

## Inventing His Own Musical Keys

Visiting artist bends rules

By SARAH L. SOLORZANO  
CRIMSON STAFF WRITER

Once a year, musician and performer Leon Gruenbaum '85 breaks his strict vegan diet by eating a slice of pizza while surrounded by onlookers. Afterwards, he lowers a plastic mannequin leg from the roof of his New York apartment building in a ritual called "The Lowering of the Leg."

He does it all in the name of art. Last week, Gruenbaum made his first visit to Harvard as this year's Peter Ivers Visiting Artist. He will work with students throughout the year, culminating in a performance with music and visuals slated for next spring.

Although Gruenbaum entered the art world through traditional music—he is a classically trained pianist and clarinetist—he now tends toward the abstract. "I got bored with classical, so I moved on to jazz. Then I got bored with that," he said.

Acting on his desire to create new and exciting music, Gruenbaum invented the world's first relativistic keyboard, the Samchillian Tip Tip Tip Cheeepheeee. "It's my odd little contribution to society," he said. The instrument, which he demonstrated during last week's visit, is an ergonomic keyboard altered to produce electronic sounds as a MIDI controller. Instead of designating a specific note for each key, Gruenbaum designed the keys to correspond to intervals within a preset scale.

"This way you can play really fast," he said, "but that isn't the only reason for it. I was focusing on the rhythm of the line—the contour of the line when I made this. It's actually hard to get used to, as a pianist. I need to start a kid on this young to see what it can really do."

Gruenbaum has released several CDs and performed as a soloist and with various artists around the world. 2002's *Away* features live recordings of his abstract pop band Math Camp, for which he composes, sings and plays Samchillian. He has also performed as a member of the Bad Spock Quartet, which consists of Gruenbaum and friends dressed in blue Starfleet uniforms and fake ears who sing purposefully out of tune.

For this year's collaborative project with Harvard students, Gruenbaum has set no specifications. But he would like them to think about combining visual performance art and music.

"It's important to explore the full range of possibility of what a performance is," he said. "I realize this gives a lot of freedom, and that can be really hard. Sometimes having any kind of limitation actually helps you to create something."

Gruenbaum encourages the incorporation of unusual elements such as a performing in an unconventional space, using aromas, inviting campus groups like the Din and Tonics or getting "normal" people involved.

"It's a tricky thing to get somebody normal to do crazy things, but I like the contradiction. It's like the actress in all the Marx Brothers movies. I heard she didn't get any of the jokes. That comes out in the movies and it worked," he said.

He said he is willing to take part in the performance in whatever capacity the students decide, whether it's playing the Samchillian or dying his hair blue onstage. But despite Gruenbaum's preference for wacky, avant-garde art, he said that he doesn't want to force students to be "weird like me."

"I see myself as the producer of the final show," he said. "I hope to show you a few ideas about what more can be done."

The production is part of the Office for the Arts' Learning from Performers program, which brings renowned artists to Harvard.

Gruenbaum participated in the Learning from Performers program as a Harvard undergraduate and says he's excited to be on the other side of the equation.

"The collaborative way of working has been a model for the Peter Ivers Visiting Artist program since the beginning," said Tom Lee, who coordinates Learning from Performers. "The idea is to draw everyone's ideas together to realize a performance."

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"I want to bring some of the literary world into the classroom." —JAMES WOOD

## The Critical View

New professor hopes to bring fresh perspective to English department

By JOSEPH L. DIMENTO  
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Trash Salman Rushdie or John Updike, and you might make a name for yourself as a literary critic. Some reviewers rely on vitriol to buoy their reputations and lose readers, but those who criticize with purpose and insight often gain a reputation as a savvy critic.

That's what some say James Wood, critic for *The New Republic* and formerly the *Guardian*, has done. Now, as a visiting lecturer in English and American Language and Literature, he wants to bring this undaunted approach to Harvard classrooms.

Wood follows a precedent for literary celebrity that comes through reviewing rather than writing fiction. Known for his thorough analysis and his unwavering stance in the face of greats (Pynchon, DeLillo and Updike have all felt the brunt of his pen), Wood, 37, has been called the last "true" critic. He himself agrees that broader, contextualized criticism—which not only evaluates literature but espouses a theory of art—is less prevalent in these times. The English department, then, has snatched up one of a dying breed.

"It is dying out," Wood says, "and a lot has to do with the rise of English studies—which isn't to blame the [universities], of course." Wood doesn't ascribe to

the "anti-intellectual schtick" of writers like Gore Vidal or Saul Bellow—he sees his year-long guest lectureship at Harvard as a chance to broaden the horizons of many undergraduates.

"I want to bring some of the literary world into the classroom," Wood says, "and I think that might have been part of the English department's idea in hiring me." His fall course, English 90lv, "Consciousness from Austen to Woolf," explores ways in which novelists represent thought. Originally intended for 15 students, the class was more than doubled to 35 when over 70 people came to the first meeting.

"I don't like turning people away," Wood says. "I don't quite understand the capping thing."

So far he says size hasn't hindered the class, even though it is a discussion-based seminar.

Wood's aim in teaching the class, as well as next semester's course on postwar American and British fiction, is to present what he calls a "writer's criticism," which he differentiates from a scholar's literary analysis.

"Writers read books for aesthetic success—it's intensely important to them whether something works or not,

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JAMES WOOD comes to the English department after writing as a critic for *The New Republic* and *The Guardian*.

## Winger Crusades for Late Goddaughter's Memoir

By SIMON W. VOZICK-LEVINSON  
CRIMSON STAFF WRITER

Debra Winger, the *Terms of Endearment* star long absent from the Hollywood scene, is coming back to the big screen today with her first major studio role in eight years and her schedule has been accordingly full of publicity grabs—like a recent "Today Show" appearance and an event Wednesday at Mount Auburn Hospital.

But Winger hasn't been promoting her supporting role in the just-released *Radio* or her upcoming star turn in *Eulogy*, nor does she plan to. The three-time Oscar nominee has something else on her mind: the placement of a former Brown University student's book at the Coop.

Winger has never been known for making conventional career choices. After starring in *Terms of Endearment*, *An Officer and a Gentleman* and *Shadowlands*, Winger has spent the better part of a decade in a self-imposed exile from the movie industry, refusing to bend to the pressures of Tinseltown. And now Winger has taken on a crusade to rescue *Breathing for a Living*—the posthumously-published memoir of her goddaughter Laura Rothenberg, who died of cystic fibrosis in March at the age of 23—from oblivion.

"I've been sort of on the warpath," Winger says. Rothenberg spent her last years writing about

her experience receiving a lung transplant which ultimately did not save her from her chronic illness.

"Laura wanted to live more than anyone I knew," Winger says. "And I don't say that lightly. Not only because she had a life-threatening disease—she just wanted every day to be as full and complete and directed as it could be."

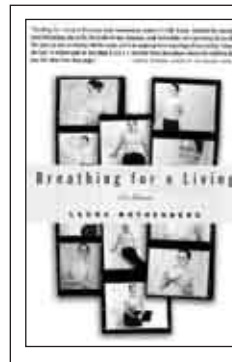
And Winger says the book has a valuable lesson about fundamental humanity in today's troubled times.

"We're in the, whether we like it or not, Bush era," she says. "If you believe that things come from the top I'd say that we're living in some of the most intolerant times, not even in recent history, but more far-reaching than that...There are some lessons here about tolerance that are so real, not abstract."

But when Rothenberg died shortly after the book's completion, Winger says it fell into marketing limbo.

"Hyperion, who put the book out, sort of weirdly didn't know what to do when Laura passed," Winger says. "They expected her to go on a national tour, and when she couldn't they just put the book out."

As a result, she says, the book that means so much to her has been unfairly ignored.



**Breathing for a Living**  
by Laura Rothenberg

\$22.95  
Hyperion

"Leave it to the corporate mentality," Winger says dryly. "When it hit Borders and Barnes and Noble they put it in the medical section."

Winger insists that such a vital, lively work deserves more prominent placement. If *Breathing for a Living* showed up on the front tables of the Coop, she says, Harvard students—the readers who she says will most appreciate Rothenberg's perspective on life and death—would run into the book without searching it out, while "running from one class to another."

Getting this kind of placement from the major bookstore chains has been a matter of more than a

polite phone call, she says.

"I was shocked that I couldn't go to Borders and Barnes and Noble and [get more conspicuous shelving for *Breathing for a Living*]," she says. "It's so money-oriented."

So Winger has tried to transfer some of her own fame to Rothenberg's memoir. The day after her "Today Show" plug, she says, several book chains sold out of *Breathing for a Living*.

She's also turned her attention to trying to get the book assigned in various high schools and colleges, including Harvard.

Winger says Rothenberg's memoir would supply much-needed variety to the one-track studies of some students, especially those on the pre-med track.

"The last thing that happens is you read literature, and if you do read literature...you read it with a highlighting pen in hand," she says. "You hand a guy who's planning on being a doctor *The Death of Ivan Ilych* and let him read some works by doctors like William Carlos Williams or Chekhov and it changes their perspective."

This would not be Winger's first experience bringing complex questions to Cambridge—in the fall of 1999, she spent a term pushing Harvard

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### THARP TALK



Legendary choreographer TWYLA THARP draws on four decades of experience with success and failure to tell a packed audience at the Sackler Museum about "the creative habit" Wednesday.

## 'Staggering Genius' Cracks Up Students

By EMILY S. HIGH  
CRIMSON STAFF WRITER

It's easy to think you know Dave Eggers after reading his work—just ask his legion of rabid intellectual fans. But last week, about 150 Harvard students and faculty spent an hour getting closer to the post-postmodern hero than any of the countless readers of Eggers' self-referential, hyperactive fiction, pyrotechnically clever literary journal and wittily personal 2000 meta-memoir, *A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius*.

Eggers was invited by fellow young luminary Zadie Smith, who is a visiting lecturer at Harvard this year, to give one in an ongoing series of readings to the Harvard audience. Those who showed up got a reading, but that was only the beginning of the evening's festivities: true to form, Eggers filled out the hour with bizarre anecdotes, off-kilter observations and a laid-back bantering session with his appreciators.

Clad in jeans and a black baseball cap, the idiosyncratic author gestured wildly and shared his thoughts on his hair, sea brigands and baseball over the course of

the evening.

"I fucking hate the Yankees," Eggers offered at one point, winning raucous applause. "It seems like IBM is fielding a baseball team."

Eggers also regaled his listeners on topics including the Old West and the pirate supply store he has established as a legal front for 826 Valencia, the writing lab he established in a strict retail zone of San Francisco last April.

During the more traditional portion of his appearance, Eggers read part of a forthcoming work, which he said "doesn't have an ending yet." At a student's request, he read several short stories.

Undergraduates in attendance—many of them English concentrators and students in creative writing classes—raved that Eggers was both humorous and down to earth.

"Meeting him and hearing him speak in person was not too far removed from reading [*A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius*]," said Kim T. Nguyen '06, an English concentrator. Eggers

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