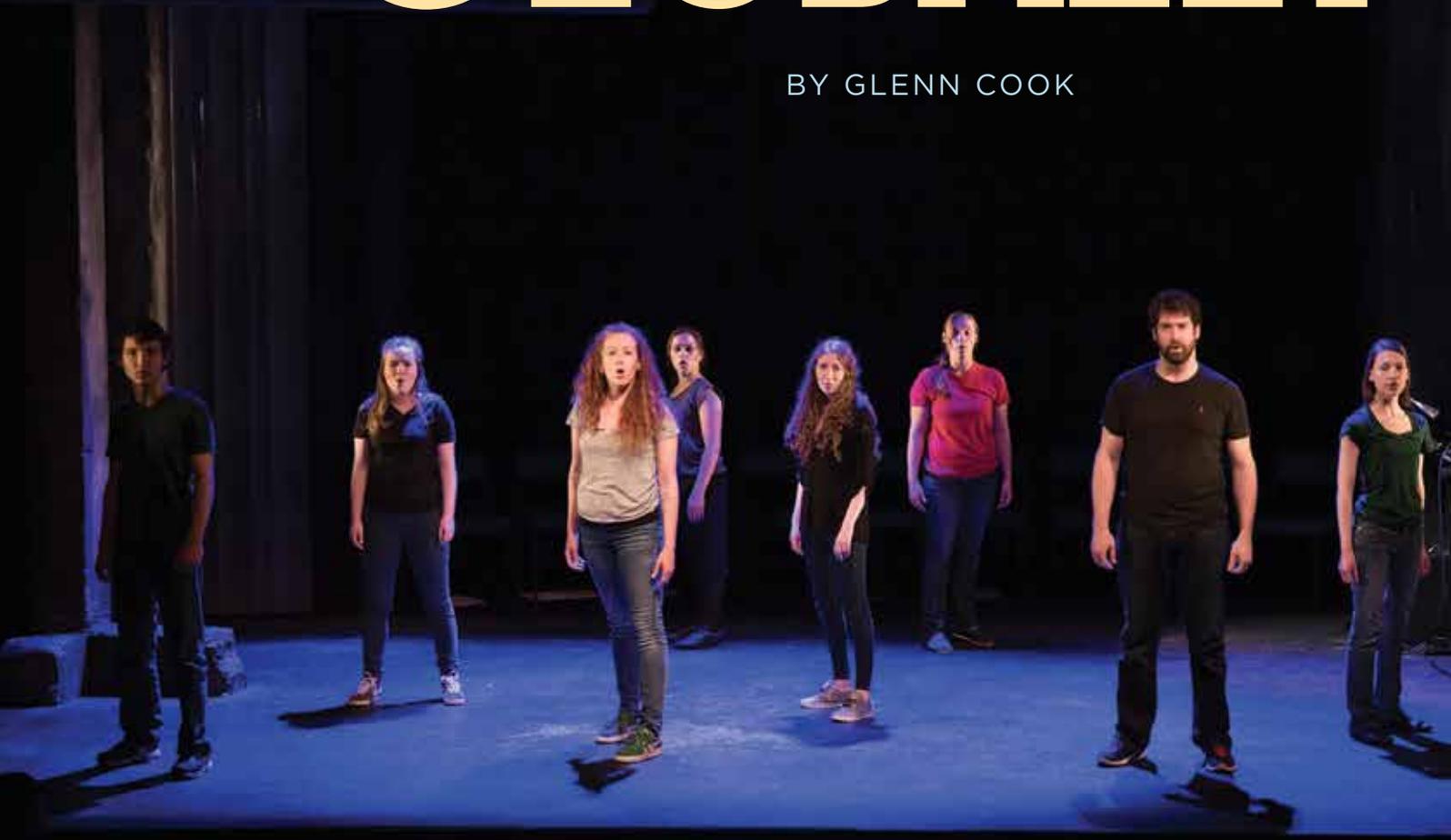


ACT GLOBALLY

BY GLENN COOK



Students performing as part of summer internship program with the Abbey Theatre, also known as the National Theatre of Ireland, in Dublin.

EDITOR'S NOTE: *This article is the second in an occasional feature series on the arts and global learning. The first article, "Designing Solutions," was published in the July/August 2016 issue of International Educator.*

AS A JUNIOR AT AMERICAN UNIVERSITY in Washington, D.C., Stephanie Kridlo was trying to determine what her study abroad program would look like. She knew that going to another country had the potential to be life changing, and she weighed her options carefully.

"I was planning to go to a well-established program in Chile when I got an e-mail about 'Rehearsing Change,'" Kridlo says of an Ecuador-based program that uses theatre to promote social justice issues. "Somehow, I knew that if I opened the e-mail it would change my mind, and it did. It was one of the most formative experiences of my life."

Education abroad programs are, by their very nature, designed to provide immersive experiences in other cultures and countries to college students. Increasingly, higher education drama programs are offering international experiences for their students through academic exchanges and education abroad opportunities that focus on skill development and, more broadly, on social justice and global issues in the developing world.

"Every society has its own way of telling stories," says Reynolds Whalen, founder and executive director of Performing Arts Abroad, an organization that offers study abroad opportunities directly to students. "Theatre is not only a unique way to understand a society, but drama is one of the most detailed or in-depth ways to see how a group of people tell their story. It's of value to anyone, not just theatrical practitioners, who want to understand a place better."

"Embodying a Character Mirrors the Study Abroad Experience"

Interest in education abroad programs has steadily grown over the past two decades, thanks in part to millennials who've been raised in an always connected, online world that takes instant global communication almost for granted. What college students discover through these programs, however, is that there's no substitute for real-life experience.

"The theatrical endeavor of embodying a character, exploring something outside your ordinary existence, perfectly mirrors the study abroad experience," Whalen says. "You are making a choice to have an experience outside your everyday life by going abroad, and doing both at the same time is the ultimate experiment in getting out of your comfort zone."

One advantage to studying abroad, especially for theatre students, is they get to "perform in places where things happen," says Joseph Lennon, director of the Irish studies program at Pennsylvania's Villanova University. Lennon, Villanova's new associate dean for global initiatives in the College of Arts and Sciences, is in charge of a summer internship exchange program with the Abbey Theatre in Dublin.

"American students know about site specific work," Lennon says. "They want to go to places and perform in spaces where you are outside the traditional theatre setting. We've created the sense that you need to go to other places rather than have the other places come to you, so you can see and experience what they are like."

Students and faculty take performing global as study abroad programs focused on drama show audiences how to view history in a new light, learn about social justice issues more deeply, heal wounds from genocide in Rwanda, and heal from apartheid in South Africa.



Lennon says Villanova's exchange program started five years ago with one-day workshops at the Abbey, which is Ireland's national theater. It has since expanded to include the internships, which run for six weeks for undergraduates and eight weeks for graduate students.

The Abbey's productions focus on social and contemporary issues, another common theme found in programs outside the United States.

Many of the Abbey's shows focus on gender, politics, and the often-fractious relationship between the Ireland's Catholic and Protestant communities.

"The purpose of the national theatre is to reflect the nation and to give the nation something to think about," Lennon says. "Theatre is used as a teaching tool for expression and self-actualization. They ask what can art do to reflect contemporary social issues, rather than merely provide entertainment."

As part of the program, students complete their reading online before going abroad. Once in Dublin, they spend three weeks taking classes in the mornings, working on one of three tracks (writing, acting/directing, and general theatre) in the afternoons, and seeing shows at night. At the end of the intensive, students perform in workshops at the Abbey for women recovering from addiction and abuse, then the graduate students spend an additional two to three weeks in Galway completing a research project at Ireland's national archives. All of the work for the internships is then completed online.

"We front load the internships for a month because we want them to spend as much time practicing theatre,



Joseph Lennon

going to plays, and meeting producers, writers, directors, and costume designers as they can," Lennon says.

This past summer, six students from University College in Dublin were given scholarships to take part in the program, furthering the international exchange. "We felt the dynamic between the Irish students and the American students was so important that we wanted to fund them to come," Lennon says. "They

teach each other, and people from different cultures have an opportunity to learn a lot from each other."

Lennon says interest in the program continues to grow, especially among graduate students who receive scholarships from a Villanova endowment. Students want to make contacts internationally and gain "practical cross-over knowledge as they go from academics to working theater professionals."

"In the arts, that's the big draw of the program," Lennon says. "They get to listen to me on campus at the beginning, but the real appeal is for them to meet people working in the national theatre and see how they do it. It's an opportunity for hands-on experiential learning."

An "Authentic Context for Learning"

David Montgomery, the adviser for New York University's dual certification degree in theater and social studies, has taken students on study abroad programs to London, Dublin, Brazil, and Puerto Rico over the past decade. He says the students sometimes struggle with the traveling and language barriers, but most call the experience "transformative and life changing."

Students participate in a summer internship exchange program with the Abbey Theatre in Dublin, Ireland.



Villanova University students rehearse in Ireland's national theater, Abbey Theatre, in Dublin. Many of its shows focus on gender, politics, and the often-fractious relationship between the Ireland's Catholic and Protestant communities. At the end of the intensive summer internship program, students perform in workshops at the Abbey for women recovering from addiction and abuse.



“Being an outsider in another place and learning with people from that country, doing the work and really learning instead of just being told what it’s like, is invaluable,” Montgomery says. “If they did the work here in New York it would still be amazing, but the extra layer of doing it with experts and leaders in other communities and other countries is something you can’t underestimate.”

Montgomery, who rotates trips abroad with five other full-time faculty members, says the diversity of the locations provides NYU’s students with a variety of opportunities to learn. The England program, usually held in London, focuses on theatre and classroom drama for young audiences. In Dublin, students work on community engagement projects, working with masks and learning how to perform in the streets or at a particular site. In Puerto Rico, students work with inmates at a maximum security prison and participate in a mask parade in San Juan.

“What we do all depends on the locale,” Montgomery says. “Puerto Rico has a more overt social justice agenda, and so much of what happens there is in response to what is happening on the island. In Dublin, the same is true, because a lot of the focus is working on using drama with various communities outside the classroom.”

“These are things you can’t do in a regular program in the U.S.,” Montgomery says. “By participating in this way, you really get involved and immersed in the culture, which provides you with an authentic context for learning.”

Whalen says this immersion is central to the idea behind all education abroad programs—that students will be

“Theatre is used as a teaching tool for expression and self-actualization. They ask what can art do to reflect contemporary social issues, rather than merely provide entertainment.”

affected greatly by what they learn from being immersed in the culture of another country.

“Every study abroad program worth anything, and most are, have a philosophy that transformation of the individual is central to their being,” Whalen says. “In performance programs, you’re trying to transform the art form by learning new, specific tools that you can use on the stage. It’s not just about learning how to act or dance better.

Whalen says students who participate in a theatre-related study abroad program return with a “wonderfully broadened perspective of humanity.”

“By integrating the performing arts into your studies when you’re going abroad, you get to make connections in ways that are far different than if you were just studying general education or exploring the cities on your own,” he says.



Students participating “Rehearsing Change: Empowering Locally, Educating Globally,” a joint project between Ecuador’s Universidad San Francisco de Quito and Butler University.

Merging Performance and Social Justice

Brontë Velez spent her junior year in two study abroad programs, first in the Czech Republic, where she learned how Vaclav Havel’s writings and plays helped destroy Communist rule in the late 1980s. For the spring 2015 semester, she was part of the first group of students to take part in “Rehearsing Change: Empowering Locally, Educating Globally,” a joint project between Ecuador’s Universidad San Francisco de Quito and Butler University’s Institute for Study Abroad. The community-based program offers classes in theatre, storytelling, and fair trade education.

Velez, whose diverse interests include multimedia and performance art, global and African history, gender studies, environmental justice, and sustainable development, was particularly interested in the fair trade component of the program.

“I’m fascinated by the intersection of art and social justice, and studying abroad was something I knew I needed to do to get as broad a picture as possible,” she says. “In so many ways in this country, we come in as a colonial presence and try to impose things on people and groups, and I wanted to see how theatre could be used in a different way.”

Daniel Bryan, a U.S.-trained actor who cofounded the Rehearsing Change study abroad program in Ecuador and serves as its resident director, says the purpose is to unite U.S. and international students so they can work together on common issues, many of them involving social justice.

“International students serve as not just a sounding board from abroad. They represent what basically the world has become,” Bryan says. “They represent a connection to this globalized society, and through this visceral real-life process, you can feel that connection between the local community and global community.”

Students can often gain a broader understanding of social justice when they see issues that are similar to the ones they face at home played out in a different place, with different laws and context, Bryan says. One cited frequently is Theatre of the Oppressed, a form that the Brazilian theatre practitioner Augusto Boal first developed in the 1960s to promote social and political change. In the Theatre of the Oppressed, the audience becomes active by exploring, showing, analyzing, and transforming the reality in which they are living.

“International students serve as not just a sounding board from abroad. They represent what basically the world has become.”



Brontë Velez studied abroad and performed in both the Czech Republic and Ecuador.

“It’s part of the nature of the culture, and part of the educational culture of teaching performance,” Bryan says. “It’s what we do. We’re not interested in a show. We’re very much against anything that’s about a show or a final product. It’s all about the process of creating.”

Many of these education abroad programs take an interdisciplinary approach, open not just to theatre majors but also to other students interested in learning more about culture and life in the participating country. For Kridlo, who debated whether to major in theatre before opting to go into international studies, the appeal of merging her two seemingly different interests was too good to pass up.

“I liked the idea of doing theatre in Spanish, and the idea of getting back into the arts in some way,” she says. “I was more nervous about it than I was scared, but that’s how I knew it would mean more to me in the long run. I got in and haven’t looked back since.”

From Reaching Adults with Disabilities to Reliving History Onstage

Learning about other cultures through theater and the arts is by no means exclusive to students who attend U.S. universities. At The Hague University of Applied Sciences, English lecturer P.A. Treanor has developed a multinational program—drama@hhs—that brings students from different countries together to perform plays in English. Since it started in 2015, students from 13 countries have

Brontë Velez performing in Ecuador with the study abroad program “Rehearsing Change.”

been involved in five productions, a mixture of American plays and revues adapted to English.

“The drama group operates outside the college’s curriculum and aims to bring both home and guest students together using English language theatre as the medium,” Treanor says. “As the facilitator/director, I have tried to encourage them to bring as much as possible from their own backgrounds and traditions into rehearsals and performances.”

Treanor says the program is “continuing to take on its own existence,” noting that he is stepping back and allowing students to run the productions, four of which are planned in 2016–17. Students will perform in Oscar Wilde’s *The Importance of Being Earnest*, Eve Ensler’s *The Vagina Monologues*, Alice Gerstenberg’s *Overtones*, and a series of Shakespeare adaptations.

As an instructor, Montgomery is “always amazed at the things I hadn’t considered before” when working abroad. As an example, he points to a recent experience at the Central School of Speech and Drama in London, where instructor Liselle Terret was creating a show featuring adults with disabilities.

“Some of the disabilities were pretty extreme, and as they were getting close to the performance, we had a chance to work with the cast. We were in the room with them and we were part of that process,” he says. “I saw how gentle Liselle was with them while continuing to challenge them, navigating that delicate balance, and it taught me a great lesson in how to facilitate this kind of work. What she drew from those cast members was really, really inspiring.”

The London-based CAPA International Education, a study abroad provider, has courses for U.S. undergraduates on “understanding the possibilities of theatre.” Taught by playwright Michael Punter, head of CAPA’s theatre education program, the course is designed for students from “a range of backgrounds.”

“I teach theatre as an urban phenomenon from Ancient Athens to now, via Early Modern London and revolutionary Paris. It’s all about how the city talks to itself about itself,” Punter says. “In the final two weeks of each semester, I show how theatre techniques can be used in

classrooms and work places to get people thinking about challenging models of behavior.”

Punter works with acting students enrolled in the Guthrie program at University of Minnesota. This past spring, the students performed his original play, *American Soviet*, that examined the work of female spies in the 1930s. In November, as part of the cultural exchange between the university and CAPA, the students will create and perform a play focusing on civil rights at the Street Studio Theatre in London.

“One of the best pieces of this is theatre is inherently collaborative,” Whalen says. “It’s not the standard, ‘We’re going to teach you one thing and this is how you have to do that one thing.’ Theatre is uniquely positioned to be a give and take of what you can do with a community instead of what you do for a community. Both sides benefit from your presence.”

Theater for Good: Reaching Prison Inmates through Drama

Ashley Lucas became interested in prison life in an effort to understand her father, who spent two decades incarcerated in the state of Texas. Little did she know that the interest would turn into a passion that would take her to 36 cities in eight countries, and lead to a lifelong passion for working with inmates and their family members from around the world.

“My father always had a really hard time talking about what life was like in prison, especially to me because I was his younger child. We were always in constant contact, but I knew very little about what his life was like in a practical way,” Lucas says. “When I started doing my research, I didn’t know any other families who were going through this, and then I found that there were 2.3 million people at the time who were affected in ways similar to me.”

Lucas, now a theatre professor at the University of Michigan’s Residential College, wrote a one-woman play, *Doin’ Time: Through the Visiting Glass*. She interviewed family members, former prisoners, and people connected to prison work, and has since performed the play both inside and outside prisons in the United States, Ireland, and Canada.

Now the director of the university’s Prison Creative Arts Project (PCAP), she has led students on several trips to Brazil to learn more about the arts in facilities there. Before leaving for Brazil, students must take a prerequisite course that focuses on the history of theatre in prisons around the world and provides them with safety training. They then help facilitate arts workshops in adult and juvenile treatment and detention facilities in Michigan before they go to Brazil, where PCAP has a partnership with the federal university.

“In the final two weeks of each semester,
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Students (from left to right) Indonesia, France, Iran, The Netherlands, Moldova, Curacao, United Kingdom, Armenia, and Sweden in front the main entrance of the Hague University of Applied Sciences after an event called “The Great Eurovision Song Contest in May 2016.” Everybody in the photo participated either sang or performed.

Students work in five different theatre programs in Rio, participating in theatre and visual arts workshops in prisons and hospitals and taking classes at the Center for the Theatre of the Oppressed. The pretrip training, Lucas says, gives them the skills to communicate appropriately.

“All of our students are profoundly shaped by this work, and it is an incredible preprofessional program for our theatre students because they learn how theatre can function in a grassroots way and in nontraditional theatre spaces,” she says. “Many of our students speak no Portuguese whatsoever when they go on this trip, so they have to learn how to communicate in other ways. Theatre gives them the grounding to do that.”

More than anything, the students learn how to be respectful of the prisoners they deal with in the United States and abroad.

“What people don’t understand is that things that seem ordinary in the outside world can create chaos in a prison,” Lucas says. “A question we never ask is why someone is incarcerated, which is natural because we’re curious and think it will help us be more understanding. But we have to let our students know that, ‘Hey, I just met you. What’s the worst thing that happened in your life?’ is not an appropriate conversation. So these lessons go far beyond what you would learn in a traditional theatre program.”

Multiple Methods in the Creative Process

One appeal to education abroad theatre programs is that many do not use the traditional Western approach. In the United States, Bryan and others note, students are put in particular roles—acting, playwriting, stage management, choreography, props. Most of the foreign programs take

a more integrated tack, using techniques such as Japan’s Suzuki method, which highlights minuscule movements or dance to tell a specific story. In many programs, performers often work without a script.

“In poorer communities in Eastern Africa, for example, most of the theatre is built on oral traditions rather than written traditions,” Whalen says. “It’s developed through improvisation and movement work. You build scenes and a play, but it’s never written down.”

In one exercise, Bryan says, two students showed what they discovered while working in a preschool using “image theatre.”

“The question was, ‘Why is education not working?’ So they showed the teacher scolding the student and the before and after effects of that, how this person transferred over time into an oppressed adult,” Bryan recalls. “Then they started to resculpt this young man, showing how things could have turned out differently. They used theatre to further dialogue and, hopefully, slowly form part of the transformative process for this community.”

“Becoming engaged in the creative process with local participants increases their interest even more,” Bryan says. “The point of performing or creating art in that type of environment is not to show up and ‘do a show,’ but to show what you’re experiencing and learning. When you have members of the community participating as well, they have real-life conflicts they need to explore, and that gives theater kids the avenue to engage in those conflicts, identify with them, and learn from them.”

In Quito, Kridlo designed and acted in a small play about gender violence while simultaneously developing a project to help eliminate the city’s machismo society. Later, in the Kichwa community of Tzawata, she and other students presented a play that looked at indigenous

discrimination in Ecuador and their own personal identity struggles in the United States.

"There are tons of different ways to be connected in a hyperconnected world. It's something we have to opt out of now rather than something we opt into," Kridlo says. "There is so much room to explore the world as a whole. Some things never make it into the mainstream and some things get subverted because they're under the thumb of social control, but we have an opportunity to have a greater global focus. Whether we take stock of it or not, it's always there."

Learning About Civil Rights in South Africa

Tavia La Follette, a theater professor at Towson University in Maryland, will lead students on a study abroad course to South Africa in January 2017 to look at how culture and the arts can be a reflective tool for society. Titled "Civil Rights and Civil Wrongs," the students will meet with artists and activists, work with township children in an arts-based program, and visit Market Theatre, which was dubbed the "theatre of struggle" during apartheid.



Tavia La Follette

"I hope will just open up the doors to their own imagination of what's possible for them to do," La Follette says of the program. "A lot of the time we think in small ways and we don't need to. There's a whole world out there of things we can do. Just getting out of the country, no matter where you're going, gives any student a more objective view on life. Going to the other side of the planet gives them even more perspective."

La Follette notes that the United States, which recently marked the fiftieth anniversary of the Civil Rights Act, and South Africa, which ended apartheid 30 years later, share common political issues today.

"Immigration is a huge issue in South Africa," she says, "and we will be discussing and talking about that as it relates to civil rights and civil wrongs. The biggest piece is to get our students to look at what we've done wrong and what we've done right. Are we looking to the past and applying it to the present?"

This is the first study abroad project for La Follette, who moved to Baltimore last year after spending more

COURTESY OF TAVIA LA FOLLETTE

Angel Uwamahoro

Healing Wounds of the Rwandan Genocide Through Performance BY SUSAN LADIKA

AS A CHILD, Angel Uwamahoro didn't even realize she was Rwandan. Now she works to bring healing to her homeland, which was decimated by one of the worst genocides of the twentieth century.

With ethnic tensions simmering in Rwanda in 1990, Uwamahoro's mother moved with Angel, who was just a baby, to neighboring Uganda. After seven years living there as refugees, the pair moved to Los Angeles so her mother could continue her education in the United States.

When her mother decided to return to Rwanda in 2002, Uwamahoro wasn't sure what to think. "My mom had to explain what I was. At first I thought I was Ugandan—then I thought I was American."

Since moving back to Rwanda, she's had a major role to play in educating people about the Rwandan experience.

Although she's only 25 years old, Uwamahoro is an accomplished actress, and

she's used her acting skills both in Africa and abroad to teach people about genocide in Rwanda, which left an estimated Tutsis and moderate Hutus dead, as well as the present-day hopefulness in the country.

Through acting, "it made me realize I had a role to play in sharing our (Rwandans') story," says Uwamahoro, who is in her senior year at Fordham University in New York, where she majors in theater and performing arts.

Uwamahoro says she has always been interested in acting, and while she was growing up she took part in numerous school performances and talent shows.

In 2005 she was invited to join Mashirika, a well-known Rwandan theater company, which was established in 1997 by a group of Rwandan refugees living in Uganda. The following year the troupe moved to Rwanda.

With Mashirika, Uwamahoro has been part of the cast of the play *Africa's Hope*, which tells the stories of survivors of Rwanda's genocide. The play has been performed

in Africa, the United States and Europe.

Although Uwamahoro and most of her family were living in Uganda when the genocide occurred, she lost several extended family members in the killing. In Africa's Hope she plays the role of a girl who saw her baby brother killed by a man wielding a machete.

Because she had lived outside of Rwanda at the time of the killings, the play has helped her gain perspective on what her countrymen and women suffered through.

After their performances in Rwanda, the cast will hear comments such as "thank you for telling the truth" and "thank you for telling our stories," she says.

Along with serving as a tool to help educate audiences about the genocide, the overarching focus of the play is "the process of forgiving and moving forward," she says.

For older Rwandans who attend a theater performance, "they are able to escape. Escape for them is going into a different world in a safe environment," Uwamahoro says.

than a decade working with Carnegie Mellon University. But for more than a decade, she has done these types of social justice projects through a nonprofit program she founded in Pittsburgh called Art Up. The downtown program, which is expanding to Baltimore, “uses the arts for social practice type of work.”

“The whole purpose of this work is exposing young people to well-established artists and forging the exchange of ideas by having them work side by side together,” she says. “That’s what we’re planning to do with Civil Rights and Civil Wrongs. The idea is to inspire, not intimidate.”

Changing Lives

Words like “inspire” are frequently used by education abroad participants, who learn as many life lessons as skills that will benefit them professionally.

“Many of our students come home with the realization that theatre is not valued in the same way here as it is in other countries. They are inspired to engage in this type of practice, and they come back with specific approaches and tools they can use to make a big change,” Whalen says. “They use different pieces and parts of things they learn in their experience abroad and turn it into an art form that becomes something different.”

Velez says her experiences abroad taught her “how much you can really work in collaboration with people and build something you’re really proud of in real time and in a real space.”

“I always wondered how something that will not last, a performance that is only a few minutes or hours, could make a difference in someone’s life, but when you use those moments of empowerment and performance together with taking classes on how to make changes in policy and practice, then it starts to come into focus,” she says. “This taught me that tangible change doesn’t have to be divorced from art or form or beauty. It can be student led and community led. It taught me that you can make a difference.”

Kridlo says performing “felt so good again” that she’s looking for opportunities to marry international exchange programs with theatre after she graduates in December. Her final capstone project, focusing on genocide, has a performance element that comes directly from her experience in Ecuador.

“What I learned through this study abroad program was that there is a purpose for the arts in everything. It’s something I knew, that the arts have real power for social change, but it wasn’t until I did this program that I saw it firsthand. It can change your life. It changed mine.” **IE**

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Uwamahoro was recognized early on for her talents and skills. At the age of 17 she was among 12 Rwandan students who were selected to take part in the Youth Leadership Program to the United States, sponsored by the U.S. State Department and implemented by the nonprofit World Learning. Through the program, the group members traveled to the United States to receive

intense training to help them develop their leadership and civic engagement skills.

In 2012 her acting skills earned her a presidential scholarship to study theater in the United States after performing for the heads of state of Rwanda and Uganda for the twentieth anniversary of the Rwandan Patriotic Front, which defeated extremist Hutus and ended the country’s genocide. She applied to several U.S. universities and enrolled at Fordham in 2013.

Even while studying in the United States, she has continued to perform. Among her accomplishments, Uwamahoro has read one of her poems at the launch of Kwibuka 20, a United Nations’ commemoration of the Rwandan genocide. She’s performed at the Rwanda Youth Forum in Dallas in 2015, which focused on the role Rwanda’s youth have played in the progress of the country.

And she’s also appeared in the off-Broadway play, *Our Lady of Kibeho*, which dramatizes events that took place in Rwan-

da in the 1980s. The Virgin Mary reportedly appeared to a group of female students at Kibeho College and warned them of an upcoming apocalypse, which some believe actually prophesied the 1994 genocide.

After she graduates from Fordham, Uwamahoro wants to return to her homeland and establish her own theater and performing arts school to help Rwandans learn to do a better job of expressing their emotions.

“As Rwandans, we have a very reserved culture. It’s very important that people learn now to express themselves,” she says. “I believe that theater and the expression of art helps to heal. I believe it’s a method of therapy.” **IE**

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