

Featured ClumniMichal Paris Davis

Class of 2009



We are so excited to welcome Michal Paris Davis back to Arizona School for the Arts as a new member of our Administrative team this Fall. Along with her considerable musical talents, Michal brings a wealth of business operations experience to our campus as she takes on the role of Recruiting and Enrollment Specialist for her alma mater.

With an eye towards streamlining the enrollment process and expanding the use of our SIS system, Michal will apply her experiences at national companies such as Zenefits, Zipwhip, and TomboyX to improve the family experience as we continue to foster a "Culture of Excellence" at ASA.

We know that you graduated in 2009, but what is your ASA story? At what grade did you begin at ASA and what were your first, and then growing impressions of the school as it was back then?

I was definitely the loud, fun and weird kid at my elementary school. I performed in my grade school talent show 3 times in one concert because no one else had signed up for the show. I was on the swim team for years and a parent recommended ASA to my mom who had never heard of ASA before. At this time, there used to be a line of parents camping outside of the school to apply and I just happened to get chosen from the lottery, not knowing how difficult it was to get in!

I would've been a totally different person had I not been part of ASA- we were the shiny performers, the goofs, the academically competitive and we were celebrated for it. I have always felt that I may have been lost without ASA- specifically without performing and being encouraged to excel.

You received your BA from Arizona State University, Barrett the Honors College-ASU Herberger Institute. What was your major and what were your goals after college?

When I went to ASU, I was already doing professional theatre at Phoenix Theatre and theaters in the valley. I studied Theater with the goal of professionally performing for the rest of my life.

Most lives take unexpected twists and turns; you crossed over from performing arts to a very successful career in business operations, eventually taking you to the Pacific Northwest. It seems like quite an adventure both professionally and geographically. In

what ways did you feel prepared to meet these new experiences and what surprised you?

It's a crazy story, and you're missing about 6 different career changes in between! I was working hard towards my professional musical theater career and I was doing pretty well for myself. I was a big belty singer, but had a huge plot twist in my own life- a vocal cord damage from a tonsillectomy.

My voice changed drastically and I had to pivot pretty quickly away from musical theater. I have always had a knack for accomplishment and made my way onto a cruise ship as a cruise director, like Julie from the Love Boat. From there, the story continues with many twists and turns.

I still sometimes have a difficult time talking about this change, but I actually didn't feel prepared. I did, however, have the fortitude to withstand discomfort, apply discipline and pick myself up to fight for new achievements. I think that my life could have gone many directions, but I am surprised at how much I was able to accomplish in all of the different fields I have worked in. Leadership feels intuitive, I hope that doesn't come across as egocentric, but I have always felt determined to lead.

Good business operations is, in part, a knack for organization and imaginative big-picture thinking to enhance knowledge of technical details. Do you think that ASA's Arts + Smarts education helped you develop these skills?

I think it would be impossible for ASA to not have contributed to the foundations that made a good fit for Operations. I think my main strengths in work are efficiency, communication and diligence. I can definitely tell you I had significantly less of those skills before ASA and after 7 total Q3 presentations and 7 years of performing, of course it was the backbone for these skills.

What brought you back home to Phoenix, and back home to ASA as an employee?

This is a fun question- I never expected or planned to come back to Arizona nor ASA. I had the opportunity to inherit a home here in Phoenix, so who could deny becoming a homeowner when the home pricing rates are what they are, especially in Seattle.

When I moved back, I was lucky enough to take a year off of working to renovate my home. I was coming from a very intense start-up as Director of Business Operations and was looking for something that brought me more joy and less burn-out. Another Alumni from 2009 also was at ASA and scoped me out and told me about an open position here. I started and it was clear there were bigger roles for me here and that it was a good fit!

How does ASA differ in your eyes as a member of staff versus as a student and what is the same?

Interesting question- as a student it felt like I was being challenged and like all the teachers and staff knew things that I would one day hope to learn. I admired the adults at ASA and I

felt like I wanted to be impressive like my instructors. Now, I realize what formative impacts each adult at ASA can have on a student at any given moment. Things I do on purpose can go unnoticed by students and things I do without intention can have huge impact. It's very interesting to see this world from the other side and it is exciting to recognize how much impact I can make here for both students and staff.

What are your broad goals for working at ASA?

There's a magic in this place, for sure. I think we all know that. I also know that we live in a very fast-paced world that is quickly changing and I want to help ASA keep the magic at the forefront of every change we make.

What do you like to do outside of work?

PLAY- I like to play and I like to adventure. I try new hobbies all of the time. Pottery, wood working, movie club, rollerblading, bike riding- you name it, I like it all. I try to invite joy and movement into my life at every opportunity. I just reread this and it sounds so silly, but its all true. If you're looking to try something new, invite me along.

Other Alumni News & Updates...

- Taromina Falsitta ('24) is attending Catholic University-Tucson Majoring in Business, Economics, Analytics, Ethics & Theology in Business and Minoring in History, Political Science & Physiology after spending the summer in Washington, D.C. as a National Journalism Intern at the National Press Club. She gained useful experience writing 4-5 short stories daily on telecommunications issues on Capital Hill and broadband access
- Samantha Howard ('07) is a Physicist and an active duty Major/O-4 in the United States Air Force. After receiving her undergrad degree at the United States Air Force Academy in Colorado, Samantha attained her MS and PhD in Applied Physics from the Air Force Institute of Technology in Ohio.
- **SungHo Kim ('17)** came for an ASA campus visit this October to see one of his favorite teachers, Maria Simiz! As a member of the very first 5th grade class to start at our school, SungHo was amazed by the changes to campus, but also remarked that in the essentials that matter most, ASA is the same.



- Elliot Lewenstein ('24) is well underway at Willamette University in Oregon majoring in Computer Science after spending part of his summer in London as a cellist with High School Honors Performance Orchestra, performing at the Royal Festival Hall on July 29th. The various ensembles featured the top rated teen performers from around the world who workshopped with prominent conductors. Elliot's family were able come to the performance and his mother, Kathryn, reports that the Music Director made excellent use of the Hall's famous pipe organ with selections for the Orchestra consisting of a medley from *Phantom of the Opera*, a Widor Toccata from Organ Symphony No. 1, and a piece by French composer and organist Camille Saint-Saëns.
- **Eleanor Lewis ('15)** After a stint at Google, she is now working at Microsoft in the accessibility space. Eleanor keeps a hand in the arts with acting, modeling, dancing, and teaching in the Seattle area.
- Elizabeth Mason ('17) is a Special Assignment Administrative Assistant 3 at Arizona Department of Economic Security, with the Policy Support Team of her division; after previously working as an Administrative Assistant 2 for Research and Analysis. Lizzy told us, "My supervisor recently commended me on my exceptional critical thinking, and the fact that my ability to concurrently read and analyze aids me in understanding things right away. When I do not understand things right away, she appreciates how I ask for the 'why?' behind the answer for a deeper learning experience ASA really helped me in refining that skill."
- Alexander Mayer ('18) received his Bachelors of Music as well as his Masters of Music from Julliard and was named the Principal Oboe Chair for the <u>Virginia Symphony</u> <u>Orchestra</u> based out of Norfolk, in January 2024. He served as an acting member of the Minnesota Orchestra in Fall 2023, and has previously played with The Metropolitan Opera, the Richmond Symphony, and The Florida Orchestra.
- Sarah Pansing ('19) recently made a triumphant, albeit brief, visit home while on tour with the Vienna Light Orchestra for a one night only performance of *The Greatest Showman Live Tribute* at the Orpheum Theatre on November 7th. Their <u>list of tour dates</u> will let you know if they will be performing at a venue near you, and while you're at it, check out the promo reel to see if you can spot Sarah!
- Emma Potter ('18) was named Principal Horn to the Madison Symphony Orchestra in June. Emma received her Bachelors from Manhattan School of Music in 2022 followed by her Masters in Musical Performance from Rice University in 2024 and will attend Colburn School of Music for her performance studies certificate while working with the Madison Symphony. Meanwhile sister Gracie Potter ('20), a 2024 graduate of the

- Colburn Conservatory of Music with her Bachelors in Trombone Performance, has just been named the Principal Trombone for the <u>Detroit Symphony Orchestra</u>. Gracie was the Acting Principal Trombone with the <u>Richmond Symphony</u> and has performed with several orchestras including the Boston, London, and (of course) the Phoenix Symphonies.
- **UPSAHL ('17)** Those of you Apple enthusiasts might have noticed a familiar voice in the MacBook Pro <u>announcement video</u> that Apple released on October 30th. A clip of UPSAHL's song "Hello" was featured at the 1-minute mark of the video. She is currently on <u>tour</u> in the UK and Europe.

Here's another great way to keep up with some school friends, we have just started a <u>Spotify Playlist for ASA Alum!</u> Listen to what your fellow musical Pigeons have been creating and if you have a recommendation to add to the playlist, please send us an <u>email</u> and let us know.