Alumni

James Gunn Releases *Superman*, and Other Alumni News

Fall 2025



James Gunn (right) on the set of *Superman*. (Jessica Miglio / WB)

Several alumni-affiliated movies hit theaters this summer, including *Superman*, an action blockbuster written, directed, and produced by DC Studios cofounder **James Gunn** ’95SOA. Indie rom-com *Materialists*, the second film by writer-director **Celine Song** ’14SOA, premiered in June.

At the 2025 Pulitzer Prizes, **Leah Binkovitz** ’11JRN and her colleagues at the *Houston Chronicle* won the award for editorial writing for a series on dangerous local railroad crossings, while **Kavitha Surana** ’11CC and her team at ProPublica were honored for public-service journalism for covering the impact of abortion bans. In the poetry category, **Marie Howe** ’83SOA won for her *New and Selected Poems*.

Aldo Cugnini ’77SEAS, ’79SEAS, a veteran broadcast engineer who holds fourteen patents, received the 2025 Bernard J. Lechner Outstanding Contributor Award from ATSC, the broadcast standards association, for his work on digital television technology.



Ruby Okidi

Kenyan-born social worker **Ruby Okidi** ’24SW was a finalist in this year’s Miss Africa USA pageant, which recognizes young African women involved in advocacy and public service.

Talia Rosenberg ’25SIPA, who worked in the office of Manhattan borough president Mark Levine while studying at Columbia’s School of International and Public Affairs, was selected for the New York State Department of Public Service’s 2025 cohort of Excelsior Fellows, a two-year program for recent graduates starting government careers.

Gardens of Renewal, an installation by landscape artist **Lily Kwong** ’12GS, was on display in Madison Square Park from April through August. Featuring a spiral pathway, the exhibition encouraged reflection on urban ecology and awareness of

endangered plant species.

The 2025 James Beard Foundation Journalism Awards, which recognize achievements in food and beverage journalism, honored **Grey Moran** ’18JRN for a *Civil Eats* article on the banning of heat protections for Florida farm workers. **Adam Iscoe** ’22JRN was a finalist for his *New Yorker* feature on the rise of impossible restaurant reservations.

Columbia alumni contributed to several Tony-winning Broadway productions this year, including *Maybe Happy Ending*, which was coproduced by **Ali Daylami** ’24SOA and swept six awards including best musical. **Jamie Forshaw** ’09SOA, **David Manella** ’18SOA, ’18LAW, and **Kate Cannova** ’13SOA served on the producing team for *Sunset Boulevard*, which won the award for best musical revival.



Pete Wernick (Will Wernick)

Hot Rize, a band cofounded by banjo player **Pete Wernick** ’66CC, ’73GSAS, was inducted into the Bluegrass Music Hall of Fame in Owensboro, Kentucky. As a Columbia student, Wernick started WKCR-FM’s *The Moonshine Show*, which is still active today.

John Zeisel ’65CC, ’71GSAS, founder of the I’m Still Here Foundation, which supports lifestyle-enrichment programs for people living with dementia and

Alzheimer’s disease, received a 2025 Thought Leader Award at the McKnight’s Pinnacle Awards, honoring professionals in senior care.

Extremist, a short film written and directed by **Alexander Molochnikov** ’25SOA and produced by **Jean Chapiro** ’22JRN, ’25SOA, won the live-action and special jury awards at the 2025 British Academy of Film and Television Arts (BAFTA) Student Awards.

Nine graduates and current students of Columbia Journalism School received Pulitzer Center fellowships to pursue projects on underreported global issues: investigative reporters **Michele Calamaio** ’25JRN, **Chris Caurla** ’25JRN, **Mariana Hernández Ampudia** ’25JRN, **Anna Oakes** ’25JRN, **Deep Vakil** ’25JRN, and **Johnny Sturgeon** ’25JRN, as well as documentary filmmakers **Luisa Barone**, **Iona Horton**, and **Claudia Rosel**.

Mocel, a brand of craft mezcal cofounded by **Elizabeth Mendoza** ’14LAW, received gold medals at the 2025 San Francisco World Spirits Competition and Agavos Awards, two of the most prestigious blind-judging events in the spirits business.



Guide to school abbreviations

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