

OVERTONES



VOL. XLVI, NO. 2 | FALL 2023

Studio
Players
Face AI

Your Best
Headshots

The Q+A:
Anthony
McGill



25 *Pivotal Events* THAT SHAPED CURTIS

CELEBRATING *100* YEARS of MUSIC MAKING

UPCOMING AT CURTIS

JANUARY 27		BEETHOVEN, ORTIZ, AND BARBER	ORCHESTRA
JANUARY 31		NATE'S WORLD	CURTIS PRESENTS
FEBRUARY 27		STRING SEXTETS	CURTIS PRESENTS
MARCH 9		RA, MACKEY, TCHAIKOVSKY	ORCHESTRA
MARCH 15 & 17		LES MAMELLES DE TIRÉSIAS & THE SEVEN DEADLY SINS	OPERA
MARCH 30		INTERSECTION	ENSEMBLE 20/21
APRIL 2		NED ROREM CELEBRATION CONCERT	CURTIS PRESENTS
APRIL 13		PORTRAIT OF GEORGE LEWIS	ENSEMBLE 20/21
APRIL 23		CURTIS COMPOSERS	CURTIS PRESENTS
MAY 2-5		THE CUNNING LITTLE VIXEN	OPERA



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Curtis alumni are always entitled to complimentary tickets; email tickets@curtis.edu for details.

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CURTIS
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FALL
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FROM THE
PRESIDENT

A Rich Past, A Bold Future



IN 2024, the Curtis Institute of Music marks 100 years of educating some of the world's most gifted young artists, helping to shape the future of classical music.

As the Curtis community prepares to celebrate this unparalleled and richly textured legacy, we wanted to share with *Overtones* readers 25 impactful moments (p. 12) that have shaped our school since we welcomed our first students in the fall of 1924. And while I'm sure you can guess a few of the moments in this piece, Senior Archivist Barbara Benedett sheds light on other moments that might be lesser known, but no less important, in shaping our school.



In the year ahead, *Overtones* will bring you additional articles and commentary about Curtis's first 100 years—the people, events, and performances that have shaped our school. But we'll also look to the future and explore ways Curtis is leading our students and our art form into a thriving, equitable, and multidimensional future.

Of course, this issue of *Overtones* also explores many other facets of Curtis and our field today. Jeremy Reynolds looks at how AI and synthesizers are affecting the careers of studio musicians in "Encrypted Careers" (p. 16). We have an interview with alumnus and clarinet faculty member Anthony McGill (p. 10) about his far-reaching career as a soloist, activist, and a member of the New York Philharmonic. Composition student Maya Miro Johnson sits down with composition faculty member Steven Mackey and guitar alumna Jiji about *Aluminum Flowers*, Mackey's electric guitar concerto set to receive its world premiere in March with Jiji and the Curtis Symphony Orchestra ("Guitar Heroes," p. 20). And members of the Curtis community share their advice for taking your best headshots in our "Sound Off" column (p. 6).

On behalf of the school and the *Overtones* editorial team, I hope you enjoy reading this issue of the magazine. If you have any feedback, or if this edition sparks thoughts on other impactful moments in Curtis's history, please let us know at overtones@curtis.edu. And remember that you can view this and previous issues of the magazine online at Curtis.edu/Overtones.

Roberto Díaz
PRESIDENT AND CEO

A TEMPO



A Maestro Crash Course, from Yannick Nézet-Séguin

Bradley Cooper turns to Curtis conductor for Leonard Bernstein biopic.

IN PREPARING FOR his portrayal of Leonard Bernstein (*Conducting '41*) in the biopic *Maestro*, actor and director Bradley Cooper sought guidance from several top conductors, notably Yannick Nézet-Séguin. As the film's conducting consultant, the Curtis faculty member recorded dozens of videos on his phone for Mr. Cooper, in which he conducted in Bernstein's manner, and provided "play-by-play voiceovers of Bernstein's performances," according to the *New York Times*.



Mr. Cooper stealthily watched Mr. Nézet-Séguin conduct from the orchestra pit at the Met, once sitting in on a performance of Debussy's *Pelléas et Mélisande*. Coaching also took place on set. For a reenactment of a 1973 performance of Mahler's *Resurrection* Symphony—a climactic moment in the film—the two men traveled to Ely Cathedral in England where the filming took place. Mr. Nézet-Séguin supplied the actor with cues through an earpiece.

Bernstein's two years at Curtis are not portrayed in the film, which focuses on his relationship with his wife, Felicia Montealegre. His Curtis years included conducting studies with the formidable Fritz Reiner and piano lessons with the demanding Isabelle Vengerova. While Bernstein's report card shows mostly As, it wasn't an entirely happy period, marked by friction with some classmates who saw him as a show-off and a Harvard snob. Bernstein later conceded that their opinions may have had some credence. Still, by his second year, he had settled in, and as an alumnus took part in the celebrations of Curtis's 50th and 60th anniversaries, in 1975 and 1984, respectively.

For Mr. Cooper, the biggest challenge was "feeling unprotected" and "naked emotionally" on the podium, Mr. Nézet-Séguin told the *Times*. "He wouldn't settle for anything less than what he had in mind."

The movie's soundtrack features Mr. Nézet-Séguin conducting the London Symphony Orchestra in works by Bernstein, Beethoven, Mahler, Walton, and other composers. *Maestro* is in theaters and arrives on Netflix on December 20.



A session at the Orchestra Bootcamp.

At Orchestra Bootcamp, Students Focus on Team Building

A tune-up after the summer break.

BY MARY CLAIRE SULLIVAN
AND SNIYA JOHNSON

This past September, the Curtis Symphony Orchestra tried something new: Instead of launching into concert preparation as usual, it spent four intensive, pedagogically focused sessions with conductor James Ross (Conducting '89). In addition to being music director of the Alexandria Symphony and a Curtis graduate, Mr. Ross is well known for his expertise in orchestral education: He is the orchestra director of the National Youth Orchestra of the USA, where he oversees all artistic and educational activities.

Orchestra bootcamp was a three-week experience focused on developing students' trust in their ability to learn pieces quickly and meaningfully. Students participated in four full-orchestra sessions and two sectionals, covering six pieces of standard repertoire. The goal, said Mr. Ross, was to "plant the seeds that would make the orchestra more productive and alive" throughout the year.

The culmination of bootcamp was an open reading of three of the studied pieces selected by the orchestra. Initially, Mr. Ross was slated to conduct, but when he became ill, four volunteers—three of them students—stepped up to stand in his place on the podium.

Among them was Ben Price, a second-year oboe student from Portland, Ore. The oboist was drawn to the third movement of Prokofiev's Fifth Symphony because of its contrasting feelings of

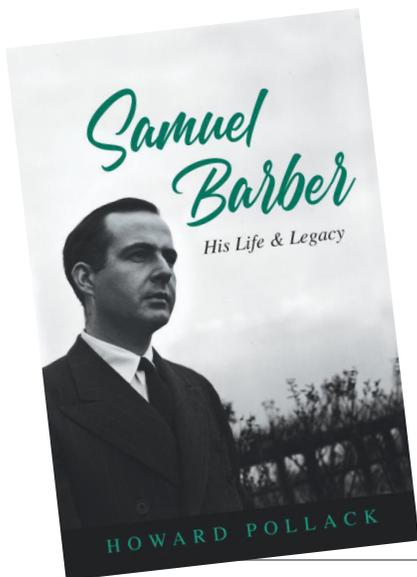
hopefulness and hopelessness. Three years in the National Youth Orchestra provided a familiarity with Mr. Ross's method of adding real-world context to the music. "Conducting the CSO is both a privilege and an incredible test of one's conducting," they said, "because they are such excellent musicians—they respond to everything!"

Benoit Gauthier, a first-year conducting fellow from Montreal, took on Rossini's *William Tell* Overture and the fourth movement of Prokofiev's Fifth Symphony. As someone new to Curtis, he was excited to jump in, but knew he had to be affirmative and convincing in his introduction to colleagues. "Boot camp was a safe space for everyone to work through difficult repertoire in a low-stakes environment," he said.

Finally, Tzu-Yi Yu, a second-year clarinet student from Taoyuan City, Taiwan, led the second movement of Prokofiev's Fifth Symphony. Mr. Yu has long dreamed of being a conductor and tries to take every opportunity to get up on a podium. "The most unforgettable moment of that day," he recalls, "was when I walked into the dining hall and everyone gave me a huge applause."

Mary Claire Sullivan is the associate director of strategic initiatives and board liaison. Sniya Johnson is the manager of strategic initiatives and community culture.

The Curtis Bookshelf



Samuel Barber: His Life & Legacy

by Howard Pollack

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS PRESS, 2023

Despite his established place in the 20th-century canon, Samuel Barber (Composition '34) is "relatively understudied and undervalued among musicologists, music theorists, and cultural historians," writes Howard Pollack in the introduction to this 700-page critical study of the composer's life and works. Mr. Pollack, the author of sweeping biographies of Aaron Copland and George Gershwin, devotes five chapters to Barber's formative years, including the nine years he studied at Curtis. After taking piano lessons in the nascent preparatory division in 1924, Barber's full-time studies included

Biographers make their cases for Barber and Schoenberg, and a venerable publicist tells her story.

a lengthy apprenticeship with Rosario Scalerò, an exacting mentor who heaped on counterpoint exercises while nurturing his better creative instincts.

Barber's friendships and his budding romance with Gian Carlo Menotti (Composition '33) are chronicled through diary excerpts, but especially remarkable is the lavish support from Curtis founder Mary Louise Curtis Bok. "Bok's sponsorship of Barber and Menotti seemed to touch every aspect of their professional lives," Pollack writes, whether providing financial assistance with car, piano, and home purchases or facilitating contacts with publishers and conductors. Barber and Menotti dedicated several works to Mrs. Bok and remained close to the conservatory well into their later years.

Schoenberg: Why He Matters

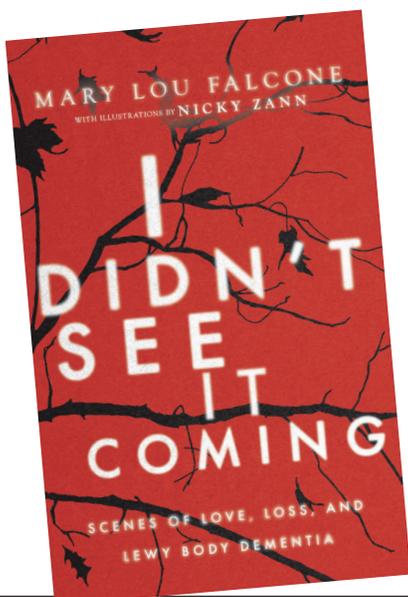
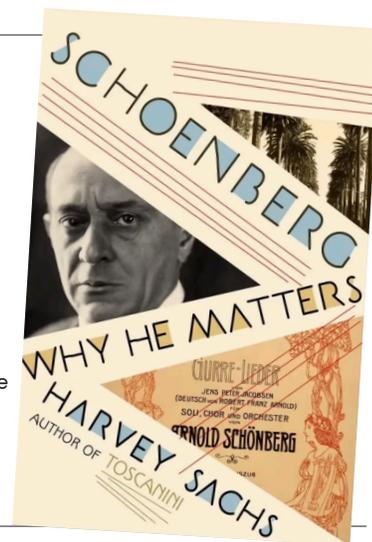
by Harvey Sachs

LIVERIGHT, 2023

Curtis music history teacher Harvey Sachs acknowledges from the start of this, his twelfth book, that he has an uphill climb in promoting the merits of Arnold Schoenberg, noting that the composer's music is mostly absent from orchestra calendars and shunned by many top soloists. It goes beyond a simple dislike of atonality. "I know of no musician who would claim that Debussy, Rossini, Wagner, or Brahms destroyed music's future," he writes,

"whereas I have heard many make that claim, explicitly or implicitly, about Schoenberg."

But Mr. Sachs fervently believes that Schoenberg's story has yet to be fully understood or solidified. In a lively, accessible prose, he explores the composer's Viennese roots, Jewish heritage, financial struggles, and eventual exile in America. Particularly engaging is a chapter on Schoenberg in California, where his students included the pianist-actor Oscar Levant and baseball legend Jackie Robinson—the latter of whom was excused from class to attend batting practice.



I Didn't See It Coming: Scenes of Love, Loss, and Lewy Body Dementia

by Mary Lou Falcone

EAST END PRESS, 2023

Mary Lou Falcone (Voice '66) emerges from her background role in guiding public relations campaigns for leading artists (including Gustavo Dudamel, Van Cliburn, and Georg Solti) and organizations (the New York Philharmonic) to tell her own story—and that of her late husband. In 2019, Nicholas "Nicky" Zann, a noted illustrator and cartoonist, was diagnosed with Lewy body dementia, a relatively unknown neurodegenerative disease. He died the following year. The memoir is, in part,

an effort to raise awareness about the condition and shed light on the role of a caregiver.

The larger story spans Ms. Falcone's New Jersey childhood, studies at Curtis in the 1960s (where director Efrem Zimbalist, Sr. identified her talents), a period as a freelance singer and elementary school music teacher in Bryn Mawr, Pa., and the launch of her New York P.R. firm in 1973, the same year she met Mr. Zann. Ms. Falcone uses an intriguing literary device that involves inhabiting the voices of those who have known her, including Mr. Zann. Chapters are dotted with meaningful anecdotes and lessons about caregiving and compassion.

Sound Off

What should musicians look for in professional headshots?

BY BRIAN WISE

Micah Gleason

Photographer, Conducting Student

→ As a conductor, Micah Gleason is accustomed to giving cues that elicit specific responses. But behind the camera—she began photographing colleagues a decade ago as a side hustle—Ms. Gleason minimizes her direction. “I try to avoid that as much as possible because when you start to do that, people’s bodies get tense,” she says.

“When I shoot headshots, I usually ask people to think about what they’re wearing. Is it a color that you think looks good on you? How is the neckline? Maybe solids are better than patterns? Is the material reflective, or does it collect a lot of lint? We’re always dealing with things like glasses and glare. That can sometimes be tricky. Some people want to look really kind of natural, and some people want to do a full glam look.

“It’s nice to have a variety of photos in terms of angles and orientation but also something that looks personal—like smiling or laughing—or implies that this person is a good colleague. You look at the photo, and you’re like, ‘Wow, what a great person that looks like.’ For some people, they come out swinging, and they’re voguing, or they’re doing a serious face. For other people, that feels super unnatural.

“I also love to use the instrument as a part of the photo. A harp, for example, is a beautiful instrument that you can use in an artistic way. The more that photographers can creatively use instruments in photos, the better.”

Julia Faulkner

*Voice and Opera Faculty Member
Director of Vocal Studies at the Ryan
Opera Center of Lyric Opera of Chicago*

→ Voice teacher Julia Faulkner believes that the eyes are the most noticeable element of an artist's headshot, even more than an out-of-place hair or blemish. "Are the eyes alive?" she asks. "Do they have warmth and energy in them?" Ms. Faulkner, who recently had her own photos retaken, says that she prefers approachable, classic looks.

"It's tough when you're starting out because the urge to go cheap is huge. Everybody has digital cameras now and can do a lot of things. But I think

it's especially important to find the best-quality photographer you can. If you get a great photo right at the beginning of your career, it can see you through the first crucial years when you may not be making a lot of money. The best place to start is by looking at other people's headshots and seeing which appeal to you.

"A lot of times, singers want to look very serious or sultry. But choosing a photo that makes you look approachable, with warmth and energy, really matters. If you are a working professional singer, you should [get photos taken] ev-

ery couple of years. But you need to be honest with yourself and say, 'I don't really look like this anymore.'

"If a photographer offers hair and makeup, you should take advantage of it and spend the extra money. And you want to have a variety of photos. I find it useful to have a photo that's offset in the frame to use for banners and things like that, where you can print something in the empty space. Changes of wardrobe are fine, but that's really the smallest part of the whole thing. With accessories, simple is better. But really, what we are looking at is the face." →



TODD ROSENBERG PHOTOGRAPHY

Brandon Patrick George

Flutist, Imani Winds

Wind Quintet/Chamber Music

Faculty Member

→ Brandon Patrick George recently traveled to Los Angeles for a session with Lauren Desberg, a photographer (and jazz singer) with numerous musician clients. Mr. George, who was preparing for the release of his solo album *Twofold*, wanted photos that could “capture the interest of a wide variety of audiences, and not just people who go to classical music concerts.”

“I look for a photographer who is incredibly authentic and is someone who I feel can capture a side of my personality that someone else couldn’t. If you’re going to travel to meet a photographer, you must plan ahead and know what you have coming up so you can knock all those photos out in one session. I told Lauren I had a few concepts: I had to have photos for an album, and I told her about the concept of the album. I told her that I needed a more straight-ahead headshot that would be used for concerto programs. And then I just gave her creative freedom to do what she wanted.

“I picked out the clothes I wanted to wear with help from a stylist. But I’m very particular about my hair. I’ve been seeing the same barber in Harlem for about 15 years now. So, I made sure I had him cut my hair just before I flew to L.A. [Ms. Desberg] picked the set and the backdrop based on the wardrobe that I brought with me.

“I’ve never done a photo shoot with a photographer who plays the flute. No one really understands it, and it’s an awkward instrument, anyway, being held to the side. There are weird angle and lighting issues that come up. So, I found that it never looks super natural for me to play in front of the camera.”





Viano String Quartet

Nina von Maltzahn String Quartet Program (2021–23)

→ As the members of the Viano Quartet prepared to graduate last spring, they decided that their group photos, last taken in 2018, needed a refresh. “The guys are in tuxes, and [violinist] Aiden Kane (’23) and I are in big dresses,” notes violinist Lucy Wang (’23). “It was super-formal and traditional.” The quartet met with Kevin W. Condon, who photographed the ensemble against bold and moody backdrops, including a street in Brooklyn. Ms. Wang and fellow violinist Hao Zhou (’23) feel the preparation paid off. They are using the images to promote *Portraits*, their new recording on Curtis’s record label.

Hao: “What I learned during the process was if you don’t trust the photographer, then he can’t really do his thing. Kevin just kind of directed the process. If he felt inspired by a particular lighting or a framing, then he took a couple more photos of that. He was basically the director.”

Lucy: “You should go in prepared with the angles you like. Some people know which side of their face they like more, or they have certain poses. You don’t need to know 50. You just need to know one or two poses that you can strike immediately without having to think. Then, you can be comfortable with any shots that are coming up. It just feels awful to show up to a photo shoot, and people don’t know what to do with their hands.”

Hao: “I’ve made this mistake before: you go in, and you’re not sure what to do, so your posture is awkward. That’s no good because then they’ll take awkward photos.”

Lucy: “It’s totally okay to tell them that we’re not super-comfortable in front of the camera, so we might need more assistance with poses and stuff. And a helpful thing: Before a photo shoot, get rid of the mutes, get rid of any random hair ties. A lot of girls have them [affixed to their instruments] for emergencies. It’s annoying to edit those out later.”

Interviews have been edited and condensed for clarity.



THE Q+A

BY
BRIAN
WISE

Anthony McGill

The Curtis clarinetist talks about championing new works, teaching through example, and campaigning for social change.



ONE OF THE MOST visible orchestral musicians in the United States is not a concertmaster or other front-of-stage performer but Anthony McGill (Clarinet '00), principal clarinet of the New York Philharmonic since 2014. Mr. McGill's public profile predates his tenure at the Philharmonic—he performed at President Barack Obama's 2009 inauguration, after all—but his recent accomplishments are especially wide-ranging.

Recently named *Musical America's* Instrumentalist of the Year, Mr. McGill has been busy. He has toured widely with Anthony Davis's *You Have a Right to Remain Silent*, a piece that deals with racial bias in law enforcement (performances are planned this season in London, Los Angeles, and Oakland). He has recently introduced concertos by Esa-Pekka Salonen and Malek Jandali and a new transcription of a violin concerto by Joseph Bologne, Chevalier de Saint-Georges.

The William R. and Hyunah Yu Brody Distinguished Chair at Curtis, Mr. McGill is motivated by an abiding belief in music's broader societal resonance. He spoke with *Overtones* about activism, teaching, and the New York Philharmonic's renovated hall at Lincoln Center.

You've been busy touring with Anthony Davis's *You Have the Right to Remain Silent* (2007), a piece inspired by an incident in which the composer was stopped by a police officer and held at gunpoint for 45 minutes in a case of "mistaken identity." What draws you (and orchestras) to this piece?

First, it's an interesting piece. It's complex at times, beautiful at others, and painful at others. It has all these different characteristics. I have to improvise on the clarinet, and I have to play the contra-alto clarinet, which is not often used. In addition, there is the story behind the piece, of Anthony Davis's experience getting pulled over in kind of a case of mistaken identity. These issues have been arising for many, many years and, of course, have been well talked about in our society. Putting all of those together, it makes for not just an interesting new piece of music, but it also gives us all something to think about.

As a solo clarinetist with orchestra, how do you dramatize this episode in Mr. Davis's life?

In some ways, it's a traditional way, which is as a soloist against the orchestra. The words of the Miranda rights are spoken throughout the piece via the orchestra. So, it really is a feeling of being the person who is accused of some sort of crime. At times, it feels like I'm trapped inside the story of this piece as the protagonist. It becomes kind of a musical theater piece or an opera, with me as a character in that. That's interesting to explore as a soloist when you're playing any piece.

In 2020, you posted to social media a solo performance of *America the Beautiful*, which was set in a minor key and shot in black and white. At the end, you sink to your knees and urge people to #TakeTwoKnees in a

demonstration against racial injustice. Before this time, had you ever considered yourself an activist on social and political causes?

I never really thought about myself with a label attached to my name, as far as what I believe and what I do. I just know that I've always believed in issues related to progress. It's hard to grow up in America being Black without understanding that the [struggle for] civil rights is not something that ended in the '60s. It's a part of everyone's everyday experience. These things have been happening since way before my parents' generation. So, the specific use of a platform like social media—and my clarinet and who I am as an artist and as a musician—is something that's specific to the take two knees movement, but it's not something that did not exist before.

Your activism has drawn attention, in part because it's perhaps not normally associated with orchestral clarinetists.

I think the pandemic and the Black Lives movement, specifically in 2020, was something that instigated [my efforts]: I need to speak up through my instrument now. Not because it's new but because this is some way that I can use my art form to express something that hopefully will make the world a better place. Or even just to speak up in protest and say, 'This is where I am. How many people are here with me?'

There has been a certain backlash against politically outspoken musicians. How do you respond to the argument that music-making should be free of politics?

Anthony McGill performs at a New York Philharmonic Nightcap concert.

It's a complicated question to think about. Music isn't simple. Art isn't simple. For much of history, a lot of different composers and types of music have been attached to something greater than themselves. Music is us, whether that's music used for religious purposes, for ceremony, for protest, or for joy or entertainment. To say that because I'm a musician, I shouldn't speak about things that are human in nature—like human rights—is not really possible for me to think about. Music can make us think about places we've never been and people we've never met and cultures we don't know anything about.

This reminds me of Malek Jandali's *Concerto for Clarinet and Orchestra* (2021), which you recently recorded, and which features themes from Jandali's native Syria. You probably didn't need to travel to Syria to understand the spirit of the music.

This is exactly why it's important. Malek writes that the piece is for all victims of injustice everywhere. So being someone like me—an American who grew up on the south side

(continued on page 28)



25

Impactful Moments IN CURTIS HISTORY

As Curtis's centennial celebration gets underway this season, *Overtones* presents the first of multiple retrospectives of the moments that shaped the school, its people, and its musical training. Curtis's archivist guides us through moments from 1924 to the present.

BY BARBARA BENEDETT



AFTER 100 YEARS, it is easy to underestimate what the 1924 opening of the Curtis Institute meant to classical music in Philadelphia. The Philadelphia Orchestra was just 24 years old when our doors opened. The Philadelphia Grand Opera Company was only eight. What would Mary Louise Curtis Bok's music school, named for her father, contribute? Eyes were on us, and for good reason: Mrs. Bok planted the school, full of famous faculty as well as students from all walks of life, right on Rittenhouse Square—in a mansion, no less.

Curious Philadelphians were quickly satisfied. Soon, the local ensembles were not only heavily populated by Curtis students but also performing compositions written by Curtis composers, and sometimes under the baton of Curtis conductors. The school's influence on classical music grew exponentially, expanding past Philadelphia as new generations of graduates traveled to other cities and countries, bringing with them the skills they honed from some of the most prominent, trailblazing musicians of their time.

As the archivist for the Curtis Institute of Music, I am proud to be a part of the school's centennial celebration. Below, I have listed some points on Curtis's timeline that have, in ways both significant and subtle, impacted Curtis. I had many more options, but in reflecting upon this list, I believe it illustrates the range of events that led us to where we are today.



1924 Mary Louise Curtis Bok bought the George Childs Drexel Mansion at 1726 Locust Street to house the school, the Sibley house on 18th Street to hold administrative offices, and the Cramp Mansion at 1720 Locust to house the strings and music theory departments. Curtis's charter was signed on April 18, 1924.

1927 The opening of Casimir Hall (now Field Concert Hall). Without a dedicated performance space, rehearsals and concerts were held in the "Assembly Room" (now the Common Room). The concert hall, completed in 1927, incorporated the Drexel mansion's greenhouse and a small theater room, supplying enough seats for students and faculty. To

combat noise pollution from city traffic, architect Horace Wells Sellers chose a concrete building with no external openings. The inaugural recital took place on December 3, 1927, with a performance by Curtis's director and famed pianist, Josef Hofmann, after whose father the hall was named.

November 27, 1928 Dedication of the Curtis organ. Cyrus H. K. Curtis, who had given the organ as a birthday present to his daughter, Mary Louise Curtis Bok, was the first to play it. A recital by organ faculty member Lynnwood Farnam followed.

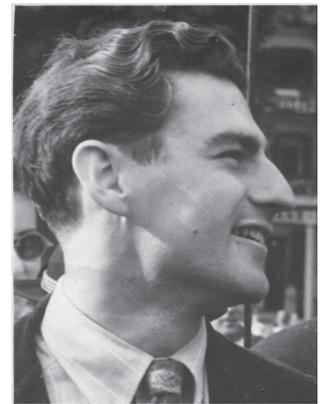
1928–29 school year One of the most notable aspects of the school, its tuition-free policy, is enacted. Initially, students paid tuition fees adjusted for income, but Josef Hofmann soon encouraged Mrs. Bok to offer free tuition to attract the best applicants. The tuition-free policy—still a bedrock of the school—also made it possible to reach out to Philadelphia's large immigrant population, who were still gaining financial security in the city, as well as urge international students to attend. With that, Curtis became the first American music conservatory to offer free tuition.



1930 Curtis harp student Edna Phillips (Harp '31) becomes the first female member of the Philadelphia Orchestra. With the encouragement of her teacher, Carlos Salzedo, Ms. Phillips auditioned for the second harp position. However, after the audition, music director Leopold Stokowski revealed that the orchestra's principal harpist would not be returning due to an injury. Mr. Stokowski offered the position to Ms. Phillips, who was just 23 years old.

1934 The first commencement of the school was held. Curtis had held end-of-year ceremonies from its start—although director Josef Hofmann was never fond of the practice—but it did not originally offer a bachelor's degree program. Coordinating with the University of Pennsylvania, Curtis began offering courses for college

credit in 1926. It took a few more years to set up a full degree program. As such, 1934 saw the first students to complete the bachelor's program. There were 77 graduates in all, including Samuel Barber, Orlando Cole, Max Aronoff, Jeanne Behrend, Jorge Bolet, Alexander McCurdy, and Rose Bampton.



April 1, 1937 Curtis staged the world premiere of Gian Carlo Menotti's (*Composition '33*) *Amelia Goes to the Ball* (*Amelia al Ballo*) at the Academy of Music in Philadelphia. Two years later, it was performed by the Metropolitan Opera—proving the work to be more than a local success. The one-act opera buffa not only cemented Menotti's status as one of the great composers and librettists of the 20th century, but also left no doubt that Curtis graduates

were making their mark on classical music.



1943 Mary Louise Curtis Bok became Mary Louise Zimbalist with her marriage to violinist and Curtis's director, Efrem Zimbalist. In his account of their decision to "tie the knot," Efrem asserts that Mary proposed to him. Two years before, Mr. Zimbalist began his 27-year tenure as Curtis's director and helped bring the school back from the financial uncertainty caused by the Great Depression and World War II.

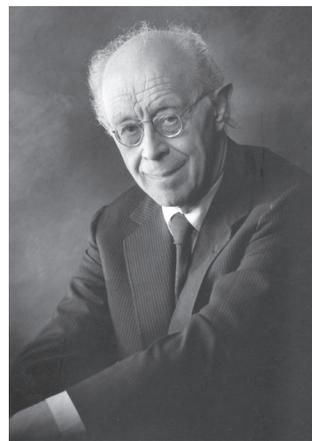
January 31, 1949 A fire broke out on the third floor of 1726 Locust Street when insulation ignited after a worker's blowtorch came too close. The blaze took three hours to get under control, although most of the damage was contained to the roof. A major concern then was the library, still housed in 1726. The *New York Times* noted the 15,000 scores and books that would have perished had the blaze been more severe.

Early 1950s Several protests were staged in Rittenhouse Square by activists against American involvement in the Korean War. Many students joined the protest, carting along instruments and lending their voice to the anti-war effort. Later alumni recall attending similar protests during the

Vietnam War. Whether through music or marches, students and faculty continue to address issues of social justice.

1968 Rudolf Serkin, who had just succeeded Efrem Zimbalist as director of the Curtis Institute of Music, asked Eugene Ormandy, the Philadelphia Orchestra's music director since 1936, to join the Curtis faculty and lead the Curtis Symphony Orchestra (CSO). Mr. Ormandy accepted but insisted that his salary be donated to help students in need. He invited guest conductors of the Philadelphia Orchestra to work with the CSO, allowing students to gain experience under the baton of conductors known the world over—a practice that continues to this day. Mr. Ormandy, who referred to the Curtis orchestra as his "other orchestra," remained on the faculty until 1977.

1970 Mary Louise Curtis Bok Zimbalist died on January 4, 1970, at the age of 93.



1977 After a period of leadership turnover and budgetary uncertainty, Mr. Serkin revived the opera program, which had been languishing after World War II-era budget cuts, and increased chamber ensemble activities. During this period the school made steps for the



creation of its advancement department and raised funds to allow for increased programming and a more public profile for the school.

1983 Renowned violinist and conductor Oscar Shumsky (Violin '36) joined the CSO on its first summer residency at the Rencontres Musicales d'Evian, a festival in France. By 2007, Curtis had expanded its touring activities with Curtis on Tour, a program bolstered in 2016 by a \$55 million gift from Nina Baroness von Maltzahn.

1986 *Overtones* returns. The school's journal, named by Mrs. Bok and established in 1929, returned from a long hiatus. The original monthly format ran until 1932, when the Depression forced a stop to publication. It

made a comeback semiannually from 1937 to 1940, when World War II halted production again. One issue was printed for the school's 50th anniversary. But the publication did not return in force until the spring of 1986.

1988 Curtis bought 1718 Locust Street to accommodate offices and added teaching studio space.

1991 Studio II-J becomes a black box theater. It was the concept of Ralph Batman, then administrator of the voice and opera department.

November 14–15, 1995 George Walker (Piano and Composition '45) conducts a two-day master class for the school's five composition majors. One year later, Walker became the first African American composer to win the Pulitzer Prize for Music, awarded for his composition, *Lilacs*.

1997 Curtis launches its website, Curtis.edu. Two years earlier, Curtis activated its first two email accounts through the regional network PALINET using the Health Sciences Library Consortium server at the College of Physicians.

1990s The city of Philadelphia installed a historical marker on the sidewalk in front of 1726 Locust St. honoring Philadelphia-born composer and Curtis alum, Vincent Persichetti (Conducting '39). Persichetti went on to teach at the Philadelphia Conservatory and Juilliard. A student brass quartet performed at the unveiling. To the amusement of many, "Juilliard" had been misspelled (missing the first "i"). The sign was quickly replaced, and the error corrected. The unlucky marker was destroyed in 2014, when hit by a car.





August 2011 Lenfest Hall, located at 1616 Locust Street, is completed. Named in honor of Gerry and Marguerite Lenfest, who supplied substantial funding for site acquisition, design, and construction, it was designed by renowned Philadelphia architects Venturi, Scott Brown & Associates. Lenfest Hall honors the streetscape of its venerable historic block, while supplying modern class, rehearsal, and performance spaces; dorm rooms; and a dining hall.

2011–12 A new sound arrives at the school with the debut of the classical guitar studio led by David Starobin and Jason Vieaux.

2013–14 After a three-year curriculum review, the school officially adopts the “learn by doing” instructional strategy, applying the research-based principle that *how* teachers instruct is of equal importance to *what* they instruct.

January 15, 2018, Martin Luther King Jr. Day: Students, faculty, and staff converge at South Philadelphia High School for a day of service. All involved spent the morning cleaning, painting, and decorating—giving the band room a needed facelift. Community Artist Fellow Nozomi Imamura (Trumpet '15, CAF '18), who taught

beginning instrumentalists at the high school, encouraged the Curtis community to honor the day by improving the environment for budding South Philadelphia musicians.

2020 As the world was disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic, Curtis embarked on its first foray into wholesale distance learning and its first online commencement. In May the school created its first “socially distanced” class photo for the class of 2020.

2020–22 While the campus was closed during the pandemic, 1726 Locust Street underwent a major restoration, which modernized some features (e.g., renovated classrooms, the installation of the Performance Innovation Lab, modern HVAC capabilities, and an elevator) and restored others, like the original woodwork and flooring. Modern improvements in fire safety enabled the removal of the glass enclosure around the main staircase and balcony—the bane of alumni from the 1960s forward—making the Common Room once again an inviting space for the Curtis community and visitors alike.

Barbara Benedett is the senior archivist and manager of curation and preservation at Curtis.

Three Curtis Trailblazers



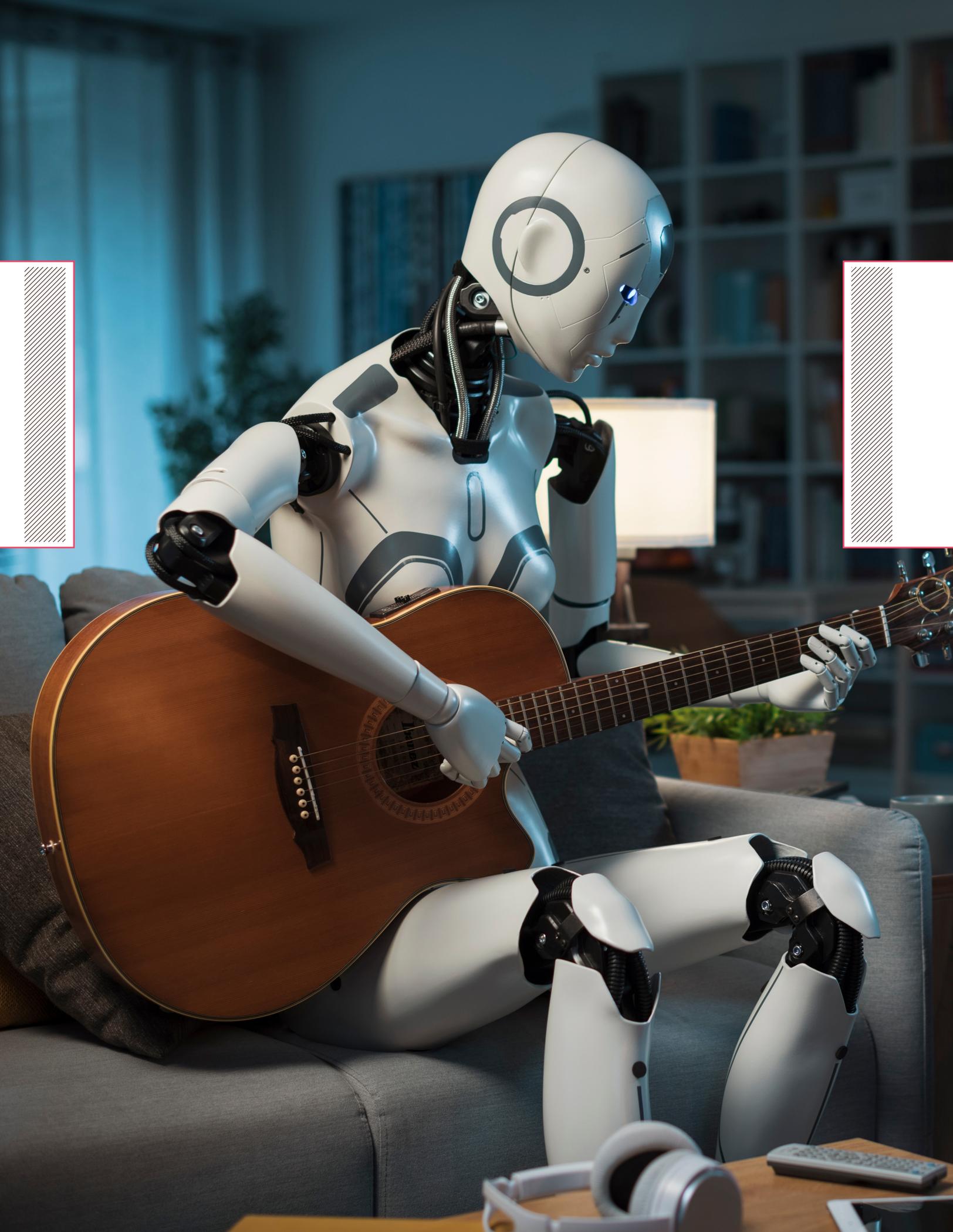
A violist, violinist, and pioneering record producer, **Alfred Brown** (Viola '52) began his career as a member of the NBC Radio Orchestra, under the baton of Arturo Toscanini. Entering the then-white, male-dominated studio recording business, Mr. Brown went on to produce albums by Lena Horne, Ron Carter, and the funk band Mandrill, among others. He toured with Ray Charles and Paul Simon and appeared on film soundtracks and in Broadway shows. He was honored with the coveted National Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences' Award for Most Valuable Studio Musician in 1984. Mr. Brown died in 2013 at age 84.



Fred Cardin (Violin '27), born in Oklahoma in 1895, was a member of the Quapaw Nation. Also known as Pejawah, he led a multifaceted career, performing early on with the Kansas City Symphony and as a member of the Indian String Quartet, an ensemble that toured on the Chautauqua Circuit. After graduating from Curtis, he settled in Reading, Pa., where he directed the Reading Opera Society and taught in the public schools. He composed numerous works including the *Cree War Dance* for violin and piano. Mr. Cardin died in 1960.



The first African American composer to win the Pulitzer Prize in music, **George Walker** (Composition and Piano '45) studied piano and composition at Curtis. He settled in New Jersey and worked in academia while composing more than 90 pieces, including the lush *Lyric for Strings* (1946). He also wrote concertos, string quartets, and a series of symphonies; his *Sinfonia No. 5* concerns the 2015 Charleston, S.C. church massacre. In addition to the Pulitzer, Mr. Walker received seven honorary doctorates, including one from Curtis, in 1997.



ENCRYPTED CAREERS

How technological advancements like AI generators and improved synthesizers are shaping the careers of studio musicians around the country.

BY JEREMY REYNOLDS



arner Music Group, one of the largest record labels in the world, made history in September when the group signed the first AI pop singer artist. The “artist,” Noonouri, dropped its debut track, “Dominoes,” on September 1, and in its first month alone, it racked up more than 200,000 views on YouTube and nearly half a million streams on Spotify. But here’s the kicker: Noonouri—also an Instagram influencer—isn’t a solo act. A real artist conceptualized its visual design. Real songwriters wrote the song’s music and lyrics. German DJ Alle Farben features on the track. In fact, the only thing about Noonouri that is actually digitally generated is her voice. And it shows—the track is a little raspy but flawless in a way that no acoustic human voice could ever imitate.

The same can be said of synthesized instrumental

music: “Yo-Yo Ma playing the cello sounds completely different from anyone else,” said conductor Sarah Hicks (Conducting ’99), who specializes the increasingly popular “live-with-film” concert productions in addition to classical performances with many top U.S. orchestras and artists. “There’s more humanity in the creation of sound than can ever truly be duplicated.” However, as

technology advances, there is concern about whether synthesized music and artificial intelligence will begin to displace professional musicians, mirroring the concerns of the writers and actors guilds in Hollywood.

“The studio industry in Los Angeles specifically has shrunk quite a bit,” said Nathan Farrington (Double Bass ’06), a bassist who recently scored Martin Scorsese’s film *Building a Bridge*. “I don’t know if this contraction is the result of less demand for live recordings in film and television, but as digital sound libraries and tech improves, it seems probable.”

While digital instrumental samples and generative AI music are making headline after headline in the music business, no one believes that they’ve yet reached a point where they’re indistinguishable from live performance, at least not to musically trained ears. What, then, is driving the contraction in studio jobs, and how are today’s musicians adapting to these technical developments?

SOUND ECONOMY

As with many other U.S. industries, the simple fact is that using automated synthesizers—and now AI—can be significantly cheaper than hiring live musicians, just like automating the fast-food industry was cheaper than hiring cashiers. Still, this isn’t a new phenomenon in the music world: “Live studio musicians have been replaced by tech for decades. It’s not a new trend due to AI,” Ms. Hicks said, continuing, “The number one driver is it’s more cost-effective. Live musicians are exceptionally expensive because of union regulations. Machines don’t need breaks or multiple takes. They absolutely don’t sound as good, but it can take a trained ear to tell the difference.”

Among the more famous examples of a synthesizer taking over for a live musician was the opening credit sequence of the blockbuster HBO show *Game of Thrones*, which handed its unmistakable cello solo off to a synthesizer instead of a cellist. “It sounds *terrible*,” said violinist Timothy Fain, whose studio credits include performances in the feature film *Black Swan* and another



HBO blockbuster show, *Succession*. “Synths drain out the life and emotion from the music, and people generally recognize this,” he added. Mr. Fain isn’t against using synths or AI as tools in the creative process for brainstorming or working through writer’s block, for example. But he’s convinced that the end result of using digital instruments instead of live studio musicians simply sounds cheap.

There’s nuance here, as the extent to which a “live” studio sound actually matters depends on what sort of music is scored. “When you have a more minimalistic score with simple, repetitive lines and with slow-moving melodies, then it’s not such a loss,” Ms. Hicks said, noting that, on the other hand, playing a John Williams score without live musicians simply can’t be done with any justice. “And there are still composers writing big orchestral music like Williams,” she said. The contraction taking place across the studio music industry to date has affected corporate and commercial video work—where the music is perhaps less important—more than in television and film scores, she noted. “Those are more formulaic, and cost will rule there.”

Then again, “Musicians are the ones using this tech, and musicians want to work with musicians,” said Gabriel Cabezas (Cello ’13), a prolific cellist who has performed on albums with famous artists ranging from Rufus Wainwright to Taylor Swift. “Maybe a movie executive wouldn’t be able to tell the difference between synthesizers and live musicians, but the people involved in actually creating the music are not going to be able to stomach it. There have been really sophisticated VSTs [virtual studio technology] around since before 2020. I don’t think the ability to create other sounds that aren’t live will completely change the field suddenly.”

OPPORTUNITY COST

In addition to improvements in synthesizers and emerging AI programs, the sophistication of recording equipment is also changing the studio landscape somewhat. “The equipment, the gear you need, and the software you need to make quality recordings of yourself—the cost has just gone way down,” said James Nova (Trombone ’96), a

trombonist in the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra who has a background in studio work that includes credits in the *World of Warcraft* video game soundtrack. “Apple has a student bundle discount for high-quality software for only a couple hundred bucks,” he said.

The lower costs have significantly reduced the barrier to entry for creating and producing music at home. “The democratization of the home studio is what started this torrential downpour of self-produced music,” said Mr. Farrington. “You’re no longer required to hear it in your head like composers and songwriters back in the day—



there’s instant playback and feedback.”

Is that translating to more studio work occurring in the home rather than at studio sessions in the wake of the pandemic? “Even before COVID, there were already musicians who had home recording studios,” said Mr. Cabezas. “But it’s definitely more popular in general now, especially if producers started working with you during the pandemic.” After all, contracting a musician to record at home is less expensive than booking studio time, and composers and producers alike have long taken advantage of that fact. Mr. Fain moved his family to a house in Montana years ago because it came equipped with a home studio. “It’s surprising how little one needs as far as equipment these days to record at this level,” he said.

For his part, Mr. Nova is sought by universities around the country for his skill in making “overdub” recordings, where he records himself playing multiple parts on multiple instruments and synching them together to produce a complete piece, a practice that exploded in popularity during the pandemic. Still, he said that while home recordings and overdubbing have become more popular, he doesn’t foresee them replacing live sessions





anytime soon. As above, it'll depend on the project. "The learning curve is too high," Mr. Nova said. "It takes a lot of patience and a lot of time, so it's not necessarily faster or cheaper to hire one person to do this instead of hiring multiple people at once in a studio."

The technical advancements in recording and production technology have actually opened the door to orchestras' biggest form of business currently: the live-with-film performances, where the musicians perform a soundtrack live underneath a screening of a film. Ms. Hicks, an early adopter of live-with-film, said that the industry has come far enough to become its own branch of the orchestra business, which requires significant labor to edit and create the scores and digital parts that make it

composers' arsenal.

Perhaps, then, the way forward is for musicians to embrace this tech. All the Curtis graduates interviewed here emphasized the importance of familiarizing oneself with new tech and software to help secure contracts. "Let's think about why we're musicians," Mr. Fain said. "Learning new skills quickly will be one of the most important skills, and that's part of the conservatory program."

Many performers who play studio contracts typically have a diversified portfolio of performance opportunities, a mix of film and television, and commercial and album work in addition to chamber and orchestral performances. "It is an absolute *must* for people to be fluent in this software," Mr. Farrington concurred, noting that many successful studio musicians are conversant in the tech in addition to being masters of their respective instruments. "How marvelous and capable these studio musicians are. It's just remarkable how they roll in and can do anything," he said. "They're a group of unbelievably capable musical ninjas."

Even the most sophisticated synthesizers and generative AI will require guidance from musicians. In 2019, an AI program on the Huawei Mate 20 Pro Android smartphone generated themes to complete Schubert's Symphony No. 8, the *Unfinished*. But because the tech couldn't actually develop and orchestrate the themes, a live human composer stepped in to do so. "Things are changing slowly, but I have a deep faith in the necessity for human touch," said Ms. Hicks. "At no point in the foreseeable future is AI going to generate something that hasn't already been thought of by a human. To be truly creative—I believe that's what makes us human."

Jeremy Reynolds is the classical music critic at the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette and the editor of OPERA America Magazine.

FAIN (VIOLIN) CREDIT: JOHN WALKER/JEEPFIsher MEDIA
 NOONOURI CREDIT: WARNER MUSIC GROUP
 GABRIEL CABEZAS CREDIT (RIGHT): ZOE PRINDS-FLASH



Left: Noonoori, Tim Fain, Sarah Hicks.
 Right: James Nova, Sarah Hicks conducting the San Francisco Symphony. Gabriel Cabezas.

possible to synch the orchestra with the film. "I remember running things on a single projection in the past, now multiple laptops. Everything is much more technologically advanced and *much* more refined," she said.

ART VS. ENTERTAINMENT

Ultimately, the question may be whether studios and directors are prioritizing music as an artistic aspect of their projects. There is a traceable historical line stretching from Mozart to Wagner to contemporary film and television composition, argues Mr. Farrington. "What Christopher Nolan is trying to do is certainly Wagnerian in scope," he said. "Take *Oppenheimer*. Nolan wants you to see it on the IMAX to be enveloped. And on the composition side, the most successful composers are concerned more with what best serves the film and amplifies the director's vision than composing in their own style." That doesn't mean composers should necessarily aim to use live musicians all the time, just as it doesn't mean all synthesized all the time. Farrington explained that synthesizers and AI will represent another tool in



REPRESENTING
MULTIPLE
GENERATIONS
AND DISTINCT
STYLISTIC
PATHS, STEVEN
MACKEY AND
JIJI ARE COMING
TOGETHER FOR A
NEW CONCERTO
FOR ELECTRIC
GUITAR.

BY MAYA MIRO JOHNSON

The Guitar Heroes

Since Steven Mackey joined Curtis's composition faculty in 2022, students and fellow teachers have come to know his conceptual and stylistic versatility, as well as his engaging stage persona as an electric guitarist. He rose to fame by writing works for himself on electric and various classical ensembles; this year, however, was the first time in his 40-plus year career that he took on crafting an electric guitar concerto for *another* great virtuoso of the instrument—Jiji (Guitar '15). *Aluminum Flowers*—commissioned by Curtis for a premiere with the Curtis Symphony Orchestra—traces the history of the guitar from the 600-year-old Spanish vihuela to contemporary pop, rock, blues, and jazz electric styles. Mr. Mackey and Jiji spoke with his student, Maya Miro Johnson, about their recent collaboration.

MAYA: Steve, you write in your program note for *Aluminum Flowers* that the piece celebrates the idea of “polymath guitarists.” What does that mean specifically?

STEVE: I think of the term polymath as someone who has mastered several disciplines. Guitarists, more than other instrumentalists, tend to do that. The nylon string classical guitar is conceived of as a polyphonic instrument. This is really a different instrument than the electric guitar, which has no resonating body and is more like the organ. Without pulling the stops to engage the pipes, there's no sound. Similarly, the

electric guitar, without effects pedals and an amplifier, really has nothing to offer.

MAYA: Steve, you've written lots of music for yourself. What's different about writing for Jiji?

STEVE: This is the first guitar concerto I've written that I don't think I would be the best person to play. Jiji is more of a polymath than I am! I am in admiration. There are some things that are right up my alley that I think might stretch Jiji. The last movement is based on looping. It's fast passage-work on electric guitar. The second movement has this delay echo pedal.

Those things, I think, will stretch Jiji, whereas they're more comfortable for me.

On the other hand, a governing metaphor is the evolution of the classical guitar. So, there's a quote of a [16th-century] piece by Alonzo Mudarra called *Fantasia*, a wacky piece with a lot of dissonance; the beginning is also nylon string guitar—pretty, polyphonic ... I couldn't do that.

MAYA: Jiji, even though you trained classically at Curtis—known for its hyper-specialization—you have such a broad practice as a performer. Did all your abilities and interests develop at different times, or were they always a part of you?

JIJI: At the beginning of my journey, I wanted to play electric. My parents bought me DVDs of Deep Purple, Santana, Prince, Jimi Hendrix, and Ritchie Blackmore, shredding the middle of *Highway Star*. I was eight years old, and I wanted to play in stadiums and be a rock musician. I wanted to get an electric, but my parents said no. The electric guitar was too loud for the apartment in Seoul, so they bought me a classical guitar. I was in this rigorous classical program in Korea. Then I came to the States, and I was a full-on classical



MACKEY: KAH POON
JJI: MARTY BRAH

guitarist ... but I was feeling burnt out and close to quitting music.

[What] changed my mind was attending the Bang on a Can summer festival in 2014 when I was a junior in college. I wanted to write my own music, but I felt like I wasn't allowed. So [BOAC] was an eye-opening experience. In the morning, we would practice and rehearse [new music], and at night, you could play whatever! I got asked to play with this band, and I thought, "Who cares! Music is music!" It always was part of me, but it all came out when I was 20 or 21. My senior recital ... was the first time Curtis ever had an electric guitar piece.

STEVE: I learned how to play the guitar by listening to Ritchie Blackmore, Jimmy Page, Jimi Hendrix, and guitarists of that time. So, for me, the new, exotic thing was classical music. It just seemed that classical music was aspiring to be the most that music could be. So, I had that same yearning, but for classical music.

MAYA: How does this piece go beyond the standard usage of the tradition of amplification?

STEVE: The classical guitar is the most ridiculously soft instrument. The best place to listen to the classical guitar is playing it!

JJJI: Guitarists are always locking themselves in their practice rooms!

STEVE: So we need to amplify that detail. With the third movement of *Aluminum Flowers*, the starting point for that was my appreciation of the sound of Carlos Santana and his singing tone. There's this one tune, in particular, *Samba Pa' Ti*. In *Aluminum Flowers*, the [Santana-esque tune] is amplified and distorted lyrically. The first movement is classical guitar. The second movement has this delay pedal that the guitarist has to keep up with. The fourth movement uses a crazy [prepared] guitar that I invented! You put a guitar pick through the lower string, so when you pluck them, they sound more like a gong than a guitar. And the left hand is

holding a bottleneck, so there's not a single "normal" note until Jiji puts that instrument down and grabs her classical guitar and [plays] this [Mudarra] quote from the 1500s. And the last movement again has the looping pedal, where she becomes her own orchestra...

MAYA: Jiji, so you're playing not only many distinctive styles of guitar but quite literally completely different physiologies of the instrument. What is the hardest thing about switching between them?

JJJI: I need to think differently. Classical is about resonance, but the electric guitar is about being precise with your sound and not having strings ring over. Also, the electric neck is way skinnier than the classical. I'm so used to stretching my left hand on my classical guitar. It's much tighter on electric, and it's like a totally different instrument.

STEVE: And for me, that's part of the theater of the piece. She starts off very simply: just her. A few instruments start to straggle in. And then the orchestra takes over from her. I'm looking forward to the theater of it: her putting down her classical guitar and strapping on the electric.

JJJI: I actually bought a new guitar! It looks so shiny and beautiful. I'm tributing this concert to Prince, so I'm going to have a fun jacket and pantsuit, fabulous high heels, big hair, big everything!

MAYA: And I'm sure a very big sound too!

To find out just how big everything will be, come hear Jiji's bedazzled premiere of Steven Mackey's *Aluminum Flowers* with Robert Spano (Conducting '85) and the Curtis Symphony Orchestra on March 9, 2024.

Interviews have been edited and condensed for clarity.



CURTIS
INSTITUTE OF MUSIC

NOTATIONS



Composition/ Conducting

1980s

Paul Brantley (Composition '85) this October held his sixth residency at MacDowell, the artist colony in Peterborough, N.H. During his residency, he composed *Mystery Sonata* for cello and piano, a commission from the cellist Laura Metcalf. Mr. Brantley is also a recipient of a Curtis centennial commission, to be premiered in 2024.

2000s

Adam Glaser (Conducting '00) in August became music director and conductor of Long Island's South Shore Symphony. Additionally, he conducted the New Jersey Symphony last January in two subscription concerts featuring **Hilary Hahn** (Violin '99) in the Sibelius Violin Concerto.

Sebastian Chang (Composition '07) composed a film score for *Nosferatu* (1922), which premiered live with the movie in the Louisville Orchestra's Halloween concert, conducted by **Teddy Abrams** (Conducting '08).

2010s



Dai Wei's (Composition '19)

new orchestral work *Invisible Portals* received a West Coast premiere by the Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra in October, conducted by Jaime Martín.



Strings

1980s

Alan Stepansky (Cello '81) was recently given the Peabody Conservatory's highest award for teaching, the Johns Hopkins University Alumni Association Excellence in Teaching Award for 2023. He is currently a professor of cello and chair of the strings department at Peabody.

1990s

Gloria Justen (Violin '90) in September launched String Sound Playground, an online learning platform and community for bowed-string players who are studying improvisation and composition.

Jenny Oaks Baker (Violin '97) and her children, comprising the musical group Family Four, are embarking on a 20-city U.S. tour this holiday season with their Christmas show, *Joy to the World! A Sacred Celebration*. Guest artists include Irish soprano Alex Sharpe, formerly of Celtic Woman.

The Formosa Quartet, of which **Jasmine Lin** (Violin '98) is a founding member, holds the title of McAndless Distinguished Professor at

Eastern Michigan University during the 2023–24 season. The quartet is also in residence at the University of Houston.

2000s

Efe Baltacigil (Cello '02) appeared with the Seattle Symphony, performing Shostakovich's Cello Concerto No. 1 in October. Later that month, he performed with the Chamber Music Society of Philadelphia, joining Curtis president Roberto Díaz, pianist Natalie Zhu, and clarinetist Ricardo Morales.

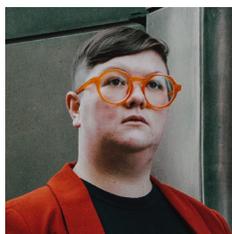
Former Eighth Blackbird sextet member **Yvonne Lam** (Violin '05) released her first solo album, *Watch Over Us*, in July, recorded on Blue Griffin. The album includes compositions for solo violin and electronics by women composers, including Anna Clyne, Missy Mazzoli, and Eve Beglarian.

Alexandra Osborne (Violin '06) was appointed associate concertmaster of the Sydney Symphony Orchestra in August. Previously, she was a violinist for the National Symphony Orchestra in Washington, D.C., a post she held for 13 years.

2010s

Rachel Kuipers Yonan (Viola '11) is a visiting scholar at Jesus College, University of Cambridge, for 2023–24. In this position, she is researching “the role of classical music in human flourishing.” She was also named the McDonald Agape Fellow in Music and Theology at Duke University, a position she will hold for three years.

In July **Katya Poplyansky** (Violin '14) was named first violinist of the Isabel String Quartet. The quartet is in residence at the Isabel Bader Centre for the Performing Arts in Kingston, Ontario.



Abi Fayette (Violin '17) has been appointed artistic director of the Orpheus Chamber Orchestra. Ms. Fayette's older sister, Madeline Fayette, recently joined the Orpheus cello section.

2020s



Danny Yehun Jin (Violin '23) has been named assistant principal second violin of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra.



Winds/Brass

1960s

John Russo (Clarinet '67) was featured as a composer

and clarinetist on two CDs released in June by the Contemporary Record Society. The first album, *The NYC & Philly Performance*, features three of his *Twenty Modern Studies*, as well as Weber's Clarinet Concerto No. 2 with Mr. Russo as soloist with the New York Chamber Players Orchestra. The second album, *Contemporary/Classic Chamber Music*, includes works by Mr. Russo and Max Reger.

1980s

Book of Birds, the second book by **Nadina Mackie** (Bassoon '81), was published in October by Friesen Press. The book features insights on the creative process, along with 60 paintings of birds by the author. The audio version of her first

book, *Solitary Refinement, Concepts for the Committed Bassoonist*, was published by Audible.

2000s

Tim Sawyier (Oboe '08), now a psychoanalyst, appeared as a guest on *The Conscious Artist* podcast, hosted by former classmate **Pallavi Mahidara** (Piano '10), in which they discussed psychoanalysis and musicians' mental health.

Achilles Liarmakopoulos

(Trombone '08) joined the trombone section of the Athens State Orchestra in May. He will continue touring as a member of the Canadian Brass and with the band Pink Martini.

Bavarian Blast

Two recent Curtis alumni—Hae Sue Lee (Viola '21) and Gabriel Polinsky (Double Bass '22)—won the top prizes at the 72nd ARD International Music Competition in Munich in August. The Curtis ties also included alumnus Andrew Grams ('03), who conducted the viola, double bass, and harp competition finals, as well as the first prize winner's concert.

Ms. Lee, who studied viola at Curtis with president and CEO Roberto Díaz, was awarded first prize in the viola category, valued at €10,000. She also received the €7,500 Osnabrück Music Prize, and the €1,000 Audience Prize. During the final round, she performed William Walton's Viola Concerto.

Mr. Polinsky won the €10,000 first prize in the bass category by performing the finale of Koussevitzky's Double Bass Concerto Op. 3. Currently the associate principal double bass in The Philadelphia Orchestra, he studied with Harold Hall Robinson and Edgar Meyer at Curtis.

"When I entered Hae Sue's and Gabe's dressing rooms, I was so pleased to see familiar faces from the times I had worked with the Curtis Symphony from before," said Mr. Grams, who conducted the Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra with the contestants. "I was even more happy to hear them play with those qualities that I identify with Curtis."

Curtis alumni clinch top prizes in Munich Competition.



Hae Sue Lee, Andrew Grams, and Gabriel Polinsky

Milestones

→ Faculty member **Benjamin Beilman** (Violin '12) married Tracy Vo on September 9 in a ceremony at Lundy Farm in Wawarsing, N.Y. Ms. Vo is a director in the private equity group at Elliott Investment Management.

→ **Timothy Dilenschneider** (Double Bass '14) announces the birth of his son, Alexander Azezi Dilenschneider, on June 29.



→ In July **Meredith LaBouff Piper** (Voice '13) and Dr. Walter Piper were married in Ramsey, N.J. Dr. Piper is a neuroscientist and research engineer at Neurable. In August Ms. Piper was promoted to assistant director of the Lindemann Young Artist Development Program at the Metropolitan Opera.

→ Yoori Kim Williams and **Patrick Williams** (Flute '14) announce the birth of their daughter, Leona, on September 29.

2010s

Austin Larson (Horn '14) joined the Singapore Symphony Orchestra as its principal horn in July.

In October **Alexander Lane** (Horn '19) became artistic administrator at the Brevard Music Center, overseeing all artistic operations, guest artist planning, and performances in the region.



Guangwei Fan (Trombone '19) has joined the Louisville Orchestra as second trombone. Additionally, he served as the guest bass trumpet player for the Guangzhou Symphony Orchestra's performances of *Das Rheingold* and served as a guest principal trombonist for the Shenzhen Symphony Orchestra's summer season.

2020s

James Vaughen (Trumpet '23) this fall joined the Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra for a one-year position as acting principal trumpet. Mr. Vaughen also serves as assistant principal trumpet of the Grant Park Orchestra.



Percussion

This fall **Raul Vergara-Montoya** (Percussion '02) became a

member of the advisory board of the Conservatory of Music of Fundacion Misericordia. His responsibilities include enhancing the musical quality and organizational structure of eight youth orchestras in southern Chile. He also became the executive producer of the Deutsche Schule La Serena and an international coordinator at the Festival Musical Bioceánico in Chile's Atacama Desert region.



Piano/ Accompanying

1970s

Beth Levin (Piano '71) is slated to tour Europe in March 2024, performing in Montreux, Munich, and Vienna.

Aglaia Koras (Piano '79) will perform an all-Beethoven concert at Carnegie Hall on December 15. This concert was originally scheduled for December 2020 to honor Beethoven's 250th birthday but was postponed due to the pandemic.

1980s

Folk-based chamber music compositions by **Ketty Nez** (Piano '83) are featured on the album *far sight sun light*, released in July by Albany Records. Along with Ms. Nez on piano, performers include Boston University alumni and members of the Denver-based Playground Ensemble.

In August **Audrey Axinn** (Accompanying '88) was

appointed interim director of chamber music at the Juilliard School, where she also teaches graduate studies courses.

2000s

FaceArt Institute of Music, a school founded in Shanghai by **Jenny Q Chai** (Piano '04), has successfully sent students to Stanford, Princeton, UC Berkeley, NYU, Tufts, Juilliard, and the Manhattan School of Music.

2010s

This year **Yue Chu** (Piano '13) was appointed to the piano faculty of the Music Middle School, an affiliate of the Shanghai Conservatory of Music.

George Fu (Piano '16) is part of an ongoing documentary film project called *Solitude with Schubert*, in partnership with the Platoon record label (and supported by the Young Alumni Fund at Curtis). The film tracks his performances of Schubert with soprano Lotte Betts-Dean during the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2024, the duo will record an album of music from the documentary.



Organ

James Vail (Organ '51), who turned 94 in March, retired the previous month as organist and choirmaster at St. Mary of the Angels Anglican Church in Los Angeles. He is a professor emeritus of choral and sacred music at the University of Southern California's Thornton School of Music.



Podcasters

Tuning In

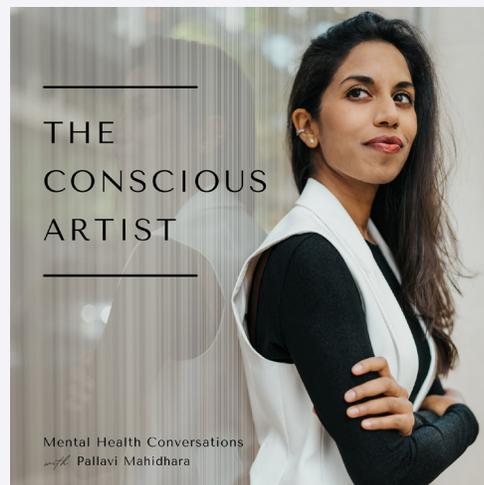
Curtis alumni connect with new audiences through the world of podcasts. **BY RYAN LATHAN**

→ **FOR THE PAST DECADE**, prominent academic journals, arts and culture magazines, influential bloggers, and media figureheads have touted the idea we are living in “the Golden Age of podcasting.” From true crime confessions and insightful political commentary to multimedia music programs such as NPR’s popular *All Songs Considered*, the digital medium—which has its roots in the episodic radio broadcasts of the 1930s and ‘40s—has seen a meteoric rise since the early 2000s. Until recent years, the classical music world had yet to embrace the format fully, but that trend is shifting, and three Curtis alumni are carving out a formidable presence in the competitive podcast landscape.

Following her time at Curtis, prize-winning Indian American pianist Pallavi Mahidhara (Piano ‘10) served as artistic advisor of the young artist program at the Escuela Superior de Música Reina Sofía in Madrid for several years. There, she created a two-week summer intensive, including workshops on wellbeing, performance anxiety, and mindfulness for musicians. In the fall of 2021, a colleague asked, “Why don’t you do a podcast?” Within two weeks, she had planned around 35 episodes worth of content. Providing Ms. Mahidhara with an invaluable source of inner healing, *The Conscious Artist* has become a way to reconnect with Curtis colleagues, dispel mental health myths, and discuss salient topics such as discrimination, motherhood, navigating grief and depression, overcoming imposter syndrome, and battling cancer. Now in its

fifth season, the podcast features guests—from classical musicians to writers, actors, singer-songwriters, dancers, doctors, and scientists—with Ms. Mahidhara serving as executive producer, writer, and host. In becoming a conduit for change, she has created a pathway to help others on their own healing journeys.

Curtis alumni often find their paths entwined both on and off the stage. Close friends and colleagues Joseph Conyers (Double Bass ‘04) and Yumi Kendall (Cello ‘04) of The Philadelphia Orchestra have sculpted careers as citizen artists and educators, guided by a belief in the transformative power of music. Eager to discuss their industry and its challenges, they launched *Tacet No More* this past summer. Together as hosts and writers, they enlisted the talents of “thought partners” and fellow musicians—producer Lindsay Sheridan and master audio engineer-producer Andrew Mellor—with a shared vision to “create a trusted space for positive discussions about classical music.” Having covered issues such as discrimination in the opera world and the divides between orchestras and their communities, Ms. Kendall and Mr. Conyers say they will continue to draw on the opinions of both artists and outside thought leaders as they plan their second season.



The Conscious Artist

Each season features twelve episodes and is recorded in Zencastr. Ms. Mahidhara then spends five to six hours editing and mixing in GarageBand, adds a pre-recorded intro and outro, along with her self-performed theme, Johannes Brahms’s *Variations and Fugue on a Theme by Handel, Op. 24*, and downloads the file. With Buzzsprout as her podcast hosting platform, she publishes episodes on Mondays. Her listeners span six continents. Follow Ms. Mahidhara on Instagram @consciousartistpodcast.

Tacet No More

The team recently beta-tested their first six-episode season and records in a private recording studio in Philadelphia where guests join them via Zoom. Mr. Mellor edits using Pyramix software and begins each episode with Igor Stravinsky’s *Firebird Suite*, chosen for its theme of rebirth. Using Captivate as the hosting platform, each episode is published on Tuesday mornings. To date, they have had over 2,500 unique listeners from 64 countries. Follow Mr. Conyers and Ms. Kendall on Instagram @tacetnomore.

HOW THEY DO IT

PETE CHECCHIA (KENDALL AND CONYERS)



Harp

In September **Abigail Kent** (Harp '17) became a harp fellow at the New World Symphony in Miami Beach, Fla. The position comes months after she graduated with a doctorate from the Juilliard School.



Voice/Opera

1960s
Fall 2023 marks the 50th anniversary of **Mary Lou Falcone's** (Voice '66) company, M.L. Falcone, Public Relations. In October her memoir, *I Didn't See It Coming: Scenes of Love, Loss, and Lewy Body Dementia*, was published by East End Press (see A Tempo, p. 5).

1970s
Sylvia Villarreal Bryson (Voice '72) composed and recorded two Christmas carols, "Christmas Symbols" and "St. Nicholas," both available online.



This fall **Sean Michael Plumb**

(Voice '15, Opera '16) returned to the Metropolitan Opera for performances of *La bohème* and to the Bayerische Staatsoper in Munich as the title character in *The Barber of Seville*.

Johnathan McCullough (Opera '17) has been named executive director of Fourth Wall NYC, a vocal ensemble dedicated to creative programming and supporting its artists with equitable pay, childcare, and healthcare support.

Emily Pogorelc (Voice '18) is scheduled to make her Metropolitan Opera debut next March as Lisette in *La Rondine*.

2020s
Surechul Charles Kim (Opera '22) recently performed in the 30th anniversary concert of the Wagner Society in Seoul, South Korea. Mr. Kim sang a variety of Wagner tenor roles.

Olivia Smith (Voice '23) is one of 11 recipients of the 2024 San Francisco Opera Adler Fellowship. A native of Kelowna, British Columbia, Ms. Smith is currently a first-year Adler Fellow, where last season, she made her main stage debut as the Voice of the Falcon in Strauss's *Die Frau ohne Schatten*.

Students

Micah Gleason (Conducting) is one of four 2023–24 participants in the Linda and Mitch Hart Institute for Women

Conductors at the Dallas Opera. She will conduct a showcase concert on January 28.

Oliver Talukder (Oboe) recently won the audition for second/assistant principal oboe in the Opera Philadelphia Orchestra.

Judah Taylor (Voice) took part in the Metropolitan Opera's production of *Fire Shut Up in My Bones*, which won a 2023 GRAMMY. Mr. Taylor will return to the Met this April for another series of performances.

In May **Tobias Vigneau** (Double Bass) was awarded first prize in the senior division of the first annual Santa Fe Symphony Orchestra and Chorus Concerto Competition. His placement earned him \$2,500 and the opportunity to perform a concerto with the orchestra this December in Santa Fe, N.M.

Faculty/Staff

In June **Matt Hagastuen** directed a documentary-style film featuring conductor Carl St. Clair, composer James MacMillan, and California poet laureate Dana Gioia, celebrating their collaboration with the Pacific Symphony and Pacific Chorale on the premiere of their choral work, *Fiat Lux*. The piece was composed to mark the consecration of Christ Cathedral in Garden Grove, Calif., and was also performed at the Renée and Henry Segerstrom Concert Hall.

Senior associate dean and Ruth W. and A. Morris Williams Jr. Chair of Liberal Arts **Jeanne Minahan McGinn** received a Lyric Fest commission for seven poems that have been set by composer Benjamin Wenzelberg. Titled *Any of Those Decembers*, the winter cantata for four voices, string quartet, flute, and piano premieres in December in Philadelphia.



Alan Morrison (Organ '91, Accompanying '93) performed a recital in June with soprano **Karen Slack** (Opera '02) at the CalPoly Performing Arts Center in San Luis Obispo, Calif. Along with works by Richard Strauss, Verdi, Cilea, and others, they performed Adolphus Hailstork's *Kamishi Seashore Song*, which was written for them and premiered two years ago.

In August **Emily Waters** and **Pete Williams** authored an article, "Forensic Cataloging: Managing Institutional Recordings through Changes in Professional and Technical Standards," which was published by the Music Library Association in the edited volume, *Managing Institutional Recordings*. The article discusses the history of Curtis's collection of recital recordings.



Then



Now

Then:

The original space held seating for 80 people. A 1929 *Overtones* article describes an “informal and pleasant [dining] room, with its wood-toned paneling and furniture, its open fireplace decorated with gay-colored tiles, and the windows high enough to catch the sunset glow which in late spring pours across nearby Rittenhouse Square at the dinner hour.” Faculty, staff, and students would gather for hearty meals and discussions of “musical personalities, technical problems, and ‘off-stage’ gossip.” Some of these confabs would continue over Wednesday afternoon tea in the Common Room—the cherished tradition that Mary Louise Curtis Bok started in 1925 and continues today.

Now:

The ashtrays are long gone and Gould Dining Hall, which opened in 2011, has increasingly focused on locally sourced and humanely raised food options. Bon Appétit Management Company, which provides food service operations, aims to purchase 20 percent of its food from small, owner-operated farms within 100 miles of Curtis.

“If you’re only ordering from farms within a hundred miles, you’re eating pretty seasonably,” Director of Dining Natalie Armentrout says of the greater focus on student wellness. “Of course, over the last ten or more years, culturally, you’ve seen a shift in people eating diets that are not as red meat based. They may not

Then and Now

Curtis Dining

Mealtime has traveled a long way since 1927, when Curtis opened its first cafeteria on the fourth floor of 1720 Locust Street, now home to the Rock Resource Center.

be vegetarian or vegan all the time, but there are terms like flexitarian—people who eat anywhere from one to five meals a week with no animal protein.”

The farm-to-fork approach involves suppliers like the Lancaster Farm Fresh Cooperative, which sources a produce market held every Thursday in the dining hall. Even more local is a roof garden on Lenfest Terrace. With ample sunshine, the garden supports tomatoes, jalapeños, and green peppers, which are harvested for salsa (canned for later

use), and herbs such as basil, which has been used in pesto.

Ms. Armentrout says that a typical day sees around 150 diners. Student favorites include a rotating, made-to-order “expo station,” featuring items like a loaded baked potato bar and an autumn-themed bar. And demonstrating how much tastes have changed since the 1920s, a recent kitchen specialty is “Monday sushi mania.” Says Ms. Armentrout, “I’m sure it is soon to become one of the favorites.”

BAILEY SPITERI (NOW)

Those We Have Lost



Vincent W. Barbee (Horn '77), a horn player and member of

the National Ballet of Canada for 40 years, died on July 28. He was 71 years old. Mr. Barbee was born on May 19, 1952, in Raleigh, N.C. and attended the North Carolina School of the Arts before attending Curtis. After graduating in 1977, Canada's National Ballet hired him for a national tour, which led to a permanent position. He moved to Toronto, where he

was also active as a freelancer. Described by his colleagues as kind and ready with a joke, he enjoyed dining out, cycling, and hiking. Mr. Barbee is survived by his brother, sister-in-law, and extended family.



Frederick Orville Lewis Jr. (Composition '63, '65), a pianist,

composer, and music teacher who was a tireless presence in Philadelphia musical life, died on October 7 at the age of 90.

Born in Philadelphia on September 16, 1933, Mr. Lewis received both his bachelor's and master's degrees at Curtis and later joined its board of directors. He taught music for four years at the Granoff School of Music, followed by eight years in the Philadelphia School District. His longest affiliation was with the Community College of Philadelphia, where he taught piano, composition, music history, theory, and other courses until retiring in 2009.

In his teens, Mr. Lewis was a gifted baseball player whose pitching won him a spot on the farm team of the Philadelphia Athletics (now the Oakland Athletics). But music was his first

calling, and while serving in the U.S. Air Force in the 1950s, he played in a band that accompanied Bob Hope and other visiting entertainers (he later played keyboards in the Monarchs, a Philadelphia band). After his discharge in 1957, Mr. Lewis married Despina Chletcos, who was his first adult piano teacher (and who taught piano from their Upper Darby, Penn. home). She died in 2016. Mr. Lewis is survived by their three children and six grandchildren.

For more obituaries, please visit Curtis.edu/in-memoriam. We welcome your news and updates for possible inclusion in a future issue. Please email us at overtones@curtis.edu.

(continued from page 11)

of Chicago, Black—and then connecting with this music of a composer who is trying to fight for the rights of his people and the children of Syria, is really powerful. I don't have to be a scholar of everything Syrian to try and play the music in a way that feels genuine.

We're talking on the one-year anniversary of the re-opening of David Geffen Hall at Lincoln Center. How does the renovated hall feel now? Has it changed the way that you do your job?

Yes. I really love the new hall. One easy thing to pinpoint is we can play with a soft touch and still be heard by the audience. The audience feels very intimate and very close to us. That has been a real pleasure for me, and to explore different rep-

ertoire, especially some of the concerti that we play. To be able to feel like I'm connected with everyone around us. And this is very important to remember: It's not supposed to be Carnegie Hall. Everyone uses that as the [benchmark]: 'Oh, it doesn't sound like Carnegie Hall!' But I don't think that was exactly the goal. We were trying to build a space where the audience can enjoy the music a lot better.

You have a full-time orchestra job, you teach at Curtis and at Juilliard, you play chamber music, and do many solo projects. How do you balance and prioritize all of this?

It's an interesting thing for my students to witness me doing. They see my tired eyes and I tell them I got off a plane from

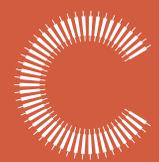
wherever for our lessons. So, they can kind of talk to me about how stressed and tired they are as students. And then we can talk about strategies for coping with things, and for managing the physical and mental challenges of being so busy. So, we actually talk a lot about how we all manage to live our lives, hopefully with a good attitude, and by trying to make things better. Basically, they get to learn that you're practicing all the time. Everything you do, you are learning. It doesn't stop just because you've accomplished a certain goal. I try to be very honest about what it's like out there.

We've found a photo of you and your brother, Demarre McGill (Flute '96), and Alan Morrison (Organ '91, Accom-

panying '93) together on "Mister Rodgers' Neighborhood" in 1994. What do you remember about this?

Oh yes, that's one of the highlights of my career! He asked us to be on an episode about the uniforms that people wear when they perform. So, we have this storyline that there was a concert coming up, and we were wearing bow ties. We were rehearsing in this church and Fred [Rogers] happened to be in the neighborhood. He came by and listened to us rehearsing a dress rehearsal. There was a little bit of acting involved. I was 14 or 15. We did Saint-Saëns's *Tarantella*, which we've had in our repertoire for all these years.

Interviews have been edited and condensed for clarity.



CURTIS
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Many Curtis alumni and friends feel a personal calling to make a difference, to leave a lasting impact on our friends, family, and the world we inhabit. You can leave a lasting legacy at the Curtis Institute of Music by including the school in your estate plans and becoming a member of the Founder's Society.

The Founder's Society recognizes individuals who have included Curtis as a beneficiary in their wills, trusts, retirement plans, and other estate planning arrangements. Its name honors Mary Louise Curtis Bok, who founded the Curtis Institute of Music in 1924, and in doing so, created an enduring legacy in classical music.

By including Curtis in your estate plans, you can create your own legacy here—joining Mrs. Bok and other dedicated friends. Contact the Development Department at Curtis at **(215) 717-3131** or **Giving@Curtis.edu** to learn more.





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ON THE COVER

1. Mary Louise Curtis Bok
2. Jorge Bolet
3. Fred Cardin
4. Leonard Bernstein
5. Anna Moffo
6. Efrem Zimbalist
7. Edna Phillips
8. George Walker
9. Lang Lang
10. Eric Owens
11. Alfred Brown
12. Gian Carlo Menotti
13. Joseph Silverstein
14. Samuel Barber
15. Rudolf Serkin
16. Arnold Steinhardt
17. Roberto Díaz
18. Hilary Hahn
19. Thaddeus Rich
20. Leopold Stokowski
21. Benita Valente
22. Max Rabinovitsj
23. Juan Diego Flórez
24. Lynn Kahle
25. Yuja Wang
26. Vincent Persichetti
27. Samuel Barber, Gian Carlo Menotti, Gama Gilbert
28. Students gather on Rittenhouse Square for Hoagies in the Square, 1995

