



# Sound Off

How are you addressing environmental issues through your work? Five members of the Curtis community weigh in.

BY BRIAN WISE

grappling with the things that I feel passionate about. Hopefully, regardless of what you believe, you can recognize that. Even if you are very conservative, if you are living in a rural environment, you have first-hand experience with environmental challenges: with flooding, extreme fires, and heat. So, for me, to deal with it on a human level, I hope it finds common ground.”

→ **TEDDY ABRAMS**  
(Conducting '08), Music Director of the Louisville Orchestra,  
Music Director of the Britt Festival

Teddy Abrams has seen the devastation from climate change up close. At the Britt Festival in Medford, Ore. wildfire smoke in recent years prompted organizers to move the 2022 orchestra season to earlier in the summer. Mr. Abrams has also championed environmental issues through his music, notably in *The Song of the River* (2019), a meditation on the earth's rising water levels, and *The Order of Nature* (2019), a collaboration with singer-songwriter Jim James.

“We often tend to think of this as just an urban versus rural issue. We assume that people think one way in city environments and differently in areas that, ironically, are most connected to the natural environment. It's a lot more complex than that. In a piece like *The Song of the River*, I'm not telling people what to think, but rather, I'm working out my own fears and

→ **LARRY BOMBACK**  
Senior Vice President of  
Administration at Curtis

Curtis launched a three-year project in 2020 to increase the energy efficiency of its facilities. An audit conducted by The Efficiency Network (TEN) identified several key measures that would reduce the school's carbon footprint and result in more than \$35,000 in annual savings. Larry Bombback is overseeing the initiative.

“The majority of the improvements come in the form of lighting upgrades. We're taking out the var-

ious fluorescent and incandescent lights across the campus and moving to LED bulbs which will save us a ton in energy costs. We're also putting in new systems controls, which allow us to monitor HVAC (humidity, ventilation, and air conditioning) remotely so that we can schedule based on usage. That allows us to make sure we are not wasting energy by heating or cooling the building unnecessarily when nobody is there. You can also almost think of these controls as a giant, campus-wide smart thermostat. Combined with the energy efficiency improvements made through the 1726 Locust Street modernization project, we expect to recover our upfront investment within 10 years. After that, we expect to be saving money, relative to what we would have spent if we had kept to our old systems."

→ **VIET CUONG**  
(Composition '19),  
composer

In 2019, the Albany Symphony introduced *Re(new)al*, a percussion quartet concerto by Princeton, N.J.-based composer Viet Cuong. It was commissioned by GE Renewable Energy, a division of General Electric that develops wind turbines, solar panels, and hydroelectric power, and which is based in Schenectady, N.Y.

"There are three movements: about water, wind, and solar power. On a deeper level there are instruments that suggest thinking about how to use things that we have. For

example, I use crystal glasses and refillable air canisters as instruments. What I think is the biggest message of the piece is that I always treat the [percussion quartet] as essentially one person. It's about synergy and working together and equal involvement. For example, the second movement has a drum set formation that is supposed to look like a wind turbine. There's actually some choreography where they spin, and each of them is essentially a blade of a wind turbine."

→ **ANDREW LANE**  
Vice President, Touring  
and Artist Management  
at Curtis

With concert touring expected to further rebound in 2022, artists and their managers are scrutinizing how to travel in healthier, more sustainable ways. Andrew Lane, who has been a driving force for Curtis on Tour, is exploring these questions as the school expands its global presence.

"Good tour routing is one way we can be mindful of the environment when booking tours. The same consideration that makes artists' lives easier when on the road also reduces their carbon footprint. If we're going to the Bay Area with a chamber group, that means trying to book multiple performances in that area so we can make the most of the trip. It makes artists' lives easier, and it is also better for the environment. When I am thinking about touring now, I think about

how we can keep people off planes as much as possible."

→ **GABRIELLA SMITH**  
(Composition '13, Artist-  
Year '16), composer and  
environmentalist

Gabriella Smith says environmental issues have been her greatest passion since she first learned about the climate crisis as a child in the San Francisco Bay Area. The composer's music includes a work about the loss of biodiversity: *Requiem*, written for Roomful of Teeth and the Dover Quartet (Curtis's Penelope P. Watkins Ensemble in Residence). Ms. Smith's *Lost Coast*, a cello concerto written for Gabriel Cabezas (Cello '13), was inspired by a solo backpacking trip along the California coast.

"I've struggled with this question [of how to address climate change] and have had different opinions over time. I've wondered if there's any use in writing music about this because am I just preaching to the choir? In recent years I've concluded that convincing people is not really what we need to be doing anymore. Most people are not climate deniers, so why focus on that group? But what music can be great about is getting people excited about solutions. I really think that the only way to solve the climate crisis is just to completely change our culture. It can't be just scientists working on this; it really needs to be an active part of everyone's life."

*Responses have been lightly condensed and edited for clarity.*

Left: Viet Cuong.  
Below: (left  
to right) Larry  
Bomback; Teddy  
Abrams; Andrew  
Lane; Gabriella  
Smith.

