Success is no stranger to the alumni of the University of Hartford. In business, in the arts, in technology, in government, in education, in health care, and nearly every other field, our alumni are making their mark. Here we highlight seven, including a student from Hertt’s Community Division, who have earned their spots on our Alumni Honor Roll. ▲ Alumni of the The Hertt School’s three divisions—theatre, music, and dance—were well represented at this year’s Tony Awards by the likes of actress Marin Ireland ’00, nominated for Best Featured Actress in a Play; musician John Clancy ’96, nominated for Best Orchestration; and Meg Guzulescu, Hertt Community Division dance student, as part of a cast that won 10 Tony Awards, including Best Musical. ▲ These three talented performers are quick to say The Hertt School played a huge role in shaping their careers.

Marin Ireland, whose role as Steph in Neil LaBute’s reasons to be pretty won her critical acclaim and landed her a Tony nomination, says acting in a second-year student production of Three Sisters at Hertt was an artistic epiphany.

As sophomores, the student actors were just beginning to perform in the classroom. Acting in that setting, under bright florescent lights with minimal costumes and just two feet away from other students, was daunting.

“The kind of focus and concentration needed for that was extreme,” Ireland says. “It taught me so much. You can’t rely on all that other stuff to do the job for you. It was you, not the makeup or the sets, that had to bring that character to life.”

Ireland was encouraged to turn her role into a classic study of human behavior by the play’s director, Malcolm Morrison, the theatre professor who was then dean of The Hertt School and creator of Hertt’s theatre program.

The chance to work with Morrison was what had drawn Ireland to Hertt. A high school friend who had studied under Morrison told her he was starting a new theatre division at the University of Hartford and urged her to apply.

Excited by the diversity of training that Morrison promised and the chance to help launch a new program, Ireland joined Hertt’s first actor training class. She is the first division graduate to be nominated for a Tony Award. She also received a 2009 Theatre World Award, an annual award given to six actresses and six actors to honor outstanding Broadway and Off-Broadway debut performances.

Ireland’s Off-Broadway credits include Blasted (Soho Rep), Cyclone (Studio Dante, Obie), The Beebo Brinker Chronicles (4th Street, 37 Arts), Bad Jazz (the Play Company), The Ruby Sunrise (Public Theater), The Harlequin Studies (Signature), The Triple Happiness (Second Stage), Manuscript (Daryl Roth), Fighting Words (Underwood), Savannah Bay (Classic Stage), Where We’re Born (Rattlestick), Sabina (Primary Stages), and Far Away and Nocturne (both at New York Theatre Workshop).

The California native says she loved working with the reasons talented cast and crew and reveled in the grandeur and history of the Lyceum Theatre, the oldest continuously operating theater on Broadway.

“It is so moving to feel that Broadway history, and to know I’m part of it,” she says.

Although she lost to veteran actress Angela Lansbury at the Tonys, Ireland says she’ll never forget her red carpet walk, or actress Edie Falco’s complimenting her work, or the look on her mother’s face when they first took their seats and the awards show actually began.

Since reasons closed in June, Ireland has had time to reflect on the Tony experience. She says the nomination has boosted her credibility and probably helped her line up her next Broadway role. In mid-July, Ireland joined the cast of Patrick Marber’s three-character After Miss Julie, a new take on August Strindberg’s famous play about class and relationships. The fall production stars Sienna Miller, Johnny Lee Miller, and Ireland.

“I didn’t really know if it would mean a whole lot,” Ireland says. “I’ve been around enough to know there’s really no such thing as a big break. I don’t feel any different, but getting recognized by people you respect so much, well, that was huge.”
John Clancy woke up to a text message last May telling him he had been nominated for a Tony for his orchestration work on *Shrek The Musical*.

“When we were in a preliminary recording session, a composer friend came up to me and said we’d win a Tony for it,” Clancy says, although the *Shrek* orchestration did not win. “I said wow, but I don’t come from that world. I mean, I wear a Mohawk. I was just glad it was good stuff.”

The Newtown, Conn., native learned to write for an orchestra at Hartt. He entered on half-scholarship as a drummer playing Metallica—thrilled that Professor Robert Carl, then the composition department chair, had taken a chance on him—and graduated in love with orchestral music.

“Hartt was very open minded,” Clancy says. “They had no problem with a rock-and-roller. They saw the raw talent. They didn’t mind I hadn’t written a string quartet as a teenager. Soon I was writing for percussion ensemble, flute, string orchestra.”

At Hartt, Clancy learned the skills that would prepare him to join with partner Danny Troob to turn *Shrek* composer Jeanine Tesori’s chord charts, melodies, piano recordings, and vocals into music for *Shrek’s* 23-piece orchestra.

Post-Tonys, Clancy is still straddling two musical worlds. He is touring as a drummer with soul rocker Danielia Cotton and working with U2’s Bono and the Edge on their rock musical, *Spiderman: Turn Off the Dark*, which will hit Broadway next year.

Meg Guzulescu did not spend her early years dreaming of winning a Tony Award. As a competitive figure skater, the West Hartford, Conn., girl wanted to win an Olympic gold medal, but fate led Guzulescu to a different stage.

When she was 8 years old, a skating friend urged Guzulescu to consider acting. She called an agent, who sent her to a manager, and within weeks, she had landed the role of young Cosette in the touring production of *Les Miserables*.

Guzulescu, who is now 13, decided to give up competitive skating and pursue a stage career. A veteran of Hartford Children’s Theater, she began taking dance and vocal classes at Hartt’s Community Division to prepare.

Under the direction of Hartt’s Rosie Docal Pizzuto, Guzulescu learned the ballet that would help her win a role as one of the talentless ballerinas in *Billy Elliot*, the Broadway musical that earned 10 Tonys, including Best Musical.

Although she plays a mediocre ballerina on the stage, Guzulescu says it takes a lot of skill for that many dancers to create so much orchestrated chaos, especially on a tilted stage.

The hardest thing for Guzulescu since landing *Billy Elliot* has been taking a temporary break to recover from a foot injury. She is eager to return to the show but already has plans for the future that involve acting in television and film.
When it comes to the smash Broadway musical, *Jersey Boys*, there is the magic that happens on stage that earned four Tony Awards in 2006, and then there is that little known magic that happens off stage in a tiny, darkened dressing room.

That is where Janelle Leone, a 2001 musical theatre graduate of The Hartt School, is head of a team of stylists that transforms the three actresses who help tell the story of Frankie Valli and The Four Seasons into 40+ different women during 52 costume changes. In all, there are 33 wigs in the show.

“From curtain to curtain, the show is a long, never-ending parade of lightning-fast costume and wig changes,” Leone says. “We’re like a pit crew in a car race. It’s our job to get those actresses back out on stage so they can do what they do best.”

The Newington, Conn., native helped build the wigs for *Jersey Boys* when it opened on Broadway in 2005, and now, as the touring show’s hair supervisor, she maintains the wigs as they travel from city to city.

Although the grueling schedule is tiring, living out of suitcases with only one day off a week, Leone is thrilled to work with some of Broadway’s best.

Her career gives Leone a chance to mix two childhood loves, performing and hair. As a teenager, she wanted to go to hairdressing school, but her mother insisted on college. A mother-daughter compromise landed Leone at the University of Hartford. Once there, she, like many undergraduates, went down a couple of paths looking for a major. She started off in musical theatre at Hartt, tried elementary education in ENHP, and then went back to musical theatre. In all, Leone spent seven years at the University.

It was during Leone’s second freshman year at Hartt that she found her career. Marla Perlstein, who runs Hartt’s costume shop and teaches costume and design classes, invited her to work at the Colorado Opera for the summer. There she learned the basics of building wigs and applying makeup for opera.

“Marla introduced me to something that I didn’t realize existed. Hair in theater! Amazing!” Leone says.

When she graduated from Hartt, Leone went out on the road with a children’s theater production. But she caught her break back at home, while waiting tables at City Steam Brewery Cafe and tending bar at Hartford Stage.

It was one of those breaks that dreams are made of. When Hartford Stage’s hairdresser left suddenly, Leone got the chance to put the hair and makeup skills she learned at Hartt to work. A month later, she found herself at the Santa Fe Opera with master wig designer Tom Watson. When Watson invited her back to New York, where he was the wig master for The Metropolitan Opera, Leone didn’t hesitate. In addition to the opera work, she also helped Watson build wigs for *Wicked*, which was her Broadway “debut” as a wigmaker in 2003. Leone began working with Watson’s assistant, Charles LaPointe, as he branched out on his own. She was at his side to build the *Jersey Boys* wigs for Broadway.

“Chuck and I spent many late nights in the wig studio getting all the wigs for *Jersey Boys* ready for deadline. He is not only a mentor, but a dear friend.”
PGA Tour standout Jerry Kelly ’89 returned to campus in June to claim a different kind of keepsake for his trophy case.

Kelly donned a doctoral hood to receive an honorary Doctor of Humanities from the University of Hartford for his accomplishments as a golfer and a public citizen.

“It’s fun to be able to get a degree like that,” says Kelly, the first Hartford athlete to receive an honorary degree. “It lets me look back on a lot of the things I’ve done and feel real good about them.”

The amiable Kelly—in town for the Travelers Championship, held at TPC River Highlands in Cromwell, Conn.—took practice swings on the Wilde Auditorium stage as President Walter Harrison recited his accomplishments. But the golfer was all business when discussing his finance and insurance degree from the Barney School of Business.

“There are so many guys [on tour] with agents in control of their lives,” Kelly says. “I knew from the start I didn’t want to be one of them. My business school background prepared me for my golf career and making a living at this game.”

A three-time tour winner, Kelly has earned nearly $20 million in prize money in 14 seasons, including $1.1 million for an April victory at the Zurich Classic in New Orleans. In 2002, Kelly won the Sony Open and Advil Western Open and was inducted into the Hawks’ Athletics Hall of Fame as the first alum to win a professional championship. He earned a spot on the President’s Cup team in 2003.

The school has been equally impressed with Kelly’s work outside the ropes. In recent years Kelly has visited U.S. troops in the Persian Gulf, co-founded a pro-am invitational to assist Hurricane Katrina victims, and served as honorary chair of the University’s Home Field Advantage campaign, which raised $10 million for a new baseball field, a refurbished soccer/ lacrosse field, and a relocated and improved softball field on campus. Kelly was also a major contributor to that campaign, which will roll out a second phase to raise money for a running track.

“Jerry’s values make him stand out,” says Harrison, who personally forwarded Kelly’s name to the University’s board of regents for consideration for an honorary degree. “He exemplifies the talents we hope we’re developing at the University: in his case, his golfing talent—doing what only a very select few can do—and secondly, the character we hope we can produce. We’re just very proud of Jerry.”

While a student-athlete, Kelly’s golf teammates included future PGA Tour members Tim Petrovic ’88 and Patrick Sheehan ’92 as well as Pete Stankevich ’89, currently the Hawks’ men’s golf coach.

“Jerry was always intense. His hockey background definitely carried over into golf,” Stankevich says. “His success on tour has a lot to do with intangibles—handling the pressure, dealing with the travel grind.”

Kelly still lives in Madison, Wis., where he was an all-city hockey center in high school, with his wife, Carol, and the couple’s 10-year-old son, Cooper. He practices deep-breathing techniques to calm his nerves and has a family member for a swing coach, brother-in-law Jim Schuman, who also is the University of Wisconsin men’s golf coach.

Ranked 22nd on the PGA Money List as of Aug. 30, Kelly hasn’t finished outside the Top 60 on the tour money list this decade. And, true to his roots, he skipped the British Open in July to help save the U.S. Bank Championship in Milwaukee, his hometown tournament.

Summing up what makes him tick, Kelly says, “It’s really uplifting to hear your name yelled out, to hear ‘Wisconsin’ and ‘University of Hartford’. So I’ve always tried to give back.”
"You’re interested in a wide range of artistic media. You have a visual eye,” says graphic designer Amid Capeci ’83, recalling the autumn of 1979 when he embarked on his education at the Hartford Art School. "But you haven’t really learned to look much past the surface. “When you attend a great art school, you learn how to think, how to solve visual problems. That was the most important part of my education,” Capeci reflects.

Guiding him through that transition from raw talent to competent designer was a paint-crusted, ink-stained cast of gurus whose approaches to art spanned the 20th century. They included prominent postmodernist painter David Salle; painter and lithographer Fred Wessel; the late Jack Goldstein, who during the 1970s and 1980s was at the vortex of the New York–based Pictures Group, from which sprang Robert Longo, Troy Brauntuch, and Phillip Smith; and the late Rudy Zallinger, whose famous 1947 mural, The Age of Reptiles, occupies one wall of the Great Hall of Dinosaurs at Yale University’s Peabody Museum.

“They were a terrific mix of traditionalists and new thinkers,” says Capeci, “and studying with them was both inspiring and enriching. It was a great foundation.”

In 1989, Capeci joined Travel Holiday magazine, which turned out to be a boot camp for learning how to use photography, maps, tables, and other graphics in storytelling layouts. He says it was a terrific experience and, two years later, helped him land the position of deputy art director at Esquire.

“I love working with editors,” he says. “I love the collaborative process and working against deadlines.”

He got plenty of both when he became design director at Newsweek, in 1995. “Nothing was more exciting than to be in a morning news meeting,” he says, “knowing we were going to put out a magazine in a week. It was simply thrilling.”

For the next eight years he was responsible not only for producing weekly content but also for producing special issues of Newsweek in response to major news like the death of Princess Diana and the 9/11 attacks.

In 2004 he emigrated to Rolling Stone where, as art director, he managed all visual aspects of the magazine’s brand. Reporting directly to publisher Jann Wenner, he was charged with creating what he calls “a refreshed and revitalized visual vocabulary for the legendary music
Ten years into his career, Mike Soltys M’94 needed a fresh perspective. It was 1992 and he had just been named director of communications at television’s ESPN, responsible for day-to-day media relations operations.

Soltys’s career trajectory had paralleled ESPN’s phenomenal popularity. But, he says, “You can become insulated.” ESPN was the only company he’d ever worked for, and the media relations game had changed decidedly over the past decade as the network’s popularity exploded. So, he enrolled at the University of Hartford as a graduate student in the School of Communication and soon found himself refreshed not only by the course work but also by interaction with classmates. “Many were senior communicators for other area corporations,” Soltys says. “It was really valuable to share ideas with them and learn how they were handling challenges similar to those I faced every day.”

Soltys found his calling early. He began earning regular paychecks as a freelance reporter for the Associated Press, United Press International, Boston Globe, and other media by the time he was in high school. When ESPN debuted in 1979, the year he was a sophomore at the University of Connecticut, Soltys was soon picking up assignments from the nascent network.

One afternoon in 1980 he encountered ESPN’s founder, Bill Rasmussen, at UCONN. Soltys needed an internship to complete his undergraduate education, and he successfully pitched Rasmussen for an opportunity to become ESPN’s first college intern. When Soltys graduated the following spring, the network hired him as a staff assistant, and he began his meteoric rise up the career ladder. The two years he spent working on his master’s degree at the University of Hartford, he says, were just the mid-career shot in the arm he needed. Revitalized, he threw himself into the next decade with renewed energy. During that time, ESPN quickly staked its claim as the world’s foremost sports network, and Soltys found himself grappling with a host of new media and new media tools.

In 2003 he was named vice president, U.S. network communications. The next year, his 23rd with ESPN, he managed the company’s ambitious 25th anniversary publicity campaign, a program so successful it garnered 12 major public relations awards. In 2005, Soltys was named Media Relations Professional of the Year by PR News.

Editors note: As we were going to press, we learned that Amid Capeci has accepted a position as the design director at Entertainment Weekly, where he will also be involved with the website.