

## A conversation with OOPS!, Davidson's student improv group

Hannah Lieberman '18, co-presidents Peter Bowman '16 and Matthew Schlerf '16 discuss OOPS!

### What defines a good performance?

**PB:** I think obviously laughter is good. If you think the audience received at least a lot of the jokes well, that's good. But I think it goes beyond that: how do we feel? Did we perform up to our potential? So it's not just about getting the laughs; it's about improving our comedy and our timing. And I think sometimes even if we get some laughs in a show, maybe we didn't really push ourselves. Sometimes that will make it not necessarily the best show, if that makes any sense. I think, too, a really good show would be one where all or at least most of the troupe has a good show, instead of maybe two or three members have killer shows but then everyone else is pretty weak. I think the best shows are when all of us are performing really well by our own standards and by the audience's standards.

**HL:** On the one hand you want people to praise the overall performance and say that the show as a whole was great, but it's also very rewarding when you hear people quoting one-liners that they really enjoyed. You don't want the show to be focused on these little one-liners that you have to build up to throughout the show, but I always think it's just a very nice experience to go out past the 900 Room after a show and hear people saying our money lines.

**In regards to what you say on stage, is there a line that you try not to cross? And if there is, how hard is it to respect it when you're making split-second decisions?**

**PB:** It used to be called OOPS! I Crapped My Pants. I think [the name] came out of some sort of thesis or some sort of project. But the story that has been passed down to us, at least, is that one member of OOPS! I Crapped My Pants got intoxicated and said some racist remarks and the school shut it down, which makes sense. So OOPS! as just OOPS! has been a reincarnation of that. So I think we're very – I don't know the details of that history – but we're very cognizant of that fact so we have a rule never to drink be-

fore performances – I mean, that's for multiple reasons. There is a definite line. I mean, I think it's just with humor in general, there is kind of a grey line: when does poking fun become something really offensive? I think we've done a good job being aware of that line. I think we all know that that line exists and know how easily we could cross it.

**Sometimes you might be doing a skit about something you don't know much about, right? So if the audience throws out a suggestion and you're like, "Shoot, I don't know what that is"...**

**PB:** I think that those situations almost add to the humor for the audience, unless it's really awkward and drawn out, but I think in the past Brian [Wiora '17] couldn't think of the word 'dragon,' and Schlerf was guessing someone who was afraid of their own reflection or something. And it ended up being drawn out for like anywhere from 10 to 25 minutes. But I think in those cases it adds to the humor. I think sometimes, though, if you let it show that you have no idea what it is and it's bothering you, then, yeah, maybe that can kind of weigh down a show. But I think that's another opportunity to create humor, the fact that you should know what a dragon is but you just can't think of it for whatever reason.

**Talk about the games that you play. Sometimes you'll play some of the same games every show. What about the ones that you repeat makes them good?**

**MS:** I think a lot of it is what we're good at or comfortable with. There are certain people who are really good at certain guessing games and certain people who might be comfortable with a party game or a character-driven game. So, we definitely have some that we know audiences like, that we know we won't [screw] up, you know, so there are those go-to's.

**PB:** I think something that we were increasingly cognizant of is that that runs the risk of [creating] sort of comedic crutches: you're always guessing the same game, and you're not really pushing yourself comedically. So, we do try to mix it up, and recently we've been dusting

off some games we haven't done in a while and developing some new ones in the hopes that we don't turn a comfortable, successful game into a crutch and something stale.

**Are there pairs or groups of people that have better chemistry with each other than other members of the group? Does that determine who goes on stage for each skit or do you try to change it up and get everybody involved with everyone else at some point?**

**PB:** Both. Technically the way we choose games is sort of seniority pick – you'll pick what games you want to do and we'll try to make it work. But, we also pay attention to maybe not pairing two people who are inexperienced in a game together. Like in a two-person game, maybe [we'll pair] a junior with a freshman. It's between balancing someone who you know is really killer at one game and can do that game but also not wanting them to again fall into the rut of always being in that game or overpowering it.

**HL:** It's a tricky balance because on the one hand, for example, we have two people who are very good at playing Bond in the guessing game about James Bond. And you want those people – they're the best at it so why would you have anybody else try it? But, at the same time, maybe there is someone you didn't know who secretly has this desire to play James Bond. You have to balance because you want to put on the best show but you also want it to be a learning experience. You want to push your boundaries, but if I really do not want to play New Choice for the rest of my life then you have to kind of respect that.

**What's the most awkward moment you can remember on stage?**

**PB:** I remember one incident when we were performing at KA. [We were playing] some sort of guessing game and one of the now-alumni couldn't get it and just walked off the stage, which was super awkward for all of us because, as we were talking about earlier, you use not knowing what something is as an opportunity to make fun of yourself and exploit that ignorance for comedic ends, but that was pretty awkward when it was just like, 'I give up.'

**MS:** We talk about the 'Yes, and' thing. It's a really fun improv rule. [The gist is], you always agree, and that [incident] is like the ultimate no.

**PB:** It kills a scene if, for instance, Hannah says, 'Oh my god is that a pineapple farm?' And you're just like, no. So the idea is that you always say yes. You agree.

**MS:** You're creating a world together, and the second that you negate something, you negate their agency to improve.

**HL:** Creating a world is very difficult, especially the very beginning of scenes, which can sometimes be hard because you have two people who are willing and able to establish what the scene is about. And, it's kind of this race of who is going to say a line first to kind of establish what's going on. And, you can have a totally different direction for the scene in your mind, and you kind of just have to roll with the punches and go with whatever is said, and that's a very hard lesson to learn because if you were just determined that it was going to be a pineapple farm and you're in space, you have to accept that I'm in space now.

**When you guys practice, what exactly do you practice? Is it just your improv instincts? Because you obviously can't practice what you're going to say on stage.**

**PB:** People are always like, 'Why do you practice if it's improv?' Or, people ask me if I do a character in a show, 'Did you practice that before?' No, I mean you're right when you say improv instinct, for lack of a better term that's kind of what it is. I mean, we were talking about the whole 'yes and' idea, getting used to doing that, for instance. So, during a practice, let's say if we run through a game we'll all be critical of what general strategies we can use to make that funnier to advance the scene. Why did we stop laughing halfway through? So, it's really just getting at the essence of certain games and trying to make sure that we're aware of what makes a scene funny. We don't really work on particular characters or any of that.

*\*To see the full interview, go to [www.davidsonian.com](http://www.davidsonian.com).*

*\*\*Also, check out OOPS!'s upcoming performances at Rusk (3/27, 5 pm) and Warner (4/8, TBD).*

## Fiddler Cast, Crew, and Musicians ready for opening

Fiddler on the Roof opens this weekend in the DFPH and features student actors

SOPHIA GUEVARA  
LIVING DAVIDSON EDITOR

This weekend the Duke Family Performance Hall will open its doors for a two-weekend run of the musical, *Fiddler on the Roof*. The story, set in 1905, follows a Jewish family through tremendous socio-political

challenges within a Russian village.

I got a special sneak peek at the upcoming opening, and several key elements stood out. The set design combines colorful paintings of village houses with wooden-colored larger set pieces of the family home. The show seems brilliantly managed with seamless light transitions and set changes. A terrific orchestral team accompanies the actors' performances. Ian Thomson '15 easily steals the show with his melodious voice that fills the theatre. My main criticism, however, is that he is almost the only actor who consistently maintains his Russian accent with-

out slipping into the familiar American accent.

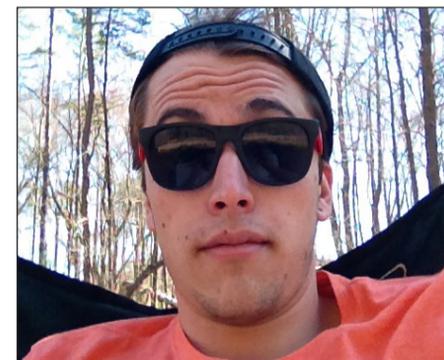
Overall, Davidson brings the story of *Fiddler* adapted from the book by Joseph Stein to life. With music by Jerry Bock, and lyrics by Sheldon Harnick, you will surely enjoy this performance of *Fiddler on the Roof*.

Ann Marie Costa directs Davidson's rendition of *Fiddler*, and Jacquelyn Culpepper serves as musical director. Tara Villa Kieth conducts the Davidson College Orchestra featuring student talent, and the night includes performances by over thirty student actors. Get your tickets now and enjoy!



Support the Davidson Theatre and Music Departments this weekend and enjoy *Fiddler on the Roof*. Tickets are available for General Admission: \$15; Seniors: \$12; Faculty/Staff: \$10; Students: \$6. Friday and Saturday shows run at 8p.m. and on Sundays at 2p.m.

Courtesy Photo Department of Theatre



### THE BEAT 10 FT. Daniel Morrice

1. Salad Days - Mac Demarco
2. Love you Madly - Cake
3. Snow in Newark - Ryan Hemsworth ft. Dawn Golden
4. Evaporated - Ben Folds
5. Just Aint Gonna Work Out - Mayer Hawthorne
6. So Good to Me - Chris Malinchak
7. Turn it Around - K. Flay
8. 19-2000 - Gorillaz
9. Crave You - Flight Facilities
10. Schnee - Abrahamsen