



PRIOR

Celebrating
2023-24

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An Inspiring Year

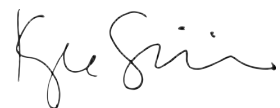
Reflecting on 2023–24 at The Prior Performing Arts Center

What a season! Our second year saw an astonishing array of activity as campus community members, alumni, and Greater Worcester residents found hundreds of reasons to head to The Prior.

It's been thrilling to witness the many ways in which the center's promise has been met this year: by the bold artistic experiments of the academic arts units, by an impressive range of arts-integrative programming from other departments, and by the imagination and confidence students brought to work they produced at The Prior. The Prior Presents series was full of highlights, including an intimate Q&A with Rhiannon Giddens before her stunning, sold-out concert (see this report's back cover!). And I won't soon forget the reminder that Holy Cross' many dedicated student-athletes are artists in their own right: a 300-person watch party in the Booth Media Lab for Women's Basketball as the team took on Caitlin Clark during NCAA March Madness.

I've also observed our community's hopes for The Prior fulfilled in quieter moments. Worcester high schoolers on behind-the-scenes tours, even pinning their own fashion designs to mannequins in the Costume Shop. Student AV apprentices training at the sound console in the Luth Concert Hall with Prior staff. Friends chatting at high-top tables in the Beehive. Colleagues taking a break from their work day at the O'Connor Family Cafe.

It's an honor to collaborate with colleagues across the campus and the city in bringing this game-changing new facility to life. I hope this brief catalog of some of the year's most exciting accomplishments and other noteworthy moments will ignite your ideas for even more ways we can come together at The Prior in the months and years ahead.



— Kyle Frisina

Interim Director, Prior Performing Arts Center



The Prior and Aspire

The Prior plays a central role in the College's new strategic plan, which envisions a bold future for Holy Cross and its community.



"As a Jesuit, Catholic college, the arts have long been an integral part of how we pursue and appreciate knowledge of ourselves and the world around us.

Our strategic plan, *Aspire*, calls us to greater focus on academic excellence and on our relationship with the city of Worcester. Both Holy Cross and the city are now the proud home for a new, world-class arts and performing space.

Through The Prior Performing Arts Center, we honor our tradition; expand the world of opportunity for future students; and deepen relationships with our Worcester community."

— Vincent D. Rougeau
*President,
College of the Holy Cross*

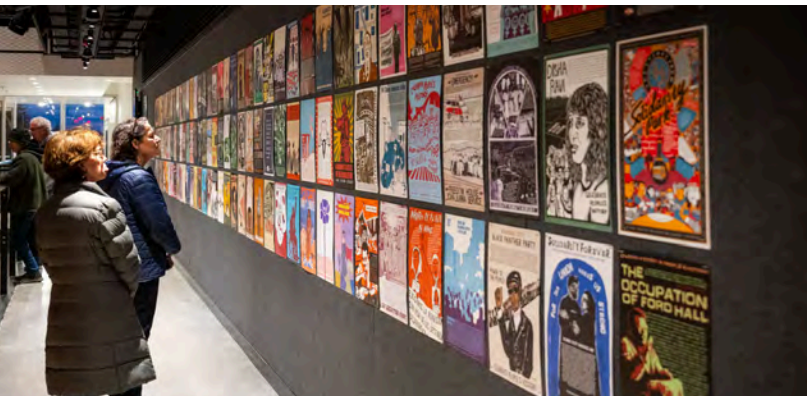
President Vincent D. Rougeau with poet, lawyer, and Prior Presents artist Reginald Dwayne Betts

By the Numbers

2023–24 was a record-breaking second year at The Prior.

252

performances and events



19,575

audience members, event attendees, and students enrolled in classes at The Prior

34

of Holy Cross' 64 academic units participated in courses and programming at The Prior



72

student workers from 29 majors

Academic Arts

Performances, lectures, and exhibitions from the academic arts departments and programs transported us to other worlds.





Previous page: Chamber Singers, Department of Music; *The Good Person of Setzuan*, Department of Theatre and Dance

This page: Francisco Cantu, Creative Writing Program; Spring Dance Concert, Department of Theatre and Dance; *Nostalgia of Now: Works from the 2024 Senior Concentration Seminar*, Department of Visual Arts



Prior Presents

Our signature public-facing series merged thrilling live events by visiting artists with educational and outreach activities.



"It was an incredible experience to get to talk to Suh about the craft of his play *The Far Country*. The way he talked about dialogue has influenced how I write now."

— Creative Writing student on class visit with playwright Lloyd Suh



Clockwise from top left: LaToya Ruby Frazier, photographer and Heidi Brake Smith '82 Fund for the Arts artist; Brooklyn Rider; Boston Lyric Opera



"Something that stood out to me was how interactive the whole session was. . . I was locked in and engaged the whole time."

— First-year Montserrat student on cluster-wide event with Deborah Goffe

"Body Stories" Workshop with choreographer Deborah Goffe; Compagnie Hervé Koubi



The Iris and B. Gerald Cantor Art Gallery

Celebrating 40 years of The Cantor from its new home in The Prior, the gallery continued to recognize and uplift **faculty-led initiatives, contemporary artmaking, student practice,** and **interdisciplinary programming,** engaging with departments from Religious Studies to Anthropology to Deaf Studies.

Always Be Around: Corita Kent, Community, and Pedagogy



Arts-Integrative Programming



Departments across campus generated arts-integrative programming ranging from an **exhibition showcasing an interdisciplinary Art History and Geology course** to a **concert by No-No Boy**, presented by the Department of History and other units, which illuminated hidden Asian American histories through folk songs, sound pieces, live projections, and storytelling.

Students Take the Lead

In year two at The Prior, students produced fashion shows, dance concerts, a cappella, open mics, and a "battle of the bands" with a haze machine. **What's next?**

Caribbean and African Student Association Fashion Show



Welcome, Worcester

This year brought artists into Worcester schools and Worcester students to The Prior. The excitement was infectious.



"The access to well-equipped studios and the supportive environment have significantly impacted my creative journey. I am deeply thankful for the transformative experience and the doors it has opened for me in developing my art and design portfolio."

— Treyvon N.
North High School student

Treyvon N. with Steven Winston, North High GEAR UP Director, in the Costume Shop; Singer and composer Mason Byne with Burncoat and South High Choruses

"Seeing the pure joy in my students' faces as they sat in a brand new theater and watched a moving performance featuring a poet who had come to their own classroom meant everything to me."

— Lauren Delgado '16
Burncoat High School teacher



Experiential Learning

Shop assistants, programming assistants, AV assistants, front of house managers, and more: student workers are the engine of The Prior.

"Working at The Prior has been one of the ways I've grown to understand our motto 'People for and with others.' With the nature of my position as a Front of House Manager, I am forced to think about others' needs before myself, and how I can best be of service to those who are counting on me. I am also able to work towards a common goal with my fellow student workers."

— Elise O'Neill '26

"There are many experiences that I could call my favorite but one in particular was working as an audience guide for Tania El Khoury's live performance installation *Cultural Exchange Rate*. I had a quick training session before the exhibit opened and I was hooked. The unique design of El Khoury's piece about the Lebanon/Syria border really resonated with me, and I enjoyed helping the audience."

— Alejandro Irizarry '27

"The tasks I completed in the Costume Shop helped me realize how many things are critical to performance that people don't see. Things like a whip stitch on the inside of the sleeve can make a costume come together—even when no one in the audience will know that it's there!"

— Julia Divine '26



What the Day Owes to the Night

Jimena Bermejo, Director of the Dance Program

On January 31, 2024, I attended the Prior Presents performance of *What the Day Owes to the Night* by Compagnie Hervé Koubi. The performance was a tapestry of juxtapositions, challenging our preconceived notions of modern and contemporary dance. The movement blended elements of capoeira, breaking, and other influences, interwoven with modern and ballet, supported by a score of classical and Middle Eastern music.

This was the third time the French company has come to Holy Cross and the first time we have been able to welcome them to an on-campus theater. Once again I found myself captivated by the beauty, skill, and performance quality of each dancer individually and the troupe as a collective. Witnessing a group of male dancers, clothed in white skirts with bare torsos, embracing one another with tenderness, offering support as they rose from the floor and leaned into each other's arms, stirred something deep within me. In a world torn by conflicts, division and war, the display of such profound physical and emotional connection resonated strongly, nearly bringing me to tears multiple times.

For students accustomed to shows like *The Nutcracker* or dance snippets on social media platforms, the performance was a sort of revelation. They were surprised at the range of emotions evoked by dance, the physicality between the dancers, and the power of their performance presence. The rarity of an all-male company, coupled with the juxtaposition of athleticism and gentle physicality, left a lasting impression on these students. Many of them made connections related to identity, culture, and humanity.

At the end of the performance, I was blushed and shaking. The "stunts" were indeed impressive and breathtaking. But, to me, the most powerful and touching moments were those when the dancers were standing, walking towards one another, looking into each other's eyes. Hervé Koubi succeeds in bringing people from disparate backgrounds and cultures together to share movement and create something, a difficult task to accomplish in the "real world"—and no less astonishing on stage.

Cultural Exchange Rate

Olga Lezama Ramos '27

I stand in line at the Boroughs Theatre, waiting to scan my ticket to the Prior Presents installation. As I enter, the room is completely dark except for a chandelier that lights a long wooden table in the center of the room, surrounded by three chairs on each side. There are a set of dozens of lockers at different heights organized in an L shape around the table. There are a total of ten students in the room, including myself. We each receive ten keys and are given clear instructions to follow the order of the keys as we opened a series of lockers.

When I kneel down to open my first locker, one of the guides pulls out a thin pillow from underneath the locker to rest my knees on. [Inside,] a small glass box contains a small bundle of hair and right next to it are a few bars of soap. There is a strong scent of essential oils. There is also a small trifold mirror inside. The center mirror suddenly turns into a video depicting a young woman combing an older woman's hair. El Khoury's voice emerges in the background and explains that this is her combing her grandmother's hair. It may seem like she has always had a sweet loving relationship with her grandmother, but the reality is very different. She has not always been treated very well by her grandmother and she does not agree with many of the things that her grandmother says, but she understands her grandmother because it's the life and struggles that she has had to endure that have shaped her into the person she is.

As I move through the installation, using the keys in my hands to unlock each new section in El Khoury's story, I feel like I am the researcher . . .

[*Cultural Exchange Rate* is an interactive live art project by artist Tania El Khoury in which audiences explore sensory artifacts related to her family's life on the Lebanon-Syria border and her search for lost relatives in Mexico. Olga's reflections are excerpted from her essay "Activism: Cultural Exchange Rate Installation," written for a Montserrat seminar taught by Jennie Germann Molz, Professor of Sociology and Anthropology.]

Scholarship in Action

The Prior, the City of Worcester, and the Worcester Cultural Coalition are the recipients of a three-year Scholarship in Action grant.



Our project, HC x WCC, aims to develop a pipeline of support for Worcester artists through creative residencies at The Prior and to create new knowledge about best practices for the campus-based arts residency model in service of local artists.

Each year, two local artists will be provided with resources to develop new work during a summer residency at The Prior. The project's first recipients, in residence in summer 2024, are Worcester artists Cyrille Vincent Ndomakette Samba and Daniel Gay.

Ndomakette Samba will be completing the screenplay for *Whirlwind*, a film about Worcester native and 1899 World Bicycling Champion Major Taylor, the first Black athletic superstar. Gay is developing *Around the World: Worcester Immigrant Diasporas in Musical Tapestry*, a composition inspired by the cultural contributions of the numerous newcomer, refugee, and immigrant groups in the Worcester Public Schools system.

Says Fabian Barracks, Executive Director of the Worcester Cultural Coalition and the City of Worcester's Cultural Development Officer, "I am thrilled about the potential of this project. Our joint efforts will enrich our local cultural ecosystem and provide valuable insights for the arts and education sectors at large." Stay tuned for more news of Ndomakette Samba's and Gay's work!

Funded Internships

This summer, The Prior is pleased to introduce a new funded summer internship program in arts administration.

Supported by the **Nancy Savage Skinner '79 Fund for Experiential and Integrative Learning in the Creative, Performing, and Liberal Arts**, this pilot program places a cohort of Savage Skinner Fellows in arts and culture organizations in Worcester and Boston.

The goals of the program include:

- Exposing students to professional development experiences including organizational strategy, artistic leadership, and business skills (project management, budget, communications) in an arts context
- Offering an in-depth introduction to a range of career pathways in arts and culture
- Helping students identify and activate connections between their liberal arts education and future work in and/or support of the arts
- Infusing the regional arts ecosystem with the talents of passionate, curious, dedicated Holy Cross students



Fellows will be closely mentored before and during their internships by Prior staff and by Associate Professor of Economics Melissa Boyle, professor of the popular class "Economics of the Arts." Boyle will also guide students in independent projects aligned with their own academic and professional interests. Throughout the summer, Fellows will meet regularly as a cohort to discuss their experiences and troubleshoot professional challenges. The 2024 Savage Skinner Fellows are:

Bridget Campbell '25 - Huntington Theatre Company (Marketing)

Rachel Golden '25 - Huntington Theatre Company (Literary)

Anahi Paulino Rumaldo '27 - Boston Lyric Opera (Office of General Director and CEO)

Kate Wheeler '25 - Prior Performing Arts Center/Worcester Cultural Coalition (Operations, Marketing)

A Night to Remember

2023–24 concluded with a joyous blessing and a world premiere.



On May 3, 2024, The College celebrated the blessing of The Prior Performing Arts Center and the world premiere of *The Given Note* by Osvaldo Golijov, Maurice F. Reidy, S.J., Composer-in-Residence, performed by The Knights with violinist Johnny Gandelsman.

Top: Osvaldo Golijov

Bottom, left to right gathered around the Class of 1956 Steinway Model D Concert Grand Piano: Susie Bruttomesso W56; Tom Beecher '56, P90; Margo Lane; Andy Lane '56; Dan Riley '56; Trudie Prior; Neil Prior '56; Pete McCloskey '56, P84; Hugh Kelly '56, P82; Mary Charbonneau P97; Herm Charbonneau '56, P97; Liz Riley; Louise McCloskey P84



Indicators of Early Success

In 2022–23, we gathered representative perspectives from Holy Cross faculty, staff, and students on what early success would look like at The Prior by spring 2024. While there remains more to learn and refine at the new center, it's clear that Holy Cross has much to celebrate! We hope this report has illuminated a few of our community's collective achievements toward the following collaboratively developed goals:

Support existing academic programs and propose new lanes for research and learning



Activate center as a destination for Holy Cross community members



Extend and/or initiate collaborations with Worcester neighbors



Produce robust range of public-facing programming by visiting artists



Establish administrative operations for The Prior



Pilot communication strategies for The Prior's constituents and activities



Thank You

Thank you to all who have attended, hosted, and participated in activities at The Prior this year! Prior staff would like to especially thank our frequent collaborators in Creative Writing; Music; Theatre and Dance; Visual Arts; the Iris and B. Gerald Cantor Art Gallery; the Office of the President; the Office of the Provost; the Office of Justice, Equity, Belonging, and Identity; Admission; Advancement; Marketing and Communications; Graphic Arts; ITS; and Facilities.

Choir and Orchestra Academic Conference Concert
Department of Music



