

Enterprising Ideas

CURTIS ALUMNI WIN GRANTS RECOGNIZING ENTREPRENEURSHIP.

BY LAURA SANCKEN

In 2016 Curtis announced its first alumni entrepreneur grants for projects highlighting innovation, sustainable community impact, and creative employment of musicianship and skill. After receiving an overwhelming response to the call for applications, Curtis awarded three grants of \$2,200 each in the categories of Community, Performance, and Innovation. Here, the alumni recipients discuss their projects.

COMMUNITY

“I want an everyday person to hear what I’m doing, no matter what it sounds like, and relate.”

—Gabriel Globus-Hoenich

BREAKING DOWN BARRIERS

“Playing doesn’t have to mean playing at Carnegie Hall, and teaching doesn’t mean being in a static classroom environment.”

So says percussionist and 2008 Curtis graduate Gabriel Globus-Hoenich. In 2015 he joined forces with Brazilian percussionist Rogerio Boccato to create PlasticBand, a drumming project that partners with the New York City Department of Probation to build community. A NeON Arts Grant from the Carnegie Hall Weill Music Institute helped them to create an initial ten-week program of free drumming classes for probation clients and community members in Harlem. Using found objects as instruments, they encouraged everybody to participate in the creation of music.

“Every day at 5 p.m., we were here to make music. We had a chant: ‘We are a Plastic Band,’” Gabriel recalls. Both probation officers and clients would join in this weekly chant together, often ad-libbing off each other and breaking down barriers to make music. In its final event, PlasticBand gave a performance for the community with guitarist Lionel Loueke and community partners from the New York Mission Society and Afro-Latin Jazz Alliance.

Through PlasticBand, Gabriel realized how blending performance and teaching could build community and appreciative audiences at the same time. “I want an everyday person to hear what I’m doing, no matter what it sounds like, and relate. If the music is complex, like a foreign language, you need to pull them in to understand it. I feel like the audiences, who are typically families of my students, appreciate this.”

With the grant from Curtis, Gabriel hopes to expand PlasticBand as both an educational and artistic organization, and commission teaching artists to create, perform, and record original compositions.



Gabriel Globus-Hoenich (Timpani and Percussion '08)

MEET THE ALUMNI

The Clarion Quartet (clockwise from left): Bronwyn Banerdt (Cello '08), Jennifer Orchard (Violin '91), Tatjana Mead Chamis (Viola '94), Marta Krechkovsky

PHOTO: JEFF SWENSON



PERFORMANCE

“This is our call for the music of these suppressed composers to break free of the silence imposed on them.”

—Tatjana Mead Chamis

IN A NEW LIGHT

What, exactly, is “degenerate” music?

Under the Nazi regime, the term (“entartete” in German) meant music of modernist tendencies rather than Romantic ones, and especially the work of Jewish composers. In 2016 four string players from the Pittsburgh Symphony—three of them Curtis alumni—joined together to perform “entartete” music alongside a speaker who provided historical context, noting how composers labeled “degenerate” were silenced through persecution or imprisonment. The musicians quickly realized how important and powerful it was to give these composers a voice again, and the Clarion Quartet was born.

“The word ‘clarion’ means a trumpet call, a clear signal,” says violist Tatjana Mead Chamis. “This is our call for the music of these suppressed composers to break free of the silence imposed on them.” Tatjana and her colleagues—violinists Jennifer Orchard and Marta Krechovsky and cellist Bronwyn Banerdt—decided to make the quartet a permanent ensemble, dedicated to educating audiences and musicians about the artistry of these oppressed composers.

Shortly after that first performance, the four musicians found themselves in Europe on a Pittsburgh Symphony tour. During a day off, they arranged a performance at Terezin, the former Nazi concentration camp near Prague known for promoting cultural activity as a smokescreen for its actual purpose. “The Attic,” a cramped space where cultural events took place when the camp was active, became the Clarion Quartet’s concert venue to give voice to works by two composers who perished in concentration camps, Viktor Ullmann and Erwin Schulhoff, as well as a new work by Boris Pigovat. The orchestra bused in several dozen musicians and music director Manfred Honeck to witness this powerful performance. The quartet has since performed in Pittsburgh on the November anniversary of Kristallnacht and has booked performances through Jewish communities across the country.

The Clarion Quartet’s goal is to bring this music to young people who wouldn’t have heard it otherwise. “We want this [music] to be a celebration,” says Jennifer. “This music needs to be heard. It’s emotional, but it’s very happy, too.” Tatjana adds, “It is some of the best music written of that time, it’s just that most people haven’t had the pleasure to know it.”

INNOVATION

“It is very rare to find solo vocals in interactive music. It is even more rare to find interactive melodies based on evolving harmonic structures.”

—Elizabeth Zharoff



Elizabeth Zharoff (Opera '12)

A VOICE FOR VIDEO GAMES

In 2012 the music for the video game *Journey* made a kind of music history. Austin Wintory, who wrote the music for the game, was nominated for a Grammy Award alongside legendary movie music composers, bringing unprecedented attention to the field of video-game music and setting the stage for the innovations of opera alumna Elizabeth Zharoff.

A lifelong gaming fan as well as a soprano who is currently a young artist with LA Opera, Elizabeth became interested in developing music for video games to fill a void in the field. “Video-game composers have primarily been creating interactive music which relies on changes in orchestration. It is very rare to find solo vocals in interactive music,” she says. “It is even more rare to find interactive melodies based on evolving harmonic structures.”

Enter Elizabeth’s company, Vocal Video Games, which focuses on incorporating vocal music into video games, using voice to heighten emotion within the game. Vocal Video Games creates opportunities for video-game composers to write for voice using middleware, a software that allows music to develop and react as the player makes choices moving throughout a game. Interactive music has existed as long as video games have been in production, but middleware allows for quicker reaction and, as a result, much more complex music.

Among Elizabeth’s successes in adding classical voice to the video-game repertoire is a new album, *Song Cycle: The History of Video Games*, which she directed and produced with the Materia Collective. A compilation of video-game music written for voice, the recording adds a new facet to the repertoire for classical singers. With her grant from Curtis, Elizabeth says, she hopes she’ll “be able to point current students towards a musical frontier that is flourishing with possibility.” ♦

Laura Sancken is director of alumni and parent relations at Curtis.