Out of the Darke

an eight-part audio series exploring Darke Hall through the stories of people who have been touched by this historic performance space
Out of the Darke is an interview series honouring the restoration and re-opening in 2022 of Darke Hall, a historic auditorium originally opened in 1929 in Regina, Saskatchewan. The series was conceived by Erika Folnović of the University of Regina Conservatory of Performing Arts. Out of the Darke is hosted by Paul Dechene. Music for the series is from Mozart’s “Dissonance” Quartet K.465 and is performed by Christian Robinson, HengHan Hou, Jonathan Ward and Simon Fryer.
This is the letter in which Francis Nicholson Darke informed the powers-that-be at Regina College — what would become in 1974 the University of Regina — that he would like to sponsor the construction of a music and arts building.

The architect on the F.N. Darke Music & Arts Building was J.H. Puntin. Poole Construction Co was chosen to do the construction. They agreed to do the work for $96,885 with an additional $3,500 on top of that to cover the installation of leaded glass.

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**Episode 1**

What Makes A Great Theatre?

Local history blogger, Kenton de Jong, answers the question, “Who is Francis Nicholson Darke?” TCU Place director of community engagement, Kirby Wirchenko, talks about how to create an active and exciting performance space. P3Architecture architects James Youck and Kate Jackson reflect on what was involved in the Darke Hall restoration and what the project means to them.
Tenders will be called early next week for the construction of the Regina College Arts building, which will contain an auditorium to seat 800. The building is to be completed by the end of the year.

Situated at the southern end of Cornwall street the structure will present a pleasing picture in Tudor Collegiate style.

The building will be constructed of Tyndall stone and brown brick with Tyndall stone trimmings.

J.H. Puntin is the architect and he states that the building will cost in the neighbourhood of $110,000 when completed.

— From May 19, 1928 Regina Morning Leader

On the same page of the May 19, 1928 Morning Leader, we also learn about a giant mud turtle that had been captured and created a great deal of curiosity when it was put on display in Weyburn. Experts declared that the mud turtle must have been the great, great grand-dad of all turtles in the district for it was, “a super turtle.”

— Great Grand-Dad Mud Turtle Weyburn District is Captive

My wife calls it, “touch old.” “We have to go away to Europe this summer and touch something old.” I think it’s human nature. In our culture. It’s about how buildings are witness to history. This building didn’t have that feel when you went into the basement. Before the restoration, it felt like a 1980s institutional space. It lacked that soul. That soul was still there. It just needed to come out. That spirit and that soul of the building has re-emerged. — James Youck of P3 Architecture

Mr. Darke, the donor of the building stepped forward and with brief words formally handed the keys to the Chief Justice J.T. Brown, chairman of the Board of Governors of the college.

“This has been spoken of as Mr. Darke’s enduring monument,” Mr Justice Brown stated, “but it is more than that. It is a temple in which Mr Darke’s beneficent spirit will live long after the youngest here have passed away.”

— From “Ceremony Marks Opening Of Music & Arts Building At the Regina College” in the January 7, 1929 Regina Morning Leader

This space, describing its value is very difficult. But when you enter, you feel it. It warms the cockles of your heart. You immediately recognize it as a valuable space. — Kate Jackson of P3 Architecture
The thing I remember fondly from Auntie Mame was — you know, Mame was very flamboyant, of course — and one performance I was lying on my back with my head to the audience, going on and on and on about something and there was only one other performer on the stage with me. And the lights went out. So I kept talking and the fellow I was on stage with, he came back with his lines. We’re in pitch black. I couldn’t see to get up. And all of a sudden, this little flashlight appears and it’s the director and she says, “I just want to tell the audience that we’re going to take a little break now.”

— Carol Gay Bell

Episode 2
Do you remember Mame?

Lyn Goldman and Carol Gay Bell are actors, directors and producers who’ve had long been associated with Regina Little Theatre. They talk about how their careers on stage have been tied up with Darke Hall.
CAST, in order of appearance:
NORAH MULDOON ........................................... Marion Lee
PATRICK DENNIS, as a young boy ......................... Andrew Wallace
ITO .......................................................... John Huston
VERA CHARLES ............................................ Lyn Goldman
RADCLIFFE ............................................... Shirley Thurm
OSBERT ...................................................... Don Walte
RALPH DEVINE ............................................ Lew Wetherell
BISHOP ELEFAROSES ..................................... Saul Lipton
M. LINDSAY WOOLSEY .................................. Gordon Hincks
AUNTIE MAME ............................................. Carol Gay Bell
MR. WALDO, a paperhanger ................................ Scott Jones
MR. BACCOCK .............................................. Doug Hicton
A STAGE MANAGER ....................................... Mac Robb
A THEATRE MANAGER .................................... Greg York
A MAID ........................................................ Mary Wallace
A BUTLER ...................................................... Doug Hicton
A LEADING MAN ........................................... Tom Lynch
LORD DUDLEY ............................................... John Strothers-Stewart
CUSTOMERS ................................................. Alton P. Grainger, Pam McMartin, Irene Strothers-Stewart, Raylene Poole, Jeanne Poole
MR. LOOMIS, a floorwalker ................................... Art Beck
BEAUREGARD JACKSON PUCKETT BURNSIDE ............ Ken McKay
COUSIN JEFF ............................................... Greg York
COUSIN FAN ................................................. Dallas Duffus
UNCLE MOUTH ............................................. John Strothers-Stewart
SALLY CATO MACDOUGAL ................................ Alyson Clarke
EMORY MACDOUGAL ..................................... Brett Bell
MOTHER BURNSIDE ....................................... Dorothy O'Keefe
A VET ........................................................ Scott Jones
GROOMS ...................................................... Terry Duckett, Saul Lipton
PATRICK DENNIS, as a teenager .......................... Scott Hudey
PATRICK DENNIS, as a young man ...................... David Christoffel
AGNES GOOD ................................................ Shirley Thurm
BRIAN O'BANNION ......................................... Tom Lynch
GLORIA UPSON ........................................... Natalya Kuziak
DORIS UPSON .............................................. Maureen Runyon
CLAUDITY UPSON ......................................... Vic Rouse
PEGEEN RYAN ............................................... Marianne Woods
MICHAEL DENNIS ......................................... Paul Russell
GUESTS, HUNSMEN, etc. .................................. Celeste Croft, Pam McMartin, Raylene Poole, Mac Robb, Nancy Sadlier, Irene Strothers-Stewart, John Strothers-Stewart, Mary Wallace

Synopsis of Scenes
The action of the play takes place in Auntie Mame's Beekman Place apartment and various other locales in which she becomes involved during a period of years from 1928 to 1946.

ACT I — Auntie Mame's apartment; the Schubert Theatre; Macy's department store.
ACT II — The Burnside home in Georgia; Patrick's schools; the Pyramids; the Matterhorn.
ACT III — Auntie Mame's apartment; the Upsons' home in Mountebank.

There will be two 12-minute intermissions.

Produced by special arrangement with the Dramatists Play Service Inc.
Hunting costumes for Mr. McKay and Mr. York supplied by Malabar Ltd., Winnipeg.

Production
Director ...................................................... Hilda Allen C.D.A.
Production Manager ................................. Dale Simmons
Assistant Stage Manager ......................... Sandra Junkin
Set Design ................................................... Rick Harvey
Set Construction ........................................ Dean Clausen, Walter Reibl
Scene Changers .......................................... Lee Dyer, Carla-Marie Powers
Costumes ....................................................... Alva Arnott
Assisted by ................................................ Olga Stinson
Wardrobe Assistants .............................. Joan Dennett, Mary Kowbel,
                                        Pat McKay, Patti Arsenych
Properties ..................................................... Jean Freeman, Ruth Meadows,
                                                Anne Harmsworth, Fay Hutchinson
Lighting ..................................................... Harold Woodward
Sound ......................................................... Dean Clausen
Make-up .................................................... Jo Dunn, Marilyn Wiebe, Nra Berg, Dallas Duffus

Acknowledgements
Dorothy Goldman ................................ University of Regina
Frances Olsen ......................................... General Recorders
Sask. Tel. .................................................. Isman Hide and Fur
Western Furs ........................................ Peter's Adventure Sports
                                      The Multiple Schlerosis Society
Central Collegiate School once stood on the site of what is now Central Park. As it did not have a very large space for a stage in its gym, the theatre program had to hold its elaborate, musical shows at Darke Hall, which was just a short walk away. — program scans courtesy Regina Public Schools archives

It was the place to play. It was the music home we had in Regina. When the Regina Lions Band was going to play there I remember we had white pants, white shirts, purple ties. My mom and dad both conducted. We couldn’t believe we were going to Darke Hall. We were pleased just to play in it. That was our home. We loved it.— Bob Mossing

### Episode 3

**Theatre Is Good For The Soul**

Marianne Woods reflects on her time on the Darke Hall stage, from when she was a piano student as a child through to her time performing with Regina Lyric Musical Theatre and Regina Little Theatre. Dan Carr on how he became an actor almost by accident in Darke Hall. Bob Mossing on Regina Lions Band and the Mossing School of Music.
Our Darke Hall

by Sheri Torgrimson

Drawing memories out, faint and far away
Like notes floating through the hall from a practise room,
Try to catch them and hold them in your hands – they are prairie snowflakes.
Neither the notes nor the memories want to be caught,
They dance through my fingers, slipping away, as if they were fragments of a dream.

But remember we must – it is who we are, where we came from...lest we forget.
A second home this place; here we made notes on pages sing,
While the hallway rang with everything from scales to concertos, rarely a dull note.

Hours spent in small rooms, coming out for air and fellowship,
Rehearsals on the stage of the hall so dark, an apt name indeed.
Communities drawn together there to listen,
A building of music, drama, art and creation.

You were old and a bit shabby in the light, but, like a woman of uncertain age,
Maintained some of your beauty from earlier days.
A truer picture of your age showed in the Saskatchewan winter,
When we walked the tunnel, lit and warm, but dusty and crumbling.
No matter, we had history, architecture and atmosphere, in a place to call our own.

Now you have regained your youth,
And while we may marvel at your new visage,
Your middle age is what will live on in our memories – our youth.

As a teenager, Miss England was known for her involvement with the Saint Cecilia Piano Club — such as in this report of a night dedicated to Liszt and Chopin in the October 15, 1930 Leader Post. The club’s events were regularly reported in the newspaper’s “Women’s Page” which was concerned with society, fashion, club affairs and personal.

As a building, it was great. It had a nice ambiance with the organ pipes on either side. Just the feel of the place with the arching beams overhead. And it had the proper theatrical rigging. For the Music Man we used the rigging. We were flying in trees and things using the original rigging. It was really nice to be in a proper theatre like that. — Edward Willett

Edward Willett reflects on his long association with Regina Lyric Musical Theatre. Susan MacDonald remembers preforming on the Darke Hall stage as a student of piano teacher Frances England. Sheri Torgrimson reads a poem about her years as a music education student.
Darke Hall was packed to capacity and scores of Regina residents were unable to gain admittance Sunday night when the brass reed band of No. 2 Initial Training school R.C.A.F. presented another in a series of recitals.

A feature was the appearance of Flt. Lt. Howard Leyton-Brown R.A.F. station, Estevan. Flt. Lt. Leyton-Brown’s clean-cut violin solos proved so popular that he was asked to play three numbers not listed on the program. His accompanist was Mrs. W. J. Mars....

Flt. Lt. Leyton-Brown gave his first recital in Melbourne, Australia, at the age of 11 and won a university scholarship at 12. He was a protege of Fritz Kreisler and Sir Adrian Boult.

Marches, novelties and numbers written by Noel Coward, Rachmaninoff and Romberg were included in the band’s program. A highlight was the rendition of Headlines, a modern rhapsody picturing the violent pace of modern life.

The band was under the direction of Sgt Maj Deadman. Proceeds will go the band fund.
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The idea for the piano, why we wanted this, was not just a piano for me or the committee. We called it the Piano For Regina committee because the idea was that it would be a piano that was accessible to pianists of all ages and experience. From the young student, probably more geared toward an older student but certainly also for teachers and professionals in the city and for visiting artists it would be a big attraction. That was our goal.

I feel like I’ve had a glass of wine after I’ve played the Fazioli. You know how you’re kind of elevated when you’ve had a glass of wine, you feel like you’re floating a bit, you’re not quite walking on the ground? That’s how it feels to play the Fazioli. I’ve also thought it feels… buttery. That’s not a word I’ve ever used with any other piano I can think of. The way you can produce legato on the instrument, connecting the sounds, the way the notes melt into one another. You have to find another vocabulary when you’re talking about the Fazioli.

— David McIntyre

Meeting Fazioli: A Darke Hall Story
by Jamie Kraushaar

I was the first in my class to play the Fazioli.

Our meeting occurred in the dead of the semester, when papers were due and final exams crept upon us. My music professor held a special masterclass, inviting his students to Darke Hall to play the new Fazioli piano. Between historic brick walls and lush red stage curtains, I was about to experience Fazioli’s charm.

Brought to the small prairie city of Regina, Saskatchewan, the Fazioli concert grand piano had been gifted to Darke Hall by dedicated local arts supporters, Dr. Roberta McKay and Mr. Elmer Brenner. It was thanks to their generosity that I was being given this wonderful opportunity. As only a second year piano student at the University of Regina, I felt incredibly lucky to have a chance to play such a rare instrument.

She had travelled all the way from Italy and she was finally home. Handmade across 3000 hours and one of only 140 pianos built that year, she was a jewel – and now she was ours.

Arranged in one row on collapsible chairs, I sat on the stage with my classmates, hands wringing and waiting, until my time finally arrived.

Although I’d had Scriabin’s Preludes memorized for weeks, I had brought the book of scores with me to make notes of sections and concepts to practice after my performance. With a deep breath, I rose, setting the score aside on my chair, open to Preludes No. 9 and 10 with No. 14 bookmarked behind them – these were three pieces I’d been practicing and falling in love with all semester.

I approached the Fazioli, smiling in awe but as if in greeting, and she gleamed back at me. After taking care to

Episode 6
The Fazioli

Jamie Kraushaar reads a story about her experience playing the Fazioli piano in Darke Hall. Dr. Roberta McKay and Mr. Elmer Brenner talk about why they gifted a Fazioli piano to the Conservatory of Performing Arts. Pianist David McIntyre reflects on why a Fazioli piano is important for Regina’s music community.
adjust the piano bench until it felt right, I took a seat, feeling the soft cushion supporting me as my legs moved into a stable but flexible position. The bench dug into my thighs and the adrenaline coursed through my body. I was grateful that I had made it today.

I inhaled, closed my eyes and prepared myself, re-immersing the imagery that David and I had been conjuring in our lessons: the sea, the calm before the storm, ripples radiating out from a single drop of water growing larger and larger.

And I thought of October.

When I was ready, I let the energy flow from my feet grounded on the floor to my arms and down into my fingers as I raised my hands and brought my thumb down to sink into C sharp. The sound that emerged from the open piano lid in that one instant was heavenly – richer and fuller and brighter than anything I'd heard before. It sang, enveloping me in warmth. The air sparkled, alive. I imagined this was what magic might sound like.

"Woah!" I exclaimed, my voice cracking as I yanked my hands away from the keys in shock. One single note cracking as I yanked my hands away, I felt like I belonged.

"Shaking the cold and the thoughts away, I pulled open the middle of the three heavy wooden doors, leaving the clear blue skies and distant geese calls behind and emerged into something reminiscent of a castle or a grand European opera house. The atmosphere instantly changed once inside, seeming cozy and welcoming.

The royal red of the carpets, seats, and curtains stood out in contrast against the hall's white wooden walls, highlighted by the golden-coloured pipe organ that stood guard grandly in the two upper corners on either side of the stage (The pipes are strictly decorative and made of plaster, adding nothing to the sound of the hidden Cavasvan organ. But, they sure looked magnificent)! Streams of light shone in through the windows, bringing the room to life with a warm golden glow. Inside the hall, it smelled so different than the world outside – like wood and paper and history. I imagined a full audience milling about in anticipation and speaking in hushed whispers waiting for the start of a great performance.

I began to cross slowly towards the right aisle where the red carpet was laid out for me as if I were someone famous and important. My footsteps echoed against the towering walls and the large open ceiling, and I stepped lighter and breathed softer as if to minimize the sound. I exhaled in relief when I made it to the softer carpet.

One feels they need to whisper in a building as old and magnificent as this, so as not to disturb the ghosts within its walls.

My fellow classmates were congregating by the stage. We exchanged greetings and after some preliminary chat about how studying for our midterm exams was going (stressful, we all agreed) and who all went to the chorale concert last weekend (wasn’t the soloist impressive?), David welcomed us to the masterclass. With a gentle smile and hands clasped in front of him, he beckoned us to follow him to the back of the stage. It was back there that the Fazioli lived when she was not making music.

Avoiding the tight corners of her temperature-controlled house, David, myself, and another classmate rolled her out slowly and carefully. My hands hesitantly touched the soft covering.

Once in position, David pulled the cover back, and suddenly there she was – stark white wooden keys standing out against jet black lacquered ones. As shiny as glass, I could see the reflection of five eager faces staring in wonder as if the piano was a mirror of another world.

David spent the next few minutes introducing us to the Fazioli. I devoured the information as if it was fuel for art. I learned that everything about the Fazioli was the result of years of research and tests upon tests to hone in on the best sound. Originally developed in the 1980s by Paolo Fazioli, an engineer and pianist from Rome, Fazioli pianos were uniquely constructed to offer a greater range of dynamics and colours than the average instrument. And, incomparable power. The piano was specifically chosen for its evenness of tone from the lowest, deepest bass notes to the clearest, brightest soprano notes which allowed for natural flow between the two without loss of strength in the higher register. And then there was the heart of the piano – the soundboard – where the vibrations created by the strings would be converted into sound waves that reached our ears as music. Forged from high-quality spruce trees found in the Italian Eastern Alps, the soundboard was built from the same trees that Antonio Stradivari used for his famed Stradivarius violins, carefully shaped and placed inside the body of the piano to create the richest tones. The exterior of the piano was as magnificent as the inside, with many parts including the hinges covered in 18k gold that would not oxidize and fade like the brass pieces on other pianos. She was absolutely, exquisitely beautiful.

And I was mesmerized.

So when it came time to play and David asked who would like to go first, my hand shot into the air like a firework. Moments later, I took my seat with Fazioli.

So struck by my first wondrous note, I stopped abruptly to relish in it and recollect myself. My classmates chuckled but I was too focused to fully notice. Rolling my shoulders, I prepared myself to begin again.

As the giant stage lights beat down on me, I felt my face flush and moisture form on my palms. My breathing quickened, my pulse raced, and my heart beat loudly and hollowly in my chest – all the familiar signs of anxiety. But, as my wise choir professor, Dominic Gregorio, once told me, musicians need a little bit of nervousness or the performance will be flat. So, you can let the nerves sit and paralyze you, or you can turn them into energy and use it to fuel your performance.

Remembering his advice, I noticed a parallel in the words from a children’s book I once read: You cannot be happy unless you are sad sometimes.

Waves and ripples and October.

I began to play.

My hands flowed over the keys, drifting from E major to C sharp minor and back again, sinking deep into chords
of the keyboard. My entire body rocked away. One must always balance. Lean too much and I will be swept away, and there is a steep drop waiting beneath doing this all my life. Give even a little, roaring water back. If I felt as if I had been onelone body attempting to hold the anguish.

furrowed as I honed in on this intensified withevery bar of the music. My brow furrowed as I honed in on this intensified anguish.

And then, with a crescendo and a large chord at the climax, the dam broke, and water came rushing through, pushing me off the edge and sending me plunging into the sea. The waves and the music roared together, overpowering everything else. Chord progressions formed a current that swept me away, carrying me through wave after wave, but I didn’t struggle. I let the music overcome me. Together with Fazioli, we relished in the despair and the anger and the uncertainty, giving ourselves over to it, with the comfort that we were strong enough to swim in the deepness of the ocean and yet always rise again to float above the waves like we had moments before.

And that’s what I did, sitting with Fazioli, holding back the tears as my eyes closed and my body swayed in rubato to the anguished chords and the soaring long notes, feeling them both equally, loving them both equally, and existing somewhere in between; learning how to be both happy and sad in time.

The notes slowly became fewer and farther between, and I knew the piece was ending soon, as was my time with Fazioli.

When the last note sounded and the final tendrils of the prelude swirled around me, I waited a moment, still like autumn, listening to them ringing in the vastness of the theatre. When my hands lifted from the keys they were heavy, tired but energized from use. My mind was clear and rejuvenated after only a brief few moments with the Fazioli. Something had been released. Set free. I nodded a thanks to Fazioli, and rose from the piano bench.

I spent the next several minutes listening intently to David’s notes and suggestions, scribbling away in my notebook and marking ideas directly on the score.

And the notes in the higher register were the most impressive. Clear and strong, they rang out as my fingers danced in little circles, flirting with the dotted rhythms. But the richness and fullness of the lower tones was breathtaking, too.

It wasn’t where or what I expected it to be. I didn’t expect an otherwise boring day in a grey month to change my life, but it did. Something finally clicked in my brain, as I realized that I didn’t need the big accomplishments as much as I needed these small victories – these seemingly insignificant but special moments. Maybe, I didn’t need to be perfect to be happy or successful after all.

For a while now, I’d been questioning my self-worth, self-confidence, and my right to be in my bachelor of music program. There were much more proficient musicians here, playing more difficult music, learning it faster, and playing it better than I could ever hope. But how could that matter, when I’d just had such a transcending experience? It didn’t. In the end, it didn’t matter that I wasn’t the best. It only mattered that I was making music.

And sitting on the empty stage, the bright stage lights beating down on me and the smell of history in my lungs, I knew that I was in the right place. I was a part of this world as much as the great musicians selling out Carnegie Hall, and as much as the tiny children learning the notes for the first time next door. I had earned my right. I may never again play an instrument as magnificent as the Fazioli. I may never fill large audiences and there may come a far-off day after my degree where I spend my days in an office before a computer keyboard rather than a piano keyboard, but as long as I keep this moment alive, and recreate it as often as I can, that’s all that I need out of my craft.

All I needed to earn my right to music was to love it.

A few weeks later, sitting in one of the plush red seats in the audience waiting for the Fazioli’s dedication concert to begin, I thought that was something that Dr. Roberta McKay and Mr. Elmer Brenner perhaps understood. I believe they wanted to share the marvelous gift of music with the city – with anyone who wishes to enjoy it – to create memorable and transcending moments exactly like the one that I had experienced. This suspicion was confirmed when they were welcomed onstage to speak at the opening of the concert and explained that they donated the Fazioli in order to give students the opportunity to play a high-quality instrument. I was a little shocked. It was all for me and others just like me! A smile formed on my face and the warmth spread to my chest, as I realized that someone I’d never met in my entire life cared so deeply about me, a stranger. I clapped as loudly as I could.

Though I have not laid hands on the Fazioli for several years, my moments with her live in my memory as a testament to the wonder and magic of Darke Hall and the passionate artists who create music within its historic walls, be they the greats or the everyday artists. More than that, it is a reminder of the wonder and magic of life.

Perhaps, one day, Fazioli and I will meet again.
The Wedding

Michele Ellingsen-Ailsby and Adam Ailsby remember their wedding which was held in Darke Hall. Singer-songwriter, Hawksley Workman remembers the shows he’s performed at Darke Hall and reflects on why such storied performance spaces are important.

These buildings are all that we’re going to have left as portals into the past for anybody who wonders what was life like before everyrthing was Uber-ed, all manner of labour was outsourced — anything quaint, that was small, anything that was bespoke. A room like Darke Hall needs to be preserved to give the future context. — Hawksley Workman

A pen and ink drawing that Michele Ellingsen-Ailsby’s father, Frank Ellingsen, drew for her and Adam as a gift in honour of their wedding.

Photos from Michele Ellingsen-Ailsby and Adam Ailsby’s wedding in Darke Hall (before restoration). Top: Michele and Adam. Bottom: Michele and Adam with Kirby Wirchenko looking on.
“It’s a treasure. We now have a treasure, and we should fill it with jewels.” — Lyn Goldman

**Out of the Darke on 91.3FM CJTR | cjtr.ca/live**

**Wednesdays at 9am starting April 20, 2022**

**Rebroadcast Sundays at 8pm starting April 24, 2022**

**Episode 1** - April 20 (April 24)
**Episode 2** - April 27 (May 1)
**Episode 3** - May 4 (May 8)
**Episode 4** - May 11 (May 15)
**Episode 5** - May 18 (May 22)
**Episode 6** - May 25 (May 29)
**Episode 7** - June 1 (June 5)
**Episode 8** - June 8 (June 12)

**The Tour**

An audio tour of the restored Darke Hall with Lyn Goldman, Marianne Woods, Carol Gay Bell, Dawn Bergstrom, Kate Jackson and James Youck.

Lyn Goldman, Marianne Woods, Carol Gay Bell on the Darke Hall stage, March 8, 2022
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