

Alumni Highlight

Rapid Reactions

From opera singer to content creator, **Elizabeth Zharoff** has persisted in a sometimes-fickle industry. **BY BRIAN WISE**

→ **When the soprano** Elizabeth Zharoff (Opera '12) launched her YouTube channel *The Charismatic Voice*, she wasn't too keen on reaction videos—a genre in which YouTubers deliver their responses to hearing well-known songs, comedy routines, or movies for the first time. But then she determined that there was a way to make it more substantial, even educational, by featuring deeper analyses of vocal styles. As of publishing time, Ms. Zharoff has 1.8 million YouTube subscribers, 7,000 donors to her Patreon account, and a five-member production team.

You take a more upbeat approach than some of the reaction roasts that one finds on YouTube, which can veer towards the snarky.

I grew up with both of my parents being teachers. My mom was a music teacher, and my dad was a middle school teacher, and I've learned from them that it's extremely important to point out first the good things, and I knew that on the channel, I didn't want to tear an artist down. Could I say 10 million negative things about performance? Yeah. But I wanted to use this as a way to boost performers and help people appreciate the music more. And so, picking out the positive things and talking about how those are done—like how they achieve this incredible high note—that felt much more natural.

Some of your most popular videos have featured heavy metal bands such as Pantera, Metallica and Iron Maiden. How do you explain that?

I think there are both surprising similarities and surprising differences between

metal and opera. And that is partly, at least, why it's so appealing. I think that the musicians in metal are extremely good. I hear these virtuosic solo guitar passages sometimes that I think are similar to a violin concerto. There's some really impressive musicianship that happens, and then it's the same deal for voice. They're both pushing the voice to the extreme. At the same time, they both are leaning into drama.

You spoke to Vince Ford's Digital Media Essentials course in September and noted how some 70 percent of your revenue comes from the clicks on your videos alone (via the advertising that YouTube sells against them). That's remarkable.

The views that we have are extraordinary. There are so many things that have to be perfectly in place to be making 70 percent of your revenue through views. But some people will make it and get to that. I think that the most common model I've seen working is a combination of things that includes



views, [paid] memberships, and often some sort of online training: teaching a course or lessons. Originally, the course and lessons were where I thought our main revenue model was going to go.

So, what happened?

If you have a billion views on a video that is 60 seconds and a million views on a video that is 60 minutes, the 60-minute video is going to make so much more money. The [number of] views don't directly translate to money. It's views for a longer duration of time that will translate to more money. We've got a lot of long-form content. Most of our videos are hanging out around 25 or 30 minutes. I think that's a little lucky. We got to that without doing it intentionally, and then realized it was really great for monetizing.

You also told Vince Ford's class that the average career span of a video content creator is about two years, according to one analysis. You've been at this a lot longer. How do you keep evolving?

So, this two-year metric I heard at a conference was given by people who are doing a lot more short-form content and on platforms that tend to reward creators with an instant viral moment—like TikTok—and do not necessarily reward longevity. But I don't think it applies to long-form creators. And there's a clear delineation: I think long-form will be able to last for a long time, whereas short-form is often following trends that come and go. I do think trends in music could shift, and that might affect me, and we develop with them. But we've been very careful to broaden our reach in music, and never get stuck in one particular area.

the United States Army Old Guard Fife and Drum Corps and will be stationed at Joint Base Myer-Henderson Hall as of December.

2020s

James Vaughen (Trumpet '23) joined the Detroit Symphony Orchestra as assistant principal trumpet. In December he solos with the Nürnberger Symphoniker in Nürnberg, Germany, the result of winning first prize and the audience award in the 2023 Aeolus International Competition for Wind Instruments.



Percussion

1990s



Victor Yerrid (Timpani and Percussion '92) produces two new shows this season, *Halloween Fandemonium* and *Leopold Loves Opera*, for his original family concert series with the Pacific Symphony at Segerstrom Concert Hall in Costa Mesa, Calif.

2000s

Patricia Brennan (Timpani and Percussion '08) released her septet album *Breaking Stretch* on Pyroclastic Records in September.



Piano/ Accompanying

1960s

William Dawson (Piano '65) was named professor emeritus at the New World School of the Arts in Miami. His musical drama *Refuge: The Love Story of Ruth* will be performed in March 2025 at Florida Gulf Coast University.

Lambert Orkis (Piano '65) joined his longtime recital partner, violinist Anne-Sophie Mutter, for concerts in August and October in Germany, Denmark, and Austria.

Craig Sheppard (Piano '68) performed Chopin's complete nocturnes at London's Westminster Cathedral for the Chopin Society UK in June. He held the 14th annual Seattle Piano Institute at the University of Washington alongside Dr. Robin McCabe in July.

1970s

Andrew Willis (Piano '72) has been appointed artistic consultant at the Cornell Center for Historical Keyboards.

1980s

In February, Albany Records will release *through the light*, featuring works by **Ketty Nez** (Piano '83), including the title work for string quartet.

Audrey Axinn (Accompanying '88) joined the faculty

at Manhattan School of Music and the Tianjin Juilliard School in fall 2024, teaching courses in fortepiano and performance practice. She is also on the Juilliard faculty in New York and at Mannes School of Music.



Organ

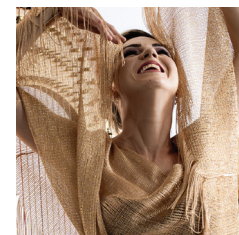
2000s

Naxos released a recording in August featuring organist **Paul Jacobs** (Organ '00) as soloist with the Nashville Symphony conducted by Giancarlo Guerrero. The album includes Charles Ives' *Variations on America* for solo organ and organ concertos by Horatio Parker, Wayne Oquin, and Christopher Rouse.



Harp

2010s



Coline-Marie Orliac (Harp '10) has been appointed solo harp of the Spanish National Orchestra in Madrid.