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Contacts: Anita DeAngelis, Mary B. Martin School of the Arts director, 423-439-5673, deangeli@etsu.edu
Lise Cutshaw, MBMSOTA marketing coordinator, 423-773-5410, cutshaw@etsu.edu

Then & Now

Spring season rich in regional culture, issues, music, drama

While fall took audiences on a world tour of cultures, the spring season at Mary B. Martin School of the Arts features a patchwork of arts events, many of which reflect a more regional perspective – traditional, historic and contemporary.

“We traveled the world with tales from Arianna Ross, music from Sweet Honey and the Mystical Arts of Tibet last fall,” says Mary B. Martin School of the Arts Director Anita DeAngelis. “This spring, many of our events have connections to our own region of Appalachia and the South. We welcome bluegrass and country musicians, actors and poets whose home bases and, sometimes, shows are rooted in the South, and we’ll screen three Southern Circuit films that probe issues prevalent in Southern culture. The spring season also features several artists, however, who represent other perspectives, experiences and cultures.”

A troupe from American Shakespeare Center in Staunton, Va., will bring Elizabethan tragedy to East Tennessee, performing Christopher Marlowe’s *Doctor Faustus*. The tour stops at ETSU’s Martha Street Culp Auditorium on Friday, Feb. 20, at 7:30 p.m. for an evening of theater, madness and mayhem, Shakespeare style. Featuring combustible books, mythical transformations, blood, ghosts and demons, “This production is intellectual, sexy, funny, visceral, human, supernatural and scary,” says ASC Artistic Director Jim Warren.

True to the style of Shakespeare’s day, ASC performers present a pre-show of live music that begins at 7 p.m. “I have no doubt that we will enjoy a unique and festive night,” DeAngelis says.

On Thursday, April 2, North Carolina-based playwright, actor and director Mike Wiley will chronicle a Southern drama, the 1955 trial and confession of the men accused of lynching 14-year-old black Chicagoan Emmett Till in Mississippi. Portraying more than 30 characters in a script he crafted himself, Wiley will perform *Dar He: The Story of Emmett Till* at 7:30 p.m. in the Culp Auditorium.

“The timing for us to present this piece this semester is significant,” DeAngelis says. “The university is really working to create forums during spring semester to talk about race relations with our student population and community, so we are bringing Mike here for this conversation. Mike also follows the performance with a Q&A with the audience.”

Although they will also travel from North Carolina, the award-winning bluegrass trio the Krüger Brothers met in Switzerland, the homeland of Jens and Uwe Krüger. Co-sponsored by the School
of the Arts, the Krügers and bassist Joel Landsberg will join Symphony of the Mountains to perform *Music from the Spring* on Saturday, Feb. 28, at 7:30 p.m. in Eastman Employee Center, Kingsport. ETSU’s Pride Band will be the opening act. The Krügers were awarded an NEA grant for *Music from the Spring*, a symphonic suite, which premiered in 2007, composed and orchestrated by Jens Krüger.

“Theyir original numbers blend virtuosity and originality with a sort of wide-eyed appreciation for the beauty of Appalachian music and culture,” says *The Ark* website, while *Bluegrass Journal* says, “The Krügers are nothing short of magnificent.”

Steinway Artist Robin Spielberg will bring more music on Thursday, March 5, at 7 p.m. in the Culp Auditorium as featured speaker and performer for the Fourth Annual Evening of Health Wellness & the Arts, co-sponsored by the ETSU College of Public Health. The pianist, composer and recording artist is a celebrity spokesperson for the American Music Therapy Association.

“Robin is another artist that I’ve been trying to get here for several years,” DeAngelis says. “She is not only going to perform for us, but she is also going to tell us her own personal story about the healing power of music – a powerful story of the effect of music on her own daughter, who was born prematurely. Robin is also an author and an actor, so we are confident she can share some important lessons with our students.”

On Saturday, March 28, at 7:30 p.m. in Culp Auditorium, Ricky Skaggs and Kentucky Thunder will add their unique blend of bluegrass, country, old-time and gospel music to Mary B. Martin School’s spring lineup. The ETSU Pride Band will also open for the legendary Skaggs, who has won 14 Grammys since he first played at age 6 with Bill Monroe. The concert is the featured entertainment for the 2015 Appalachian Studies Association Conference being hosted by ETSU, but open to everyone.

“Our bluegrass program has had a long-term relationship with Ricky Skaggs,” DeAngelis says, “so the School of the Arts is excited to actually bring Ricky to ETSU for a concert.”

With artists from North Carolina, Kentucky and Virginia, the School of the Arts kicks off its season Tuesday, Feb. 3, with a poetry reading by Memphis resident and University of Tennessee alumna Heather Dobbins. The reading will begin at 7 p.m. in Ball Hall 127 with a reception to follow. Dobbins' poems have been published in *Beloit Poetry Journal*, *Big Muddy*, *New Millennium Writings*, *The Southern Poetry Anthology (Tennessee)* and *TriQuarterly Review*, and her poetry collection *In the Low Houses* was published in 2014.

“I have loved Heather Dobbins' poetry for many years,” says Literature & Language professor Jesse Graves. “Her poems show the tenderness and beauty our personal lives can achieve, while also casting a bracingly honest look at the social and political worlds around us.”

Dobbins, a middle and high school teacher for 14 years, will also work with creative writing students while at ETSU.
Nick Pope, an author and former leader of the British government’s UFO Project, will also work with Literature & Language students, as well as give a lecture Thursday, April 23, at 7 p.m. in Rogers-Stout Hall 102. His non-fiction books *Open Skies Closed Minds*, about UFOs, and *The Uninvited*, about the alien abduction mystery, made the *New York Times* Top 10 list.

“ETSU has a small creative writing program, but one that is growing,” DeAngelis says. “We are thrilled to have two opportunities to support that program this spring. Literature is also a creative art.”

Also in April, the School of the Arts will present a free screening of the new documentary *Seymour: An Introduction*, a portrait of pianist and piano teacher Seymour Bernstein, directed by actor Ethan Hawke. The screening is scheduled for Friday, April 10 at 7 p.m. in Brown Hall Auditorium, and Bernstein will be on campus for the film and master classes with ETSU music students.

In addition to the Bernstein documentary, Mary B. Martin School of the Arts is continuing its sponsorship of the 2014-15 South Arts Southern Circuit Tour of Independent Filmmakers, with three more films spring semester. *The New Black* will be shown on Feb. 23; *Old South* on March 16; and *A Kind of Order* on April 20. All are free, on Mondays at 7 p.m. and will include Q&A sessions and receptions afterward with the filmmakers.

“We’ve have some charged film topics this semester, but I think it’s good we have an opportunity to come together as a community and talk about these issues,” DeAngelis says. “And then add to that *Dar He*, and there will be a lot to talk about.”

*The New Black*, which captures the complex intersection between faith, racial justice and LGBT rights, and *Old South*, the story of two Southern communities seeking common ground, will be held in Culp Auditorium, while *A Kind of Order*, which focuses on the role of race and power in the prison system, will be in ETSU’s Ball Hall Auditorium.

“We will experience a wide breadth of the arts this spring – some of it quite close to home, geographically or in subject matter – but the part that I really love is that we put almost all of our artists in direct contact with our students and that’s always exciting,” DeAngelis says. “I love it when, after an artist has been here, I see students who participated and they tell me, ‘Oh, that made such a big difference in my life,’ or I find out that the students are still communicating with the artist or that they learned something about other people in other cultures that they weren’t expecting.

“Those things make what we do, to me, very special.”

For information about the ETSU Mary B. Martin School of the Arts or tickets to events, call 423-439-TKTS (8587) or visit www.etsu.edu/martin. Please “Like” ETSU Mary B. Martin School of the Arts on Facebook and follow it on Twitter and Instagram @ArtsAtETSU.