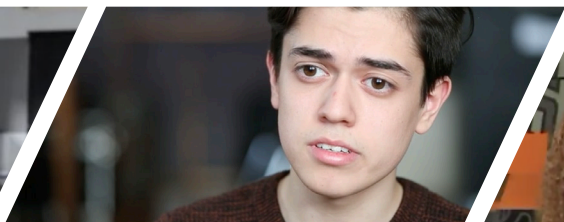
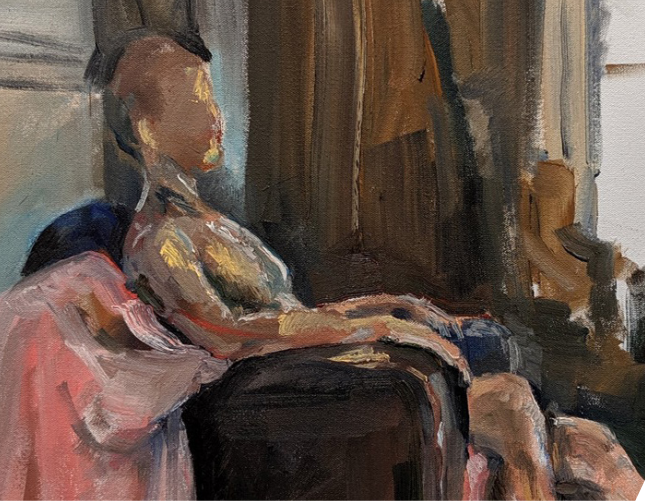




The Chicago Academy for the Arts **PRESS**







BALLET REVIEW

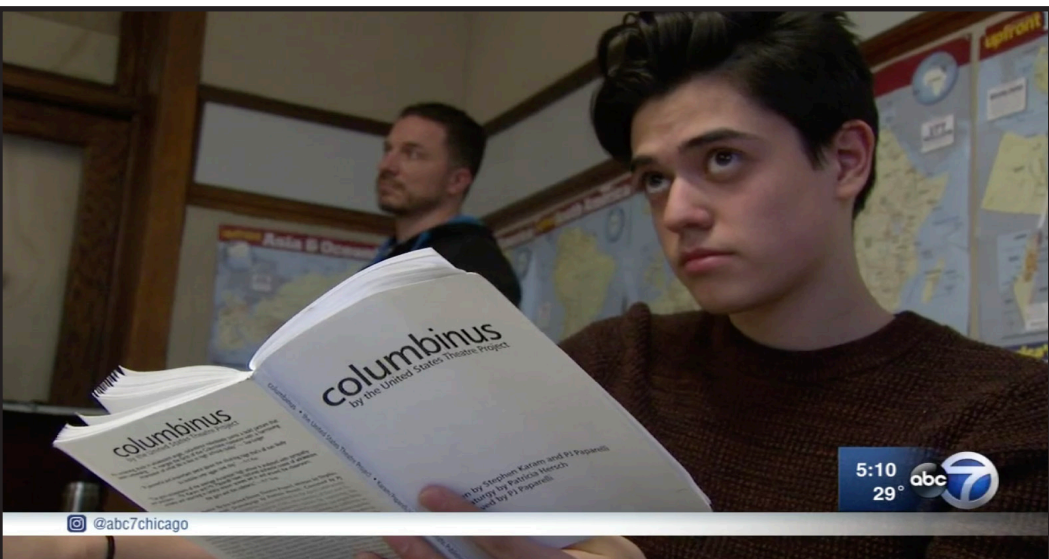
“ I did not expect to be seeing such mature artistic development in fifteen-year-olds. Individuality comes much later for most ballet dancers, but it is in fact the individual who auditions and gets hired. It is here that The Chicago Academy for the Arts students have the proverbial leg up. The range of artistic influences the dancers encounter is coupled with rigorous classical ballet training in technique, pas de deux, and pointe — every day.”

-Joseph Houseal
Ballet Review



COLUMBINUS

Featured: ABC7 Chicago, WBBM,
Chicago Tribune, WGN, Patch, and FOX



From the Chicago Tribune

"Is it an undue burden to have lockdown drills and active shooter drills?" Ben Dicke, Theatre Department Chair, said. "One of my kids just said, 'School should be a place where I'm not worried about my safety,' and yet we know that's not true.

"I see this as an opportunity to continue an important conversation with our students, with our community, with our audience," he continued. "I think it's vital."

Jason Patera, Head of School, said the school has a history of tackling works that challenge students to think about difficult topics in a nuanced, complex way. They've staged *Doubt*, a play about sexual abuse in the Catholic church, and *Spring Awakening*, a musical about teenage sexuality.

"Our kids handle it in a very responsible and authentic and important way," Patera said. "This is what art is for. This is what work that matters is for."

Flores said "*Columbinus*," with its mixture of horrific violence and run-of-the-mill teenage exploits, is a reflection of both the lives of those in the cast and their mission as artists.

"This is an environment where we are challenged to use our art to send out messages," he said. "We know that's what we have to do. We know that's important for us to do."

It's also, Dicke said, an opportunity to honor the countless lives affected by gun violence in the United States.

"Our kids kept saying, 'How do we honor the victims of all of these shootings?'" Dicke said. "Without giving anything away, I think the play allows us to stand alongside survivors and honor the victims both."

It's the right play at the right time, Patera said.

"I think our nation routinely underestimates what adolescents are capable of, and they're certainly capable of wrestling with this work," he said. "The students never saw it as controversial. They saw it as art that reflects their lives."

“

It's definitely a lot emotionally, but it's a great responsibility to tell the story, and even more so to tell it as teenagers. It's really our story.”

- Jacob Flores for *The Chicago Tribune*



Jacob Flores, 16
Columbinus actor



From WGN

It's a raw, moving interpretation of the events from April 20, 1999. In The Academy's performance of it, high school kids will play the roles of real high school kids who never got to see tomorrow. The play has been around since 2005, but the students putting on the docudrama were not even alive when the attack took place. For them, this is an historical event. As part of this school project, all 14 students in the play were asked to research the 13 victims, and then presented their lives to their fellow classmates.

Columbinus is a first-person, narrative documentary-style play that was created by Chicago playwrights and has been performed all over the country ever since, including on college campuses including Harvard and Northwestern.

But this year, Chicago Academy for the Arts students are taking on the most serious topic of their young lives: gun violence in schools. They call themselves the "mass shooting generation," and the Columbine massacre is a cornerstone of America's sad history of school shootings. The play is also hitting close to home because months into rehearsals, the shooting at Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Fla., took place.

"There's a nervous energy about it. This is an emotional piece and people will have an emotional response to it," Ceridwyn Quaintance, a senior, said.

About 75 percent of the teenage cast took part in the national walkout last week. They are the same ones who will portray the stereotypes found in schools across the globe.

The head of school Jason Patera says he has not received one single call to complain about the subject matter.

"My initial gut reaction is, 'Oh jeez, there is no way we can do this.' But immediately that is superseded by, 'We have to do this play. If we can't do it, who else is going to tell this story?'" Patera said.

Unafraid to take on challenging work, the cast is staring down the barrel of gun violence with the best weapon they've got.



GRANIA MCKIRDIE

Featured: WGN, CBS Radio,
and The Beverly Review

“ I think it’s really heartwarming to know that 20 years later we’re still doing [the AIDS Benefit]. It just goes to show how dedicated and hardworking the students at The Academy are.”

-Grania McKirdie for WGN



From The Beverly Review

"The Academy offers something really unique. It puts equal emphasis on the academics and the arts," McKirdie said. "So, I'm being held to the same standards in my arts classes that I am in my academic classes. It's not just something I do as a hobby or an extra-curricular anymore."

McKirdie said her arts classes connect to academics—and real life. Attending a school for performing arts, she said, has been healthy for her mind and soul.

"I think it has just let me become a more critical thinker," McKirdie said, "and a more empathetic person."

Grania McKirdie has helped organize the annual AIDS benefit for The Chicago Academy for the Arts since she was a freshman at the high school for performing and visual arts in River West.

This year, the Oak Lawn resident is the director of the two-day benefit, which runs Sept. 20-21 at The Academy, 1010 W. Chicago Ave., and features a variety of student performances.

Last year's show was "very successful," McKirdie said, but she hopes her final show is even more memorable.

"My goal is just to make it the biggest one yet," McKirdie said, "and maybe have some of the new things I've created this year become tradition for it."

McKirdie said past benefits have surpassed their goal of \$10,000, and she hopes the 2019 event will achieve an equal impact.

"It's just going to be a really, really fun night," McKirdie said, "of just trying to make the world a better place and making a difference."

— Kyle Garmes (September 10, 2019)





Isaiah Day
15-year-Old Dancer



ISAIAH DAY

Featured: ABC7 and South Side Weekly

“ The kids here really inspire me the most. It’s kind of mind-blowing to see the talent in this school, especially in dance,” Isaiah said. “I look at my peers and I’m like, wow you guys are actually amazing. It pushes me to be better. It pushes me to be a better person, a better dancer.”

*-Isaiah Day for
Southside Weekly*



From South Side Weekly

When Randy Duncan, Chair of the Dance Department at the Academy, first caught sight of Isaiah among hundreds of dancers at a master-class convention, he knew Isaiah would be a great fit at the school. Two years into the program, Duncan still sees the desire that Isaiah has week in and week out.

“All the kids that attend this school, they have to have that passion,” Duncan said. “This is not a school for those who just want to kind of dabble in dance, or music or theatre or whatever. It really is about those special kids who have a desire to be professional once they leave here.”

But while he’s here, Isaiah now also finds motivation among the student community at The Chicago Academy for the Arts.

“The kids here really inspire me the most. It’s kind of mind-blowing to see the talent in this school, especially in dance,” Isaiah said. “I look at my peers and I’m like, wow you guys are actually amazing. It pushes me to be better. It pushes me to be a better person, a better dancer.”

— Maple Joy (February 13, 2018)





JASON PATERA

Featured: WGN Radio,
The Chicago Tribune, TEDx,
National Association of Independent
Schools, My Suburban Life Magazine,
and Independent School Magazine

“

I have the best job in the world. I'm surrounded by people who want to be here. Everybody should know what that feels like. This is home, and it's an enormous privilege to be a part of a community like this.”

-Jason Patera for My Suburban Life

From WGN

"I have the best job in the world," Patera said. "I'm surrounded by people who want to be here. Everybody should know what that feels like. This is home, and it's an enormous privilege to be a part of a community like this."



Marypat Mulholland is on the Board of Trustees of the school, and her daughter is a senior in the visual arts program, so she knows Patera very well. She said she was "thrilled" when she learned he was a finalist because he is such a strong and confident leader.

"He makes this school his life. He walks in with a smile on his face every day and is the biggest supporter of these kids," she said. "He has boundless energy and an undying passion. He makes it a point to be very present with all the students and knows them

all as individuals, which is very special."

Randy Duncan, chairman of the dance department, has worked with Patera for many years, and he echoed Mulholland's sentiments. He described Patera as a "man of great integrity with an extraordinarily brilliant mind."

"He's definitely deserving of this award. We're so proud of him," Duncan said. "You can see it and feel how important this school is to him. I've watched him grow from chair of the music department to principal to head of school and develop into an incredible administrator who cares about each and every individual at this school."

From The Chicago Tribune

When Patera posted this year's list of Unsolicited Advice on his Facebook page, I was immediately hooked. More people need to see this, I thought.

"One of the exercises I do with myself all the time is ask, 'If you could write a letter to your 17-year-old self, what would you say?'" Patera, 43, told me.

That's the root of his Unsolicited Advice, which he collects and compiles all year. Here are my favorite 10 from this year's list.

1. "Art is really important. Whether or not you actually end up making it, you have a responsibility to support it, with both your time and your money."

2. "Community is also really important, and it's almost certain that you will never find a community like this one again. That's OK — you shouldn't just be looking for communities anymore, you should be building them."

3. "Being someone is always better than seeming like someone. Be a great artist. Be a good person. Be happy. Don't just waste time trying to seem like it on Instagram."

4. "The more you get, the more you want. If you think you'll be happier when you have more of something — more money, more stuff, more power, more success — you're never going to have enough. 'More' becomes 'normal' shockingly fast, and when the novelty wears off, you feel exactly the same as you felt before."

5. "Instant gratification is not the same as happiness. Much of the modern world — your phone, your Juul, your credit card — is designed to trick you into thinking you're happy. They're really just stealing your time and your money."

6. "There's an old joke that you should take to heart: 'How did the artist end up with a million dollars? They started with \$2 million.' Become an expert with money. Start today. It is not hard to be the smartest person in the room about money, and Google will teach you — for free — how to do it. Keep in mind, though, that money and happiness are pretty much unrelated. If you're miserable when you're broke, you're still going to be miserable when you're not."



7. "Be sober. The more you believe that alcohol and drugs help you do anything, the more it means you have work to do when you're sober. Sooner or later, we all have to operate in reality, and living cleanly will illuminate paths for you that will take you anywhere worth going."

8. "Whether they were really high, or really low, no one will ever again care what grades you got in high school. Most of your college professors are going to be so terrified of social media attacks and helicopter parents they won't give you anything less than a 'B,' regardless of what you actually deserve. So decide right now to hold yourself to a standard — a much higher standard — that's not related to letter grades, praise or recognition. Demand more from yourself than anyone else could ever expect, embrace criticism and don't expect anyone to care about your feelings."

9. "Develop the courage to be disliked. Have high expectations for the people around you. Think for yourself and don't be afraid to express well-founded but unpopular opinions. Have uncomfortable conversations. Don't be an a-----, but also don't be a clone or a pushover."

10. "Reject mediocrity. If you haven't already, you're going to discover that other people get uncomfortable when you set big goals and work incredibly hard to reach them. Don't let those people slow you down, even when they're your friends. Most of what you think are the limits of your potential are illusions, so never, ever, apologize for having and pursuing big dreams."

Good stuff, right?

"I'm not at all suggesting, 'Hey, I've always done these things, and my life is perfect, so you should be like me,'" Patera told me. "I'm painfully aware what it's like to not become an expert with money by the time I'm 20. I'm painfully aware of not having the courage to be disliked earlier than I did. I'm saying, 'Hey, these are some of the ways I've screwed up. Maybe you can learn from me.'"



JASON PATERA

TED Talk - "Life at the Intersection of Excellence, Purpose, and Passion"

“

For decades at The Chicago Academy for the Arts, I've witnessed firsthand over and over again what happens when young people learn to do things that they believe matter, do things that they deeply enjoy doing, and do things that they are inspired to do really well."

-Jason Patera



MICAH COLLIER

Featured: The Chicago Tribune's Daily Southtown and NBC Nightly News with Lester Holt



“

Music is a lifestyle. I wake up listening to music. I go to sleep listening to music. Throughout the day, I listen to music. My life revolves around music.”

-Micah Collier for Chicago Tribune

From The Chicago Tribune

Jazz has brought him a confidence and a love for improvisation, not to mention the ability to take constructive criticism from his predominantly adult colleagues.

“I’d say less than 5 percent of the players in the clubs are high school age,” he said.

Rose Colella, music department chair at The Academy, said, “I’ve never seen a high school student at Micah’s level of prominence in performing within the community. Just three years ago, he wasn’t even sure how to walk a bass line. Now, with the the incredible training he’s received from Joe Policastro and John Sims at The Chicago Academy for the Arts, along with his classes in theory, piano and ear training, Micah has made a name for himself as a sought-after bassist on the professional jazz scene in Chicago.”

Micah intends to study jazz composition and music therapy in college. “One of my goals is to make others feel good. Music can be everyone’s escape from the real world. I want to help people get over whatever they’re going through with music,” he said.

Chris Chisholm, managing owner of Andy’s, said, Micah’s two-show gig Thursday is a “one-off,” but he has plans to put the band in the regular lineup.

For being so young, Micah’s already got it down as to how to be a professional. He takes everything seriously and has fun doing it at the same time, which is a tough thing to find in any age musician let alone a teenager who’s still in high school. He is the consummate professional already and extremely talented to boot.”

— Donna Vickroy (March 23, 2018)



JUSTIN TRANTER

AND THE JUSTIN TRANTER RECORDING STUDIO

Featured: Billboard, WTTW, CBS Chicago, WGN Radio, NBC 5, WLS Radio, Pittsburgh Music Magazine, The Chicago Tribune, Good Celebrities, Getty Images, and Windy City Live

“

They'll be so far ahead of other students when it comes to getting into college, and so far ahead when it comes to getting a real career in the music industry.”

-Justin Tranter for NBC Chicago

From the Chicago Tribune

Now, at age 38, Tranter is one of the most successful songwriters in modern pop music. His writing credits include Halsey's "Bad at Love," Imagine Dragons' "Believer," Jason Derulo's "Lucky," Selena Gomez's "Good for You" and Justin Bieber's "Sorry." He's been nominated for a Golden Globe and a Grammy.

His parents, he said, made the decision to transfer him to The Chicago Academy for the Arts during his freshman year.

"It saved my life," he said. "Being 14 in 1994 and seeing kids already living their truth? It felt like the most magical place ever.

"For a teenager to have a safe place to collaborate, to push their boundaries creatively, to be accepted," he continued, "it's life-changing."

He promised himself that once he made it big, he would find a way to pay back the school for the impact it made on him, for the sense of belonging it offered him in a way that few other places had.

Last week he made good on that promise. Tranter donated a state-of-the-art recording studio to The Chicago Academy for the Arts and enough money to fund a contemporary writing and production instructor.

The school isn't releasing a dollar figure for the gift but confirms it's the largest donation from an alum in its history.

The studio includes a control room outfitted with Pro Tools, a microphone-filled tracking room, a vocal booth, acoustic paneling and a lab with four production workstations.

Tranter came to town last week to dedicate the studio and perform a concert with current academy students at Thursday night's ribbon-cutting.

"I always say our kids aren't at the academy — they are the academy," head of school Jason Patera told me in the hallway as students and parents rushed up the steps to find a seat for Tranter's concert. "Justin is living proof."

The studio, Patera said, gives students access to world-class tools and instruction, but the gift is bigger than that.

"He's an inspiration to the kids," Patera said. "Not just because he's an alum and not just because he's written a bunch of hit songs. He's an inspiration because the kids here understand what it means to cultivate community, and now they get to see him doing that on the world stage."

— Heidi Stevens (September 24, 2018)

The Chicago Academy for the Arts

Welcome Home, Justin!





“

It's an unbelievable place. We all have nostalgia about where we went to school, but I just feel so fortunate that I have the privilege to not only feel nostalgia but also give back in a really concrete way.”

- Justin Tranter for WGN





ZACH JEPPESEN

Featured: The Chicago Tribune, The Jam, Milwaukee Journal Sentennial, Northwest Herald, and CBS 58

“ There’s no other place that I’ve found that makes me feel the way this place does. I want dance to be my future and this is the best place that I could find that could prepare me for that.

-Zach Jeppsen for CBS 58

From The Chicago Tribune

"It has been my hope as a mother that each of my sons will find work, relationships and play that bring them joy," Tracey Hall, Zachary's mother, said. (Zach is the youngest of four boys.) "Zachary has been unique in that he seems to have found joy in movement and dance nearly as soon as he could walk, and he has rarely wavered in his passion."

She couldn't let that fade.

"It's more than just feeling accepted here," Zach said. "It's feeling like everyone is cheering you on. It's more than just being part of something. Everyone who's part of it, we also feel like we're important. It's one of the best feelings that you can get to experience."

And it's contagious.

"Some other kid is going to come here in five years and feel like this is home," Patera said. "And he's going to feel like that because of the work that Zach is doing now."

That's a beautiful legacy.

"When Zachary dances," his mom said, "he comes alive onstage with such emotion and beauty that I am filled with joy. How lucky I am to literally go along for the ride."

— Heidi Stevens (December 22, 2017)





ELISE ROBINSON

Featured: WGN

“ It makes the work I make personal because I know exactly how it feels.”



**EVENING
NEWS**

Elise Robinson ARTIST

An excerpt from WGN

After years of pain from just putting on clothes, Elise was diagnosed with tactile defensiveness. Her wardrobe consisted of the only thing she could tolerate: fleece sweaters and pants worn inside-out, so the seams wouldn't touch her skin.

Nothing seemed to help, until Elise began to draw. Abstract lines seeping into patterns of what she calls, "structured chaos," it's a direct reflection of what she was feeling inside.

With each piece of artwork Elise completed, something unexpected happened: the physical pain that crippled her for so many years began to subside.

Her work moved from paper to sculpture and form pieces. Jason Patera, Head of School at The Chicago Academy for the Arts, says it's a phenomenon he sees with countless students.



"Inescapable Oppression"

"This is a place where if you have a calling, if you have a sense of purpose in the art you make, this feels like home," he said.

Elise's source of pain is now a source of inspiration. Her artwork covers half a room at the academy, and she's happy to be pain-free, and known for her work instead of her condition.



AMARI FRAZIER

Featured: WGN
and The Weekly Citizen

“

'He just has this spirit in his soul that reaches an audience,' Duncan said.

Taking Frazier under his wing, Duncan lined him up with dancers who had been perfecting their craft for years. Fast forward four years later, Frazier is at the top of his class and the recipient of a full scholarship to Juilliard.”

-Erin Ivory with WGN

