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LLCs foster community, artistic expression and civic engagement

KAYLA REED
CAMPUS EDITOR

Concordia is home to three Living Learning Communities (LLCs) in the Upper Quads: Bella Amore, Creative Edge and Polis Plaza. With housing applications open, now is the time to get to know these communities and decide where to live next year. The Courier interviewed the three Faculty in Residence Professors of the Living Learning Communities to get to know their communities better.

Bella Amore, located in Chi Omicron, is a women's only LLC. The Faculty in Residence is Dr. Kristen Koenig, a Sociology professor. Koenig said, "Bella Amore is a unique and meaningful place for women to live and grow. It is a space where community is built intentionally and where women are supported as they navigate their faith, relationships and vocational callings. This work may seem ordinary, but it is deeply significant. It has been life-changing not only for residents, but for my family as well, as we have formed lasting relationships that continue beyond their time in the LLC."

Koenig noted the importance of community in Bella Amore. She said, "I love living among the women at Bella Amore and getting to know them in their day-to-day lives. What I value most is being part of those seemingly 'ordinary' moments, like shared meals, conversations and time together, which are actually where the most meaningful growth happens. It is in this everyday life that relationships are formed and where I see vocation and community lived out in a powerful way."

Bella Amore hosts a variety of events throughout the year. Koenig said, "We host gatherings like Taco Talks, charcuterie nights, and sweet talks that create space for both connection and meaningful conversation. These events reflect the heart of Bella by bringing women together in ways that feel natural and relational. Taco Talks and charcuterie nights are favorites because they foster both community and thoughtful discussion in a relaxed setting."

Creative Edge is headed by Music professor Dr. Christian Hauser. He said, "At Creative Edge, we are a community who appreciate all of the arts, regardless of how artistic we think we are. Bring your outside of the box thinking as we dance, act, create, play games, paint and make music."

Creative Edge provides unique opportunities to both appreciate creativity and express it. Hauser recalled, "During a previous event we asked Professor Sara Fletcher to come in and talk about Jackson Pollock, the painter who grabs a brush

with paint and flings it on a canvas. We listened to a mini lecture about his work and then we covered the entire dorm courtyard in tarps, canvases and had some stations with wood chairs...we had students take their turn in flinging paint at them...That was a really fun event." Those green and gold speckled chairs are perched just outside of the Creative Edge Common Room, where anyone walking by can see firsthand the creativity that drives the community.

Besides designated events to foster creativity, the Common Room of Creative Edge is also home to a number of instruments including a piano and a vast collection of board games, which students can use at any time. Hauser said, "If you're interested in playing games, appreciate the arts or want to learn a new instrument...come to the Creative Edge!"

This is the fourth year that Hauser has been the Faculty in Residence at Creative Edge. He shared that his favorite part of the role is "being that mentor role for students and getting to know them personally." He added, "To help facilitate that, we sometimes host early morning coffee and donuts, and students just come and talk. That's a real chance to develop relationships with students and petition prayer requests."

Creative Edge also incorporates trips as a part of their community, sometimes in collaboration with Polis Plaza. Hauser said that past trips have gone to see the Getty Museum, Getty Villa and the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library (where students viewed the Dead Sea Scrolls). Hauser added, "I'm hoping we can go to the Huntington Gardens next term."

Dr. Bryan Santin, English and History professor, leads Polis Plaza. He said, "Polis Plaza comes from the ancient Greek word 'polis' which is the word for city state, so we think of it as a community really geared around politics, faith, pop culture, trying to think about what would prepare students to live in the real world. Usually when people say the 'real world' they are talking about business, money, etc, but we're thinking of the real world in the larger sense of, what does it mean to live in a political community, at the local level of a city, at the larger level of state or nation state, or even the world? What does it mean to live in these kinds of political communities and how can we think and talk about that as part of our LLC? We think of this as civil discourse or civil dialogue."

Santin also noted the importance of community within the LLCs. He said, "I have a phrase that I call 'glancing encounters' where I just kind of run into people, often students, but even the other faculty. You run into people and a lot can happen in those five minute encounters... seeing people regularly walking too and from the dorms you strike up a lot of really interesting conversations which is something you don't get if you're faculty and just come into the building, teach, leave and drive home."

Polis Plaza emphasizes open dialogue and important conversations. Santin said, "We have a recurring event we host every two weeks called Agora 360 dialogues, and choose

a topic that's usually in the news that's controversial...The goal is not to say what you believe, the goal is to understand and kind of ventriloquise different positions, and to kind of gain experience talking to people in those ways."

He added, "I think there's an apprehension, a kind of nervousness, around talking about important topics: political topics, religious topics, those kinds of things, and I think our LLC is designed to help students talk about those things in a healthy and productive way."

The sense of community within the LLCs drives it as an integral part of Concordia campus life, cultivating friendships and conversations. Interested in applying to live in one of the LLCs next year? Apply for an LLC as part of the housing application. Housing selection will take place the week of April 6. For questions about housing, email res@cui.edu.

Women's water polo is making a splash

JOSEPH PANETTA
SPORTS EDITOR

Women's water polo is up and running, and they're having a ton of success. Currently sitting at 14-9 the ladies have four more regular season games before taking on the WWPA Tournament.

This season has been nothing short of amazing for the ladies and they have a chance to make history and turn in their best record as a program.

"The key is just going to be consistency," said senior attacker Kennedy Brubaker. "We need to keep pushing every day in practice, staying disciplined, and continuing to build off what we've already done. If we stay focused and keep working, I think we can finish really strong."

"To finish the season strong, it really comes down to consistency and composure. At this point, everyone is talented, it's about who can stay disciplined and execute under pressure," said junior goalie Jaden Soto. "If we stay connected and play with confidence, I think we can do something special."

Soto has been lights out in the cage for Concordia, garnering majority of her team's saves and contributing to their rock solid defense.

(Continues on p. 6)



PICTURED ABOVE: Creative Edge Common Room
Photo courtesy of: Kayla Reed



PICTURED ABOVE: Bella Amore Event
Photo courtesy of: Kristen Koenig

Sip-Sip Hooray brings specialty dirty soda and coffee to campus

REBEKAH MICHEL
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Within Orange County, it often seems as if there is a new beverage shop or small business popping up each week. Yet many Golden Eagles are deciding to not only support local coffee and beverage businesses, but ones that are student-owned and operated.

Sip-Sip Hooray is a new small business run by Concordia sophomore, Isabel Gibboney, out of her dorm on campus. As their Instagram bio states, Sip-Sip Hooray is a “home-based dirty soda shop located at Concordia University Irvine.”

When asked what inspired her to begin her small business, Gibboney responded, “I was inspired to start Sip-Sip Hooray over the summer, when dirty soda was becoming popular. My dream has always been to own my own coffee shop, and when I first tried dirty soda, I knew it was something new and unique that not a lot of people were experimenting with.” The trend of dirty soda includes adding coffee creamers, syrups and other sweeteners to sodas. It has grown in immense popularity in recent years, thanks to TikTok, influencer culture, and the

popular Utah-based chain Swig Soda.

“I became really excited and started trying different creations. After testing many ideas, I landed on a few really good ones, which became my menu items. I started selling drinks at my house, and people loved them, so I decided to bring my business to Concordia,” said Gibboney.

As an entrepreneur, time management is essential for Gibboney. “Starting a business while also being a full-time student is definitely difficult and keeps me very busy; however, I wouldn’t want it any other way! One thing that’s nice is that I get to work around my schedule. I post pick-up times for when I am free, so I don’t have to worry about it conflicting with school or athletics. It has been so much fun and has taught me how to utilize my time wisely,” she added.

Another unique feature of Sip-Sip Hooray is its unique specials for each month. In March, the specials consisted of a Lucky Charms Latte, a Lucky Charms Coke, a Honey Vanilla Matcha, a Leprechaun Lemonade and a Shamrock Spritz. With drinks ranging from dirty sodas to matchas to lattes, and even recipes with the popular Alani Nu

energy drinks, Sip Sip Hooray truly offers something for everyone with a frequently changing menu.

What are some of her favorite specials? Gibboney replied, “Some of my favorite drink specials that I have offered are my S’mores Latte and Dirty Dr. Pepper, my Christmas special Peppermint Cola, and Lucky Charms Coke and Latte.”

Sip-Sip Hooray is a great example of how Concordia allows students to pursue their passions and, as in Gibboney’s case, start their own small business. “I see Sip-Sip Hooray continuing even after college. I hope to be able to buy a trailer and sell on the go one day! I would love to travel and sell my dirty sodas to people all over the country! I also hope for my own shop in the future. I’m super excited to see Sip-Sip Hooray continue to grow,” said Gibboney.

Wanting to order your Sip-Sip Hooray? Orders are able to be made through Instagram DMs. Pick-up times for beverages are posted daily on the accounts’ Instagram stories. Follow @sipsiphooraysoda on Instagram for the latest updates and news on Concordia’s newest beverage business.



PICTURED ABOVE: Follow @sipsiphooraysoda on Instagram to place your order

Photo courtesy of: Isabel Gibboney



PICTURED ABOVE: The small business is run on campus, allowing for easy pick up

Photo courtesy of: Isabel Gibboney

Line dancing club gains traction at Concordia

KAYLA REED
CAMPUS EDITOR

Joining a club can be the perfect way to get involved on campus, and God’s Country Club may very well introduce you to your new favorite hobby. Run by Cal O’Flanagan and Heidi Bishop, the club teaches line dancing and swing dancing on different nights throughout the year.

O’Flanagan, an Engineering major, said, “God’s Country Club got started with a passion for dance and a shared idea between Heidi and I to bring the community together to move our bodies and enjoy some fun memories, and learn something new.”

The line dancing side of the club, headed by O’Flanagan, meets every Monday night in Student Union 203 (the dance room) from 7:30 - 8:30 p.m. O’Flanagan said, “Be willing to try something new and see what you might surprise yourself with.”

The first Wednesday of every month, a different part of the club meets. Heidi Bishop teaches swing dancing. Come by yourself or

with a partner and enjoy learning swing dance steps. Bishop, a sophomore, said, “Swing dancing is really such an easy style of dance to learn that anyone can pick it up pretty quick.” Both swing dancing and line dancing are beginner-friendly. Anyone can participate regardless of skill level.

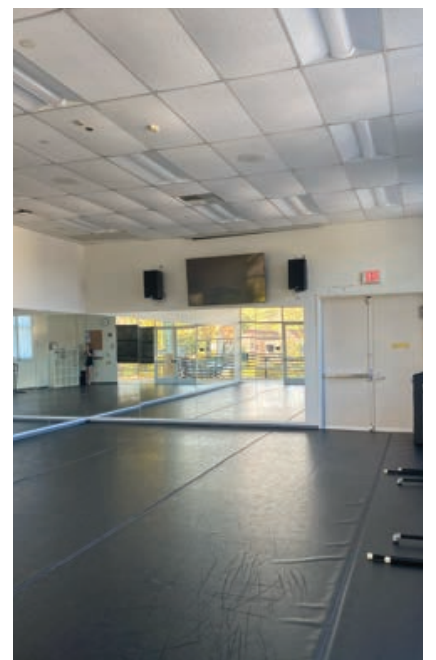
Bishop said, “Swing dancing might seem like you need to be really good to enjoy it, but it’s really easy to get to a basic level of swing dancing where you can be able to enjoy dancing with your friends and just have a good time. It’s a great skill to have when you need a dance break from homework, need to break it down on the dance floor, or just want to have some fun!”

The two halves of the club combine on the first Wednesday of each month, where the club hosts an Open House from 9 - 10 p.m. in the CU Arena. Alternating between line dances and swing dances, the open gym night is a great way to try out something new while having fun with friends.

God’s Country Club has picked up a group of students who regularly attend. Sophomore Hannah Robinson emphasized how amazing the sense of community is within the club. The club allows students from a variety of majors and schedules to connect through dancing.

Bishop said, “My favorite part of running the swing dancing part of the club is being able to connect with different students I wouldn’t normally. During the part of our swing dancing nights where everyone is practicing the new moves they’ve learned, I love to go around to talk and dance with people, especially the newcomers to the club. I love swing dancing because I get to dance, but it’s also just a wonderful opportunity to get to know people.”

Come for the dancing and stay for the fun sense of community. You might even pick up a new hobby! For more information on God’s Country Club, email O’Flanagan at cal.oflanagan@eagles.cui.edu or Bishop at heidi.bishop@eagles.cui.edu.



PICTURED ABOVE: The Dance Room, where Line Dance meets

Photo courtesy of: Kayla Reed

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Hawaii club set to celebrate a night of aloha this Sunday

TYNA ROMOFF
STAFF WRITER

Concordia's annual Spring Luau is returning this year with a unique twist: celebrating the rich history and culture of the paniolos, or Hawaiian cowboys. Focusing on storytelling, tradition and community, this year's event promises to be one of the most immersive yet.

According to Ka Pu'uuhonua's president, Jai Viela, the inspiration for this year's theme came from a desire to try something new while still honoring Hawaiian culture. "We wanted to do something a little different," he said. "We wanted to honor the paniolos." The paniolo tradition has deep historical roots in Hawai'i. As Viela described, cattle were first introduced to the Hawaiian Islands in 1793 when Captain George Vancouver gifted them to King Kamehameha I. With no natural predators, the cattle population quickly grew out of control. By the 1830s, King Kamehameha III brought in vaqueros, or cowboys, from Mexico to teach Hawaiians how to manage livestock. Over time, Hawaiians adapted these techniques, creating their own unique ranching culture, equipment and traditions that are still celebrated today.

Vice President of Ka Pu'uuhonua, Lyla Sato, emphasized the cultural significance behind the theme. "Mexican vaqueros taught the native Hawaiian people roping and ranching, which helped them create the paniolo ways," she said. "The club wanted to do a paniolo theme to honor Hawaiian cowboys who helped build Hawai'i's ranching industry."

She also highlighted how this year's luau will incorporate historical elements into the experience. Traditional palaka prints, once worn by plantation workers to represent their identity, will be featured throughout the event in costumes and decorations. "We wanted to honor the paniolos and the diverse cultures that contributed to Hawai'i's history," Sato

added.

Planning an event like this is not easy. According to Viela, one of the biggest challenges has been managing all the moving parts. "There's just a lot of moving parts to this event," he said. "It's also the only ticketed event that Concordia has for students, so ticket sales are a big part of it." Sato added that coordinating vendors and budgeting for the event has also been a challenge, especially when bringing in authentic items from Hawai'i.

Despite these challenges, the team has worked hard to create an unforgettable experience for students. This year's luau aims to feel more personal and immersive than ever before. "We want this year to feel like you're in your family's backyard," Viela said. "Like you're in a backyard in Hawai'i."

This event will feature a wide variety of performances, including traditional hula, Siva Samoa, and even fire knife dancers to close out the night. Freshman dancer and choreographer, Oliva Holmquist, shared what it means to be part of this event. "Performing at this event means that I get to share my culture with everyone," she said. "Moving away from home was a little tough, but I feel like I am still at home when I dance hula."

Holmquist also emphasized the storytelling aspect of hula. "Every movement tells a story," she explained. "With this dance, I wanted to make sure the audience understood what we were dancing to and the story of the paniolos. It's upbeat, fun, and expressive."

Ultimately, this year's luau is more than just an event; it's a celebration of culture, history and connection. Through music, dance, food and storytelling, the Concordia community is invited to experience the spirit of aloha in a whole new way. The luau takes place this Sun. March 29 at 5 p.m. on the Commons Lawn.

Advancing Women in Leadership hosts seventh annual luncheon

KAYLA REED,
CAMPUS EDITOR

On March 6, Concordia's Advancing Women in Leadership Task Force held its seventh annual luncheon, bringing together women from a variety of campus leadership roles to share in a time of community and fellowship over a good meal.

The title of the conference this year was Beyond Measure: Lessons from the Outdoors and featured a presentation by Business professor Dr. Yi Schuler on her recent experiences in mountaineering.

Co-chaired by professors Ashlie Andrew and Lori Doyle, the Advancing Women in Leadership Task Force Members are made up of women from nearly every department on campus. The annual luncheon aims to provide community and encouragement for Concordia women.

Andrew loves the conference for a variety of reasons. She said, "First off, it often introduces you to new and different voices in or around our campus. Most of us know of Dr. Yi Schuler but many of us didn't know her personally until today. This gives us an opportunity to see another side of her talents. Second, I think it's inspiring and motivating... This is a great opportunity to build each other up and remember why we work here. Third of all, it gives us an opportunity to glorify God through our vocations."

Schuler presented on her experiences in mountaineering some of the biggest peaks in the world, most recently Mount Aconcagua in Argentina— the tallest peak in the Americas. Schuler, who also enjoys mountain biking, hiking and backpacking, combines her interests in mountaineering. She relates it all back to her points as her presentation was an inspirational message about climbing the peaks in one's own life.

Focusing on theme verse Ephesians 3:20, the conference also provided time for discussions on the importance of faith in leadership roles. Associate Vice President of Strategic Communications, Ann Ashmon, said, "I appreciate how we can bring God and our faith into our

daily lives and into our work and how we can share that perspective with each other and support each other in that. It's a gift."

Ashmon said her favorite part of the annual luncheon was "hearing from my colleagues and the amazing things they do." Every year, the conference brings in new speakers from Concordia's community and encourages women to lead with the gifts God has given them.

Schuler said, "We have this platform for women where we have a safe group to be ourselves and rely upon the resources provided and shared and find our path forward as a community." She pointed out the importance of community among Concordia women, saying, "That we are intentional in creating these spaces and bringing in diverse experiences and connections to grow each other is amazing."

The connections made through the Advancing Women in Leadership program provide a great opportunity for fellowship for the women at Concordia. Andrew said, "My favorite part [of the conference] is just the community it provides from all corners of campus. While we're all united on the mission of Concordia, so many of our departments take place separately and this is the opportunity to see people we don't usually get to see and spend time with."

For more information about Advancing Women in Leadership, email Ashlie Andrew at ashlie.andrew@cui.edu.



PICTURED ABOVE: Dr. Yi Schuler
Photo courtesy of: Kayla Reed

KA PU'UHONUA: THE HAWAII CLUB PRESENTS

THE ANNUAL SPRING LU'AU

nā Paniolo: honoring the Hawaiian Cowboys

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PICTURED ABOVE: Luncheon Attendees listening to Dr. Schuler's presentation
Photo courtesy of: Kayla Reed

Meet the Newest President and Vice President of ASCUI

JAI VIELA AND TENLEY SITZE

Jai Viela: Hello, Concordia Friends!

My name is Jai Viela, a sophomore Communication major! I am from Maui, Hawaii. I have a deep appreciation for community, education and mentoring young leaders to serve their communities. My favorite memory from Concordia is meeting some of my best friends, who I could not imagine my life without.

I am excited to serve as the 2026-2027 ASCUI President. I hope to foster a sense of community at Concordia and continue collaborating with all of our on-campus groups. I also look forward to hosting service projects to improve our landscaping and campus areas. Along with my mentor, Amanda Norris, we have worked hard to create a dynamic ASCUI team that brings creative

ideas, a passion for bringing people together, and love for this incredible campus community.

We hope that, through our work, we can bring visible change to our campus while mentoring the next generation of student leaders. My work would not be possible without you, so please stop by my office in the CSLD, email us or chat with me in the hallways to share your concerns and ideas for improving your well-being.

I am excited and ready for the work ahead. Blessings & love, always.

Tenley Sitze: Hi! My name is Tenley Sitze. I was born and raised in San Diego, California, and I will be a junior in the fall. My major is Liberal Studies, and I have the joy and privilege of being part of the Lutheran teaching program with the hopes of becoming a middle

school teacher. A fun fact about me is that I have never had a dog, but I do have a desert tortoise named Lester.

I am excited about my upcoming position as Vice President because I truly love this school, and I look forward to building a team of senators who will help me brighten our campus and bring much-needed change to the community. I am thrilled to connect with the student body in a different way than I have before, by receiving feedback and providing support where our campus needs it. I am thankful for this opportunity to serve my community here at Concordia, to pour into the senate team, and to work with my fellow ASCUI members to be friendly faces and represent our student body well.

It is difficult to decide on a singular favorite moment during my time at Concordia thus far, but Beach Bash is always a fabulous time. Having lived in California all my life, I still find myself in awe of the Lord's creation of the ocean. The beach is one of my favorite places in the world, and sitting around the

band as they lead all of us in worship on the beach is a true glimpse of heaven. I am so excited to serve as ASCUI's Vice President in the fall! I commit to serving our community faithfully and hope to promote further unity between all groups and people on campus. Thank you for your support as I prepare to take on this role in the new school year!



PICTURED ABOVE: Jai Viela and Tenley Sitze are thrilled to serve the campus body during the 2026-2027 school year. Photo courtesy of: ASCUI Instagram

“Animal Farm” leaves audiences wondering: What makes a man and what makes an animal?



PICTURED ABOVE: The Theatre Department brought George Orwell's classic novel to the stage. Photo courtesy of: Giselle Parra



PICTURED ABOVE: The unique characters within the show required demanding physicality from the actors involved. Photo courtesy of: Giselle Parra

GISELLE PARRA
STAFF WRITER

On March 13 through March 22, Concordia's Theatre and Film Department transformed into the cast of “Animal Farm,” directed by Lori C. Siekmann, Professor of Theatre and chair of the Theatre and Film Department.

This play was a script adaptation written by Ian Woolridge from George Orwell's satirical novel “Animal Farm.” This allegorical novel critiqued the rise of Stalinism through the use of farm animals who overthrow their human owners to create a better society for themselves. Governed by the pigs, the animals live by their new laws: Whatever goes upon two legs is an enemy, Whatever goes upon four legs, or has wings, is a friend, No animal shall wear clothes, No animal shall sleep in a bed, No animal shall drink alcohol, No animal shall kill any other animal and All animals are equal.

Playing two roles, Liam Gilmore, a junior Theatre major, took on the persona of Snowball, the “traitor” pig, and Benjamin the Donkey. To prepare for this role, he watched “a lot of donkey videos, from Eeyore to real-life donkeys.” He paid close attention to “how they move their mouths, how their legs bend, and how their nostrils and ears work.” So before each show, he would work on “morphing” his face as best as he could into “pig and donkey-like characteristics.”

In order to get fully into the role of Benjamin the Donkey, Gilmore emphasizes his time creating the outward appearance of his character. “A lot of it was in where I hold my shoulders, and then when I put on my costume and makeup, the less I could make out my own face, the easier it was,” said Gilmore.

Not only was Gilmore preparing himself physically, but stretching played a big role as he had to hold himself in “uncomfortable poses for most of the show.” Gilmore added, “I played with the lines before each show to make them feel new and organic, as if I'm saying them for the first time.”

This intense dedication to his role paid off as Gilmore delivered a compelling performance, truly bringing Benjamin to life.

Gilmore's often on-stage companion, Clover the horse, was played by junior Theatre and English major, Layla Trimman. To get herself into character, Trimman “made a playlist of songs that

[she] felt reflected Clover's journey” throughout the show and fit the show's theme overall. “This really helped me get into the headspace my character was in from the beginning of the show until the curtain fell,” Trimman said.

To deal with the intensity of the show, Trimman and Gilmore both emphasized their unwinding time and stressed the importance of community bonding. “It sounds funny, but the moment I go back in the dressing room and wipe off the makeup and dirt and see my face again, it decompresses me,” Gilmore said. Trimman shared a similar sentiment, saying, “Being in an animalistic physicality onstage for an hour straight every night affected me much more than I initially thought, so it required a spike in my self-care outside the theater with getting as much sleep as I could, stretching daily, and staying in shape.”

As soon as the curtain fell, the cast would play “Let's Groove” by Earth, Wind & Fire to “celebrate having a good show rather than sulking in the depressing ending,” Gilmore said. This cast grew with each other as they spent “all of mid-semester break together rehearsing.” “We still hung out afterwards, watching movies and playing games. This show has such a deep message and intense moments onstage, and having trust in castmates was so important. Being able to grow with these people while portraying such a thought-provoking story was such a blessing, and I couldn't have done the show without these amazingly talented friends of mine,” Trimman said.

Stepping away from “Animal Farm,” Gilmore's main takeaway is that community is so important. “Understanding history is important, and why what happened happens. It's our job to speak up, not be bystanders. For example, Benjamin is one of the smartest animals; he's one of the only animals capable of standing up to Napoleon's regime, yet he never does... He just lets it be when he has the ability, the smarts to fight back.” Gilmore said.

Make sure you catch the Theatre and Film Department's next production “Scenes of Love From Shakespeare” on April 23 and 24 at 7:30 p.m., as well as April 25 and 26 at 2:00 p.m. Buy tickets now at <https://www.simplenetix.com/e/scenes-of-love-from-shakespeare-tickets-231063>

Students use the code CUISTU for free admission.

Concordia's Music Department Honors American Film and Stage Music

SUMMER DAISY MEZAK
STAFF WRITER

On March 28 at 6:30 p.m., Concordia's Symphony Orchestra, Donne di Canto and Men's Chorus will be performing in the USA250: American Classics for Stage and Screen concert located at Faith Lutheran High School, Las Vegas. They will be joined by the Faith Lutheran High School Choir in a collaborative performance honoring the impact that music has throughout the 250 years of America. Tonight, they will perform at Orange Lutheran High School at 7:30 p.m., highlighting many of the same pieces in a closer setting to Concordia.

These ensembles will be showcasing a wide range of music from films such as classics throughout Disney's history: "Coco," "The Princess and the Frog," "Pocahontas," and "James and the Giant Peach." The choir will also perform highlights from "La La Land," as well as music from "Crimson Tide." These songs were chosen from differing genres that wholly represent the American aesthetic. Each of Concordia's musical groups have spent countless nights preparing for this exhibition of works.

Music Director Dr. Dan Wessler shared the program's readiness and challenges for these pieces. "It's been a challenge to execute, but an enjoyable one, and the students are clearly energized by the task," Wessler said.

Adding to this, Bradford Thain, a junior, said, "What I'm looking forward to the most about the concert is the delivery of the entire performance. I

am especially excited for the portions that I am not singing because I will be able to listen extra well to the orchestra and the awesome playing," said Thain.

For many of the performers, these works hold sentimental value as well as historical importance. Many have expressed that they are thrilled to commit themselves to performing these extraordinary works. Thain said "Rehearsing the pieces has given me a much deeper appreciation for one of the pieces; Many of them have layers, which are not immediately apparent, but give a profoundness to the music, which it would not be the same without." The connection and deep understanding of the music has made the anticipation of the performance only more promising.

As the performances approach, each of the ensemble's hard work and dedication will be showcased in a memorable evening, one full of celebration and pride in American heritage. This concert promises to bring forth cultural identity in a new light and an expression of nostalgia that will resonate with the audience. The events are free and open to the public. Concordia's music department will surely produce another spectacular performance.

For more information about the USA 250 Concert, visit <https://www.simpletix.com/e/usa250-american-classics-for-the-stage-and-tickets-233012>. For more information about Concordia's music department, visit <https://www.cui.edu/arts/music>.

USA 250: Orange County to celebrate America through music and education

REBEKAH MICHEL
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

"Tis of Thee", "The Battle Hymn of the Republic" and an arrangement of the text of the Declaration of Independence.

By taking a brief glance at the Music Department's events for the spring 2026 semester, one will notice a lengthy series of concerts throughout the entire semester, attributed to our nation's history. This year, the Music Department has successfully launched a concert series entitled USA 250, which lifts up and informs the greater Orange County community of our nation's founding documents and its rich history.

Dr. Jo Ellen Chatham, Director of Concordia's Center for Civic Education, worked closely with Dr. Jeff Held, Assistant Dean of the School of Arts and Sciences and Director of Orchestral Activities, to create a musical series that emphasized the importance of our own history and our continued efforts towards progress.

"Americans are very ignorant of our own history... The Declaration of Independence changed the world. It came up with this idea that all men are created equal," said Chatham. She added that "USA 250 states that America is the perfect ideal, but the United States of America is a work in progress."

The USA 250 concerts offer an increasingly meaningful experience for the audience member as the art becomes a means of education. "I think memorializing in music our nation's history is not only entertaining, but it is informative and inspiring," added Chatham.

Beginning in February, the Music Department held a series of concerts at the Richard Nixon Presidential Library and Museum, celebrating the composers of the Great American Songbook, such as John Philip Sousa, and Rodgers and Hammerstein.

As the series continues, concerts have included works from all three choirs at Concordia, the Concordia Wind Orchestra and Symphony, select student ensembles and soloists and the Laudamus choir from Concordia Seminary in Saint Louis. Notably, on March 15, the Concordia Wind Orchestra, The Concordia Choir and Laudamus gave a concert in the stately East Room of the Nixon Presidential Library. This particular concert included arrangements of "My Country

However, just as our nation's progress is not over, neither are the efforts behind USA 250 and concerts celebrating America. On April 18, the annual Concordia Masterworks concert will celebrate works by notable American composers, Aaron Copland, R. Nathaniel Dett and Morten Lauridsen. Entitled "American Anthems," the concert will bring the diverse works of these composers to life with the Concordia Choir, The Master Chorale and the Master Works Orchestra under the direction of Dr. Michael Busch. "American Anthems" will be held at the Soka University Performing Arts Center on April 18 at 3 p.m. To purchase tickets and receive more information on the concert, please visit <https://www.simpletix.com/e/concordia-masterworks-2026-american-anthem-tickets-233024>

The Music Department's efforts to educate the greater community about our nation's history will continue into the New York City Carnegie Hall Tour in May. "On May 9, 2026, 100 Concordia musicians will be on stage at Carnegie Hall. The Concert Handbells, Concordia Choir, Sinfonietta and Concordia Brass will be presenting "Inscriptions," a new major work by Dr. Christian Guebert '10. Our hour-long performance will be the culmination of Concordia's USA 250 Festival in the spring semester," said Dr. Jeff Held. Serving as the grand finale of the USA 250 series, Concordia will share the work of its own composers in one of the most respected performance halls in the United States.

As the Music Department continues to partake in the USA 250 festival, students and faculty are encouraged to celebrate the anniversary of our country and familiarize themselves with our nation's founding documents and our rich history. For more information on USA 250 please visit <https://www.usa250-oc.com/> or connect with Concordia's Center of Civic Education by contacting Dr. Jo Ellen Chatham at joellen.chatham@cui.edu.



PICTURED ABOVE: Members of Men's Chorus, Donne Di Canto and Concordia Symphony Orchestra are eagerly anticipating their tour to Las Vegas.
Photo courtesy of: Music Department



PICTURED ABOVE: Concordia's Music Department provides enriching and educational concerts, such as their upcoming "American Anthems."
Photo courtesy of: Music Department

Beach volleyball celebrates Senior Day

JORDAN VANDER VEEN
STAFF WRITER

On Sat., March 14, the beach volleyball team celebrated Senior Day. The team honored their senior class of Teagan Algarra, Kennedy Farley, Kelia Giusta, Emma Hugeback, Madi Kelly, Olivia Medina and Aliyah Moore. The Golden Eagles started the day by beating The Master's and Mira Costa College. Then concluded the day with a ceremony to congratulate the seniors.

Algarra, senior, reflected on her time on the beach volleyball team with gratitude and satisfaction. Algarra said, "These last four years at Concordia have been the hardest, but most rewarding times of my life so far – and I'm so full of thankfulness for every single experience."

These seniors shaped the culture of the program and built a family among teammates.

Graduate student, Moore, said, "It

has been a privilege to get to know you all, and I hope that the culture is passed down with each new team because it truly is one of a kind." Moore continued with her love for her teammates, "I hope that I forever represent the bits and pieces of each and every one of you."

"Through the ups and downs of the sport, knowing that my teammates were going through it right alongside me kept me going every day," said senior Hugeback. The relationships formed off the court are what made their time at Concordia so special.

While the seniors prepare to say goodbye to collegiate beach volleyball, they hold on to the sisterhood forever. "The most important thing you can take away from this college experience is to take care of your teammates and those you love," Algarra expressed, "because one day your senior day will come, and after your last match, your last practice, your last season, they are the only treasure left after you step off the sand."



PICTURED ABOVE: Seniors Emma Hugeback and Teagan Algarra
Photo courtesy of: Sam Campion



PICTURED ABOVE: The seven seniors before their ceremony
Photo courtesy of: Sam Campion



PICTURED ABOVE: Concordia Beach Volleyball team celebrates two consecutive wins
Photo courtesy of: Sam Campion

Water polo cont.

(Continued from p. 1)

"I take a lot of pride in studying shooters, staying disciplined with my positioning, and being consistent in the little things; because at that position, details really matter," said Soto. "At the same time, a huge part of my success comes from our defense. They do an incredible job of applying pressure and forcing outside, lower-percentage shots, which allows me to play more confidently and aggressively in the goal. When you trust the six players in front of you as much as I do, it lets you focus on just doing your job, and I think that's been the difference."

As great as the defense has been, the offense has been just as good. Sophomore center Sierrah Ferguson, who led the team in goals last year, is putting together another impressive year for her CV, including a four goal performance in the 12-7 win over Cal State Monterey Bay.

"I've faced a lot of adversity this season, and I've learned to treat every game like it's my last," said Ferguson. "I give all my effort every possession to show up for not only myself, but my teammates."

Concordia's season started off rough with three losses in four games against ranked opponents in the Triton tournament, but that has only helped to push them to new heights.

"I think playing ranked teams early on really challenged us and pushed us to grow," said junior attacker Kailah Peery. "It helped build our confidence and showed us that we can compete at a higher level."

"We've been using some of our games against top 10 nationally ranked teams to learn and pick up things we can use later, especially on both ends of the pool when it comes to conference play," said Soto.

Perhaps the biggest contributor to their success in the pool has been how close these ladies have been out of the water. They are way more than just a team, but a sisterhood that isn't afraid to poke fun at each other.

"If a teammate seems off, we address it immediately with a key phrase, POW. Keeping

each other accountable is necessary in our culture," said Ferguson.

Peery cites her favorite memories as beating #19 ranked UCSB 13-12, "and watching [sophomore teammate] Cassady [Woolley] fall into the pool with her robe on at CSMB."

"My favorite memory would have to be from our trip back from Monterey Bay," said Ferguson. "We had an hour left in our 16-hour drive, and the energy was seriously lacking. We decided to turn on all of our flashlights and address who the best "deaf singer" is right then and there. It was a seriously unforgettable moment."

The team also did a Google survey among themselves where players could vote among themselves for team superlatives such as "most likely to win the hunger games" and "most likely to foul out."

Ferguson, who has voted "best aux" has chosen to remain humble upon receiving her reward. "I think the award was given simply because I have all the team playlists saved on Spotify. Many of my teammates have much better taste than me, but it's still fun to be given the honor!"

Brubaker denied allegations of jealousy over not being voted most likely to be famous. "I think that's completely fair. Cassady [Woolley] definitely has the talent to be famous, especially with her voice. I've heard her music and I genuinely think she could be famous right now if she starts releasing it. I'll just say I knew her before she blew up."

Soto has denied to comment on how she would manage her anger issues after being voted "most likely to crash out."

This season has been nothing shy of both immensely successful and delightfully thrilling and the ladies on the team have more than enough personality to back it up.

Make sure to stay up to date with the ladies @cuiwpp on Instagram and come out to their next home game at William Woollett Jr. Aquatics Center on April 3 against Cal State Monterey Bay.

CUI Stunt looks to finish strong

JOSEPH PANETTA
SPORTS EDITOR

CUI Stunt is getting into the thick of their season and currently sits at 8-5. With a few regular-season games left, the ladies are looking to finish strong and make a run in the NCAA tournament.

“This season, the team has trained harder than ever, focusing on stamina, strength and skill-building,” said senior base Michelle Lourenco.

The stunt team usually finishes with a record around 0.500, but this year they’ll be looking to finish strong and turn in one of their best seasons yet.

“I’d say our main goal this year as a team is to be a better version of ourselves; we want to play like the team we are scared to go against,” said sophomore tumbler Chrislyn Greene. “Yes we love to win, but the win only counts if we play like the strongest version of ourselves.”

The management of the team has also been revamped with Lourenco crediting their “new coaching staff that has emphasized these focuses and has

pushed the team to get new skills and continuously improve, even in the midst of our competitive season.”

The ladies are currently on a two-game slip, but are determined to get back on track before the NCAA tournament.

“We have been practicing harder than ever,” said Lourenco. “It is a very intense environment as we perfect routines and continue to skill-build, but we are all working toward the same goal: to be our very best.”

Stunt is a sport that often doesn’t get a lot of credit for how physically grueling it is, as it requires athletes to be in peak shape.

“For practices, we have been working like no other. Running every week, conditioning and repping our routines and skills over and over again, even when we feel like we can’t do it anymore,” said Greene. “So when it is actual game day, it’ll be a breeze. The harder we work at practice, the easier a game will be.”

This hard work has not stopped the ladies from having a great time in the midst of their

successful season.

“My favorite part of this season has been getting better every game we play,” said Greene. “We have ups and downs at practice, but we don’t let that portray on the floor during game day. We are more connected as a team this year, and I feel as though we are going through this season together.”

These growing connections, unfortunately, come with a few bittersweet departures every year, as the team currently has six seniors who have given so much to this program and will be graduating after this season.

Lourenco reflects on her time in stunt. “I feel blessed to have had this opportunity to continue in this sport as long as I have and to see it emerge and grow into what it has become today. I know this sport will continue to grow and offer opportunities to many more people in the future, and I am very grateful to have been part of this history in the making. As the season comes to an end, I am planning to make the most of it and savor every moment I have left. I am thankful to all the girls I have met and

the memories I have made with CUI Stunt.”

However, it is not quite time for the ladies to say goodbye yet, as they set their eyes on the national tournament. According to Lourenco, the tournament will be “the first of its kind” because “we have never had enough West Coast DII teams to hold such a tournament, so it is exciting to see what this looks like.”

“We have been working on these routines for months now, and it is truly a matter of trusting ourselves and our teammates to do our best,” said Lourenco. “Over the next week, we will keep repping out our routines and building our confidence to best prepare for this tournament.”

The NCAA tournament will begin on April 2 and run for multiple days in succession.

Don’t forget to wish our stunt team luck and stay up to date with them @cui_stunt on Instagram. Make sure to attend senior night and support these ladies on March 31 at home against Vanguard University.

Review: Love Story: John F. Kennedy Jr. & Carolyn Bessette

SYDNEY WEAVER
STAFF WRITER

America’s royal family, ‘90s nostalgia and a devastatingly beautiful couple. This is what makes “Love Story: John F. Kennedy Jr. & Carolyn Bessette” a captivating, dramatized retelling of the couple’s lives, including relationships, highs and lows.

The reception of the show however, has been controversial. While fans are loving a new on-screen romance to obsess over with fresh-faced actors, Sarah Pidgeon portraying Carolyn Bessette and Paul Anthony Kelly as JFK Jr., there has been some backlash on the respectability of the show.

John F. Kennedy Jr.’s nephew, Jack Schlossberg, spoke out against the show’s Executive Producer, Ryan Murphy, saying, “The guy knows nothing about what he’s talking about, and he’s mak-

ing a ton of money on a grotesque display of someone else’s life.” Schlossberg also added that he wanted people who do watch the show to “watch it with one letter in mind, and that’s a capital F for fiction,” during his CBS interview.

Daryl Hannah, actress, and long-time off-and-on-again girlfriend of JFK Jr., also scolded the FX series for her inaccurate portrayal. In her essay for The New York Times, she stated that “The actions and behaviors attributed to me are untrue... These are not creative embellishments of personality. They are assertions about conduct – and they are false.” Hannah shared the same sentiment as Schlossberg that there was no real insight into the lives of those portrayed in the show.

While those closely tied to the show’s portrayal may

not be ecstatic about the FX series, fans are glued to their TV’s every Thursday night. The show encapsulates every aspect of the ‘90s that made the era so special. The music, fashion, and New York’s prime and beautiful faces have taken over people’s minds.

The soundtrack of the show is enough to keep any music lover watching. With glimpses of Lenny Kravitz, Mazzy Star, Sade, Radiohead, The Cranberries and more, the ‘90s sounds are transformative. You are taken to a different time period where you feel like you get to experience the streets of Greenwich Village as a New Yorker yourself.

The positive response to the show has been widely highlighted on social media. People are sharing their take on the Carolyn Bessette Kennedy, aka “CBK,” minimalist style or giving hauls

of vintage Calvin Klein they found raiding their mom’s closets. People also shared glimpses of the iconic JFK Jr. backwards hat trademark making its way to the heads of New York City men. A backwards baseball cap or Kangol may take over men’s spring fashion, while a simple tee paired with vintage Levi’s and a bare face may signal spring has sprung for women.

If you are looking for a new bingeable series, grab your popcorn and settle in to watch the series ASAP. While the show is in fact a dramatized retelling of John F. Kennedy Jr. and Carolyn Bessette’s love story, it is one drama worth watching. The finale aired Thursday March 26 and is streaming on Disney+. Tune in to learn how the love story ends.

Celebrating Easter in the community

KIARA AZUMA

LOCAL/GLOBAL EDITOR

This year, Easter Sunday falls on April 5, following the 40 days of Lent. In addition to Concordia's Easter break and services, local churches in the Irvine community host special services that students can attend to celebrate Easter.

When asked to explain from a Lutheran theological perspective, Dr. Scott Stiegemeyer, Associate Professor of Theology and Bioethics, said, "The core meaning of Easter is the promise that those who have the Spirit of Christ will one day rise bodily to glory like He did. Each time a Christian makes the sign of the cross and says the name of the Trinity, they are reminding themselves that they are baptized into Christ and the power of Easter lives inside them."

Senior and Business finance major Nathan Stuewe said, "Easter is a celebration of God conquering sin, death and the devil. Easter is a par-

ty in Christ! It is a reminder that Jesus rose from the dead, that we might one day rise with Him."

Kaelyn Cheney, senior, also shared what Easter means to her. "Easter was the most important day in history, and it is a joy to celebrate it each year. Without [His] resurrection from the dead, His death on the cross would not free us from the consequence of sin, death. We can rejoice because our relationship with God is restored and our sins are covered," said Cheney.

Even with the existence of various denominations, Easter remains a unifying celebration across Christianity.

"Someone said that Easter is the Father's 'Amen,' to the Son's statement from the cross, 'It is finished,'" explained Stiegemeyer, "Christians typically worship on Sundays because our Lord rose on a Sunday morning, and we wish to commemorate that every week. That's how important it is,"

Concordia's abbeywest student ministries have two

events that students can participate in to celebrate Easter. On Tues. March 31 at 6:30 p.m., they will have their special Passion Week service. "An artist, Tom Clark, has come the past several years (and will be here this year as well) and paints during the service," explained Cheney.

In addition, there will be an Easter service during Tues. chapel on April 7.

For students looking to participate in Easter services around Irvine, Mariner's Church and Good Shepherd Lutheran Church are local options that are hosting special events.

Mariner's Church is hosting events from April 2-5. On April 2 at 7 p.m., they will hold their young adult service, popular with college students. On April 3, at 5 and 7 p.m., Mariner's is hosting their Good Friday Communion Service. They will have their Easter Fest on Sat., April 4, before their 2 p.m. service, featuring an egg "hunt" for all ages at 1

p.m., crafts, cookie decorating, food trucks and photo opportunities. They will also hold the Easter Fest after their 6 p.m. service that day.

On Easter Sunday, Mariner's will have services at 6:30, 8 and 10 a.m., as well as noon and 2 p.m. Their address is 5001 Newport Coast Dr Irvine, CA 92603; Mariner's is a non-denominational, Christian church.

Good Shepherd Lutheran Church will also be hosting Holy Week worship. There will be services on Sun., March 29, at 8 and 10 a.m. for Palm Sunday. They will also have services at 6:30 p.m. on April 2 and 3 for Maundy Thursday and Good Friday. For their Easter service, they will have both traditional and contemporary worship. Their traditional service will be held at 8 a.m. and contemporary services at 9:30 and 11 a.m. Their Easter service will also have photo ops with their flower cross, as well as coffee and treats. Their address is 4800 Irvine Center Drive, Irvine, CA 92604.

Understanding the conflict in Iran

KIARA AZUMA

LOCAL/GLOBAL EDITOR

On Feb. 28, the United States and Israel attacked Iran's missile infrastructure and military sites, leading to the death of Iran's Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, and other senior members of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps. President Donald Trump released a video statement on Truth Social, explaining why the U.S. has attacked Iran.

Trump said that their objective was to defend Americans from imminent threats from the Iranian regime. He explained they had tried to work out a deal for Iran to renounce building nuclear weapons, but said they refused. "Instead, they attempted to rebuild their nuclear program and to continue developing the long-range missiles that can now threaten our very good friends and allies in Europe,

our troops stationed overseas, and could soon reach the American homeland," stated Trump.

He continued, "For these reasons, the United States military is undertaking a massive and ongoing operation to prevent this very wicked, radical dictatorship from threatening America and our core national security interests... And we will ensure that Iran does not obtain a nuclear weapon."

Iran has retaliated by attacking U.S. military installations across the region as well as striking U.S. embassies in Riyadh and Kuwait City. As of March 24, 13 U.S. soldiers have been killed in the conflict, and there are reports of over 140 members injured.

People may also have noticed that gas prices have skyrocketed in the past few weeks, costing well over \$5 per gallon. This is due to the conflict leading to the

attacks and closure of the Strait of Hormuz, which, according to BBC News, is a "key artery accounting for about 20% of global oil supply." Further attacks on oil and gas hubs located in the Middle East have also halted production, contributing to a rise in gas prices.

This situation is being continuously updated across all news stations and social media. It can become difficult for students to understand what is occurring and where to look for information.

Students who want to gain a better understanding can begin with resources that introduce the political context of the conflict. Dr. Bryan Santin, Associate Professor of English, provided two works that help contextualize the current conflict with Iran.

The first work is a book titled "Iran: A Very Short Introduction" by Ali M. An-

sari. According to the official book synopsis, it introduces readers to "Iranian history and politics, placing the Islamic Revolution in the context of a century of political change and social transformation."

For a more recent work, PBS Frontline's "Remaking the Middle East: The U.S., Israel, and Iran" is a documentary available to watch on YouTube. This documentary provides context on the conflict's background and details what led to the U.S.-Israel war with Iran. The link to this video is <https://youtu.be/vWoon6lZM0?si=Zv9MJN-uoxQvXiu3V>.

"As introductory works, these are solid places to start. However, I would caution students that, as a general rule, introductory works are good places to start one's investigation of an issue, but bad places to end that investigation," said Santin.