

CMU Alumnae Play Powerful ROLES ON BROADWAY

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Broadway experienced an unexpected first last year: An all-female creative team assembled by alumna Leigh Silverman mounted a production of “The Lifespan of a Fact” by journalist John D’Agata.

“I feel it is our responsibility as we gain power and any kind of platform, that we continue to widen the road as we go,” said Silverman, a 1996 College of Fine Arts graduate. “This is my fourth Broadway show, and I felt it was important to include, as I have throughout my career, women and people of color and put them in positions of power.”

Earlier this year, three alumnae from Carnegie Mellon University — producer Jamie deRoy, costume designer Ann Roth and lighting designer Peggy Eisenhauer — received nine Tony Award nominations. Additionally, alumna Judith Light received the 2019 Isabelle Stevenson Award for her work as an advocate for LGBTQIA+ causes.

“My experience of being a woman working on Broadway has been nothing short of extraordinary, amazing in every way,” Judith Light said. “These people and these casts and these productions — it’s beyond words how much love and faith and support I’ve received.”

Numerous CMU alumnae are making their marks on Broadway. Here



Kristolyn Lloyd (front row, left), Meg Zervoulis, Emily Skinner, Leigh Silverman (back row, left), Liz Coleman, Jamie deRoy and Peggy Eisenhauer are some of CMU's notable female alumni working in theater.

are four who shared what inspires them, tools they still use from their CMU training and what advice they have for students following in their footsteps.

PAULA WAGNER

Paula Wagner (A 1969) experienced a sort of homecoming this year when she returned to her theater roots to produce the Broadway musical adaptation of the 1990 movie “Pretty Woman.” Though she has been working in film since the late 1970s, Wagner’s love for entertaining began at age 13 at the Youngstown Playhouse in Ohio.

Wagner cites her work in the theater for giving her the tools to move forward into a career as an agent and now a producer. Her agility and love of storytelling have given her career longevity and allowed her the ability to work across mediums.

“I think that the philosophy of Carnegie Mellon, ‘My heart is in the work,’ is a simple one, and it can be translated in many ways,” explained Wagner, a member of CMU’s Board of Trustees. “At CMU, there was a commitment to what we were doing, to the work we were doing, because it had a meaning and relevance.”



Paula Wagner



Kristolyn Lloyd



Peggy Eisenhauer



Jamie deRoy

KRISTOLYN LLOYD

When Kristolyn Lloyd (A 2007) arrived at CMU to study musical theater, she was struck by the amount of talent that surrounded her. Those peers drove her to work hard.

“I think it’s valuable for every young person to know that when they get into the business, there are going to be people that are better than you,” Lloyd said. “There’s something about adjusting to working in a competitive environment. You have to find a way to show up and do your work. That’s what I learned at CMU.”

Lloyd notes that being a black woman on Broadway has given her a unique voice and the ability to bring an important perspective to conversations about what a play is trying to say to its audience. Her noteworthy career has included roles on television and stage. She played Alana Beck in the original cast of “Dear Evan Hansen” and recently starred as Jo March in a new adaptation of “Little Women” at Primary Stages.

PEGGY EISENHAUER

Peggy Eisenhauer (A 1983) stands out as one of a few Broadway lighting designers who happen to be women. She refers to herself as a wild card — someone who has broken a barrier but hasn’t left a path behind.

As a child, Eisenhauer saw Broadway productions and noticed the work of professional lighting designers. A favorite was Jules Fisher, and when it came time to apply to colleges, she chose his alma mater, Carnegie Mellon.

“I met him when I was 18, as a sophomore, because he came to school to give a talk. Flash forward to getting to work with him, not that much later when I was 23, it all sprung out of CMU,” Eisenhauer said.

After graduating, Eisenhauer began assisting Fisher, and eventually formed a more than 34-year strong artistic collaboration. Together, they have earned three Tony Awards and have been nominated for a dozen.

One of her best suggestions for young designers is to look for mentorship from many, not just from one person.

“You can find and cultivate a board of mentors who you can rely on that don’t have to give their whole life to you but that can offer support.”

JAMIE deROY

Jamie deRoy (A 1967) is a connector. As one of Broadway’s most prolific producers, she helps get productions up, running and funded.

Her career in the theater began as an aspiring actress at CMU, where she learned the discipline and rigor that would lead her to a childhood dream, first formed when her father invested in the Broadway productions of “The Pajama Game” and “Damn Yankees.”

After working as an actress on film, television and stage, she dipped her toe into the world of producing after seeing “The Complete Works of William Shakespeare (Abridged).” With more than 50 Broadway and 40 off-Broadway productions to her credit, deRoy has won seven Tony Awards.

“Everything is about connection for me. It snowballs — I didn’t rush into things right at the beginning. I see something off-Broadway, like ‘The Band’s Visit’ or ‘Vanya and Sonia and Masha and Spike,’ and become attached because I think it’s a great production, or I like the director or writer.”

See more profiles of CMU’s Broadway alumnae at cmu.edu/ambassadors.

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— Paula Wagner