



Dance of the Genes

Liz Lerman Dance Exchange Premiere
Melds Genetics and Choreography

“One of the great lessons I’ve learned from Liz [Lerman] in the three years we’ve worked together is the importance of ‘rattling around in someone else’s universe,’” writes Center for the Arts director Pam Tatge ’84 in her essay for the *Ferocious Beauty: Genome* program. The Liz Lerman Dance Exchange opened its world premiere performance of this new work at the CFA theater on Feb. 3, the result of three years of collaboration between the Dance Exchange and Wesleyan, one of the major sponsors of this project.

The universe in which founding artistic director Lerman was “rattling” was that of biologists, specifically those who work with genetics, and it began when Tatge learned that Lerman hoped to explore this subject in her work. Her goal was to refine ways of conveying scientific ideas to nonscientists and to gain knowledge through this dialogue between science and dance.

“I knew she needed to meet Laura Grabel, then dean of Wesleyan’s Natural Sciences and Mathematics and a developmental biologist,” Tatge writes.

Grabel, a trained modern dancer and one of the collaborators on this project, notes that, “There’s not much call for a dancing biologist, so for the past 30 years or so, I have kept those parts of my life separate.” That, however, has changed.

Lerman, who received a MacArthur “genius” grant in 2002, was a visiting assistant professor at Wesleyan in the fall of 2005. To explore the topics of greatest concern to geneticists and to learn the science behind the debates, Lerman and company have entered the classrooms and labs at Wesleyan, talking to scientists and students. Lerman also joined Grabel and Associate Professor of Philosophy Lori Gruen in teaching *Reproduction* in the 21st Century, which Lerman calls “a vital gift to the project: an opportunity to try out our ideas, have a dialogue, and test the contribution that art can make in the examination of a topic.”

Says Grabel: “We did the ‘menstrual cycle dance’ in class, I danced in my cell culture room, I talked about stem cells and danced with Mendel.”

The performance in February—a multimedia and multidisciplinary event—used dancers, video, music, lighting, and narrative to explore the implications of genetic research. Interviews recorded with scientists at Wesleyan, Stanford University, and the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign formed the backdrop to dancers depicting the motion or emotion of scientific concepts. Still images and animations were projected onto a giant screen or onto the dancers’ bodies.

In one segment dancers whirl on stage, drawn to one another and forming partnerships, then breaking away, melding their bodies into a new group’s dance, interpreting, perhaps, the randomness and

- Striegel-Moore Leads Largest Binge-Eating Study Ever
- New Scholarships Honor Neely Bruce
- A Conversation with Actress Halley Feiffer ’07
- Forensic Geology Course—the Real CSI

variety in genetic combinations. In another segment, projected on a huge screen, an actor portraying Gregor Mendel tends his peas. In a video of scientists, Wesleyan biologists Laura Grabel, Laurel Appel, and Manju Hingorani talk about their work. To tackle questions of artificially prolonged life, dancers interpret a fairy tale in which a young man captures Death in a sack so his beloved will never die. New “rules” for old age, including mandatory games of Russian Roulette and a prohibition against the use of seatbelts, flash on a screen and illuminate a lone man in fitful bursts of exercise, like a prisoner in his cell.

A performer peels apples, comparing the curled peel to the shape of the human genome, and muses on the varieties of the fruit she used to discover outside as a young girl. Now, she says, they are all the same—beauti-

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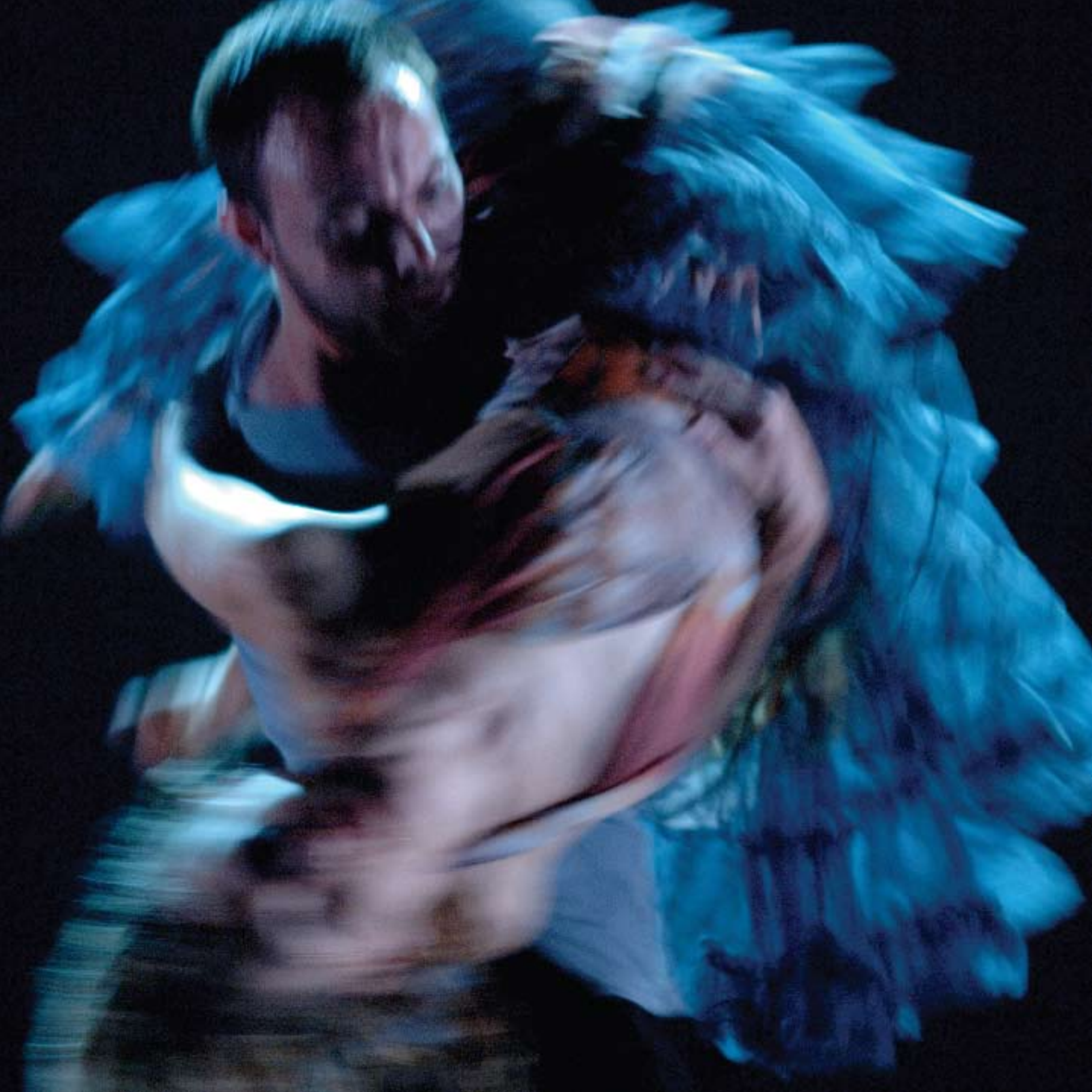
ful but without flavor. Her final wistful note on agricultural engineering, “No more tart surprises,” arrives as a counterpoint to the entrance of a new dancer, a small woman in a wheelchair who joins the able-bodied members of the collective in a dance. *New York Times* critic Jennifer Dunning calls the moment “an irrefutable case for the place of perceived biological imperfection in the span of human genetics. Her argument has nothing to do with ethics. And it is a case that could be made only by an artist.”

This is Lerman’s version of “nonfiction dancing”—an exploration of a topic within the context of modern dance—presented, she says in the program for the event, in the way that she might read nonfiction: “It allows for deep, absorbed comprehension, but also for skimming and for what I call the *I Ching* method: randomly opening to a page and picking up a thread wherever the eye falls. Through this process we arrived at the same things a reader can gain from nonfiction: amazing stories, details, specificity, and the benefits of research that someone else has done.”

The second performance of *Ferocious Beauty: Genome* was later in February and was to be followed by six performances nationwide over the next 10 months.

“Knowing early in our process that a major institution saw so much potential in the project helped us to know we were onto something of critical value,” Lerman writes. “Our sincere thanks to all of our partners at this dynamic university.”

KEVIN KENNEFICK




**WILL INCLUDE MEN
LARGEST BINGE-EATING STUDY EVER**

Professor of Psychology Ruth Striegel-Moore is the lead investigator for the largest, most comprehensive binge-eating study ever undertaken.

An internationally recognized expert on eating disorders, Striegel-Moore says the four-year study will take place in Portland, Ore., and will include male and female subjects between 18 and 50 years of age. The study is being funded by the National Institute of Mental Health; the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases; and Kaiser Permanente Center for Health Research of Portland, Ore.

“Kaiser Permanente’s involvement is the reason that the study will be conducted in Portland,” Striegel-Moore says. “That’s where they are headquartered, and they will provide access to the study population and offer the clinical sites.”

Kaiser Permanente maintains an extensive database of all its members’



health care visits, conditions and treatments, as well as significant demographic information on each patient. It has extensive procedures in place that ensure patients’ information is protected and that individuals’ participation in the study is completely voluntary. As a result, Striegel-Moore and her co-investigators will be able to look beyond the immediate data generally associated with eating disorder studies.

“For example, in these studies we usually know the subject’s age, sex, and maybe a little bit more,” she says. “But this database will allow us to look at such things as health history, income level, education, past treatments sought, and a wealth of other information that will allow us to get much more specific in our analysis. It’s a treasure trove of comprehensive data that is, quite frankly, a researcher’s dream.”

Striegel-Moore says that hers is the first major study to include male subjects and such a broad age range. As a result, the study will provide new data on how common binge-eating is among men and individuals who are beyond college age.

“Men and people who are not in their teens and 20s suffer from binge-eating too,” she says. “But for some reason they’ve been excluded from major studies.

“One of the innovative components of this study is that we will examine in detail what treatments people receive as part of usual clinical care,” she says. “Prior studies have investigated how successful an experimental treatment was. What is unknown is how eating disorders are being treated in clinical practices outside of clinical research studies. Our study will also examine the cost of our treatment compared to the cost of the typical treatment patients receive in the context of usual clinical care. This will help inform decisions about optimal use of scarce health care resources.”

**POST-SEASON HONORS
MEN'S SOCCER TAKES NESCAC TITLE
AND NEARLY UPSETS NCAA CHAMPS**



NESCAC Coach of the Year Geoffrey Wheeler reports:

Wesleyan captured its first ever New England Small College Athletic Conference (NESCAC) Championship in any sport when the men’s soccer team defeated Amherst and Williams in the same weekend. As the No. 7 seed in the tournament, Wesleyan upset No. 2 Bowdoin in the first round before going on to defeat No. 1 Williams in the semi-finals and then No. 4 Amherst in the finals. The victory over Williams marked the first triumph over the Williams Ephs since 1992.

With the championship came an automatic bid to the NCAA Division III tournament, another first for the program. The men’s team defeated Muhlenberg in a thrilling 3–2 overtime victory before falling to No. 1 seed and defending national champ Messiah 2–1 in overtime in the second round.

Accompanying the success came some appropriate post-season honors, including NESCAC Rookie of the Year for Matt Nevin ’09, who finished the campaign with nine goals and five assists. Earning 2nd Team All-NESCAC honors was Jared Ashe ’07, who made the move from forward to defender early in the year.

When we play, we try to focus all our energy on our work rate, our attitude

and our reaction to adversity. There’s not much we can do about the referee, the weather, the field, or even the other team, so we focus on what we can control. When we travel, we look sharp in coats and ties. We leave a clean locker room after a game, a clean bench.

I was hired as the men’s coach in the spring of 1999. And what an honor to succeed Terry Jackson, not only a legend in Wesleyan soccer lore but also an icon in the soccer community at large. In fact, when I was a senior in high school, I visited Wesleyan and met with Coach Jackson. I remember how friendly and warm he was as we toured Wesleyan. Never did I think I would have the opportunity to coach here.

**NEW ENGLAND CHAMPION
CROSS COUNTRY TEAMS HAVE
OUTSTANDING SEASONS**



NESCAC Coach of the Year John Crooke reports:

The New England Regional meet was the major highlight for both the men’s and women’s teams in 2005. The women placed seventh in the toughest region in the country and the men placed second to qualify as a team for the National Championships. The men ended up placing 14th at nationals.

The men placed four runners on the All New England regional team and Owen

Kiely ’06 was the New England Champion. Owen Kiely and Ellen Davis ’07 both attained All-America status by virtue of their finish at the National Championships.

Cross country is not running; it is racing. I am always telling my team that time doesn’t matter, place does. Cross country is a team sport. A team is made up of seven runners. The first five runners score for the team. Each runner gets points based on his or her finish. If you place fifth, your team gets five points and if you place 27th, your team gets 27 points. You add up the points for your first five runners. The team with the lowest point total wins.

Almost all of my athletes run all three seasons. The athletes need to train year-round to be successful at the national level.

NESCAC cross country on the women’s side is without question the toughest conference in the country. The national team champion and runner-up have come from the NESCAC the past five seasons. This fall was the first time in six years that the national champion was not a NESCAC school. Last fall our women’s team placed fifth in the NESCAC, fifth in the New England region, and 14th in the country. The men’s side is very strong too, and I would say that it is in the top three or four of the toughest conferences in the country.

**NEW SCHOLARSHIPS
MUSIC PROFESSOR HONORED**

Blake Reynolds ’36 has given nearly \$1 million to endow three Wesleyan scholarships in honor of Professor of Music Neely Bruce. Naming scholarships for a standing member of the faculty is a first for Wesleyan and particularly apt since Reynolds and Bruce are good friends.

A second gift honoring a current faculty member has come from an anonymous alumnus who has endowed a University Scholarship in honor of Professor of

Economics Richard Miller, whom he praised as “a great teacher and a great person, who had a tremendous impact on my life and career.”

Reynolds says, “The university furnished me with the basics I needed for an active engineering career. I absorbed enough liberal arts to be comfortable for life among my mostly non-engineering friends. I wanted to do something for Wesleyan, but what?”

“The answer was that there are worthy students who might not make it without help, the very ones my sympathies run with. At the same time, I have wanted to honor Neely Bruce for his proficiency at the piano in conducting concerts of wide-ranging music, from classical to rags, as well as his bubbling-over enthusiasm for playing and teaching music.”

Bruce, who learned about the scholarships while visiting Reynolds at his home in Damariscotta, Maine, says that he was “overwhelmed and almost literally speechless” when he heard the news. “It’s a wonderful vote of confidence in the music department, as well as a tremendous honor for me.”

The two men met in 1987, when Bruce played ragtime piano at the 51st Reunion banquet. Reynolds was so impressed with the concert that immediately afterward he asked Bruce to play for the Retired Men’s Association of Greenwich, Conn., his home at the time. Since then, Reynolds has booked him for dozens of concerts in Connecticut and Maine.

“Blake is a wonderful host and an all-around great guy,” Bruce says. “He has very interesting stories and an incredibly sly sense of humor. He’s an inspiration to all who know him.”

Reynolds, retired from a career in engineering, most recently with Texaco Inc., was a mathematics major at Wesleyan and a member of Phi Beta Kappa and Sigma Xi honorary societies. He also competed in soccer and managed freshman baseball. He took music theory with the late

Professor Joe Daltry and played trumpet in the field band.

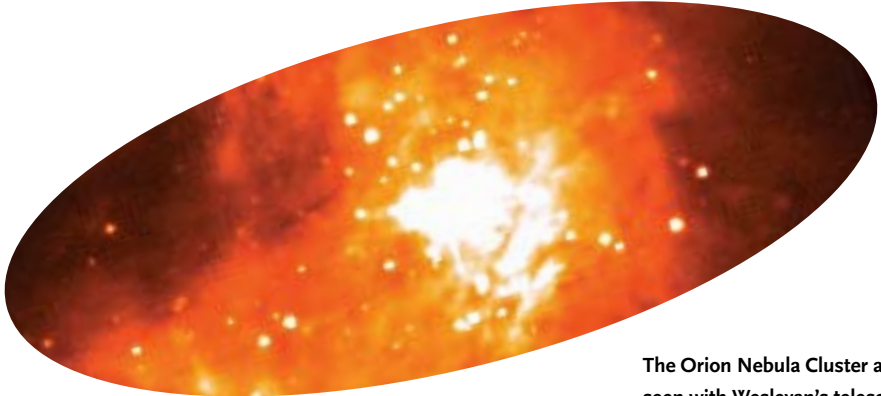
Thanks to Reynolds’ generosity and his dedication to Wesleyan, others will have the opportunity to study music and perhaps play in a band, just as he did. They may even have a chance to study under the namesake of their scholarship.

**14-YEAR PROJECT
STUDY MAY REVEAL BEGINNINGS OF
OUR OWN SOLAR SYSTEM**

A 14-year study by Wesleyan researchers has revealed a phenomenon that may indicate the formation of new planets or perhaps even the existence of young planets orbiting young sun-like stars more than 1,600 light years away.

These observations were presented at the American Astronomical Society (AAS) meeting in Washington, D.C., on Jan. 11, by Professor of Astronomy William Herbst, Gabriel Roxby ’06, and Eric Williams, the systems manager of the Van Vleck observatory.

The Wesleyan team analyzed 500 stars in the Orion Nebula Cluster, which is approximately 1,600 light years from earth. The data from the stars was collected by faculty and graduate and undergraduate students during a continuous 14-year period. The observations gave the astronomers the unique opportunity to track the long-term behavior of these stars concurrently with their subtle changes over short timescales.



The Orion Nebula Cluster as seen with Wesleyan’s telescope.

The findings detail the discovery of many young T Tauri stars with intriguing patterns in brightness variation over both short and long timescales. One star—Trapezium 093/JW#669—is of particular interest because it seemed to grow brighter and then fainter in a remarkably steady pattern with a period of about 10 years. This is an extremely long cycle, given that it rotates every 1.18 days.

One theory suggests the presence of a disk of dust and rock orbiting the star. Such a circumstellar disk would have to contain a large clump, such as a planet or proto-planet, in order to obscure the light of the star at certain times and not others. Another possible explanation for the brightness fluctuations is that the star is experiencing magnetic cycles akin to those seen in our Sun; its magnetic field becomes stronger and weaker over time, causing the total area covered by sunspots to grow and shrink. A third theory is that the phenomenon is being caused by the presence of a young fully-formed gas-giant planet akin to Jupiter.

Whatever the cause, the observations by the Wesleyan researchers may offer significant insights into our own solar system’s origins. Trapezium 093/JW#669 bears a strong resemblance to a younger version of the Sun, and it may be undergoing processes similar to those in the Sun’s early history. Further investigation may reveal whether these or other explanations can account for this star’s long and regular period.

Philip Trager

Philip Trager '56 is an internationally known photographer whose photographs are held by major collections including the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Museum of Modern Art, and the Bibliothèque in Paris. The Library of Congress recently accepted a comprehensive archive of his work.

Trager has published ten monographs of his photographs. His *Villas of Palladio* has become a standard document for architectural and art historians, according to Clare Rogan, curator of the Davison Art Center. Commenting on his images of contemporary dancers published in *Dancers*, the Los Angeles Times Book Review said his collection “besieges the eye with its bold sense of mystery, contradiction, and surprise,” and “His images, his very aesthetic, linger powerfully in the mind.”

After Wesleyan, the Trager retrospective will travel to the University Art Gallery, University of Massachusetts at Dartmouth, and the Allen Memorial Art Museum at Oberlin College. An accompanying catalog will be published by Steidl Verlag. Both the exhibition and the catalog, notes Rogan, “will reveal the beauty and skill of Trager’s work from his earliest photographs of dance and architecture, and will include some of his Wesleyan photographs.”

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Talking with Actress
Halley Feiffer '07



The multi-talented artist Halley Feiffer '07 has acted for several years. She has appeared in three critically acclaimed independent films, including Noah Baumbach's *The Squid and the Whale*, in which she gives a lovely and intelligent performance. The film was released theatrically last fall and is available on DVD. It received four Golden Globe nominations, six Independent Spirit Award nominations, and both Writers Guild of America and Oscar nominations for best original screenplay. Feiffer acted most recently in Hilary Brougher's *Stephanie Daley*, which premiered at the Sundance Film Festival in January, where it received the Waldo Salt Screenwriting Award for a dramatic film.

Feiffer not only acts, but she also writes and directs plays. At Wesleyan, she has starred in *Life x 3* and *Aunt Dan and Lemon*. Last fall, she directed David Mamet's *Sexual Perversity in Chicago* at the Patricelli '92 Theater. She won the Young Playwrights' National Competition in New York City for her one-act play, *Easter Candy*, which was performed off-Broadway, and she recently was commissioned to write a play, *Passion Fruit*, for St. Paul's School

in Concord, N.H. The play also was produced at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe last summer.

DAVID LOW: How long have you been acting?

HALLEY FEIFFER: I decided I wanted to be a professional actor when I was 12. My parents refused the idea—they didn't think the business was good for children, and they also felt I could learn more in acting classes and doing school plays. But my parents eventually conceded because I was really passionate about it. I went to an acting camp for six years called Stagedoor Manor (it's pretty well known because they did a movie about it called *Camp*). I did a couple of great plays there and I just knew I wanted to act as a career. I got an agent when I was 14. One of my early jobs was in an AT&T commercial shown on the night of the Super Bowl—but they only filmed my hand! I also appeared briefly on an episode of *Law and Order* as a depressed, alienated, and scary Catholic girl who was a murder suspect.

DL: What part do you play in *The Squid and the Whale*?

HF: The movie takes place in 1986 in Park Slope, Brooklyn, and deals with a married couple (played by Jeff Daniels and Laura Linney) who are both writers and getting divorced, and the effects of the divorce on their two sons. I play Sophie, the girlfriend of the writers' 16-year-old son (played by Jesse Eisenberg). I had never felt so comfortable in an audition as when I read for this film. The dialog is clipped, succinct, and very natural so I just slipped into the character easily. A year later I found out I had gotten the part. I was the second actor cast. I accepted the part without having read the full script because I was so excited by what I had read in the audition.

DL: What was your experience working on the film?

HF: The whole movie from the beginning was blessed. The process was magical for

everyone; I have never been treated so well on an acting job before. I became friends with the director and Jesse, and I really felt I had a close connection with many of the people involved. Everyone was working on the film because they just loved the script, including the cinematographer, the assistant directors, and the hair stylist. Most of them usually get paid much more money for their work.

DL: What was it like working with the director?

HF: Noah Baumbach is an unusual director. He takes a very specific, caring interest in each person in the cast, which I had never experienced. I had just met him twice at the audition and one day he called me up to have lunch. We didn't talk about any of the characters in the film. We just talked about ourselves.

DL: Would you talk about your role in *Stephanie Daley*?

HF: The movie concerns a 16-year-old girl played by Amber Tamblyn (TV's *Joan of Arcadia*) who is accused of killing her new-

born baby, claiming she didn't even know she was pregnant. I play Rhana, Stephanie's best friend, a character very different from myself. I enjoyed this part because usually I'm typecast for roles calling for a smart, awkward girl who is best friends with the guy and is actually in love with him but the guy doesn't like her back. Rhana is the popular one who brings Stephanie to parties and is always talking about boys; without realizing it, she becomes the enabler for her friend to get pregnant.

DL: What's the difference between acting on stage and in film?

HF: In theater, you have more time for rehearsal and to create a character. In film, your performance needs to be as spontaneous as possible. I think actors are cast more often in films because they're perfect for the part.

DL: What do you like best: acting, writing, or directing?

HF: I find directing and writing more fulfilling because I have more control over my work, but I find acting way more fun.



Jeff Daniels, Halley Feiffer, and Jesse Eisenberg (left to right) in Noah Baumbach's *The Squid and the Whale*. Photo by James Hamilton, courtesy of Samuel Goldwyn Films and Sony Pictures Entertainment.