

# Wanderlust touches down with musicals in Midtown

**Amanda Sieradzki**  
Council on Culture & Arts

Living abroad, actress Laura Hope-London marveled at how the United Kingdom preserves its buildings. She wandered city streets and saw businesses repurposed out of old jails and encountered many shop owners and locals who took pride in their history. She also visited sites of trauma, such as

Auschwitz, and emphasizes the importance of these places as well.

Now living in Tallahassee, Hope-London is pursuing her doctorate in theater at Florida State University. She is also holding onto her eternal wanderlust by turning it into Wanderlust, a site-specific theater company.

“What motivates my desire to travel is to experience new places and learn about new types of people and cul-

tures,” says Hope-London. “I think theater can do that, too.”

As artistic director of Wanderlust, Hope-London is looking forward to debuting their first show, “Musicals on the Move” on July 18. The premise of the company is to transport musicals and place them “on location” in their authentic backdrops.

Kicking off at Hawthorn Bistro & Bakery, audience members are invited to

move in tour groups around the block and see musicals performed in local businesses. Participating sites include Vocelles Bridal Shop, SoDough Baking Co., Chop Barbershop, A Country Rose, Finnegan’s Wake, and Fire Betty’s Arcade Bar.

“It turns out there’s a lot more theater nerds who own small businesses in Tal-

**See MUSICALS, Page 2C**

# Musicals

Continued from Page 1C

lahassee than you would think," laughs Hope-London, who is keeping the selected musicals for the performances under wraps. "We wanted to introduce site specific theater to Tallahassee and show what it can do."

Hope-London was born into a musical family. Her grandfather and father were jazz musicians, so she grew up singing jazz standards and classic songs from the golden age of musicals. Among her favorites are "Carousel," "The King and I" and "Oklahoma."

She earned her BFA at New York University's Tisch School of the Arts and her MFA from the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama. As a scholar, Hope-London is drawn to musicals that capture a specific moment in time. Her research at FSU delves into "Hamilton," as well as Beyonce's relationship to musical theater via her visual album "Lemonade."

"I think there's something really special about telling stories through song," says Hope-London. "In musicals the emotions and stakes are so high that people can no longer speak, they have to sing, and there's something really beautiful about that."

While her career has taken her from performing in London's West End to film and TV production in Hollywood, Hope-London always wanted to start her own company. The seed was first planted in her time at NYU under the guidance of her late mentor Elizabeth Swados. Swados was a theater writer and director who pushed the boundaries of musical theater.

Hope-London was part of Swados' original musical "From the Fire," that told the story of the tragic Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire that claimed 146 lives. The remains of the factory have been rebuilt and converted into a classroom building for NYU.

"We performed the reading of that musical and there was something so special about performing these women's stories in the place where it actually happened," says Hope-London. "I remember thinking



**Wanderlust presents "Musicals on the Move" on July 18. The Show begins at Hawthorn Bistro & Bakery.**

LAURA HOPE-LONDON

## If you go

**What:** Wanderlust presents "Musicals on the Move"

**When:** 5:30 p.m. on July 18

**Where:** Show begins at Hawthorn Bistro & Bakery, 1307 N Monroe St. #1

**Cost:** \$25

**Contact:** For more information, visit <http://www.wanderlustarts.org/>.

then that this was a really interesting way to tell stories. I wished all theater could return its story back to the scene of the crime, so to speak."

Rehearsing for site-specific performances is a complicated process as time in the actual venues can be limited. Hope-London is grateful for the six stage managers, two musical directors, four tour guides, and cast of 21 actors who have helped her get the ball rolling for "Musicals on the Move." She says that her assistant

director Hannah Fazio and choreographer Holly Stone have been instrumental in dreaming up what could be achieved in each space.

The casts rehearsed on a rotating schedule and are a mix of FSU and FAMU theater students, Tallahassee theater veterans and community members. Hope-London says the collaborative nature of the project means looking at non-traditional theater spaces and transforming them into a 360-degree experience for audiences. Each venue will involve the audience in an immersive way as the action takes place around them.

"You have to take in account the space you have to perform choreography or stage things appropriately," says Hope-London. "It takes a different kind of performance when people are standing two feet away from you versus when they're sitting fifteen feet away from you in a theater."

"Musicals on the Move" begins with a pre-show happy hour at 5:30 p.m. before the shows start at 7 p.m. Given the intimate nature of these performances, Hope-London says audiences should be open-minded and ready for anything. They should also wear comfortable walking shoes as they'll progress through four venues before visiting the final two as a large group.

To secure tickets, donations can be made to Wanderlust's IndieGoGo campaign.

Hope-London is excited to launch the company, and has big plans for future performances. She wants to stage a full-length show in Tallahassee next year, and has many plans in the works. Some include stagings of pre-existing musicals, such as "Showboat" on a defunct New Orleans showboat, while she hopes other ideas will foster new musicals based on and in historical sites.

"The other large part of Wanderlust's mission is community engagement," adds Hope-London. "What better way to engage with a community then to reflect their stories back to them?"

*Amanda Sieradzki is the feature writer for the Council on Culture & Arts. COCA is the capital area's umbrella agency for arts and culture ([www.tallahasseearts.org](http://www.tallahasseearts.org)).*