

PCAP NEWS

February 2019

The PCAP newsletter aims to keep incarcerated artists, writers, and performers informed of what the Prison Creative Arts Project (PCAP) is doing and how to be involved. If you know someone who would like to receive this newsletter, please have them write to us.

A Note from the Director

by **Ashley Lucas**

I'm writing to you on one of the coldest days we've seen in Michigan in quite a long time. Temperatures tonight in Ann Arbor are supposed to reach -16°, and two days of classes were cancelled at the University of Michigan this week due to extreme cold. I know that prisons are not the warmest of places, and all of you are on my mind. We in the PCAP Office are hoping you are warm, safe, and well.

There are so many things happening right now at PCAP that it's hard to tell it all at once! Here are a few highlights.

Music Programming

PCAP has a new Concert Series this year thanks to the work of fabulous grad student Ali Friedman. The series brings world class performers—mostly from our School of Music, Theatre, and Dance—to prisons, youth facilities, and communities where folks have come home from prison. Musicians perform for about half an hour and then do some kind of interactive activity that engages the audience in learning about music or making a bit of music themselves. Our first event in the PCAP Concert Series was held at FCI Milan. We had a wonderful time and are looking forward to the upcoming concerts in the series, which will be at facilities all over the state. We've even got plans for a Spring Break tour to several facilities up north!

A new choir on our campus called Out of the Blue has adopted PCAP for this school year. They are planning concerts at youth facilities, MDOC prisons, and at PCAP's community workshop in Ann Arbor. The choir performed at our fundraising auction in December and held a benefit concert to raise money for PCAP at Ste. Anne de Detroit cathedral. Cozine Welch read poetry in between songs, and Mary Heinen McPherson sang the final song of the concert with the choir—a beautiful version of the hymn "O, Freedom!"

The university Chamber Choir and members of the professional non-university choir Exigence, both directed by Eugene Rogers, will be performing *Lifesmithing* at the opening reception of the *24th Annual Exhibition of Art by Michigan Prisoners*. This means that those of you inside the walls will get to hear this beautiful piece of music inspired by writings from the *Michigan Review of Prisoner Creative Writing* because it will be recorded on the art show video that we send to facilities. This is the same piece of music by composer Roshanne Etezady that I described in the last PCAP newsletter. Several of you asked about recordings of that performance. Sadly, I do not know of any video or audio recordings.

The university Men's Glee Club will perform at the reading of the *Michigan Review of Prisoner Creative Writing* on Sunday, March 24. We are so grateful to have the support of so many fabulous groups at the School of Music, Theatre, and Dance.

Weekly Workshops

A number of you have written me very kind letters asking how to get more PCAP programming. I wanted to let you know that we are doing our best to meet your requests. The biggest challenge we face is a lack of classroom space at the facilities. The other significant challenge is the distance of most facilities from the Ann Arbor area, where most of our volunteers live.

For those of you who are in facilities that are harder for us to reach on a regular basis, please watch for our special events. We plan to bring the Concert Series and one-day workshops to several facilities this year and welcome your invitations to attend special events organized inside. If you send us an invitation via your special activities director or by writing to us at the PCAP Office, we will invite PCAPers to join you.

Linkage Project

I also wanted to take a moment in this newsletter to explain a bit more about our reentry program, which we call the Linkage Project. The idea behind Linkage is to provide a continuum of support from your experiences with PCAP inside the walls to your life after incarceration. Members register with the project every year and, just like PCAP on the inside, there is no minimum participation level. Here are a few more details about what Linkage looks like right now.

- Weekly creative arts workshops at Miller Manor public housing community every Monday night in Ann Arbor. These workshops look a whole lot like the weekly workshops we offer in prisons (except we bring food!) and are open to anyone whether they have any link to incarceration or not.
- Three annual events to help connect you to a broader art-making community and learn practical strategies for how to use your artistic skills in the outside world. This is usually a Linkage member lunch in Ann Arbor, a visit to ArtPrize in Grand Rapids, and a one-day conference in Detroit.
- An open invitation to attend all PCAP events, talks, meetings, performances, exhibitions, and my classes. Though you can't take my classes for credit unless you're enrolled at the university, you are welcome to participate one time or come every week, as two current Linkage members are doing.
- We offer transportation or travel reimbursement as often as we can for Linkage members to attend PCAP activities. If we ask you to speak, help us hang the art show, or provide other services we pay you an honorarium (speaker fee). We often get asked by other people on campus if we know speakers and recommend Linkage members for these occasions.
- Sometimes there are unexpected opportunities outside of PCAP's regular programming. For example, PCAP was invited to present at a national conference and a Linkage Project member was part of our panel. The more time you spend with us—on either side of the walls—the more we can match the opportunities that come our way with your needs and abilities. As really amazing things emerge, we want to know you well enough to recommend you with confidence.

Podcast

For those of you who are unfamiliar with podcasts, it's a kind of radio show that plays on the internet, and we've started one of our own. *While We Were Away* is recorded and produced by current and former PCAP students, and each episode tells the story of someone released from prison. So far, it's getting a lot of positive attention from listeners. We're talking to folks in Lansing now about making it available for all of you in MDOC to download on your JPay tablets, but we're not quite there yet. If your families want to listen, they can find it at SoundCloud, iTunes, Spotify, or <https://lsa.umich.edu/pcap/podcast/listen.htm>.

That's all for now, folks. Stay warm and sign up for our Winter semester workshops which will be starting soon in Women's Huron Valley, Cotton, Parnall, Gus Harrison, Cooper St., and FCI Milan!

U-M Student Podcast Helps Former Prisoners Tell their Stories

by **Fernanda Pires**

Wearing a maize and blue scarf and with a wide and bright smile, Asia Johnson sits composed in front of a microphone at the Shapiro Design Lab. Across the table, with attentive eyes and headphones, is the host Hannah French, a student at the University of Michigan.

In the next hour or so, Johnson will share stories of her nine years living behind prison bars, her fears, her moments of sorrow, and the joy from learning that she was coming home.

"I am willing to talk about anything if it is going to help someone," she said. "I want to shed light in the darkness that is incarceration. I hope participating in the project gives me a voice to do that."

A natural communicator, Johnson is one of the characters in the new podcast "While We Were Away," produced by a group of U-M students launched in early January. In the introductory segment, she defines herself as a poet, an activist, a writer and a hopeful romantic.

Vividly, she tells French how it felt to cross the gate of the Women's Huron Valley Correctional Facility last October, after being locked up for almost a decade.



"As soon as I set foot out of the prison, I felt like I was no longer wearing dirty glasses," Johnson said. "Somebody had literally cleaned my glasses and I could see through all the darkness."

Then she talks about her time inside and how the arts saved her while behind bars, and about hitting roadblocks and managing to overcome them after her release from prison.

The podcast's first season will feature the stories of seven other prison community members, describing their experiences of coming home after long years in exile. Producers expect the narratives to serve as guidebooks for those seeking knowledge, peace, comfort and joy in life on the outside.

"Coming home is a complete physical, mental and spiritual metamorphosis. It is a complete change of life with distinct changes and challenges. My entire life changed when I went inside and when I came home," said Mary Heinen, coordinator and former mentee of the Prison Creative Arts Project, a program at U-M's Residential College that brings those impacted by the justice system and the U-M community into artistic collaboration for mutual learning and growth.

About 27 minutes long, each podcast episode will tell stories of a different participant and be a portrait of what life could look like on the outside. It will focus on the joys in spite of struggle, and will offer words of wisdom for the future by those who faced the same reality.

"There are not a lot of resources to prepare people when they come out," said French, a senior studying anthropology and creative writing, with a minor in community action and social change. "I think stories are an incredible people-moving machine, and the switch from writing and reading stories to oral and audible ones has been a joy."

It all started last spring with a group of students chatting in a local restaurant about their desire to work with and somehow help formerly incarcerated people. The idea was to find a way to contribute something relevant, meaningful and real, to provide information and resources to people who have been involved in the criminal justice system, but also to produce a show that would be entertaining, hopeful and light-hearted.

U-M Student Podcast Helps Former Prisoners Tell their Stories cont.

One of the students, Kathryn Condon, now a U-M alumni, was interested in combining her passion for the Prison Creative Arts Project with audio storytelling. She started this conversation, aiming to create a podcast that could statistically help change the recidivism rate.

“There is an incredibly high percentage of people in Michigan that return to prison, mainly because there are so little resources for folks when they get out,” she said. Condon also knew that people in prisons entertain themselves and those around them via storytelling.

“Which, after recording all of these interviews, I can’t help but wholeheartedly agree with,” she said. “I mean, have you listened to these men and women talk? I laughed, cried, smiled, sang, clapped during the recording of these interviews.”

For Heinen, those regaining their freedom after prison are eyewitnesses to history and are primary sources.

“So much of what we have seen and lived is not written in books or recorded. It is first-hand knowledge,” she said. “And PCAP is instrumental in social justice in real time in the real world. It is a bridge we cross to freedom, often by the road we paint and speak into existence with words.”

Johnson couldn’t agree more.

“I hope the podcast humanizes a dehumanizing experience. I hope that people will listen and be moved to action,” she said. “It is difficult being a returning citizen and it is only due to my family and volunteers who were willing to invest in me that I am living and thriving.”

Literary Review

The Prison Creative Arts Project (PCAP) is accepting submissions of creative writing—fiction, poetry, essays, or memoir—of up to 4,500 words (ten typed pages) for *The Michigan Review of Prisoner Creative Writing*. The next pieces selected will appear in Volume 12, appearing in 2020. Writers are notified 8-10 weeks after submissions are received. Submissions are accepted throughout the year.

Thank you for your outstanding pieces of writing that you have submitted thus far. We strongly encourage you to continue in this creative process and send us any and all of your work.

PCAP at LSA Residential College
ATTN: Phil Christman
701 E. University Ave. Ann Arbor, MI 48109-1245

Please submit the following information with your written work:

- Your legal name (so we can communicate with you by mail);
- Your name or pen name as you’d like it to appear in the journal, if that’s different than your legal name;
- Your MDOC ID number;
- Your current address;
- A short paragraph about yourself/your writing that will be published alongside any accepted piece.

Linkage Project

Would you like to stay connected with PCAP when you return home? The Linkage Project offers workshops, cultural field trips, connections to PCAP’s campus community, and the opportunity to build a network with other artists, writers, and performers. If you would like to participate, please write to Vanessa Mayesky when you have a release date or email pcaplinkage@umich.edu after you come home.

Call for Prison Library Wish List

The Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Ann Arbor Prison Books Program is a volunteer-run program that collects and distributes donated books to Michigan prisons. Books are for recreational reading, self-help, literacy, and, most recently, art and writing programs in the prisons. PCAP sends a wish list to the Prison Books program each year. If you have suggestions for your prison's library, or want to send feedback on new books that have arrived, please write to the PCAP office.

Call for Writing: MTSU Shift

Middle Tennessee State University (MTSU) is seeking authors for the second volume of *SHIFT*, a journal dedicated to literary excellence. Manuscripts should be clearly handwritten or typed using 12-point type in any standard font. Please include a cover page with the title of the piece and author's contact information.

- Flash fiction: 400-1,000 words
- Short stories: <5,000 words
- Creative non-fiction: <5,000 words
- Poetry: Up to 4 pages
- Plays: Up to 10 minutes or 1 act

SHIFT gladly accepts multiple submissions from each author. Authors may submit up to four entries of poetry or flash fiction; two entries of creative non-fiction, fiction, or plays; or three entries of multiple genres.

Submit work to:

MTSU Write
MTSU Box 70
1301 East Main Street
Murfreesboro, TN 37132

Like a Breath of Fresh Air

by **Ricardo Ferrell, PCAP Participant**

[Editor's note: this essay has been edited due to space constraints.]

Long before PCAP's creation, I participated in workshops with University of Michigan students who would frequently travel down US-23 to Whitmore Lake, where I was being housed as a juvenile at the W.J. Maxey Boys Training School. Those experiences, 45 years ago, are forever wedged in my memory because the interactions with students gave a sense of belonging and something fresh and new to look forward to each month. Some of us would go on trips with staff off grounds to the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor. I would walk around campus as a 16-year-old troubled teen, in awe, imagining what it would be like to one day attend the university.

Fast forward to 1991, I attended a drama class offered by the University of Michigan at the G. Robert Cotton Correctional Facility in Jackson, Michigan. [PCAP Founder] Buzz Alexander was the professor at the time and brought in drama students which provided a collaborative learning experience for both U of M students and prisoners alike. My longstanding involvement and participation with PCAP has had an enormous therapeutic value enabling me to move forward.

The second theatrical workshop to be held here at the Reformatory in six months lends credence to how the PCAP folks obviously recognize the amazing raw talent that's hidden deep in the bowels of Michigan's oldest prison. Today's workshop included seven brilliant U of M students: Amana; Carlos; Christian; Hannah; Kym; Si Si; and Syd—joined by 16 talented prisoner participants: Anthony; Arthur; Brad Brandon; Corey F; Corey G; Dariyone; Dedrick; Elijah; Joshua; Michael; Ricardo; Robert; Rodney; Ronnie; Salathiel; and Thomas. The combined energy in the room produced one of



Like a Breath of Fresh Air cont.

the best workshops yet and Director Lucas indicated her fascination with everyone's participation, while being enthusiastically engaged herself throughout the entire workshop.

I often think about people like Joyce Dixson, Abdul Rahman, Shaka Senghor, and Cozine Welch Jr., all formerly incarcerated individuals who had a connection with the University of Michigan, either teaching through PCAP or working on campus in some capacity. They all have inspired me to realize that very possibility could also be open to me upon my release, in that, I too could very well join the Linkage Project (PCAP's reentry program) and receive facilitator training enabling me to be involved with the Atonement Project, which can also lead to my becoming a PCAP professor.

These are the reasons why I say the PCAP experience is like having a breath of fresh air because there I once was, at the age of 16, thinking about how it would be to attend the university. Now to be involved with PCAP after all these years encourages me even more. My many years of participating has allowed me to feel a sense of belonging due to the way the folks at PCAP and the University of Michigan have treated me with common decency, unlike the way many in society have rejected those of us in prison.

Having the opportunity to now be involved with PCAP and looking forward to involvement upon my release gives me a great deal of hope with limitless possibilities, letting me know that I can creatively contribute to the well-being of our society.



Life After PCAP

by **Julia Marino, PCAP Associate**

It is hard to believe that it has been almost four years since I was actively involved with PCAP. During my senior year at the University of Michigan and for a year after I graduated, I facilitated theater, creative writing, and art workshops. I also helped out with the *Annual Exhibition of Art by Michigan Prisoners*. I was always amazed by the talent, creativity, and passion for art that I saw both in my workshops and at the exhibition. I still feel that PCAP is a part of my life as I am reminded of it every day by the art on my apartment walls, much of which was either purchased at the exhibition or gifted by workshop participants. Two pieces that hang in my living room were painted by a workshop participant in 2015. These works are very special to me, and serve as a wonderful reminder of the incredible openness and generosity of spirit that I encountered in each of the workshops I facilitated.

Another joy in my history with PCAP has been sharing it with people I have met in my work and travels. A friend I met in California was so taken with one of the paintings I had purchased years earlier at the PCAP Art Auction, I gifted the piece to her when she moved away. It now hangs in the apartment she shares with her husband in upstate New York, and she is able to share the story and message of PCAP with anyone who sees it and comments. It is exciting to think that PCAP has touched the lives of so many people country-wide.

Since my time with PCAP, I have earned a master's degree from the University of Texas at Dallas and practiced as a Speech-Language Pathologist in California. My career has now brought me to Chicago, where I work as a Speech-Language Pathologist at an inpatient rehabilitation hospital. My work involves treating patients to help them regain their language, speech, swallowing, and cognitive abilities following medical events such as strokes or traumatic brain injuries. One of my favorite aspects of my job is fostering respectful, caring, and trusting relationships with my patients, much like the friendships I formed with my workshop participants. After volunteering with PCAP, I wanted to pursue a career in which I could continue to build relationships with people even in their most vulnerable moments. I am grateful to everyone I worked with in my workshops for being so open and honest, and for setting me on this path.

I am thrilled to be back in the Midwest, and I am excited to be able to finally return to Ann Arbor in March for the *24th Annual Exhibition of Art by Michigan Prisoners*! I can't wait to see your pieces there.

Calendar

March – July, 2019

24th Annual Exhibition of Art by Michigan Prisoners, March 20 – April 3
Duderstadt Center Gallery, U-M Ann Arbor

Artist Panel, March 24
Duderstadt Center Gallery, U-M Ann Arbor

Michigan Review of Prisoner Creative Writing reading, March 24,
Pierpont East Room, U-M Ann Arbor

Linkage Project Workshop Day, April 6
Detroit Institute of Arts (DIA)

Exhibit sales information mailed and payments mailed, July

Rolling submissions for *Michigan Review of Prisoner Creative Writing*, vol. 12

Weekly creative arts workshops

About PCAP

Mission Statement

The Prison Creative Arts Project brings those impacted by the justice system and the University of Michigan community into artistic collaboration for mutual learning and growth.

Contact Us

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Jose Casas, Phil Christman, Sarah Messer,
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PCAP Staff

El Chen, Graham Hamilton, Mary Heinen,
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PCAP Special Projects Staff

Azhar Aboubaker, Caleb Foerg, Fernanda Pires,
Jonathan Smith, Cozine Welch, Jr.

Annual Exhibition Curators

Janie Paul, Senior Curator
Alyssa Baginiski, El Chen, Nelly Emlaw, Graham
Hamilton, Lenae Jefferson, Charlie Michaels,
Jason Wright