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Flags hang outside the main entrance of Zoellner Arts Center on Packer Avenue. Each Friday, Zoellner posts a video highlighting the artistic talents of a student, faculty or staff member for the Lehigh community to view. (Hallie Fuchs, B&W staff)

Zoellner Arts Center starts Spotlight Series to highlight theatre performances

BY ELLA MORRISSEY — ; PUBLISHED APRIL 27, 2021, 12:00 PM

LIFESTYLE

Without being able to hold traditional in-person events, Zoellner Arts Center has been finding new and creative ways to maintain a connection between the Lehigh and Bethlehem communities.

“The Zoeller Spotlight Series” was started for the fall 2020 semester as a way to highlight the talents of Lehigh students, faculty and staff from different departments, backgrounds and interests.

“This intimate series allowed us to use technology as a tool to reach out to those who were or are feeling isolated, disconnected and removed from the daily norms of our lives,” said Mark Wilson, executive director at Zoellner.

Lynn Farley, the director of the series, said in an email that Zoellner is on track to produce 24 spotlights by the end of the academic year. The series showcased 13 individuals last semester, including both Lehigh students and staff.

Omogolo “Bishop” Pikinini, ‘23

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An international student from Botswana, Omogolo "Bishop" Pikinini, '23, said he has always had an interest in music, primarily American rap and music by Tupac Shakur.

Pikinini started out writing poetry and learned he could translate those skills into creating rap verses.

When the pandemic hit, Pikinini couldn't return home to Botswana, and instead focused on creating music while staying at Lehigh.

"The pro-artist was born in that period," he said. "Music became the only thing I could resort to."

Pikinini performed for the Spotlight Series twice, both times performing original songs. He said most of his writing comes from trying to be relatable to the Lehigh community.

"When you write music, you are aware of where you are and what people are going through," Pikinini said. "Being at Lehigh influences my music and what I choose to write about."

Pikinini's YouTube channel has blossomed from motivational speaking, to poetry and now to sharing his music.

After receiving a positive response from the community, Pikinini said he hopes to collaborate more with Zoellner through music projects and studying his craft.

Michael Jorgensen, Professor of Practice, Lehigh Music Department

Michael Jorgensen, originally from Cincinnati, took an interest in the violin at a young age after attending Lollipops Family Concerts put on by the Cincinnati Symphony.

Although he didn't start taking lessons until a few years later, Jorgensen said he quickly became captivated by pursuing violin as a career.

"The first day I came home from my lesson, I told my mom I'm going to be a violinist for my job," Jorgensen said.

After living in London for a few years, Jorgensen found his way to Lehigh through an interest in being both a teacher and performer. He has been here for the past eight years.

Jorgensen said he was grateful for the opportunity to perform a violin piece by Johann Sebastian Bach on the Zoellner stage, despite it not being in front of a large audience.

"Being able to provide any comfort or respite from what's going on in people's daily lives, I think that really means something to people," he said.

Jorgensen said he is hoping to record another performance over the summer that includes works from various composers such as Beethoven and Clara, and Robert Schumann.

Leah Canel, '21

For her spotlight, Leah Canel, '21, performed "Work" by Emma Lazarus.

Since the Lehigh theatre season was virtual this year, Canel, a theatre studies major, saw the Spotlight Series as a way to give back.

"It's really hard to continue theatre because of COVID, so it was a nice way to bridge the gap between the greater Bethlehem community and the people who typically perform on the Lehigh stage," Canel said.

Canel got involved in theatre at a young age. She first took it up as a hobby, but now it has become something she can apply to her classes and homework.

"Theatre and performance in general helps everybody understand because it's appealing to people's emotions and everybody has emotions, no matter what your background is," Canel said.

Canel's senior thesis project, a play titled "Through the Window," is being produced by the Department of Theatre and opens May 7.

Alex Radus, Lehigh University lawyer from the Office of Assistant General Counsel

As assistant general counsel, Alex Radus has worked on many of Lehigh's entertainment contracts, which is how he was recruited to perform original songs on the guitar for the Spotlight Series.

Radus has been playing guitar and singing for most of his life, he said, and later gravitated toward composing his own music. Before the pandemic, he regularly performed at MusikFest, Godfrey Daniels Coffee House and The FunHouse.

For Radus, performing his music for the Lehigh community was special, he said.

"A lot of people that I work with on a daily basis emailed me saying, 'I had no idea that you played, that was cool and I enjoyed the song,'" Radus said.

Radus and his band are releasing a debut album on May 18. He also has another album coming out towards the end of the year that focuses on Americana-style music and his talents as a singer-songwriter.

Jack Catlett, '23

Jack Catlett, '23, a design major, started drawing comics at a young age that helped propel his interests when he arrived at Lehigh.

"I'm always using creative thinking and that's how I find direction in my own personal art projects," Catlett said.

For one of his classes, Catlett created a video of him doing a self-portrait and was later recruited to the Spotlight Series to talk about the experience.

Although it has been difficult learning virtually and not having hands-on projects, Catlett said he has been able to find his own personal direction outside of school

Catlett is working on a clothing brand and has been creating animations for it over the past year.

"I think it's always important for people to work on their own side projects," Catlett said.

The Zoellner Spotlight Series will continue into next fall.