



# Sound Off

How are you building a presence on social media? Five members of the Curtis community weigh in.

BY BRIAN WISE

## J'Nai Bridges

*(Opera '12), mezzo-soprano*

→ J'Nai Bridges makes the most of Instagram's visual focus, posting photos of floor-sweeping gowns, European streetscapes, and the lavish opera productions in which she appears. There's also a clear, winning personality behind her feed. In a recent email exchange, Ms. Bridges said that her 17,000-plus IG followers turn to her account for updates on her career and dollops of inspiration.

“On platforms like Instagram and Facebook, people want to know that you are human, and they want to see who you are, what you do, and what your passion is. Adding to this point, I think people are looking for inspiration, so when I do post my professional news, it's inspiring for people. For me, that's what it's all about. That's what I'm looking for in other pages that I follow as well: ‘How can I be inspired?’ I also like to lift up the other people I'm collaborating with. I think it's imperative to not only share what you've been working so hard on but to also use social media to lift others to make people aware of other incredible artists and collaborators. I really enjoy that part about promotion; it's not just about me, and again, we need each other.”

## Ray Chen

*(Violin '10), violinist*

→ Ray Chen has cultivated his fan base through an engaging mix of social media content: fiery performance clips, cute animals, and whimsical music humor. The personable violinist regularly holds meet-and-greets after his concerts as a way of strengthening the connections he has made online, where he has 340,000 followers on Instagram and over 265,000 subscribers on YouTube. Mr. Chen advises musicians to tailor their

content to the demographics of each platform.

“Many of my colleagues become (understandably) worried when terms like ‘brand building’ or ‘marketing’ appear, but it can be simplified to two things: knowing yourself and choosing which parts of yourself resonate with the audience you’re trying to reach. That’s basically content creation in a nutshell. After that, it’s like practicing your instrument: it requires discipline, consistency, and being willing to constantly put yourself out

there. Some people do choose to use their socials as pure marketing and there’s nothing wrong with that so long as you’re also giving back something in return. For example, if I were to market an upcoming concert, I would provide some form of exchange — like a performance or educational video — for that person’s time and attention. There’s ‘trust’ in the relationship between any product and the market that one must develop.” →







Karen Slack  
*(Opera '02), soprano*

→ Describing herself as a “digital creator” on her Facebook profile, the versatile soprano Karen Slack presents a freewheeling mix of personal dispatches (wine tasting photos, cat antics), rehearsal clips, and nods to favorite entertainers and sports heroes (*Lizzo*, *Serena Williams*). On Instagram, where she has over 18,000 followers, she is a particular advocate of using hashtags that appear in popular search results.

“For me, sharing my life and performing are what resonates. People love it when I talk about traveling to a gig, or when I’m showing my family, my pets, and my husband, and the things that we do outside of my job. Facebook is where I am the most present and have the most engagement with my audience. I’m not really a Twitter person. I think it’s because my audience on Facebook is so vibrant. They comment. I’ll put a post out there and it will blow up because of the interaction between members of my audience. People are really verbal. They will engage with one another, they’ll tag me, and ask me questions about a certain post. You just have to be savvy, get your point across, and be able to police people who may offend. Particularly around race and sexuality issues, I feel a responsibility to protect my audience.”

KIA CALDWELL



## Jasmine Choi

(Flute '04), flutist

→ Jasmine Choi says that she has gained most of her 260,000 Instagram followers after people first encountered her performance and instructional videos on YouTube. “They’re mostly flute fans or aspiring flutists who want to learn different pieces,” she notes. Sprinkled among her updates are a handful of posts that she has made for companies, including Lamborghini Seoul, Tiffany & Co., and Korean cosmetics firm O HUI. Such branded posts can offer a viable source of compensation, she says, provided that the partnerships feel authentic.

“One of the things that I find important is that social media is there for socializing. If you’re not into mingling with your fans, talking with them, and answering their questions, it loses its point. And I’m glad that, generally, I love people and meeting people, both online and offline. [Of course], I must be a little bit careful because I know that a lot of youngsters look up to me and follow me. So, I try to set a good example and share good advice, performance tips, practice tips—something more valuable than just showing off what I’m doing. I’ve also done several [branded posts]. I do get a lot of requests. But the important thing is to pick and choose so that it’s something you really support, and you really believe in.”



## Patricia K. Johnson

*Vice President of Communications and Public Affairs at Curtis*

→ Patricia Johnson is responsible for managing Curtis’s public profile. She has worked in strategic communications and marketing for two decades, and before arriving at Curtis in 2019, served as director of marketing and communications at OPERA America. She stresses the importance of writing in a natural, conversational voice.

“You wouldn’t walk up to a group of people who know you, announce that you have a great concert coming up, and then walk away, right? Of course not! Same goes with social media—think of it more like a conversation, with natural give-and-take, not as a one-way announcement. It’s important to engage with your followers when you can, react to comments, and respond to good questions. Just be sure to be yourself and use your own voice when engaging—it’s easy to spot when publicists run an artist’s social feed! Think of how you might share your process and your journey in a way that feels comfortable and genuine for you. You may also consider sharing posts and content that you find interesting or helpful; that can help vary the rhythm and tone of your posts while also building rapport. And personally, I always pause for a second before I post or reply to anything—if I feel any hesitation about what I’m posting, I stop, because there’s probably a good reason for the feeling.”

Comments have been edited for clarity and length.