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# Remembering an Eastman Leader

*Douglas Lowry brought warmth, wit,  
and transformational leadership  
to the Eastman School.*

By Karen McCally '02 (PhD)

IN THE HOURS FOLLOWING THE OFFICIAL ANNOUNCEMENT that Douglas Lowry, the Joan and Martin Messinger Dean Emeritus of the Eastman School, had died, a crowd gathered.

The site was Eastman's Main Hall, the wide corridor with the prosaic name that from that day forward would be known as Lowry Hall.

By the time Jamal Rossi took to a podium, the gathering had extended from the easternmost staircase to the western entranceway. Named dean upon Lowry's resignation just nine days before, Rossi, Eastman's longtime professor of woodwinds and, as executive associate dean, Lowry's closest associate at the school, remarked on the gathering and its meaning:

"This—this alone—right here, this view. What a remarkable tribute to a remarkable person."

Lowry was named dean of the Eastman School in 2007. He came amidst a transition in which the school was making major investments in facilities and seeking greater visibility in a rapidly changing environment in which no music school, no matter how distinguished, could take an illustrious position for granted.

In the spring of 2011, University Trustee Martin



**A COMPLETED VISION:** The Eastman School's East Wing (above), which George Eastman had envisioned, was completed under Lowry's tenure, as was the renovated Kodak Hall at Eastman Theatre (left). Lowry's composition *Geo* commemorated the hall's opening.



**PARTNER:** “This is hallowed ground, and we’re happy we could have been part of your lives,” Marcia Lowry told the gathering in the newly named Lowry Hall.

## Select Compositions

*The Freedom Zephyr* (2013). A celebration of the Underground Railroad. Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra, with narrator Paul Burgett '68E, '76E (PhD) and guest conductor Ward Stare.

*Wind Religion* (2013). To commemorate the 60th birthday of the Eastman Wind Ensemble.

*Geo* (2009). To commemorate the opening of Kodak Hall at Eastman Theatre. Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra, Christopher Seaman, director.

*Good to Go* (2008). Trio for oboe, horn, and piano. Premiered at the International Horn Society Convention, Denver, Colo.

*Between Blues and Hard Places* (2007). Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music Chamber Players.

*Exordium Nobile* (2003). Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra, Paavo Järvi, director.

*Blue Mazda* (2003). Monodrama for soprano, brass, piano, and percussion. *Piece a' Brevis* (2003). For four trumpets. Recorded on *New Dimensions* (Summit Records) by the Freiburg Trumpet Ensemble.

*Suburban Measures* (1993). For trumpet and organ. Recorded on *20th Century Music for Trumpet and Organ* (BIS) by Anthony Plog (trumpet) and Hans-Ola Ericsson (organ).

Messinger '49E and his wife, Joan, decided to endow the Eastman deanship, underscoring not only their commitment to the school, but their confidence in Lowry's leadership.

That September—the same month in which he was officially installed as the Joan and Martin Messinger Dean—Lowry was diagnosed with multiple myeloma.

He worked through his illness and treatments. As dean, he endured a heavy travel schedule, as he sought to build relationships around the country and globe. As a composer, he continued to create music. His six years at Eastman were jam-packed with accomplishments in both of those roles.

The renovation of Eastman Theatre to become Kodak Hall at Eastman Theatre was completed under his leadership. His composition, *Geo*, was commissioned by the Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra to celebrate the opening of Kodak Hall in October 2009.

Jeff Beal '85E, an Emmy Award-winning composer for film and television, praised *Geo*, a five-part, motion-filled, cinematic musical journey Lowry said was inspired by George Eastman's role in developing the motion picture, and by the Eastman Theatre's early history as a movie house.

“*Geo* has a classicism that's very literate, but also a joy to it that isn't trivial,” says Beal. “Celebratory pieces are looked at as banal. But *Geo* is just a really genuine, joyful, classy tribute.”

Lowry oversaw the construction of Eastman's East Wing, a part of the school originally envisioned by George Eastman that includes Hatch Recital Hall and other up-to-date performance, rehearsal, and teaching spaces.

Last February, the Rochester Philharmonic premiered another of Lowry's compositions that celebrated the Rochester region's distinguished past: *The Freedom Zephyr*, a tribute to the Underground Railroad that combined music with texts by Frederick Douglass, Walt Whitman, and Ralph Waldo Emerson.

These were only his most tangible accomplishments. Alone, they constitute “an amazing legacy,” says Rossi. But, he adds, “I'm not sure that's what his greatest impact was.”

“As musicians, we talk all the time about what separates a great performance, somebody who plays beautifully, with great sound and amazing technique, from a real artist,” says Rossi. “For Doug, the ability to connect with people was his artistry.”

The ability to connect and communicate—no small matter in any leadership role—is especially important in stewarding an evolving institution that has so much history behind it.

“We deal, in a way, with the past. We don't discard things from the 17th century because we're now in the 21st,” says Vincent Lenti '60E, '62E (MA), professor of piano and historian of the Eastman School who has taught at the school for more than 50 years.





**TRIBUTE:** Following the announcement of Lowry's death on October 2, students, staff, and faculty convened in Eastman's Main Hall, renamed Lowry Hall (above). The Hatch Recital Hall (right), offering state-of-the-art acoustics, was completed in 2011, under Lowry's tenure.

And yet, he notes, as tastes, demographics, and modes of creation and distribution of music evolve, schools must respond. The result has been division over the very mission of music schools. Is the job of faculty at a school like Eastman to train fine musicians? Or should Eastman faculty also focus on helping students create ways to make a living through their art?

"There are people who say it's not my job as a teacher to get students jobs. My job is just to teach them," says Lenti. "But we wouldn't survive very long if we kept turning out a lot of wonderful people who couldn't get



## In His Own Words

"In the coming years, Eastman will take a hard look at the breathtaking changes in the way that music is experienced and consumed, and examine the emerging relationship between music and other art forms, particularly new media. We need to lead this exploration, define its path of events, revive live music."

—Quoted in *Eastman Notes*, Summer 2007

"The notion of vigorously connecting your music with other art forms is not a new idea. Stravinsky's association with Diaghilev brought us *Petrushka*, *Firebird*, and *Le Sacre du Printemps*. . . . This spirit of collaboration will be central to the survival and splendor of music's next great era, as music tumbles about in the combustion chamber of the real world, the robust theater of ideas; not just musical ideas inspired by somebody else's musical ideas, but the mosh pit of literature, visual art, drama; of the sciences, of social friction, of politics; in short, the mosh pit of the human condition—the human condition with which you must and will engage. Trust me, it needs you."

—Eastman Commencement Address, May 2008

"Just a few short months ago, we sent that next generation of musical leaders out in the world. Our guest was Clive Gillinson, the executive and artistic director of Carnegie Hall. Clive began his speech rather inauspiciously, at least from my perspective. He declared to this sea of graduates something along these lines: 'In 20 years, 90 percent of you will be doing something different than what you originally planned.' Understand that the house was packed to the rafters with the parents and families of graduates. I remember thinking, 'Clive had better be good on the rebound.' Which he was, of course. His provocative message really wasn't that our Eastman graduates would abandon their dreams. His point was that those very core musical dreams may likely take on a different form at some point."

—Convocation Address, September 2010

"Music has always been a public art, with some part of it, I guess, held in private reserve. But one of my fears is that that private reserve has gotten larger and larger, and the public stake has gotten smaller and smaller. Maybe because we spend so much time indoors, we become very gifted at wrapping up our music into these impressive conceptual packages so that we can put them up on the shelf for adoration by us and our peers. But that's not what Bach wanted. Shakespeare wrote enormously complicated plays, but he wrote them for the public. Bach and Shakespeare both wanted their music to be heard. When music becomes privatized, it loses its tether to the general public. So how can we be surprised when the public turns elsewhere?"

—Eastman Commencement Address, May 2013

employed." When necessary, he says, Lowry "had a way of coaxing people" to understand that their roles as mentors had broadened.

Lowry was among the arts leaders who recognized that helping students prepare for jobs meant reimagining ways of connecting with audiences. Among his projects was the Paul R. Judy Center for Applied Research, launched this past summer. The center, responding to the declining audiences for major American orchestras, aims to promote research into and experimentation with alternative models for ensembles.

His quest to spur innovation, however, didn't preclude active support of traditional models. Christopher Seaman, conductor laureate of the Rochester Philharmonic, says, "From the standpoint of the Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra and myself as its former director, Doug was the perfect dean of the Eastman School. He loved the orchestra, he understood its excellence, and everything he did for us was aimed at the benefit of both organizations and their symbiotic relationship."

Eastman faculty and alumni from across musical genres noted that Lowry was expert in posing questions—questions that brought clarity to debates about the mission of the school, the role of the arts in society, and the relationship of music to other arts and to other human enterprises. And he got people to join in conversations.

Maria Schneider '85E (MM), a Grammy Award-winning jazz composer, recalls Lowry approaching her for her thoughts on Eastman's jazz program. "He was enthusiastic to hear ideas, and I came at him with a thousand of them. Sometimes he would joke, 'Oh, my God, here comes Maria! Run!' But he liked it. He knew I would be throwing out a thousand things I could imagine happening at Eastman."

Mark Volpe '79E, managing director of the Boston Symphony Orchestra, stepped up his involvement with Eastman at Lowry's request, joining the Eastman National Council, an advisory board Lowry was eager to expand, and accepting an invitation to deliver the school's commencement address in 2009.

"He was so wonderful in laying out the case for the school and for alumni involvement," says Volpe. "Relationships"—with alumni, arts leaders, University leaders, with faculty, and with stakeholders in Eastman's home of downtown Rochester—"will be his ultimate legacy."

James VanDemark, professor of double bass and cochair of the strings, harp, and guitar department, says Lowry's openness to people and ideas set a positive tone at the school.

"Something that was very evident about Doug from the day he arrived on Gibbs Street was that he had a very broad view of the world. He had a completely informed, nuanced view of the musical world, and the world in general," VanDemark says. "He was remarkably devoid of any kind of artistic prejudice."





**A LEADER IN MANY ROLES:** “His talents complemented each other,” says composer Jeff Beal ’85E of Lowry’s skills as an administrator, composer, and conductor. “He could see a puzzle and know how to organize it, know what’s important and what isn’t.”

Born in Spokane, Wash., in 1951, Lowry grew up in Idaho. He played piano, guitar, and trombone as a youth, and married his high school sweetheart, Marcia. He started out as a pre-med student at Idaho State University, but quickly changed course, transferring to the University of Arizona to study music theory and composition.


He pursued graduate study at the University of Southern California’s music school, began his professional career there, and rose to associate dean and chair of the conducting department. Before coming to

Eastman in 2007, Lowry was dean of the University of Cincinnati’s College-Conservatory of Music.

Among the close-knit community of music school leaders, Lowry’s death was mourned not only as a personal loss, but a loss to the profession as well.

Joseph Polisi, president of the Juilliard School, noted that arts institutions either rise or fall together. And what happens at one matters elsewhere, especially if that one is a place like Eastman.

“Eastman’s historic role is extremely important,” Polisi says, adding, “it’s not every day that you get a guy like Doug. He had a really excellent sense of vision about where the arts profession should be going. And he coupled that vision with the ability to implement, which is a rare combination.”

Robert Blocker, dean of Yale’s school of music, reflected on the relationship with Lowry that he enjoyed for nearly 25 years. Through their wide-ranging conversations, “There’s not much we didn’t touch on,” he says. And while their roles as music school deans demanded they occasionally competed with one another, Blocker says, “We encouraged each other. We were friends working for the same larger goals.” 



FETCHING PHOTO: Sam Sadtler '12 plays with his dog, Cleo, on the Eastman Quadrangle.

MELIORA WEEKEND/OCTOBER 10-13

# Meliora Memories

Celebrating the 2013 edition of Meliora Weekend, Rochester's signature fall event for alumni, families, faculty, and students.



CLASS PORTRAIT: Rocky joins classmates Jana Muller '05, Joel Castillo '05, baby Tristan Castillo, Carlos Carames, Charmaine Teodoro '05, Alexis Hammack '05, and baby Sofia Carames Teodoro on the Wilson Quadrangle.





**FOR THE FUTURE:** “The future of our economy is in our research universities,” Robert Gates, former secretary of defense, told President Joel Seligman in a conversation before a full house at Kodak Hall (above).



**DANCE PARTNERS:** Rebeca Tomás '98, the artistic director and choreographer for A Palo Seco Flamenco Company, leads alumni, students, and parents in a flamenco workshop.





**MEL TALKS:** Moka Lantum '03M (PhD), explains how technology could improve health care in Kenya as part of MEL Talks, a new TED Talk-style format featuring alumni, students, and faculty members in single-person presentations.



**LEGAL TEAM:** Former Democratic Congressman Barney Frank (far right) and legal scholar Arthur Miller '56 talk about Frank's role in advancing gay and lesbian issues during a special session of Miller's Court and the Presidential Symposium.



**ALMA MATER:** The YellowJackets serenade Sue Bokert, parent of Kyle Bokert '17, during a performance on the Wilson Quadrangle.



**FITNESS FIRST:** Runners make their way around the first turn of the alumni fun run at Fauver Stadium on Saturday morning.



**OMSA:** Richard Bailey '15S (MBA), Sierra Cason '14, and Taneisha Sinclair '14 meet up at the Office of Minority Students Association's networking reception.



**HEAL:** Harvey Alter '56, '60M (MD) discusses his work to nearly eliminate hepatitis from U.S. blood transfusions.




**RETTNER HALL:** Named for University Trustee Ronald Rettner (above) and housing programs for digital media and engineering, the new building was formally dedicated with the help of Rabbi Asher Yaras (top) during a Meliora Weekend ceremony.

#### INTRODUCING RETTNER HALL

## A Hub of Creativity

VISITORS TO CAMPUS FOR MELIORA WEEKEND HAD A CHANCE TO tour Rochester’s newest building. Ronald Rettner Hall for Media Arts and Innovation was formally opened as a hub for the arts, humanities, sciences, and engineering on the River Campus. Named in honor of Ronald Rettner, a University trustee, entrepreneur, business executive, developer, and advocate of higher education whose lead gift made the building possible, the hall features recording studios, high-end computers, 3-D printers, and other technology.

“This is the first building in the country that integrates engineering, computer science, art, graphic design, and music,” Rettner said during the dedication ceremonies. “It encourages student collaboration. It’s team-oriented—students working and learning together and from each other.”

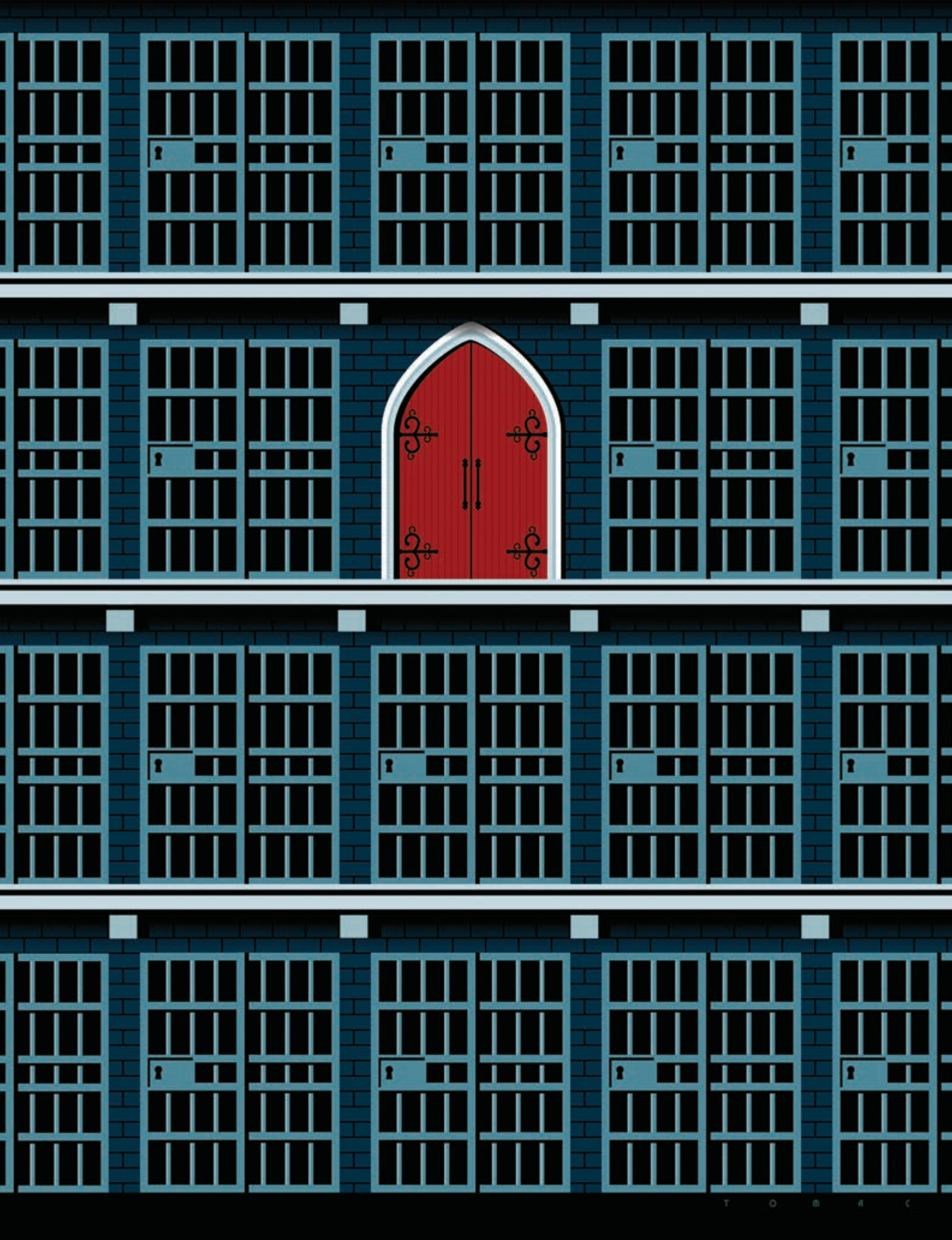
The new building also houses two of the University’s newest majors, digital media studies and audio and music engineering. 



**3-D VIEW:** George Ferguson, director of programming and operations for Rettner Hall (left), talks with visitors about 3-D printing. Combining such technology with open areas (top) and flexible work spaces, the building is designed to spur collaboration.



**STUDIO TIME:** Dan Waldman '17, an audio and music engineering major, and Peter Snell '17, a neuroscience major, tour the control booth in one of the building's recording studios.



# Down *in the* Chapel

In the chapel of a maximum-security prison, a scholar of religion searches for lessons about life, justice, and spirituality—and the forces that shape them.

*By Joshua Dubler*

HOW, IN GOD'S NAME, HAS IT COME TO THIS?

Any answer can only be partial, but here's a survey: by a bounteous universe (honor it by what ever name you choose), by a sun that makes things outgrow their bounds, by a nature that continues to slowly come undone, and, lastly, at the fragile margins, by the actions and inactions of women and men.

Somewhere along the way, eons after it all began, clans of men, women, and children began to till the earth. Affixing themselves to the land and to the calendar by which their crops were sown and reaped, these men and women gradually developed a set of activities, some immediately germane to material flourishing and some seemingly extraneous to it. Here we might take special interest in the “less useful” activities: our forebears cut symbols into rock, they fashioned semblances out of pigment, they made music, and they danced. They played games. The children watched them do it, the parents showed them how, and the practices survived them all.

Much later, in the same corner of the world, in a trend spanning roughly a millennium and a half—and henceforth the historical record will substantiate our conjecture—a handful of influential visionaries were credited with gaining access to a realm of reality beyond reality, whereby they received, from an invisible being regarded as to some

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*The essay is adapted from Down in the Chapel: Religious Life in an American Prison (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2013). © Joshua Dubler. Used with permission. All rights reserved.*



degree sovereign over all that they saw and didn't see, a set of amendments to the laws by which they lived. Let us call the commemoration of these wondrous encounters and the enactment of their consequent prescriptions religion (though as a category presuming to isolate an elementary component of our species' nature, religion will only emerge much later). On their merits, too, as well as via conquest, trade, and emigration, these cultural and religious forms spread, mutating with each and every transmission. Eventually, they even traversed the ocean. Toward the very end of our story, in a uniquely idealistic and opportunistic hour, a country was founded.

It is here, in the new American republic, that we stumble upon the curious innovation that will one day furnish our seven days their improbable setting. For it was in Ben Franklin's Philadelphia that a group of middle-class Quakers and their fellow religious progressives, having grown disgusted and horrified with the going forms through which public depravity was censured, revolutionized punishment. On the strength of their mobilization, the age of the stockade, the whip, and the gallows was declared over. In the modern era, punishment was to be softened, transformed from a system that extracted recompense from the body into one intent on mending the soul. Henceforth, the debauched offender was to be removed from his corrupting environment and placed in a penitentiary, where, by means of a solitary encounter with the divine light dwelling within him, he would be reformed. At Philadelphia's famed Eastern State Penitentiary, which opened in 1829, the aspiration of holy encounter was literalized architecturally with the placement of skylights—"eyes of God"—through which the sequestered prisoner might come to see himself as the Almighty saw him, slough off his sin, and repent.

In theory, the penitentiary was to have been the quintessentially modern institution. And by means of surveillance and instruction, its product, the transformed man, henceforth to be known as the prisoner, was to be the archetypal bearer of what theorist Michel Foucault would a century and a half later call the "modern soul." As iconically illustrated via Jeremy Bentham's idealized prison, the panopticon, Foucault's elegantly simple idea was this: if people are unsure whether or not they are being watched, they will assume responsibility for policing themselves.

In this manner, as a properly disciplined modern subject, the prisoner was to have been rougher hewn, for sure, but in the end fashioned not all that differently than the factory worker, the soldier, the student, and the patient—a man endowed in body and mind with the requisite know-how to act (and only to act) in the productive manner befitting his peculiar social position.

Things didn't turn out as planned. The silence and solitude of Eastern State inspired madness more than rectitude. Before long, as incarceration became the norm, solitude itself was sacrificed to overcrowding. Reformist zeal proved fleeting. By the mid-19th century, the penitentiary's founding aspiration had been

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largely abandoned, leaving the institution branded with its name to hobble on without coherent philosophical justification, a machine without a ghost. In the public conceptualization of crime, the pendulum swung—much like it did again in the final decades of the 20th century—from Quaker environmentalism to Calvinist fatalism. Moral turpitude came to be seen not as a collective product of rotten environments but as the intrinsic nature of rotten men, and, gradually, as driven by the shaping power of the ownership class and the spirit of American racism, the modern prison grew into the appropriate instrument for the infliction of just deserts.

In the chapel, this epic history is also local history. For when Eastern State was mothballed in 1971, its prisoners were dispatched to Graterford Prison. Back then Graterford's population was only half of what it is today. But then came the wars on crime, then on drugs, and, eventually, on terror. Interests lobbied, people organized (and failed to organize), government officials did their things, and the system changed with the times. More and more prison time was handed out to more and more people, such that something like 2.3 million Americans will spend tonight in prison or in jail.

## 'Unlikely Historical Contingencies'

AMERICAN RELIGIOUS HISTORY PROVIDES ONE WAY TO ACCOUNT FOR THE ARRAY of dispositions on display in the chapel. By linking imprisonment to reform, the religious beginnings of the penitentiary left their institutional traces, as did, more diffusely, the second and third Great Awakenings, when practices empowering individuals to draw their own theological conclusions proliferated, thereby presaging ever more innovation. Recent trends have been more directly determinative: the Great Migration north of African Americans during the early decades of the 20th century and the attendant urban improvisations that made Islam in its varied articulations part of the black religious vernacular; mid-century litigation undertaken by religious outsiders that stretched the narrow conception of what qualified as protected free exercise under the First Amendment; the prisoners'-rights movement of the 1960s, in which religious prisoners, predominantly members of the Nation of Islam, agitated for and won rights to possess religious literature and ritual implements and to assemble for prayer; the explosion by more than 600 percent of the national prison population over the final three decades of the millennium; the pro-religion spirit of our political era that has brought new public and private support for religious programming on behalf of incarcerated men and women even as other educational and therapeutic opportunities have dissipated; and, at Graterford, the 1995 raid and subsequent chapel shake-up. By enabling some moves and circumscribing others, this unlikely sequence of historical contingencies—sometimes recalled, mostly forgotten, and always contested—lives on in the chapel's practices.

## 'Thoughts Come in a Flood'

FOR AN ACCOUNT MORE ATTENTIVE TO RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE, INDIVIDUAL men may furnish a second starting point. At Graterford, one could make the



# Belief Behind Bars

"Prisons," says Joshua Dubler, "are the closest thing I have to a calling."

When the assistant professor of religion was a child, his mother worked at Rikers Island, the primary jail system for New York City, and Dubler says that he has "lived the age of American mass incarceration, where the prison population has exploded by about 500 percent."

A new book by Dubler, *Down in the Chapel: Religious Life in an American Prison*, is the product of fieldwork he carried out in Pennsylvania's Graterford maximum-security prison in 2005 and 2006. It brings together his commitment to exposing the realities of the American prison system and his curiosity about religion. "I was raised quite observantly by people who are fundamentally kind of agnostic—agnostic Orthodox Jews. By the time I figured that out, I found that very interesting," Dubler says. He earned his doctorate in religion at Princeton for the project that is now *Down in the Chapel*.

The scholarly book, which reads much like a novel, follows over the course of a week a group of about a dozen prisoners who work in Graterford's chapel. Dubler himself figures as a character in the book, as he traces his interactions with the men: Muslims, Christians, Jews, Catholics, an atheist. The chapel is a kind of



Joshua Dubler

workplace, where Dubler and the others discuss their beliefs, their world views, and their experiences with the prison system. He calls the ways that the men adjust to a life term in prison "a central drama of the book."

"When I'm not in the habit of going to the prison, it's shaking," Dubler says. "It's a kind of monument to human waste and human pessimism. But once you're there every day, it's like any other environment: you acclimate to it, and it becomes normal." He began the work convinced that he didn't want to produce a piece of disinterested scholarship, but initially he

tried to operate simply as an observer. He quickly found that impossible. "So I got to a place where I was mixing it up with people. That was fun for them, and fun for me. People, especially with something they care about tremendously—which for most of these men is their religious beliefs and practices—they're excited to talk about it. I think I made their lives temporarily less boring."

There are two assumptions people tend to make about prisoners' relationship to religion, both wrong, Dubler says. The first assumption, based on what he calls "a kind of secularized Protestant theology," rests on the notion that genuine religion "is about conviction in your heart, and because we tend to define prisoners by their crime, we just assume that when a prisoner is pleading a kind of righteousness," he is being insincere. The opposing assumption, he says, is that prisoners come to religion because they have nothing else in their lives. "Religion is more complicated than either of those frameworks allow," he says, an idea that he illustrates through the conversations that fill his book.

"At my most ambitious, I want readers to think about their own role with respect to American mass incarceration," Dubler says. "As recently as 1970, we had about 300,000 people in prison in this country. Since then, our population has doubled—and now we have 2.2 million people in prison. We have 5 percent of the world's population, yet 25 percent of its prisoners. We're in the midst of an unprecedented experiment in locking people up." And as the prison population has grown, he notes, it has done so in a racially disproportionate way, with Hispanics almost twice as likely, and African Americans almost six times as likely, to be incarcerated as whites.

Dubler says that he hopes that *Down in the Chapel* will lead people to question the existing system and to begin to contemplate alternatives.

—Kathleen McGarvey

case, religion truly starts where William James says it does: with "the feelings, acts, and experiences of individual men in their solitude."

Having arrived in the prison undone, men must learn to survive confinement, one another, and themselves. Many did not have rich interior lives before, but now the thoughts come in a flood: anxiety in search of assurance, suffering in search of language, anger in search of a foe, chaos in search of order. Of course, these men were once children, too, and do not arrive in the prison as blank slates. They come equipped with religious proclivities born of their families and communities: in the past, there was a grandmother or mother who preached the Word at them, in vain; there was a voice inside their head that knew when they were doing wrong; like the majority of Americans, without thinking about it too much, they've always known that God is who He said He was.

Whether in solitary confinement or in the general population, days at Graterford are frightening, boring, and exhausting. One gets by the best he can. At night, the distractions fade away and the thoughts rush in. It is here where the prisoner is forced, in James's language, to "stand in relation to what ever [he] consider[s] the divine"—which is how many religious men will soon conceptualize the echo of their thoughts. Here anxiety comes for assurance, suffering to make sense, and anger to be honed; here the self begins to erect an order, and here the terrible secrets that a man must keep to survive become the things that only me and God know about.

## 'Religion Proves a Trove'

FROM THE PRISON'S VANTAGE POINT, HOWEVER, ALL this comes only later. First come the steel and concrete, then authority structures, regulations, and only then the prisoners' religious ideas and practices. And what may we say of these practices? Foremost, as can be said of any social forms that have been around since longer than yesterday: they work. Just as mass incarceration works—not to rehabilitate and reintegrate prisoners (far from it!) but rather to reproduce itself, grow, crowd out alternatives, and become normal—so, too, for these men is religion made to work.

Living in prison is a crazy thing to make men do, but the overwhelming majority of convicts will give it a shot. Strangely and twistedly, men are conditioned by the building, the administration, by the staff, by their peers, and by themselves into making it through another day, another week, another year. The incarcerated men draw on all resources available, and toward this end, religion proves a trove. An illustration might help:

If the convict is alone, shared tribal marks suggest religious faith to be one way of finding his people. More likely, if one already has people from back in the street, then their differentiating symbols and postures are easy to assimilate into one's style, one's affect, and one's language. By aping those who've already figured out how to do it, men begin to make their lives in here. In this

process, there is certainly room for religious meaning. From their pockets, the acculturators pull out penciled Bible verses or Qur'anic surahs, words that they say help them get by. But these bulbs will take a while to flower. More critical at this stage is finding one's footing. Because early on danger is especially acute, one must pay close attention, and check his impulses. If one forgets to mind himself, then a prisoner or a guard will serve as an instructor and burn the memory into his body. But this is less common than it used to be. More likely, should one forget, the task of building self-awareness will be subcontracted to time, a bottomless stock of which is stored in the hole.

After 90 days, the prisoner returns to the block one didactic scar richer. Following a brief spell of clairvoyance, anguish dissipates and boredom returns.

Primed for action by his fellow prisoners, by his cousin who once did time, and, principally—like the rest of us—by what he's seen on television, the convict is pleasantly disappointed to discover that very little, in fact, happens here. Bored one night, with his cellie asleep, the TV out, but the light still on—it could be weeks or years into his sentence—he picks up his Bible. After flipping through its crisp pages, he finds the recommended verses. For the first time in ages, he reads.

Now something is happening. The next night he picks up where he left off. Maybe it's his need, maybe it's his vague sense of readiness, maybe it's the brute power of the printed word, but for what ever reason, he finds that when he reads these verses, he suddenly knows something in a way that he hasn't known anything before. Or perhaps the novice is illiterate. Religious traditions are transmitted orally most of the time, and here it is no different.

Through a third party, he receives word to come down to the chapel on Sunday, that his cousin will be there to meet him. He goes. Jesus, it's good to see him. They hug and reminisce and get dirty looks from the ushers. When it's over, they agree to do it again. And another time. Before long, going to the chapel becomes a normal thing to do. It proves much more enjoyable here than when he was a kid. He enjoys listening to the gospel music, or even to the sermon. Even when he's bored, there's a feeling of camaraderie in being bored with others. And while two years back he wouldn't have believed you if you'd told him, when Sunday comes around he's as excited for chapel as he is for the Eagles. Well, almost.

One tough Wednesday, he gets bullied on the shop floor. He tells himself that if he can just hold it together until Sunday, everything will be okay.

Meanwhile, some of the dudes he saw in the chapel, he sees around on the block. They share a laugh. They start sitting together in the chow hall. These guys give praise to Jesus a lot, and that's a bit odd, as is their talk of how they were saved on such and such a day. Other behaviors make more immediate sense. He becomes attentive to what he's eating: I mean, this food will kill you if you don't watch out! Once a week his new buddies walk the yard, and he joins them. Other than to

work, his weekly trips to the chapel and the yard are the only times he gets off the block.

One Sunday during service, the sun is shining and the choir is singing, he is overcome by a strange sense of euphoria, a feeling that the worst has passed and that, in the end, everything is going to be all right. He tells the other guys about it over chow. That feeling, they tell him, is the Holy Spirit reaching out to save him.

A few weeks later, maybe something happens again. As he's been prepped to expect, he feels somehow like a new man: clean, absolved, and deeply grateful. Or maybe nothing happens at all. Instead, ever so slowly, the Jesus talk that once seemed so weird ceases to be so. The man begins to make the religious language his own and, as such, comes to understand his own experience



through it. One of the things he understands intuitively is that he is no longer the same person he was when he first came to prison.

So religion at Graterford works: it works to replicate itself inside its residents' bodies and minds; once there, it helps to pass the time, to give a man tools to survive this boring, scary, and sad place, both in isolation and together with his fellow men. It works to institute self-control, conditions discipline of conduct, of diet, and, especially, of thought. It gives the prisoner the framework to think through who he is, what he has done, what will happen when he dies, and how he might never go home.

Or, just as likely, it provides objects for contemplation so that he doesn't have to think about such dire things. If perhaps never to the stark degree achieved by the jail's edifice and regimen, as a lived practice, a prisoner's religion gives shape to his world.

In its perverse and roundabout way, then, religion at Graterford honors the penitentiary's founding mission, producing men who regard themselves as transformed, and indeed, in a variety of ways, they are. **R**