

ARTS

“Music is healing. Music holds things together”
PRINCE

Dramat presents junior’s dark comedy about slam poetry

BY KIVA BANK
STAFF REPORTER

The dark comedy — written by Elora Sparnicht ’27 — centers around a high school slam poetry team, Drop The Mic Poetry Club’s CompSquad, and how the dynamics of the teammates shift in response to the replacement of a senior member. The play deals with intimidating themes of self-esteem, suicide and grief within the microcosm of high school competitive slam poetry. Co-directed by Sparnicht and Nicolas Maynulet ’27, the production is running from Thursday through Saturday, with four performances in total. Sparnicht said the work was inspired by her experiences on her high school slam poetry team in downtown Los Angeles, where she competed alongside her sister Kaya Sparnicht ’29, who plays the CompSquad poet Zoe. “I love slam poetry, and I think it’s such a powerful and under-hyped art form,” Elora Sparnicht said. “I don’t want this to be a critique of slam poetry, but rather a critique of what happens when we ‘hyper-competitive-ize’ — make competitive worlds that are supposed to be for the sake of the art.”

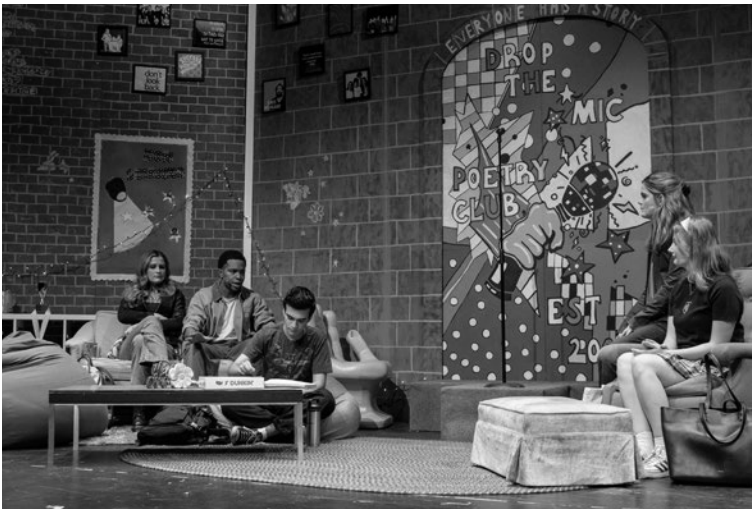
In the opening scene of the play, characters Carter and Zoe forget their lines, an incident based on Elora Sparnicht’s having forgotten her routine when she performed a duet poem with her sister Kaya in high school. “It is a luxury as an actor to have experience in what my character is experienced in,” Kaya Sparnicht said. The majority of the poems in the show are real poems that Elora and Kaya Sparnicht used in competitions, except for a few joke poems and a new poem she wrote in a scene for Zoe. “One of the great things about doing an original show is that we have the space and the writer to make changes and adapt it and help fit it to the original cast, and do that in a way that you wouldn’t be able to with the show that’s already written,” Maynulet said. One significant change made during the production process was swapping the gender of Carter’s character. Carter — originally intended to be a female character — was Zoe’s best friend, until Zoe realizes that she is undervalued as a poet in their partnership. Elora Sparnicht explained that actors were welcome to try out for any character regardless of gender, and when Slater Vance ’28 performed Carter’s monologue, the

production team thought he was “perfect” for the role. Accordingly, Elora Sparnicht said the character was “gender bent” and shifted to dating Zoe instead of being best friends. Even with the gender swap, however, Kaya Sparnicht explained that the relational tension between the two characters remains true. “I think that that feeling of being underappreciated can apply to both romantic relationships and just normal friendships,” she said. “I think having the opportunity to adapt and add for the characters in the room is unique and really special,” Maynulet said. “I think it made a big difference for what the show’s final product will look like.” Elora Sparnicht said she finalized the script around November. However, there was one more major change in January, when she stepped in to play Nina after the initial cast member had to step out for personal reasons. “We decided that this was the best way to keep the process moving along,” Maynulet said. “I still think we made the right choice, and she does a great job playing Nina, and it’s been great to have her not only be a part of the production directing team, but also a part of the cast and getting to interact with all of them.” He explained that since Elora

Sparnicht wrote the show, she was familiar with the lines and could easily grasp the complexities of Nina’s character, who he said shares similarities to Elora Sparnicht herself. Maynulet said he did not not know anything about slam poetry before the show, but he still thinks the story is relatable for Yale students because of its satirical approach to hyper-competitive environments. Maynulet said all of the

characters have their own form of imposter syndrome, similar to some Yale students. “I think a lot of times people feel like they have to overperform or reach a certain caliber,” he said. The play is running at the University Theatre, located at 222 York St.

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KIVA BANK / CONTRIBUTING PHOTOGRAPHER
Yale Dramatic Association’s Spring Experimental Show — “SLAMMED” by Elora Sparnicht ’27, who also co-directed the play and performs in it — opened on Thursday.

Whiffenpoofs tap class includes first female business manager

BY KIVA BANK AND GEMARD GUERY
STAFF REPORTERS

A call at 5 p.m. on a Monday might seem trivial, but for the newest tap class of the Whiffenpoofs, getting a call from current members will alter the next year of their lives. Monday evening, 14 juniors received the news that they were accepted to Yale’s and America’s oldest collegiate a cappella group. The class of Whiffenpoofs-designate included Daniela Rodriguez-Larrain Fernandez ’27, who was the first woman tapped to be the Whiffs’ business manager. Rodriguez-Larrain Fernandez said in a phone interview that she was waiting by herself in her room when she received a call from current Whiff Lucas Oland ’27, who is also her boyfriend. “It’s really sweet to have someone that you love and you have a relationship with that tells you this incredible piece of news,” she said. She said she is “excited” for the upcoming year of travel and singing and feels prepared to take on the role of the business manager. She has been the business manager of Mixed Company for the past year, as well as tour manager of the Yale folk group Tangled Up in Blue. “I know it’s a very big responsibility, but I feel very capable of doing the work, and I am very excited to have this incredible

honor being the first woman to take the position,” Rodriguez-Larrain Fernandez said. She said all auditionees were required to sign a contract agreeing to take a gap year if accepted to the group. Applying to be the business manager involved a presentation and Q-and-A component in addition to the regular audition process, she added. Founded in 1909, the Whiffenpoofs were traditionally a group of 14 male seniors. In February 2018, the Whiffenpoofs accepted their first female singer following a joint decision earlier that month with Whim n’ Rhythm — Yale’s only other all-senior a cappella group — to consider accepting singers of any gender. In 2021, the Whiffs tapped their first non-male business manager, Sydney Bakal ’23, who is nonbinary, according to Rodriguez-Larrain Fernandez. Eason Rytter ’27, a member of the Spizzwinks, received a FaceTime from a current member of the Whiffs, Emily Patrick ’27, at 5 p.m. Monday while walking along Chapel Street with a friend. “I immediately collapsed to the ground, screaming,” Rytter told the News in a phone interview. “I’m just overjoyed.” He said he spent the next several minutes thanking Patrick, whom

he described as a friend. Rytter recalled saying “oh my God” repeatedly. Rytter said that while growing up, he used to hear about the Whiffs from his mother — despite her not having any connection to Yale — which influenced his decision to attend the University. “I never believed that it was a group I would one day join,” he said. Rytter said he prepared for the audition for three months by “drilling every day,” describing the audition process as “intense” and “strange” because it differs from the regular first-year rush process, when candidates are still new to the a cappella community. Auditions were hosted by the current Whiffenpoof class and consisted of only one round. Every prospective Whiff had to prepare a personal solo, a solo of a Whiff song and the background part of one of their songs. The entire audition process takes approximately 20 minutes in total. The newly selected Whiffenpoof tap class of 2027 includes five non-male members, the highest number of non-males in Whiffenpoof history, which the tap class of 2023 also had. Last year, the Whiffenpoofs announced their first woman musical director in the group’s 117-year history, Eunice Oh ’27. After the phone calls, the taps were

announced in a post on the Whiffs’ Instagram page. Joining the the Whiffenpoofs’ class of 2027 are Rytter, Rodriguez-Larrain Fernandez, Ben Heller ’27, Jiayang Jin ’27, Kenneth Vo ’27, Storm Egbosimba ’27, Marko Gajic ’27, Stellan Min ’27, Grace O’Grady ’27, Eshaan Giri ’27, Ryann Schaffer ’27, Natalie Bassini ’27, Cyrus Rivers ’27 and Justin Wang ’27, the new musical director. For Gajic, a current Yale Alley Cat, being a Whiffenpoof has long been a goal, given his love for the a cappella community he found at Yale.

“I’ve been singing for much of my life, and I’ve found that it has brought me incredible communal spaces on this campus and beyond,” Gajic said. “I’m super excited to get to do it with the Whiffs.” The Whiffenpoofs originated as a quartet that gathered weekly at Mory’s Temple Bar, according to the group’s website.

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YULIN ZHEN / PHOTOGRAPHY EDITOR
On Monday evening, the Whiffenpoofs announced their next class of singers. The class is tied for the most non-male members in the group’s history.

Among next Whim singers, some Yale a cappella novices

BY KIVA BANK AND GEMARD GUERY
STAFF REPORTERS

On Tuesday night, the newest members of Whim ’n Rhythm celebrated their acceptance into Yale’s senior-only soprano-alto a cappella group in a tradition-filled tap night. Just the prior evening, 14 Yale College juniors had received a call that they had been accepted into Whim.

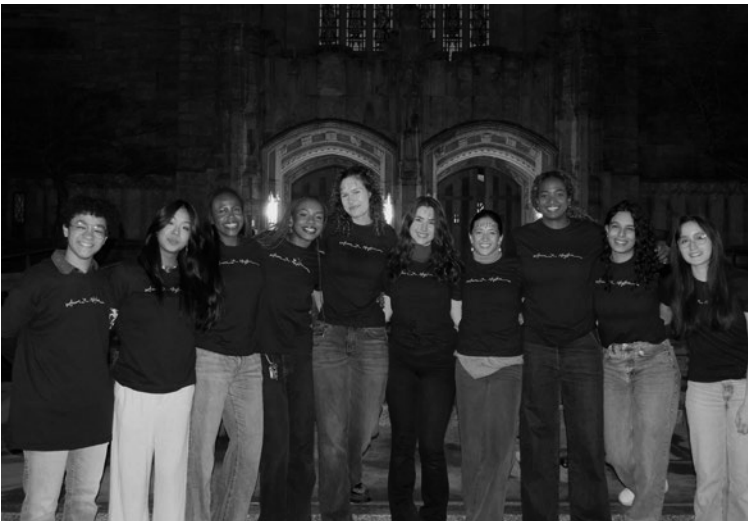
“I think what’s so beautiful about the Whim ’n Rhythm experience is that it’s 14 women coming together to craft this repertoire and forge this experience for the audience that’s music made purely with the voice and body percussion,” Tamara Bafi ’27, one of the new taps, said. Whim was founded in 1981 as a senior-only group of seven women, according to the group’s website. Yale’s other senior-only a cappella

group, the Whiffenpoofs, which accepted only men until 2018, this week announced a tap class including five non-male members. The Whim ’n Rhythm class of 2027 was announced Tuesday on the group’s Instagram page. Some of this year’s tap class, including Bafi and Lelah Shapiro ’27, came without backgrounds in a cappella singing at Yale. Shapiro said that before auditioning for Whim, she hadn’t performed any music at Yale besides DJing but was inspired by her sister’s experience in the group and decided to take a chance. “For one of the Whim tours my sister’s year, they visited Los Angeles and stayed with my family, and I got to see the incredible work that goes into planning an a cappella tour and the impact that it has on the audiences,” Shapiro told the News. Bafi has been a member of Yale Glee Club, and given her love for singing, she said that she felt that joining an a cappella group was a “natural next step.” According to Isabelle Millman ’26, the current musical director of Whim ’n Rhythm, the variable backgrounds of taps mark a trend over the years, where more and

more members of Whim haven’t previously been involved in a cappella or music at Yale. “It’s an incredibly musically diverse tap class, and it’s always exciting to put together a whole group of singers and musicians and see the magic they can make together,” Millman said. According to the group’s website, Whim ’n Rhythm auditions consisted of ear training, pitch-matching and blending exercises. Every prospective Whim also had to prepare their own solo and a section of “Softly, As I Leave You” and do a short interview. For Bafi, part of the appeal of Whim over the Whiffs was not having to take a gap year to be a part of the group, she said. “I love the Whiffenpoofs, and I think it’s an incredible group with this incredible tradition,” Bafi said. “Not doing the gap year is really great, because that way it complements your academic experience senior year and it provides a great transition to what lies beyond.” She explained that she thinks the Whim’s summer tour after senior year is a “unique opportunity.” For Erin Kearney ’27, another new tap, being in Whim will give her the chance to work with new talented singers with whom she has not had

the chance to sing before. “I liked that it’s historically been all female because I’ve never sung in a group that’s all upper voice parts,” she said. “I’m really excited to get to know them, travel with them and sing a genre of music that I haven’t really sung before.” Kearney, a current member of Shades of Yale, lives with Shapiro, and the pair waited together for their Whim decisions. They both received calls within five minutes of each other informing them they had been accepted into the group. In addition to Shapiro, Kearney and Bafi, the other members of this Whim class are Bella Amell ’27, Jas Hollis ’27, Nadia Petersen ’27, Pearl Mallick ’27, Justine Xu ’27, Sarah Feng ’27, Lauren Walker ’27, Diana Cao ’27, Salma Laraki ’27, Alexis Mburu ’27 and Ava Gordon ’27. Xu will serve as musical director, and Hollis will serve as business manager. Whim ’n Rhythm releases a new album every spring.

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YULIN ZHEN / PHOTOGRAPHY EDITOR
The all-senior a cappella group Whim ’n Rhythm on Tuesday announced its next class.