“Right now, I see the comings and goings as the natural progression of things. There’s that initial bittersweet moment, but then with change comes a new opportunity.”

five-hour rehearsal: running through pieces, learning repertory from videos, or creating new work with an outside choreographer. Then Ho would complete a kettlebell workout—“I call them ‘my moves!’”—as part of her cross-training. On the commute to her Upper East Side apartment, she’d start her homework: reviewing her choreography and reading medical articles to answer questions from the previous day’s clinical round and in preparation for the next one.

Finding the balance has been taxing, but the pursuits have been complementary. “The body is our instrument, and medicine is just understanding the body better,” said Andy LeBeau, the assistant artistic director at Taylor. “Madelyn’s become very vital to a lot of the dancers. Her nickname’s Dr. Ho, and everybody asks her questions.”

Ho’s willingness to chart her path by following her passions mimics how she’s developed as a performer. She trained as a ballerina throughout high school; when she first started as a modern dancer in college, she focused on nailing the technical movements. This tendency carried over to Taylor 2, where LeBeau noticed her determination to be perfect and worried that she might have trouble finding the artistry in the movements, or allowing herself to have fun. Now he sometimes jokes with Ho during the more intense moments of practice that it’s dance, not brain surgery. “It’s not about the actual step, and that step can change as long as the intention maintains its integrity.”

Ho has embraced the way Taylor’s choreography—at once athletic and expressive, in which dancers are cast as humans, never swans—invites her to engage emotionally, based on her personal experiences. Her interpretations of Esplanade in particular change constantly. “Right now, I see the comings and goings as the natural progression of things,” she said. “There’s that initial bittersweet moment, but then with change comes a new opportunity.”

That also reflects her stance in anticipation of her May graduation from HMS (see page 20). For now, Ho intends to continue her career with PTDC, holding off on taking up her medical residency for the foreseeable future. Eventually, she wants to pursue dance medicine, an interest sparked by her recognition of the unique demands dance places on the body and her experience of suffering a dance injury as an undergraduate. In the meantime, she’s figuring out how to continue studying medicine outside medical school—perhaps by spending more time at the Harkness Center for Dance Injuries at NYU Langone Medical Center, where she completed a clinical rotation earlier this year.

“I’m at a place right now where I’m really growing and happy where I am dancing,” she said. “I’ll see where it takes me.”

Not “Mickey Mousing”

The rigors of accompanying silent films

by SOPHIA NGUYEN

A hundred years ago, a night at the movies meant live music. Even low-end joints had at least a violinist and pianist; grander establishments employed 50-piece orchestras (some of which, by the 1920s, were replaced by massive Wurlitzer organs that supplied surround-sound audio with less manpower). These days, most theaters up-sell their couch-coddled viewers with whiz-bang visuals (IMAX and 3-D).

Robert Humphreville, a frequent Harvard Film Archive accompanist, says he’s mostly asked to play comedies, especially from “the big three”: Charlie Chaplin, Harold Lloyd, and Buster Keaton. (A scene from Keaton’s Sherlock Jr. appears over his shoulder.)
and the mass die-off of silent movies, there are niches where the art of film accompaniment survives. In the Boston area, for example, these movies are shown at university art-houses like the Harvard Film Archive (HFA), or in special screenings at independent theaters. But they’re also shown in retirement homes and town halls and other unexpected corners: for customers at the Aeronaut Brewing Company, silent films are served alongside IPAs as a hipster novelty; for members of the New England Vintage Society, watching a Harold Lloyd classic after their annual Jazz Age ball, they’re a portal to a more graceful era. The silent-movie scene is a surprisingly diverse ecosystem, and its members aren’t shy about approaching the accompanist afterward to say the music was too loud, or off-cue, or contained an anachronistic melody.

Martin Marks ’71, Ph.D. ’90, might have had this in mind when, at the HFA last summer, he introduced his piano performance for Ernst Lubitsch’s The Young Prince in Old Heidelberg with an apology. The first half of his score had been carefully prepared, he said: “The second half is molto improvviso, and hopefully there are not too many disasters of forgetting what’s coming up next.”

Marks’s painstaking approach is an outgrowth of his scholarship: now a musicologist at MIT who has published widely on film music and contributed to DVD anthologies of classic movies, he started accompanying film while in graduate school, when the HFA’s first curator asked him to supply music for Lubitsch’s Lady Windemere’s Fan. Marks likes to pair a film with its original score whenever possible. But at other times, much like the theater musicians of yore, he draws from his extensive repertoire of “incidental music” (short pieces whose titles range from “Andante Agitato, Number 23” to “At the Rodeo”), filling in a “cue sheet” of scenes and music that guides him through the film.

Robert Humphreville ’80, also a regular HFA accompanist (and a professional freelance pianist, organist, composer, and conductor), does comparatively little prep. For his own Lubitsch performance, The Oyster Princess, he watched a screener, taking notes about the plot and finding period-appropriate melodies for the fox-trot scene in the middle, something peppery. He landed on a mix of “Ain’t She Sweet” and “Hello, My Baby.” “It was very 1920s,” he muses in retrospect. “Almost a Charleston.” In terms of hours worked, these performances are “wonderful distractions,” he says. (Such gigs pay between $250 and $350.) Even then, he plays so many that he doesn’t get attached to any particular film: “I don’t develop a real fondness. They sort of come and go pretty fast.” Still he, too, is strict about being historically correct. “Nothing—to me at least—is more distracting than somebody who all of a sudden takes some, you know, Beatles theme and sticks it into a silent movie.”

Jeff Rapsis takes an entirely different approach to his accompaniments at the HFA and elsewhere: rather than the traditional piano, he usually plays a “just barely por-

The Chernobyl nuclear power plant a few weeks after the disaster. In many respects, the fallout lingers.

Chernobyl: The History of a Nuclear Catastrophe, by Serhii Plokhii, Hrushes’kyi professor of Ukrainian history (Basic, $32). An accessible account of the disaster (one of many, from before World War II through the present tense military skirmishes) visited on Ukraine. The author, who was a student there at the time, weaves together personal stories, the Communist institutional context, and the fallout, literal and metaphorical, from April 26, 1986.

Unequal and Unrepresented: Political Inequality and the People’s Voice in the New Gilded Age, by Kay Lehman Schlozman, Henry E. Brady, and Sidney Verba, Pforzheimer University Professor emeritus (Princeton, $29.95). Prompted by a chance observation that the Hearst Castle in San Simeon dated from one Gilded Era, and the recent ex- crecence of megamansions from a new, continuing one, the authors joined forces for their book. For his own Lubitsch performance, the HFA’s first curator asked him to supply music for Lubitsch’s Lady Windemere’s Fan. Marks likes to pair a film with its original score whenever possible. But at other times, much like the theater musicians of yore, he draws from his extensive repertoire of “incidental music” (short pieces whose titles range from “Andante Agitato, Number 23” to “At the Rodeo”), filling in a “cue sheet” of scenes and music that guides him through the film.

When he started graduate school, Martin Marks thought he would study Beethoven or Schubert (“my first loves in classical music”), but quickly got hooked on silent-film scores.
Cold Comforts

Returning to Russia in A Terrible Country

by Maggie Doherty

Perusing social media in recent months, you get the sense that Russia once again looms as America’s great antagonist. Russians are meddling in our election and colluding with our president. The KGB is stealing our private data and spreading “fake news.” Anyone who says something controversial on social media can scapegoat a Russian bot. The Cold War is back, this time as farce: rather than political ideology that dictates that the market, not the state, rules the citizenry. Under neoliberalism, citizens identify primarily as consumers, and competition—for housing, healthcare, employment, even for affection and care—becomes a feature of daily life. Neoliberalism manifests differently in different countries, and Gessen takes care to describe the forms of political and economic oppression specific to the novel’s setting. Nevertheless, to an American reader, life in Putin’s Russia looks more familiar than she might expect.

To show the continuity between these former Cold War enemies, Gessen deploys an ideal narrator: Andrei Kaplan, a Russian-born American academic, who observes Moscow with a useful combination of knowledge and naiveté. Preparing for his trip, Andrei expects to encounter a country in turmoil. “I had half expected to be arrested at the airport! I thought I’d be robbed on the train.” But when he arrives, he is struck by how copacetic he finds the country, and by how much has changed since he visited by how much has changed since he visited.

In this moment of high-pitched, heated commentary, A Terrible Country, Keith Gessen’s second novel, arrives like a cold, welcome wind. Gessen ’97 packs his book with observations about contemporary Russian life. The liberal radio station, Echo, criticizes Putin freely; the trains still run every two minutes, but they are horribly overcrowded; only older cars, usually driven by Chechen men, pick up passengers on the street.

But A Terrible Country is less a travelogue, or a guide to post-Soviet Russia, than it is a novel about life under neoliberalism—a political ideology that dictates that the market, not the state, rules the citizenry. Under neoliberalism, citizens identify primarily as consumers, and competition—for housing, healthcare, employment, even for affection and care—becomes a feature of daily life. Neoliberalism manifests differently in different countries, and Gessen takes care to describe the forms of political and economic oppression specific to the novel’s setting. Nevertheless, to an American reader, life in Putin’s Russia looks more familiar than she might expect.

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