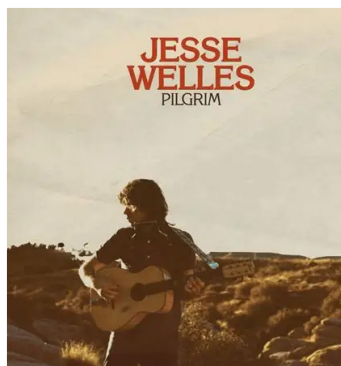
*Pilgrim* isn’t an album you can skate through, or something that you listen to once and understand fully. But if you stick around for it, Welles is a musician that twists his words into something entirely relevant and even more rewarding.

## Classic Book Review: *Fahrenheit 451* (1953)

by Cannon Gibbs

Ray Bradbury’s *Fahrenheit 451* is not just a novel about burning books—it is a warning. Set in a future dystopian society where books are outlawed and firemen set fires instead of extinguishing them, the novel follows Guy Montag, a fireman who begins to question the world around him. His story begins when he meets a young lady by the name of Clarisse. Clarisse shares with Montag and eventually asks Montag, “Are you happy?” This sets Montag into a spiral of doubt that grows as Montag encounters people who risk everything for books and as he realizes that his own life, lack of thought, meaning, and real connection, is as empty as the world around him.

*Fahrenheit 451*, the title alluding to the temperature at which paper burns, feels eerily modern. Today’s world is full of screens, distractions,



and constant noise. Bradbury warns us that when people stop asking “why,” they stop being truly alive. This society of censorship and shallow entertainment reflects a fear we should still take notice of: that trading genuine living for comfort might lose curiosity, morality, and progress altogether.

This novel really explores the repercussions of comfort. Without books, we lose lessons of the past. Humans have the power to learn from history—but only if we preserve it. As philosopher George Santayana said, “Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.” Books carry those memories.

There’s a concept called *Übermensch*—the individual who rises above conformity to create new values—that is stamped in Montag. Surrounded by a form-fitting society, he chooses to break free, to think, and to fight for something more.

Reading *Fahrenheit 451* changed how I see the world. It made me notice how easy it is to be distracted, how tempting it is to stop noticing and asking questions, and how vital it is to resist that temptation. Books do more than tell stories; they teach us, challenge us, and remind us of who we are. Bradbury’s purpose here is clear: if we abandon thought, we abandon ourselves.

## Restaurant Review: The Flying Biscuit

by Trinity Collins

The mural of a flying pig grabs your attention the second you walk into The Flying Biscuit Café in West Ashley. The walls are covered in designs that make the place instantly feel cheerful. Right after, you might notice the smell of bacon and pancakes filling the room. It’s the kind of vibe that puts you in a good mood before you even sit down.

The staff adds to that with kindness that feels genuine, not stiff or overly professional. My friends and I showed up at 11:43 A.M., and even though it was busy, we were seated by 11:47. We ordered, and about 15 minutes later, we got our food. Everything looked good, smelled good, and came out hot, which isn’t always guaranteed at busy brunch places.

I ordered the Stuffed French Toast Breakfast (\$17.99), and it was the highlight of my day. The toast was fluffy, topped with custard and berry sauce, plus a random strawberry stranded on the plate (they probably expect you to post it on Insta or something). It was sweet but not too much, just enough to feel like dessert for breakfast. On the side came eggs cooked just right, crispy bacon, a ‘flying’ biscuit, and creamy grits that balanced the plate with something savory.

Most of the prices on the menu are around \$12–\$20 for breakfast entrées, and the portions are

big enough that you’ll probably need a to-go box. For how much food you get, the prices were pretty good, especially compared to other restaurants in Charleston.

The atmosphere tied everything together. It was lively but not overwhelming. There wasn’t music playing, but the hum of people talking gave it energy without making it hard to hear your own group. It felt like the kind of place where you can eat too much food with friends, laugh a lot, and never feel rushed out.

Overall, The Flying Biscuit Café is one of the better affordable breakfast spots in Charleston. The food looks good, tastes even better, and the prices make sense for what you get.

Look out for the next issue of *Applause* on Friday, October 10!



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## September Horoscopes

by Ellis Richards

### Virgo (August 23 - September 22)

I know your co-workers are SO dumb, but please, as the bank of every friend group we're begging you to stick to it for the check. Think of Outback Steakhouse! Domino's! The Chick-fil-A! A banquet with your besties is surely worth the added headache, right?...Right?!

### Libra (September 23 - October 22)

The autumn leaves and intense showers bring an explosion of natural beauty to the fold! Invest in a camera, use your phone, or even go retro and buy a Polaroid, because it's the perfect time for aesthetic photos to fill your monthly dumps on Insta. With some practice, you can be an Adobe Lightroom warrior!

### Scorpio (October 23 - November 21)

Diaries, journals, booklets, lockets, the tomes of your heart are everflowing and maybe overflowing, so innovate! The margins of your favorite book, napkins, your notes app, use even the underside of your desk for extra storage and become a documentarian of all those thoughts and emotions!

### Sagittarius (November 22 - December 21)

Sojourning, journeying, and traveling some more! It was just a week ago you told me about your trip to Rome, and now you're going to Italy?! Sagittarius I ask for your sake and my sanity to relax, go shop downtown on 51st, visit Boone Hall for some fresh fruit, go hang with another sign! I know the grass is greener across the water or in another state, but ours is still pretty fresh too!

### Capricorn (December 22 - January 19)

As we creep closer to the spookiest month of the year, the leaves shift from verdant to rust, pumpkins bring a fresh pop of orange to every porch in suburbia, and the time to save money is now, dearest Capricorn! Tuck your bills and forms under the mat and go frolic in the leaf piles so (un)intentionally laid out at your discretion. And please, for the love of all things good and innocent, let another sign cover your 1 AM Doordash cravings; your wallet will thank you!

### Aquarius (January 20 - February 18)

Parents? Siblings? Friends? The people who stick with you through and through are sure to offer support in your time of need and they want you to know! Keep an eye out for trinkets, signs, and worldly goodies as you, my friend, are due for some reassurance and relaxation.

### Pisces (February 19 - March 20)

Expect to spend some time through the looking glass going into this misty fall. A vibrant and detailed inner world like yours is bound to draw in some visitors from the other side. Hang out in the dark, explore the woods, go places with that good "weird" energy and expect the unexpected, you're quite the medium after all.

### Aries (March 29 - April 19)

Even in the storm of the early year workload, changing relationships, and new schedules, a tenacious spirit such as yourself can weather anything that comes your way. With such a deep well of passion the assignments will graze by your cheek like a light breeze, so bend your knees when you land Aries! We're rooting for you! Just please stop trying to convince me to take more AP's, my pea-brain can't handle it.

### Taurus (April 20 - May 20)

Slow ya roll! I know most love to skip over the terms and conditions, probably sign a big fat X on the line and go about their business, but you, Taurus, know that calculation and contemplation are the keys to the kingdom so to speak. Study hard, position yourself for growth, and play the long game because your wisdom will be rewarded in time.

### Gemini (May 21 - June 20)

Quit all that zipping around and read for a sec, I've got news for you, our walking PR specialist! You're a good communicator in all kinds of ways-talking, texting, FaceTime-but remember just because I don't want to call until three in the morning doesn't mean I hate you, I swear! Also, please clear out your spam folder in Gmail, because why on Earth do you still have an offer for a discount galaxy print neck-pillow from 2021? For posterity?

### Cancer (June 21 - July 22)

You're good, Cancer! Really good! I swear it's like you have a PHD in helping people articulate all those weird sorta-known emotions like sonder and andronitis. However, it's the main ones that may catch you off guard this month. So remember to take whatever time you need to process and re-center.

### Leo (July 23 - August 22)

Put down those stock trackers, planners, and portfolios, and trust your gut! The ever-capable Leo has no need for preparation, set-up, or prior knowledge, and you shock me every time with how you wing it and still get an A! ...Please share your talents with us lesser signs, we're begging.



# Taylor Swift Trivia

by Sheridan King

1. What is Taylor Swift’s middle name?
2. What is Travis Kelce’s jersey number?
3. What year was she born?
4. Finish the lyric: “It’s a love story, baby just say \_\_\_\_”
5. What is her mom’s name?
6. What was her first album?
7. What color is the theme of her upcoming album?
8. What does “Taylor’s Version” mean?
9. Who was she famously in a feud with?
10. How many cats does she have?

## Answers

1. Allison, 2. Eighty-Seven, 3. 1989, 4. Yes, 5. Andrea, 6. Debut, 7. Orange, 8. A remake where she now owns the music., 9. Kanye West, 10. Three

Kynisha Middleton,  
12th grade Band



Fletcher Seminaroti

2/10

1. Emily
2. 87
3. 1987
4. I want it that way
5. Amy
6. Bad
7. Blue
8. A remake of her former album
9. One of her exes or SZA
10. 13 (her lucky number)

Henry Duncan,  
10th grade Visual Arts



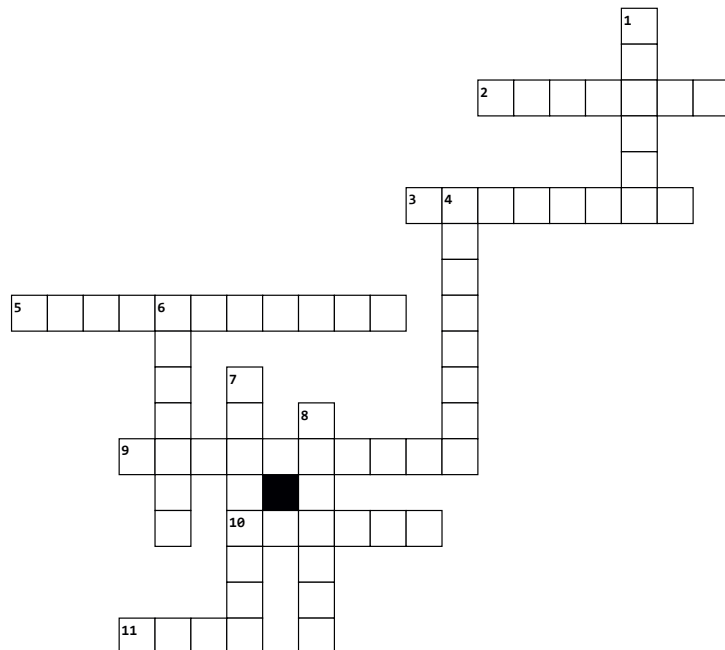
Fletcher Seminaroti

4/10

1. Beyonce
2. 87
3. 1982
4. Please
5. Laufey
6. Album #1
7. Pink
8. She owns it/remake
9. Kanye
10. 3 cats

# School Supplies Crossword

by Sheridan King



## Across

2. Holds your written notes
3. Used to cut paper
5. Colorfully emphasizes all of your important information
9. Used to solve problems in math
10. Erasable test-taking writing utensil
11. Reading material about a specific subject

## Down

1. Holds all of your papers (in 3 rings)
4. The only approved electronic device
6. Holds the key to the school
7. Holds all of your school supplies
8. Has important due dates and a calendar



L	A	U	T	U	M	N	C	U	E	P	T	E	K
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E	M	O	C	L	E	W	W	L	P	A	A	A	E
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September Word Search

SEPTEMBER  
SCHOOL  
APPLES  
LEAVES  
LABOR-DAY  
PUMPKIN-SPICE  
WELCOME

AUTUMN  
WINDY  
EQUINOX  
LUKEWARM  
HARVEST  
FALL  
VIRGO

SOA Sudoku

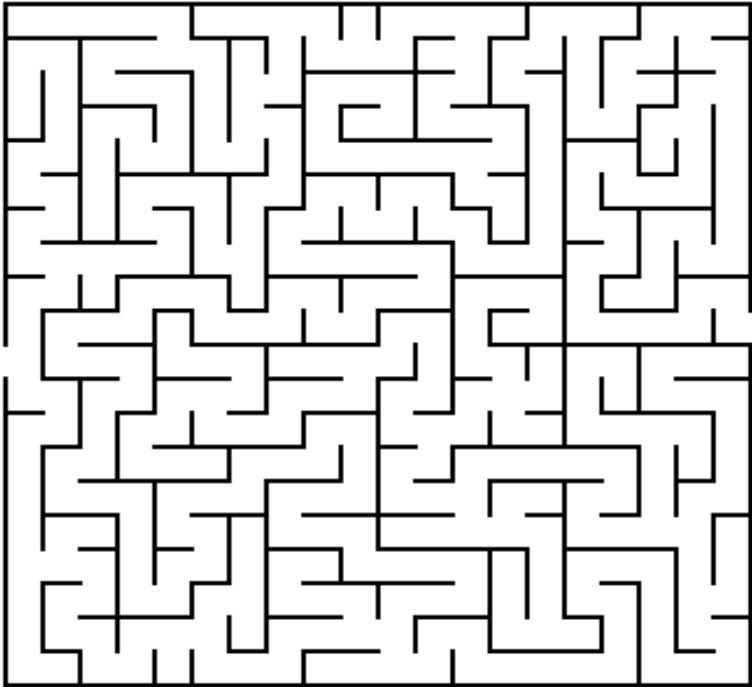
by Frankey Coakley

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5	2					1	3	4



Help Ms. Cipolla find her papers!

by Frankey Coakley







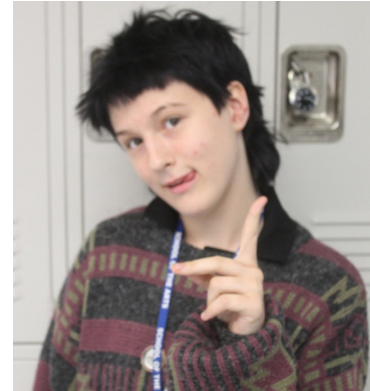
“Lost my math packet 3 times.”

Sam Mason, 6th grade Creative Writing



“I almost got bit by an alpaca.”

Hanna Fazzari, 7th grade Visual Arts



“I ran around my neighborhood dressed as a pirate.”

Luke Threatt, 8th Grade Visual Arts



“My older sister forgot how to swim while swimming with dolphins.”

Ms. Bonnet, English Student Teacher

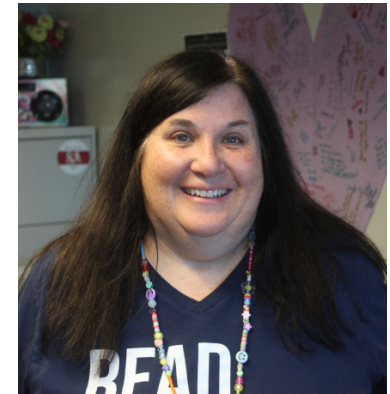


“I saw the *Barber of Seville* at the Vienna State Opera. It was very funny.”

Dr. Selby, Strings Teacher

# What was the funniest thing that happened to you this summer?

by Cannon Gibbs and Fletcher Seminaroti



“I accidentally entered the car wash with my window open.”

Ms. Gomez, Media Specialist



“I got jumped by 3-year-olds at work.”

Joshua Simonis, 9th Grade Vocal



“The same random people took our photo in Philadelphia and New York.”

Katie Childers, 10th Grade Visual Arts



“I almost got run off the road by a tractor-trailer.”

Eli Ellington, 11th Grade Band



“I got pantsed in a Waffle House.”

Grey Harlos, 12th Grade Piano