

Curtis Overtones

VOL. XLVIII, NO. 2 | FALL 2025



Frontline Performers

Alumni find unexpected career paths in the military.

PLUS

Repertoire
Trailblazers

How to Improve
Competitions

Inspiring
Instrument Cases

Curtis

Join us in 2026 to experience music-making at its highest level—and the energy and excitement of extraordinary young talent. Curtis continues its season filled with orchestral brilliance and sweeping romantic symphonies, cutting-edge contemporary music, a world premiere, and captivating operas that take you on journeys of magic, myth, and faith.



2025/26 Season Curtis Sounds Like This.

Jan 25: **Osmo Conducts Bartók** | Orchestra

Feb. 26 & 28: **La Passion de Simone** | Opera

Mar 26: **Yannick Leads Mahler & Dawson** | Orchestra

Apr 4: **Portrait of Jessie Montgomery** | New Music Ensemble

Apr 30 & May 2: **A Midsummer Night's Dream** | Opera



Curtis alumni are entitled to complimentary tickets for mainstage performances. Email tickets@curtis.edu for details.

FALL
2025

Contents

02

From the Office of the Provost

Nick DiBerardino introduces the changes to the musical studies curriculum.

A Tempo

03 Curtis' offices get a glow-up, new faculty arrive, and a new organ comes to Field Concert Hall.

07 SOUND OFF
How can music competitions be improved?

10 THE Q+A
Composer in residence Jessie Montgomery talks about inspirations and overcoming writer's block.



The Marine Chamber Orchestra

12

Marching Orders

Military ensembles can offer a stable career and a viable alternative to civilian orchestras. But they also mean boot camp—and culture shock.

18

Champions of Neglected Repertoire

How musicians use their powers of persuasion to promote new and offbeat work.

22

Case Stories

When string players use their instrument cases to stay motivated.

Notations

- 24** Alumni
- 27** Faculty
- 27** Students
- 28** Those We've Lost

Curtis Overtones

is the semiannual publication of the Curtis Institute of Music.

1726 Locust Street
Philadelphia, PA 19103
(215) 893-5252

curtis.edu

Roberto Díaz
President and CEO

Brian Wise
Editor

Patricia K. Johnson
Vice President of
Communications

Jamie McCrary
Associate Director of
Communications

Contributors
Isabel Cárdenes
Hannah Edgar
Kristen Manka-White
Heidi Waleson

Art Direction
Michael Wilson

ISSN: 0887-6800
Copyright 2025
By Curtis Institute of Music



FROM THE OFFICE OF
THE PROVOST



→ **WHAT DOES IT** take to become a “musical leader?” In 1924, Mary Louise Curtis Bok pledged “the full resources of the Curtis Institute of Music” to answer that question. In Curtis’ 101st year, we celebrate her legacy and continue to invest in her visionary ideals as we train the future leaders of our art form.

This school year, Curtis has invested in that future in many ways—including by reshaping its musical studies curriculum. Musical skill-building at Curtis, rigorous as ever, now centers on increasingly individualized and interdisciplinary learning environments. The goal: to best develop reflective, well-rounded artists who are empowered to cultivate their own distinct voices.

The new curriculum makes several creative shifts. For one, students learn core musical concepts in a multidisciplinary context. Musical studies now connects organically to topics in the humanities and sciences. A new set of “musical mechanics” courses integrates learning outcomes that were previously taught separately, including keyboard skills, counterpoint, and music theory.

Individualized instruction is a significant point of emphasis. Solfège and keyboard studies, previously offered in group settings, are now taught in one-on-one tutorials. Students also receive individual applied musicianship tutorials uniquely tailored to their specific needs.

The new curriculum meets this century’s demand for a broader approach to repertoire. The coursework incorporates music from every era, covering an expanded canon—from Palestrina and Monteverdi through the present day—while focusing less narrowly on the common practice period. A greater emphasis is placed on contrapuntal improvisation, group sight-singing, and dictation. There are new offerings in world music, jazz theory and improvisation, historical improvisation, and composition for non-majors. A capstone project now completes the final year of study.

In this new curriculum, music is heard, felt, and embodied. Curiosity, creativity, and critical thinking are always at the forefront. The goal is to meaningfully connect the analytical skills and historical knowledge learned in the classroom to lessons and performances. But most importantly, it aims to foster lifelong learners who are deeply curious, forward-looking, and able to achieve the highest levels of artistry.

There’s much to learn in this issue of *Overtones*, including how military bands can offer a stable career path for classical musicians—though not without some tradeoffs, as Heidi Waleson writes in her cover story (p. 12). Hannah Edgar looks at how musicians summon their powers of persuasion to get new and obscure repertoire before receptive audiences (p. 18).

In *Sound Off*, four musicians propose ways to improve competitions (p. 7). Jessie Montgomery, Curtis’ 2025–26 composer in residence, talks about writing music that speaks to present-day issues (p. 10). Plus, we peek inside the newly renovated offices at 1718 Locust Street and discover the creative and meaningful ways students decorate their instrument cases.

Please enjoy, and join us in the spirit of curiosity, creativity, and critical inquiry.

Nick DiBerardino

Provost and Dean of the Conservatory, Rock Chair in Composition Studies

A TEMPO



The Curtain Rises on Revamped Offices

Curtis' historic office building reopens
after summer renovations.

THE TOWNHOUSE-TURNED-CURTIS OFFICE building at 1718 Locust Street has seen a lot of history, and in recent times, it didn't always flatter: Soot and grime covered the building's brick façade, worn carpets lined the floors, and the roof was a growing concern.

No longer.

This past September, Curtis finished a three-month renovation of the English Baroque-style edifice. The façade was power-washed, walls repainted, carpets torn up, hardwood floors polished, and a new roof installed. Security upgrades were made. Displaced departments—including human resources, admissions, student services, and finance—began returning in August.

The refurbishment of the 7,800-square-foot building was led by C. Erickson & Sons, a Philadelphia firm that also oversaw the new organ installation in Field Concert Hall and will lead the refurbishment of the Art Alliance building, which was damaged in a fire in July (see page five).

John McFadden, a Curtis trustee and enthusiast of historic buildings, has been a lead supporter of the



renovation. “If you have a cost structure that prevents you from taking care of buildings, they decay,” he said of the need to invest in upkeep. “If you don’t take care of things, you turn an asset into a liability. I don’t like turning assets into liabilities.”

When Curtis bought 1718 Locust Street in 1988, its years as a single-family residence were long past. The mansion, built in 1903 and once home to some prominent Philadelphia families, had taken on a second life as offices for law firms and nonprofit organizations (including the Greater Philadelphia Cultural Alliance). While a ground-floor kitchen was removed, much of the original decorative trim, moldings, and wood paneling survived.

“It was not vandalized in the worst way,” Mr. McFadden said of the late 20th century updates. “The important rooms are scarcely touched.”

Especially striking is the former drawing room on the second floor, an oak paneled space that will soon become an elegant conference room (Barbara Eberlein, a noted interior decorator, worked on the refurbishment). On the same floor, a former dining room now gleams with rococo moldings and a gilt mirror above a fireplace. Overstuffed bookshelves that once lined the connecting hallway have been moved.

A Luthier Workshop

The fourth floor has undergone bigger changes. Originally dominated by six servants’ bedrooms, and more recently, temporary practice rooms, it now contains offices and a new luthier workshop. An airy room with a U-shaped workbench, the workshop is filled with every tool of the trade: carving implements, paint brushes, glues, pigments, dyes, abrasives, varnishes, a drill press, disc sander, and other tools.

“The proximity makes it more convenient for people to take better care of their instruments,” said Christo Wood, the resident violin maker whose previous workshop was over a mile away. “One thing I get to do is build relationships with the students and help them understand what it takes to take care of a great instrument.”

Numerous amenities have been added to the building. They include new central air conditioning, security cameras, hallway lighting, card readers, and intercoms. But certain quirks remain. Calling himself a “basement enthusiast,” Mr. McFadden marvels at the original artifacts in the cellar, including an early hot-water cylinder (the room was originally used for coal storage).

Mr. McFadden says he was motivated by a personal connection to the neighborhood and its architecture. His great grandfather and great uncle both owned homes on Rittenhouse Square, though neither building remains. “I have a degree of nostalgia for the preservation of what’s left,” he said, adding, “Buildings are nice. They don’t argue with you.”



The main console and auxiliary console for the Dobson Opus 100 in Field Concert Hall.

Organ Project Moves Closer to Completion

More than 4,600 pipes will come to life this spring.

Commuters heading to Locust Street one July morning faced an unusual detour: An organ was blocking the road. Workers from Dobson Pipe Organ Builders were unloading a semi-truck containing part of the Opus 100, the new organ destined for Field Concert Hall. A second delivery arrived two weeks later and so began the process of installing the instrument that would serve Curtis’ organ department.

The organ parts came from the Dobson factory in Lake City, Iowa. The components were gingerly moved, first to the basement beneath Field and then upstairs as the pipes were mounted in the walls adjacent to the stage. While most pipes were installed by early September, the painstaking work of voicing them is expected to take until late February.

Voicing involves “determining the quality of sound we want out of each specific stop,” said Haas Charitable Trust Chair in Organ Studies Alan Morrison (’91). “We came up with a complete description of every stop on the organ, how we wanted it to sound, and how it should blend with other lengths of pipes.”

The Opus 100, some seven years in the making and costing \$4.5 million, boasts 4,698 pipes and 73 ranks (a set of pipes of the same timbre). The main console consists of four keyboards (called manuals) with 61 keys each and 32 pedals. An auxiliary console, to be solely used for teaching purposes, includes two 61-note manuals and one 32-note pedal board.

The Opus 100 replaces a 1941 Aeolian-Skinner organ, which had reached the end of its lifespan. Mr. Morrison and his students will get an initial chance to demonstrate the new instrument at a March 6 concert with Curtis brass players followed by an official unveiling on March 31.

Curtis Adds New Voice, Instrumental Teachers

The start of the 2025–26 school year brought a wave of appointments to Curtis' teaching studios, as the school expands its instrumental and vocal faculty. Here is a rundown.



Instrumental Faculty

The highest-profile appointment has been that of **Yuja Wang** (Piano '08), who will come aboard as an artist collaborator in the 2026–27 school year. Though her role will be different from that of a traditional faculty member, it will potentially include master classes, coachings, and other projects.

"I live in New York, so I could teach at Juilliard," Ms. Wang told the *Philadelphia Inquirer*. "But Curtis for me holds something special, and there's something endearing about that."

In August, Curtis added several other instrumentalists to its faculty roster: Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra principal bassoon **Julia Harguindey** ('13), Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra associate principal trumpet **Conrad Jones**, Metropolitan Opera Orchestra principal flute **Chelsea Knox**, and groundbreaking harp soloist **Noël Wan**.

Additionally, Imani Winds announced last summer that **Mekhi Gladden** (Oboe '22) would join

the ensemble and Curtis' chamber music faculty, taking over from founding member Toyin Spellman-Diaz.

The new hires mean that every instrumental department at Curtis now has a minimum of two faculty members, allowing students to glean multiple perspectives through their studies. Often, these can be quite distinct from one another: Ms. Wan's background as a soloist in jazz, pop, and avant-garde styles, for example, complements that of Elizabeth Hainen, who is principal harp of the Philadelphia Orchestra.

Vocal Studies Faculty

In October, Curtis added six prominent artists to the voice faculty, three of whom are alumni: bass-baritone **Patrick Carfizzi**, bass-baritone **Alan Held**, baritone **Elliot Madore** (Opera '10, Voice '09), soprano **Amanda Majeski** (Opera '09), soprano **Jennifer Rowley**, and soprano **Karen Slack** (Opera '02). Both Ms. Slack and Ms. Majeski will take on leadership roles in addition to their teaching responsibilities: Ms. Slack will serve as a creative advisor for the department while Ms. Majeski will be a pedagogical advisor.

Stage director and writer **John Matsumoto Giampietro**—already a member of the Curtis faculty—will serve as dramatic advisor, acting instructor, and resident stage director. The department is led by Miloš Repický, director and Hirsig Family Chair in Vocal Studies and Opera.

Lastly, the department has announced three new visiting faculty members: mezzo-soprano **J'Nai Bridges** (Opera '12), baritone **Jarrett Ott** (Opera '14), and bass **John Relyea** (Opera '96).



Art Alliance Building Repairs Begin

Repairs are underway at the Philadelphia Art Alliance building after a July 4 fire tore through the historic structure, which Curtis had acquired six months earlier. The school remains committed to the former mansion at 251 S. 18th Street, which it purchased for \$7.6 million from the University of the Arts bankruptcy. Work involves bracing the interior and adding structural materials to keep the walls intact. The roof and sides are now wrapped in a fire-retardant, recyclable plastic enclosure that's secured by scaffolding and designed to withstand snow build-up during the winter months.

The cause of the fire is undetermined, according to the Philadelphia Fire Marshal's Office. As work continues to stabilize and clean the structure, the school says it is striving to ensure the safety of workers and Rittenhouse Square neighbors while planning for the building's future use.



THE PLAYLIST

Chelsea Knox

WHEN COMMUTING BETWEEN Manhattan, where she's principal flute of the Metropolitan Opera Orchestra, and her home in Westchester County, New York, Chelsea Knox often gets some quality time to plan activities for her three children—or indulge in a podcast or three. Since joining the Curtis flute faculty in August, her travel radius has grown.

A painter as well as a musician, Ms. Knox is especially attuned to different art forms. She tells us about what she's been enjoying recently.

Book: “The Met is opening its season with *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier & Clay* by Mason Bates. It's based on the novel by Michael Chabon, which I re-read this past summer. When I first met my husband, he gave me a copy and recommended it. I took notes of things I liked, so we'd have things to talk about on our early dates. I read it a decade ago, and it was nice to come back to it. The opera adaptation is very different.”

Movie: “I have three kids and, right now, everyone is very into *KPop Demon Hunters*. We listen to it in the car all the time. I have three-year-old twins, and they bust out all the moves and just want to listen to it on repeat. It's well done and the animation is beautiful. The movie centers around a girl K-Pop band, and they're a force of good, and they're fighting a demonic K-Pop boy band.”

Museum: “I live in Westchester County, so we go to Storm King [Art Center] pretty often. I especially like Alyson Shotz' *Mirror Fence*. It's a mirror that reflects the landscape, the viewers, and the changing light. It's one of our favorite things to go and engage with.”

Album or Song: “My kids love the artist Danny Go. He's a YouTube performer, but the music is really good. As a parent, you can appreciate the entertainment value. We actually just saw him at Madison Square Garden. He sings children's songs with a club beat, but they're very imaginative and fun. I appreciate the work he puts into making songs parents don't hate to listen to.”

Podcast: “I listen to *10% Happier* with Sam Harris on the train or whenever I have a free minute. It's a meditation-centered podcast with interviews and a focus on mindfulness. There are a lot of interesting insights into performance anxiety. Because he has so many high-profile interview guests, a lot of them deal with similar things to what we as performers also deal with.”

Restaurant: “I'm very new to exploring Philadelphia. But one find is K'Far. They have really amazing baked goods. Every time I go, I must bring back pistachio sticky buns for my family and co-workers.”

SOUND
OFF

How Can Competitions Be Improved?

Four musicians recommend new best practices.

BY BRIAN WISE

Pamela Frank

Violin faculty member, concert violinist

→ As a teacher and concert violinist, Pamela Frank has seen competitions and prizes from all angles. She has chaired the jury of the Menuhin Competition and served on jury panels at the Indianapolis, Queen Elisabeth, Michael Hill, and Young Concert Artists competitions. She says an ideal competition has the ambience of a festival and “should be a healthy, enjoyable, pleasurable, and even friendship-fostering experience.”

BLIND PRE-SELECTION: “If I were a contestant, what would lead me to one competition over another is the ethics of it, or at least the perception of fairness. The Indianapolis [International Violin Competition] does a great thing in which the pre-selection is done all live by three jurors in the same room, listening in realtime with a proctor. Now, I would even

modify that. I would say, in the effort to be fair, nobody would read résumés, even in the pre-selection process, and it would be blind, not by video. It would just be listening, without seeing or knowing anything about the candidate.”

TEACHERS AND THEIR STUDENTS:

“The definition of a teacher needs to be extremely specific. It should be made known to all the potential jurors ahead of the competition. Usually, it’s not specific enough. Some competitions [require disclosure] if you’ve given two to three lessons in the last year; I would say it would have to be at least one or two lessons in the last two to four years. Furthermore, you’d have to disclose master classes. But the other way to eliminate problems is just to say that current students of jury members are not eligible.

JURY MAKEUP: “I would advise having fewer teachers and more diverse types of

professionals on the jury. The smallest proportion should be the teachers—even though I am one—and then performers, other kinds of educators, managers, critics, presenters, or other instrumentalists.”

PRIZES: “For me, the competitions that help the student most are not, ironically, the ones that just provide money, but [those] that provide support. Management and mentorship, to me, are the most important.”

REPERTOIRE: “I would want as broad and diverse [repertoire] demands as possible. You’d curate your own recital program just to see what kind of artistic vision or voice you have. You would play chamber music. You would lead a chamber orchestra without a conductor and play a concerto. And besides the commissioned piece, I would have an improvisation round, which is what the Menuhin Competition used to do, to see how creative you are on the spot.” →



Monica Ellis

Chamber music faculty, bassoonist, Imani Winds

→ At the 2001 Concert Artists Guild (CAG) International Competition, Imani Winds was chosen as an Educational Residency Ensemble, placing it on a circuit of community education events. The honor “really honed in on the type of skill set needed the most” for chamber groups, says founding bassoonist Monica Ellis. She now sits on the board of directors for CAG, a role that has given her a window into the competition process. Recently, CAG announced it is ending its annual competition in favor of smaller, local auditions that will take place throughout the year.

ADJUDICATION PROCESS: “I judged the [Fischhoff National Chamber Music Competition] about four years ago, and that was my first time judging. That was a very interesting adjudication process. Nobody talked to each other. You go in expecting to deliberate, but it’s actually just the opposite. As a judge, for every round, you put your choice in the hat and then somebody takes that hat, counts the votes up and then, ‘Here’s the answer.’”

MORE DIVERSE JURIES: “For there to be more diverse winners, there must not only be a more diverse jury but also more diverse applicants. So, what’s the organization doing to help? From the jury’s point of view, there’s got to be a lot of opinions in the room. There can’t just be one or two people deciding who is going to be on the jury, from the tape round all the way to the final round. You ask ten people and only five can do it, so make sure that the ten people to begin with are from diverse groups.

BROADER TALENT POOLS: “For the pool of applicants, you have to work a little bit harder. Some of the most basic things: Did the marketing go out to a wide variety of locations that have chamber music programs, or did it only [reach] the top five conservatories around the country? Don’t just wait for all the applicants to come to you. You must go to various applicant pools and think outside the box.”

Haochen Zhang (Piano ’12)

Concert pianist

→ Because Haochen Zhang was just 19 when he won the 2009 Van Cliburn Competition, he says he quickly put aside the need to chase more prizes. He never had to face competition burnout or worrying about matters of fairness or transparency. “Afterwards, I was like ‘I’m done with this!’ I didn’t really think about what the jurors were thinking, and what I could have done differently.”

At the same time, Mr. Zhang believes that competitions can have a vital place in classical music, if managed properly. “Of the different art forms, music is the closest to sport,” he says. “I’m not saying they are similar—not at all. But in comparison with other arts—[whether] movies, photography, painting, or novels—there’s a certain kind of athleticism associated with the virtuosic quality of instrumental or vocal music as a performing art.”

JURY FEEDBACK: “I had a lot of friends who were in competitions, and I did see some controversial results: When I thought some of my friends played well, they didn’t advance to the next round. Some people whom I thought were less deserving went forward to the final and even won the competition. I don’t have a definitive answer, but if the jurors can write down comments everybody can see after each round for each competitor, that might help the transparency of the competition—and form a healthier discussion around the musicians’ playing.”



PRIZES: “One of the reasons I attended the Cliburn instead of other top-tier competitions was because I felt they didn’t just want to produce a winner; they wanted to build a platform for making a real concert pianist. The reason is they have this automatic three-year [management]. It’s not, ‘We have a winner here whom we’ll throw to the market and see which management wants to take our medalist.’ It’s more like, ‘We want to take care of the medalist, provide support after they win, and give them concert exposure.’ That’s what I value the most.”

ONLINE PUNDITS: “A competition is like a social media event. Sometimes, you see this gap between the viewers online and the jurors’ decisions. In that regard, if the jurors could write comments about each contender, it might help merge this gap between the juror and the online viewers, and it might form a better public discussion about music and music playing.”



Timothy Chooi (Violin '17)

Violinist, faculty at the University of Ottawa

→ Timothy Chooi’s lengthy competition credits include the top prize at the 2018 Joseph Joachim International Violin Competition Hanover and second prize at the 2019 Queen Elisabeth Competition. Recently appointed head of the string department at the University of Ottawa, he calls himself “a big supporter of competitions.” Still, he sees room for improvement. Competitions can help an artist break into new countries or markets, but they don’t offer a catch-all career boost.

PERSONALITY SHOWCASE: “If I were designing a competition, I would model it like a German competition, like ARD, Hanover, or Stuttgart, and put a lot of weight on the repertoire. But I would like there to be rounds where the artist’s [personality] really shines through as well. I would create something where the performer had to compose something. I think a lot of competitions are very general right now.”

TEACHERS AND STUDENTS: “Any time I’ve had any relationship in terms of teaching or mentoring a participant, I’ve always recused myself [from voting]. In that sense, I’m proactive about that. I think it’s obvious, but everybody has a different moral code when someone should recuse themselves. When you have your girlfriend or boyfriend in a competition, you need to recuse yourself. That is pretty obvious to me, but you’d be surprised how often that doesn’t happen. As a teacher, any mentorship over the last ten years, I would recuse myself. If it’s a master class at a festival from three to five years ago I would think twice, but I don’t think it’s as big of a deal.”

ADVICE TO STUDENTS: “I advise every [student] to have a goal. Some would include competitions, many not. It’s not for everybody. It’s a specific mindset and everything is already a competition, in some ways.”

Interviews have been edited and condensed for clarity.



THE Q+A

Jessie Montgomery

Curtis' 2025–26 composer in residence is a voice of our time.

→ **WHEN CHUCK D** of Public Enemy famously called hip-hop “the Black CNN,” he was touching on a larger idea that goes beyond genre: Music and current events have always been closely connected. The composer Jessie Montgomery recognizes this. She has frequently used her work to engage with contemporary issues, including global unrest (*Divided*), New York City street life (*L.E.S. Characters*), the speeches of prominent activists (*I Have Something to Say*), and the ideals behind the U.S. national anthem (*Banner*).

But Ms. Montgomery isn't easily pigeonholed, and her interests range farther afield—from the cosmos in *Starburst* and nature's infinite patterns in *Rounds* to the chemical reactions in *Chemiluminescence*, which the New York Philharmonic premiered last April. This April, Curtis New Music Ensemble will present her Concerto Grosso and *Musings* for two violins, each inspired by earlier historical eras and composers.

A Manhattan native with degrees from the Juilliard School and New York University, Ms. Montgomery wrote some of her earliest works for the PUBLIQuartet and the Catalyst Quartet, two intrepid string quartets in which she played the violin. More recently, her performance outlets include the eclectic Everything Band and a violin-double bass duo called big dog little dog.

*Overtone*s spoke with Ms. Montgomery on a video call from her home in Chicago, where she recently finished a three-year residency with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra. We began by discussing her role as Curtis' composer in residence for the 2025–26 season.

BY
BRIAN
WISE

You'll be at Curtis in April to lead a master class and participate in a concert featuring your music. What do you focus on when teaching college-level composers? And what is foremost on students' minds?

At a school like Curtis where the students come in well-honed, there may be holes and things that have to be fine-tuned, but I find that I get the opportunity to discuss more artistic desires. So, the master classes tend to center around who the student is and what their interests are: ‘What are the things that catch your attention in music? That's the well from which you're going to be pulling out your creative ideas.’ Especially when I come in as a guest, they've been working regularly on technique and specific things, so this is a time to not throw those out the window but prioritize their own personal visions.

Speaking of inspiration, one of your most popular recent works is *Hymn for Everyone* (2021), which followed a six-month bout of writer's block. I understand its theme came to you during a hike. Is there a lesson here about creativity?

Definitely. We shouldn't fear writer's block. Writer's block means that there's something brewing, and you got to get

down to the center of it. It doesn't mean that you suddenly can't write music, or you're stuck forever. It's a natural part of the process, and usually something simple breaks the shell. Sometimes it's taking a walk. Sometimes it's going on a weekend trip to visit a friend. I often find that a lot of good ideas come away from the desk.

You've composed several works that explore the diversity and richness of American life, including *I Have Something to Say* and *Banner*. But some see diversity as a negative these days. That said, should music hold up a mirror to society, or should it serve more as an escape for listeners?

I feel like we've been teetering on this constantly. Even now, it's an amplification of where we started this conversation back in 2020. The purpose for me personally hasn't changed. My purpose for writing and creating work is to communicate. It's sharing. Being a Black American person and really, any American person, I have to speak on these issues. I speak about my personal experience. But I think everyone can take from those stories and say, ‘What is my role in history and in the current times? What do I have to offer and what is my



JIYANG CHEN

point of view?' I also love music as a balm. I have all the different feelings. I would say if there's anything I take a hard stance on, it's that everyone should have access to music.

Do you find orchestras or presenters are becoming more cautious in the current environment, and less eager to play up diverse perspectives?

I haven't yet experienced it among the orchestras themselves. I've heard audience members experiencing issues, and that's challenging. But for the time being, my work has been well received in the infrastructure of orchestras themselves. If they don't like me, I don't know about it [laughs]. Not to say it isn't probably an issue in some organizations. Even in organizations that don't really want to wear the hat of making any real statement, they still seem to be programming with diverse composers in mind.

Some of your most-performed orchestral pieces are also quite brief and pithy: *Starburst* and *Strum* each last under 10 minutes. This is a common feature of contemporary orchestral music today. What do you make of this and the general priorities of orchestras?

I've been getting asked to do longer, bigger works, mainly in the form of concertos, which is wonderful. Then, I get to work directly with a soloist, explore orchestration, and conceive of the work in a collaborative way. My heart is in chamber music. I spent 18 years of the first part of my career in a chamber group of some kind. So, when I think about writing longer works, I think about smaller forces. Even with all good intents and purposes, in the orchestra setting, collaboration is particularly challenging because there are so many people involved. [In contrast], the feeling of the back-and-forth rapport that you can create in a smaller ensemble

is something I'm starting to gear a lot more of my attention toward.

In 2024, you composed *Procession*, a concerto for Cynthia Yeh, the principal percussionist of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra. What other concertos are on your plate?

Right now, I'm working on a concerto with [South African cellist] Abel Selaocoe.

He's known for doing all these unusual vocalizations and improvisations. Will you highlight these talents?

Yes, a bit of that, and his own unique colors and things he brings out in the cello. The premiere is in Germany in March. He's an artist in residence at the Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin. Then it will come to Lincoln Center in the summer.

After Juilliard, you earned a master's degree in music for film and multimedia at New York University. How much is film music a part of your career today?

I did a feature documentary called *Loudmouth* [about the life and battles of Reverend Al Sharpton] in 2022. [Film music] is definitely a different beast. But I would say it gave me profound respect for film composers. Also, it reinforced the idea of how music conjures memory and feeling. Coming up with a concept or a narrated progression—and then underscoring that—is where the ideas come the quickest. I still write with theater in mind.

You're a native New Yorker. How are you finding Chicago?

It's great, actually. There are aspects of it that feel like New York, 20 to 30 years ago. I'm really enjoying it. The pace is a little slower. Of course, there's a great community of musicians here.

Interview has been condensed and edited for length.

{ BY HEIDI WALESON }

No Ordinary Music Career

Military ensembles can offer a stable career for classical musicians, and to some, they're a viable alternative to civilian orchestras. But they also mean boot camp—and culture shock.







WHEN TRUMPET PLAYER Karl Sweedy ('01) finished his bachelor's degree at Curtis, he went to the New World Symphony. In the second year of his three-year contract, he was taking auditions without success when he talked to a friend who had just won a spot in the Air Force Band. Mr. Sweedy spotted an upcoming audition with the ensemble and decided to go for it. When the personnel director at New World asked him, "Do you really want to do that?" Mr. Sweedy's response was, "What kind of question is that?" He won the post in the Ceremonial Brass, an Air Force Band ensemble. Today, he is the senior enlisted leader for the band and a chief master sergeant, the highest non-commissioned officer (NCO) rank of E-9.

The premier Washington, D.C.-based service bands—Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marines—represent a serious career opportunity for conservatory-trained musicians. They attract rigorously trained applicants, perform at a high level, and can provide a stable, decently paid, creatively satisfying life. Each is an umbrella organization for multiple musical ensembles: For example, the 180 musicians in the U.S. Air Force Band make up the Concert Band, Ceremonial Brass, Air Force Strings,

Singing Sergeants, Airmen of Note (big band and jazz), and Max Impact (a rock band). The other services have similarly varied components; only the Navy has no string ensemble. The auditions are highly competitive (other service bands and choirs, based elsewhere in the U.S. and overseas, have different standards and job expectations).

But there are, naturally, tradeoffs to this stability, from enduring boot camp to understanding military culture. Other challenges can seem magnified amid shifting political winds.

Trombonist Chris Clark ('95) joined the Marine Band in 1999 after several years of freelancing and taking auditions in New York. "I needed a job," he says. Marine Band members are exempted from basic recruit training (this is not the case in the other services) and are given instruction in military behavior and customs. He found that his musical background was surprisingly compatible with life in the military. "Practicing an instrument takes the same sort of discipline the military requires," he says. "High expectations are nothing new. I had great leadership, and older, more experienced people to lean on."

The different entities of the Marine Band play about 500 performances a year, whether it's "strolling strings"

The Air Force Strings.





in the White House or a month-long tour in the Midwest. Flutist Kristan Cybriwsky ('90), who joined the Marine Band in 1998, found a variety of music-making. "It can feel like being a freelance musician on retainer," she says. "Every week is different. You might have a parade on a Friday evening, then two events at the White House, a funeral at Arlington, and a chamber music concert at the Library of Congress. There are opportunities to be entrepreneurial." Mr. Clark and some friends formed a brass quintet that did work for the band as well as concerts and tours on their own, even recording an album. Some members freelance for other D.C.-area musical organizations as their schedules permit.

Although Curtis has no band program per se, the education is still a good preparation. Mr. Clark says, "I did a lot of orchestral playing in the Marine Band, including things I played at Curtis. A lot of the older band repertoire is orchestral transcriptions, and the brass ensemble classes were applicable." The biggest difference? "As a trombone player in an orchestra, you sit around for a long time and then have to sound your best. In a band, it's the opposite. There's very little rest in a band."

Performing conditions are not always ideal. "We play outside a lot; there's lots of marching and outdoor ceremonies," says Mr. Clark. "In bad weather, when it's cold and raining—as a brass player, you're the one that goes out to do that no matter what. And D.C. is hot in summer."

Left: Karl Sweedy (Trumpet '01) performing in the Ceremonial Brass.

Below: The Air Force ensemble Max Impact.



Diana Fish ('87) a cellist in the Marine Band from 2004 to 2014, says, "Union rules don't apply; you can't say it's too hot or too cold. And there's no option to say, 'I don't want to play that job, I think I'll take a day off.'" Since the Marine Band, known as the "President's Own," plays regularly in the White House, its members have the highest security clearance; as a result, there is no system for hiring substitutes. When the bands go on tour, they often travel on school buses and play in high school gyms.

FIRST COMES BOOT CAMP

For the non-Marine bands, getting through the weeks of basic training has its challenges, too. Mr. Sweedy says, "It's basically about breaking you down, removing the ego to learn about team dynamics." Matthew Vaughn, co-principal trombone of the Philadelphia Orchestra and a Curtis faculty member, has "vivid" memories of his Air Force Band recruit

training in 1993. “The daily physical training at 5 a.m. is all about mental and emotional strain; they put you under stress and see if you can still function. It happens in San Antonio, Texas, outside in the brutal heat.” There was also an obstacle course and weapons training, as well as a lot of classroom time. He adds drily, “I did learn to fold clothes well.”

There are thrills as well. Highlights for Ms. Fish included playing Ronald Reagan’s funeral (“you feel that the world is watching”), a state dinner for Nelson Mandela, and an event when Yo-Yo Ma, who was a guest, sat in with the Marine Chamber Orchestra. For Ms. Cybriwsky, some of those high school gym shows in the middle of nowhere “reminded me of the power of music. Band kids would rush up to ask us to autograph their programs; we were a big deal to them. Veterans would come in uniform, in wheelchairs. We’d play the Armed Forces medley, and these guys who could barely stand up would stand when they heard their service song. It was humbling.”

Military service also has perks. Today, members of the premier bands, who join at the E-6 level, have starting salaries of about \$80,000, including a housing allowance that is not taxed, plus full medical coverage. The post-9/11 GI Bill allows service members to use education benefits for family members. Mr. Vaughn describes the pay as “mid-level ICSOM orchestra, but better and more stable. I went from there to the San Antonio Symphony, which was very unstable and stressful.” After 20 years,

band members can retire on a military pension with medical coverage for life.

Mr. Clark took full advantage of being in the military. He enjoyed the work and the life and got a doctorate partially paid for by the Marine Corps. Midway through his service, he got interested in audio recording and took courses. When he retired in 2024 after nearly 25 years, his military pension gave him the security to start an entirely new career. Ms. Fish, who retired after 20 years, says the pension is much better than the musicians’ union payout (though she gets that too, since she freelanced). She, too, has embarked on a new career as an interfaith/Buddhist chaplain in a Florida hospital.

Five years ago, Mr. Sweedy was promoted to a non-playing role as chief master sergeant in the Air Force Band, managing the work, people, and mission, which he finds enormously rewarding. “I would never have guessed that I would be in charge of 180 people, finding out where they can best add value to the unit,” he says. The band manages itself and its \$4 million budget—everything from IT and emergency management to supplies and deciding where, when, and why the musicians will play. “It’s a legacy thing, paid forward as we move up the ranks,” Mr. Sweedy says. “Up front, we ID people in the unit who have particular skills.”

He cites a new horn player, formerly with the Montreal Symphony and a published author, who is now working on tasks including social media and a new



Clockwise from top left: The Marine Chamber Orchestra, Diana Fish (Cello '87) with the Obamas, Chris Clark (Trombone '95) performing in the Marine Band, Kristan Cybriwsky (Flute '90) in the Marine Band.



The Singing Sergeants is one of six ensembles from the United States Air Force Band.

coding system. “She comes to work with a smile, not just because of her playing but the four other things she’s doing to add value to the unit and being in charge of seven other people,” Mr. Sweedy says. “You can apply the skills that you learn as an orchestra musician—active listening, adaptability, building teams—outside of the orchestra silo. I wouldn’t trade it for the world.” Mr. Sweedy can’t quite bring himself to hang up his trumpet, however—he plays the occasional outside gig. As an E-9, he will have to retire after 30 years, in 2033.

After the initial four-year enlistment period, band members can opt to re-up, but they must serve out their enlistment terms, even if they win an audition elsewhere. Mr. Vaughn took some orchestra auditions during his four years and made the finals for a few. “It gave me confidence that if I left the band, I would find something. Still, you have to decide about reenlistment after three years, and it was the hardest decision of my life to decide not to.” Mr. Vaughn was unemployed for a summer before winning the San Antonio job; two years later, he joined the Philadelphia Orchestra. Back then, he says, some elite orchestras looked down on the military band experience. He knows better, and when he reviews resumes today, those applicants are usually invited.

Ms. Cybriwsky also decided that four years in the band was enough. “It’s physically demanding, and you’re giving up a certain amount of control over your life. It was a great job for the time I was there, but I wanted to try something else.” In 2002, there was a boom in post-9/11 national security jobs, and her high security clearance opened doors for her—her first job was as a personal assistant for a defense intelligence contractor. “It was a paid classroom for me to learn about consulting, and I was seeing behind headlines in a classified environment.” She subbed in the Kennedy Center Opera House Orchestra while working and getting an MBA and eventually shifted full time into management consulting.

NAVIGATING MILITARY CULTURE

For these Curtis musicians, the military trappings can be positive and negative. For Mr. Clark, the *esprit de corps* was real. “Marines love the organization,

the tradition, what we are all trying to do—there’s a lot of pride, and people are excited to be there. When we’re playing something really difficult, maybe because of the weather, you have that to lean on.” By contrast, Ms. Cybriwsky was sometimes made to feel that, as a musician who had not gone through recruit training, she was “not a real Marine.”

There are also some non-negotiables, like maintaining military decorum and weighing in twice a year. (“The New York Philharmonic doesn’t ask you to hop on the scale,” Ms. Cybriwsky notes.) Prospective enlistees may face difficulties over their medical histories, such as medications for mental health conditions; things like excessive debt may prevent them getting the necessary security clearances.

Current and former band members also acknowledge the current administration’s efforts to undermine the military’s historically apolitical stance could be a deterrent for new applicants. However, they see positive signs in the culture of the organization. Mr. Vaughn’s service was in the era of “Don’t ask, don’t tell.” “I grew up in a conservative family, clueless about homosexuality,” he says. “There were closeted gay people in the band, and there was a culture of acceptance. In my experience, the military is more progressive than the country as a whole; that’s what serves their mission.” Mr. Clark says, “I can guarantee that over 20 years, you will play for things you don’t agree with. In the end, people want to be in a professional, world-class organization. Will they still come? I bet they will. We’ll see.”


Heidi Waleson is the opera critic of the Wall Street Journal and the author of Mad Scenes and Exit Arias: The Death of the New York City Opera and the Future of Opera in America (Metropolitan/Picador).

of PERFORMANCE *and* PERSUASION

When an artist wants to program something off the beaten path,
how do they bring stakeholders along?

BY HANNAH EDGAR





Curtis New Music Ensemble performs George Crumb's *Black Angels* in February 2025.



CLASSICAL MUSIC LEANS on tradition more than most art forms. In recent years, the field has made strides to diversify programming: Data from the League of American Orchestras and Institute for Composer Diversity shows that the share of season programming by race and gender-marginalized composers has increased from 4.5% to 22.6% over the past decade in the U.S. But the same report indicates that, despite the surge in programming by living and underrepresented composers, their works rarely occupy the marquee “symphony” spot on a program.

Wrapped up in those trends is an implication that audiences can only handle so much new music. Where does that leave musicians who keep new and lesser-played music at the heart of their career?

What goes around...

For most, bringing presenters, collaborators, and audiences on board requires shrewd powers of persuasion—a strategy of convincing stakeholders that a lesser-known piece is worth their attention. Eleanor Sokoloff Piano Studies Chair Michelle Cann has spent much of her career doing just that.

Ms. Cann first played Florence Price’s Piano Concerto in One Movement with the Dream Unfinished Orchestra in 2016, an ensemble formed after Staten Island resident Eric Garner was choked to death by a New York City police officer.

Afterwards, she worked with her agent to try to secure more performances of the concerto. They had

few takers. “I definitely did not have the same kind of interest that I have now,” Ms. Cann says.

Things changed nearly overnight when she recorded the work with Yannick Nézet-Séguin and the Philadelphia Orchestra in 2021. Once she’d put a high-quality recording of the work into the universe—one orchestras could reference while putting together a season—“suddenly, everybody wanted a piece of it,” she recalls.

“I wasn’t pushing [Price’s] concerto because I thought it might be an asset for my career. I did it because I was inspired by her, as a Black female pianist myself. How can I not want to be part of changing that narrative?”

In that way, Ms. Cann notes, recording under-programmed music can become “another part of the advocacy.” But that’s not to understate the investment involved.

Jennifer Koh (Violin ’02) is one of the lucky few soloists to make playing and recording new music part of her appeal—so much so that her focus never felt unusual, or burdensome. A leading child prodigy of her generation, she estimates she’d worked her way through the standard repertoire by the time she was 17; she was performing concertos by Gian Carlo Menotti (Composition ’33) and Andrei Eshpai by the time she’d graduated Curtis.

Even so, Ms. Koh has occasionally encountered logistical and financial hurdles when she wanted to record new or non-canonical concertos—repertoire works which require far more buy-in than solo or chamber albums. Some never materialized.

“Recital CDs are much more possible,” she says.

Like the debut album Oliver Talukder (Oboe ’24) will release in September with pianist Moriah Trenk. Tentatively titled *Briefly Gorgeous*, Mr. Talukder won recording sessions for a debut album through a competition hosted by the Chica-



go-based label Cedille Records, which is producing and distributing the record.

Briefly Gorgeous is named for its centerpiece work, a world premiere written by current Curtis composition student Delfin Demiray and inspired by Ocean Vuong's novel *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous*. From there, Mr. Talukder intentionally selected works that drew upon his background. Reena Esmail's *Jhula Jhule* and his arrangement of Arturo Márquez's *Danzon No. 2* nod to his South Asian and Mexican heritage, respectively, while his oboe arrangements of Florence Price art songs honor his upbringing in Chicago.

Unusually for a debut album, nearly all his selections are by living

composers—meaning, in most cases, that Mr. Talukder is contributing to their still-nascent discography. That's no accident, he says. Katherine Needleman ('99) and Philippe Tondre's oboe studio at Curtis encourages students to bring in and prepare a piece that's unfamiliar to them each week. Naturally, much of the repertoire Mr. Talukder selected was new music.

"You run through all the [standard] oboe repertoire really quickly," he says, with a laugh.

In the process, he discovered that he was exhilarated by the affordances new music could provide. The same philosophy led him to record mostly new music on *Briefly Gorgeous*.

"I felt like I had more freedom to

make my own musical interpretation of the piece, rather than play a piece that hundreds of oboists have played before, who all have an opinion of the way it should go," he says.

An advocate in the orchestra

Mr. Talukder's persuasive bent started early. While he was in high school, the Chicago Youth Symphony Orchestra programmed Edgar Varèse's bracing *Amérique*, to the consternation of many of Mr. Talukder's peers. He found himself trying to talk them off the ledge.

"Some people in the orchestra quit," he remembers.

Mr. Talukder encountered some of that same resistance at Curtis. He was rotated onto the Curtis New Music Ensemble while it prepared Louis Andriessen's *Workers Union*. The work is written in precise rhythmic unison but indeterminate pitch. The result sounds like a collection of voices chanting together, pitches rising and falling in hazy discordance.

About half the ensemble, unaccustomed to the piece's sound and approach, "thought of the piece as a joke," says Mr. Talukder. So, during rehearsal breaks or over a meal, he gently encouraged his colleagues to shift their thinking into a quasi-theatrical framework. They weren't just playing a piece about a workers' union, he argued: For those 15 to 20 minutes, they had to *be* a union—fighting for better pay, better working conditions, time off.

"It's all or nothing, quite literally, because if one of us is off by an eighth note, we're not united," Mr. Talukder says.

Benoit Gauthier (Conducting '25) has also seen firsthand how a work's context can endear it to skeptics. A former Rita E. Hauser Conducting Fellow who currently teaches conducting to nonmajors at Curtis, Mr. Gauthier programmed Claude Vivier's *Lonely Child* for his Curtis capstone recital last year. The meditative, abstract work for soprano and orchestra is perhaps the Québécois

Top: Michelle Cann. Bottom, L-R: Oliver Talukder (Oboe '24), Benoit Gauthier (Conducting '25), Jennifer Koh (Violin '02).

composer's most famous opus, but it is seldom heard in the U.S.

During his first read-through of *Lonely Child*, Mr. Gauthier could sense some discomfort from Curtis Symphony Orchestra musicians. Afterwards, he took a moment to talk to the orchestra about Mr. Vivier's personal background. Abandoned in an orphanage and adopted by an abusive family, Mr. Vivier spent his adult life longing for his birth parents.

Mr. Gauthier noticed an immediate change in the musicians' attitudes; they approached the work with more openness and commitment than they had in the first run. Ultimately, he even felt that *Lonely Child* came off better than his recital's canonical piece, Rachmaninoff's *Symphonic Dances*.

"Young conductors [are often told], 'Don't talk; just do the music.' But actually, for pieces that are a little bit out of the box, like *Lonely Child*, we need to [talk] to have the musicians with us in the boat," Mr. Gauthier says.

Stressing the local angle

Of course, clearing a pathway through music is as crucial for audiences as it is for musicians. When not at Curtis, Mr. Gauthier leads his own orchestra in Quebec, l'Orchestre symphonique de la Côte-Nord. Last season, it premiered the *Requiem de guérison* (*Healing Requiem*) by Alexis Vollant, a composer from the Innu First Nation. Mr. Vollant's *Requiem* addressed the cultural and generational wreckage wrought by Canada's residential school system, which involuntarily removed Indigenous schoolchildren from their homes in a forced assimilation strategy.

For such projects, the persuasive element is essentially baked in, says Mr. Gauthier. Anyone living in Canada, regardless of race, inherits the residential system's history. Mediating that history through Mr. Vollant—a voice from the region's Indigenous community—added to its immediacy.

"They felt this connection with the work," Mr. Gauthier says.

Conductor and composer Teddy Abrams (Conducting '08) has taken this strategy to new heights during his tenure at the Louisville Orchestra. Mr. Abrams' ambitious initiatives tend to have a local flavor—like a composition written for and performed in Kentucky's Mammoth Cave National Park, a genre-omnivorous oratorio about Louisville native Muhammad Ali, and a collaboration with Louisville-born rapper Jack Harlow. Even the orchestra's resident composers—who form its Creator Corps program—are truly in residence, receiving a salary and lodging in Louisville's Shelby Park neighborhood.

"You can learn from national and international models and approaches, but in terms of serving a population, the Louisville Orchestra serves the people that live here," Mr. Abrams says.

But if audiences don't show up to a concert at all, the persuasive needs in question may be far deeper than anything a single artist or composer can address.

"You really want an orchestra

to be a democratic institution that reflects the population around you, as opposed to feeling like an exclusive club that doesn't have any members—which is, I think, what happens to a lot of arts institutions," Mr. Abrams says. "The exclusivity is valueless, because it doesn't stand for anything and isn't connected to anybody's desires or missions as artists."

That carries lessons not just for artists but for arts administrators. For example, does an organization lean on headliners alone to sell tickets? Or has it meaningfully built an audience that's curious and invested in the curatorial direction, no matter who or what is performed?

In her years on the road, Ms. Cann learned how to tell the difference. "I've had audience members tell me, 'Well, I wasn't sure about this concert, because I didn't know any of these names. But they always bring great people.' You were skeptical as an audience member, but you trusted your organization."

Hannah Edgar writes about classical music for the Chicago Tribune, New York Times, and Musical America, and produces radio for WBEZ Chicago.

The world premiere of Amy Beth Kirsten's *Infernal Angel* in May 2025. At left is Maya Mor-Mitrani (Voice '25), and seated is guest artist Ty Bouque.



Case Stories

You can sometimes learn a lot about a musician by peering into their open instrument case. On a backstage visit before the Curtis Symphony Orchestra's October concert, four string players gave us a mini tour.

BY JAMIE MCCRARY



Anaïs Feller, violin

Case highlights:

Pictures of Blackpink, her favorite pop group;
lucky coin; Romans 5:8 verse

► **Performer pizzazz** Whenever I'm feeling nervous, it helps me embody someone I see as confident. And for me, that's my favorite K-pop band, Blackpink. Recently, I was practicing this huge run in a piece, and I just imagined a confident, beautiful girl trying to show people happiness. By visualizing Blackpink's confidence and command, I was able to step into that state.

► **Lucky charm** During high school, my biggest dream was to get into Curtis. This coin is so special to me because one of my closest friends gave it to me—they even engraved it with my name—and it traveled with me to all my college auditions.

It's a reminder of the wonderful, loving people I've met through music.

► **Perfectly imperfect** Romans 5:8 helps me remember my playing isn't going to be perfect—but that's OK, because I'm an imperfect person. Diligence and hard work will always be seen, and sometimes that's enough. Performance-wise, it's also about remembering my music isn't just about me. It's about having a heart of giving to others—I believe this is the heart of music, and life in general. *Anaïs Feller, from San Diego, studies with Midori and Erin Keefe, is the Tobe Amsterdam Fellow, and entered Curtis in 2023.*

Sooeon Kim, violin

Case highlights:

Poster from her first solo recital;
Snoopy card; baby violin bow

► **Performance inspiration** I knew I wanted to be a performer after my first solo recital. I was 11 years old performing at Kumho Art Hall in South Korea. It was my first time performing by myself, and I remember feeling true happiness on stage. I keep this recital poster because it continues to inspire me before I perform.

► **Practice motivation** [Snoopy] was my former teacher's favorite character and keeping it in my case motivates me to practice. My teacher was like a second

mom to me—she's actually my godmother back home. I always want to make her proud, so it helps me lock in while practicing.

► **Playing around** Even though my friend gave this to me for fun, I still use it often to practice slowing my bow speed. It's a good reminder to have fun—but still serves as a good practice tool.

Sooeon Kim, from South Korea, studies with Shmuel Ashkenasi and Pamela Frank, is the Martin and Sarah Taylor Fellow and entered Curtis in 2022.





Hannah Tam, violin

Case highlights:

Family pictures from a trip to Japan; photos of her cats in Hong Kong; shots from Curtis' holiday party

► **Steadfast support** This family picture reminds me that, even though we all live in different places, I still have a tight-knit support system. My family has been my biggest supporter since day one—they've done nothing but their best to help me. My mom left her whole family for five years to live with me here; my dad works to support us, and my brother always says good luck before concerts. It's a reminder I'm not alone, and that people I love are cheering for me.

► **Comfort cats** I've had my cats Ned (orange, pictured right) and Rio (brown, pictured left) since I was five years old. We grew up

together—I even wanted to be a veterinarian when I was younger. When I'm home in Hong Kong, they sit with me while I practice.

► **Chosen family** In 2022, I was alone here for a month because my mom's visa was revoked. My close friends at Curtis would hang out with me every day—they made sure I wasn't alone. The holiday party picture reminds me that even when I'm feeling lonely, I have a strong support system.

Hannah Tam, from Hong Kong, studies violin with Benjamin Beilman and Ida Kavafian. She entered Curtis in 2018 and is a Demeng Foundation Fellow.

Emad Zolfaghari, viola

Case highlights:

Letter from a student; photo of his string quartet; pictures of close friends

► **Meaningful mentorship** I was performing at a festival recently, and I started teaching lessons to one of the other player's children. She was only four years old and was so enthusiastic. It was so fun to spend time with her and help her learn. The letter she wrote me is a reminder of why I do what I do.

► **Musical bond** The photo of my quartet is also a reminder of why I do what I do. Each of us felt this connection when we played, and as people—but we're spread out in New York, Boston, and Philadelphia. Last summer, we wanted to audition for some festivals, so we planned a rehearsal schedule and each traveled to

practice together. I think it's that each of us took time to work and be together.

► **Celebrating community** So many people, myself included, get wrapped up in the repertoire; we feel we have to practice until we're perfect. Pictures of my close friends remind me what else viola has given me: wonderful friendships, travel, and many meaningful experiences I've gotten to live.

Emad Zolfaghari, from Oakville, Ontario, studying viola with Misha Amory and Hsin-Yun Huang, is the Elaine W. Camarda and A. Morris Williams Jr. Fellow and entered Curtis in 2021.





Composition/ Conducting

1980s

In the past year, several pieces by **William Coble** (Composition '86) received premieres, including *Satsang* for solo double bass, which Boston Symphony Orchestra bassist Todd Seeber introduced at Tanglewood in August. This year will bring the premiere of *Spring Forward* for eight brass players, commissioned by Syracuse University.

Commemorating the 90th birthday of Arvo Pärt, in September **Paavo Järvi** (Conducting '88) and the Estonian Festival Orchestra released *Credo*, an Alpha Classics recording of the Estonian composer's music recorded at the Pärnu Festival. Mr. Järvi also conducted the ensemble in its North American debut, an all-Pärt program at Carnegie Hall in October.

1990s

Juan Carlos Lomónaco (Conducting '96) this year conducted the Orquesta Sinfónica Nacional del Perú, Orquesta Sinfónica Nacional de México, Orquesta Filarmónica de la UNAM, and the Orquesta Sinfónica de la Universidad de Guanajuato where he is artistic director.

2000s

The Ojai Music Festival has named **Teddy Abrams**

(Conducting '08) as its artistic and executive director, effective this September. He will continue to serve as music director of the Louisville Orchestra. He succeeds Ara Guzelimian, who concludes his tenure with the 2026 festival.

2010s

Conner Gray Covington (Conducting '17) debuted with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra in three performances of *How to Train Your Dragon* in November. The next month he made debuts with the Houston Symphony and the New Jersey Symphony.



Winds/Brass

1980s

The Dallas Winds and Seraph Brass are scheduled to premiere **Steven Juliani's** (Horn '82) *The Distant Band* for brass quintet and wind ensemble in Dallas in April. Seraph Brass is led by **Mary Elizabeth Bowden** (Trumpet '04).



Ellen Dinwiddie Smith (Horn '87), who made history in 1991 as the Minnesota Orchestra's first female brass player, re-

tired in August after a trailblazing career that also included positions in the orchestras of Fort Worth, Texas and Charleston, S.C. In retirement, she will continue to teach horn at the University of Minnesota.

2010s

Courtney Prizrenac (Horn '10) has been named second horn of the Canadian Opera Company Orchestra.

2020s



Victoria Knudtson (Horn '20) joined the Philadelphia Orchestra as assistant principal/utility horn in the 2025–26 season. Ms. Knudtson comes to Philadelphia from the St. Louis Symphony Orchestra, where she has been playing since 2020.

In August, **Alan Tolbert** (Trumpet '22) was named acting principal trumpet of the Louisiana Philharmonic Orchestra in New Orleans for the 2025–26 season.

James Vaughn (Trumpet '23) will join the Philadelphia Orchestra as its principal trumpet in 2026. He returns to Philadelphia after holding the principal trumpet position in the Minnesota Orchestra.

Last spring, **Derek Gullett** (Trombone '24) was named

principal trombone of the Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra, a position that had been vacant since 2018. He previously served as acting second trombone of the Sarasota Opera Orchestra.



Piano/ Accompanying

1960s



In April, **Lambert Orkis** (Piano '65) toured the U.S. with Anne-Sophie Mutter, performing in New York, San Francisco, Ann Arbor, Urbana, and at the Library of Congress, where they also recorded a video interview titled *Manuscript Encounters*. In August, Mr. Orkis and cellist David Hardy gave a concert on period instruments for the Cornell Center for Historical Keyboards' Forte | Piano conference in Ithaca, N.Y.

1970s

Jeffrey Chappell (Piano '74) released a solo piano album in May on the Centaur Records label with music by Samuel Barber (Composition '34), Alberto Ginastera, and Charles Griffes.

1980s

Audrey Axinn (Accompanying '88) was appointed to the solo piano major faculty at Mannes School of Music this fall. Dr. Axinn also teaches at the Juilliard School, Manhattan School of Music, and the Tianjin Juilliard School.

1990s

In April, **Benjamin Loeb** (Accompanying '92) conducted Ukraine's Lviv National Philharmonic in Verdi's *Requiem* to honor the soldiers and civilians who died in the war with Russia. That same month, Mr. Loeb conducted the Dallas Symphony Orchestra and Chorus in a performance of Murry Sidlin's *Defiant Requiem: Verdi at Terezin*.

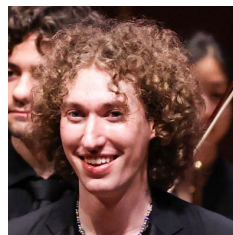
2000s

Jonathan Biss (Piano '01) was appointed to the piano faculty of the Glenn Gould School at Toronto's Royal Conservatory of Music in September. Mr. Biss intends to uphold the legacy of his late mentor, Leon Fleisher, who taught at the conservatory.

2010s

In October, **George Xiaoyuan Fu** (Piano '16) received *Gramophone's* 2025 Concept Album Award for *Colouring Book*. The album features Mr. Fu's performance of Debussy's *Études*.

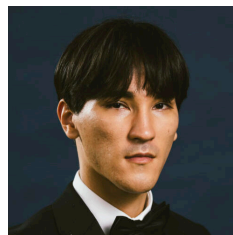
Ying Li (Piano '19, Community Artist Fellow '22) won first prize and the audience award at the New York Franz Liszt Piano Competition in October.



Michael Davidman (Piano '19) was the classical winner of the 2025 American Piano Awards and the Christel DeHaan Fellowship last April. He performed Rachmaninoff's Piano Concerto No. 3 in the finals with JoAnn Falletta and the Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra. The prize package includes a recording for the Steinway label.

2020s

Eric Lu (Piano '20) won first prize at the International Chopin Piano Competition, held in Warsaw in October. **Zitong Wang** (Piano '22) won third prize and the best performance of a sonata prize, and **William Yang** (Piano '23) received sixth prize. The competition is held every five years in Warsaw and is devoted entirely to the works of Chopin.



Elias Ackerley (Piano '24) won second prize at the 74th ARD International Music Competition, held in September. He played in the second prize winner's concert with the Munich Chamber Orchestra.



Voice/Opera

1990s

Last April, **Rinat Shaham** (Voice '95, Opera '98) appeared on a new recording of Bartók's *Bluebeard's Castle* for the Pentatone label, featuring the Netherlands Radio Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by **Karina Canellakis** (Violin '04).

2000s

Matthew Rose (Opera '03) appeared in stagings of Mozart's *The Magic Flute* at London's Royal Opera House and at the Metropolitan Opera this fall. Last summer, Mr. Rose co-directed the Spoleto Vocal Arts Workshop in Italy with Jeremy Carpenter.

Laura Reyes (Opera '05) became the alto section leader and cantor at St. Joseph Church at Bronxville, N.Y. in September.

2010s

Anthony Reed (Opera '15) in September made his Opera Philadelphia debut as Don Prudenzio in *Il viaggio à Reims*. He recently joined the chorus at the Metropolitan Opera.

Emily Pogorelc (Voice '18) made her debut at the Vienna State Opera in November in Verdi's *Falstaff*. In May, she is scheduled to make her house and role debut as Susanna in

Mozart's *The Marriage of Figaro* at Dutch National Opera .

2020s

Kylie Kreucher (Opera '25) was selected as a winner of the Lyric Opera of Chicago's Ryan Opera Center auditions in September and received the audience favorite award. She will join the Ryan Opera Center Ensemble for the 2026–27 season.



Percussion

2000s

Denis Petrunin (Timpani and Percussion '06) joined the Charlotte Symphony Orchestra as its acting principal timpanist for the 2025–26 season.



Strings

1960s

Zina Schiff (Violin '69) in July released her 17th album on Naxos featuring Alan Hovhaness' Violin Concerto No. 2 and the composer's works for violin and piano. Ms. Schiff's daughter, Avlana Eisenberg, conducted the Salzburg Chamber Soloists for the orchestral portion of the album.

1980s

Emmanuel Feldman (Cello '88) recently patented his TekPin cello endpin, which is designed

to support the instrument at a vertical angle and reduce the weight the cello puts on a player's body. He is also the inventor of the TekStand cello stand, which allows him to perform while standing.

1990s

Heather Miller Lardin (Double Bass '96) joined the faculty of Juilliard's Historical Performance program this year.

2000s

Solomiya Ivakhiv (Violin '03) has received the Outstanding Faculty Award from the University of Connecticut, where she is a professor of violin and viola and head of strings. In May, Ms. Solomiya performed Viktor Kosenko's 1928 Violin Concerto with the Lviv National Philharmonic, and completed recording *Music of Resilience*, a collection of works by Ukrainian composers for violin and orchestra scheduled for release on Naxos this summer.

In September, **Adrian Anantawan** (Violin '06) received a 2025 Brother Thomas Fellowship from the Boston Foundation. Seventeen fellows each received an unrestricted grant of \$20,000 intended to support their professional endeavors.

Bella Hristova (Violin '08) performed the Dvořák Violin Concerto at Carnegie Hall in December with the New York String Orchestra conducted by **Jaime Laredo** (Violin '59), in his final concert leading the

Curtis' 2026 Grammy Nominees

The nominations for the 68th annual Grammy Awards were announced on November 7. Below is a list of Curtis-affiliated nominees. The awards ceremony will take place on Sunday, February 1. Congratulations to all the Curtis alumni and faculty who were nominated.

BEST ORCHESTRAL PERFORMANCE

Yannick Nézet-Séguin, Curtis' head of conducting, and the Philadelphia Orchestra were nominated for *Still & Bonds*.

BEST OPERA RECORDING

Visiting faculty member **J'Nai Bridges** (Opera '12) received a nomination for her role in Houston Grand Opera's recording of *Heggie: Intelligence*.

Yannick Nézet-Séguin, conductor, and the Metropolitan Opera Orchestra and Met Opera Chorus were nominated for *Tesori: Grounded*.

BEST CLASSICAL INSTRUMENTAL SOLO

Yuja Wang and the Boston Symphony Orchestra were nominated for *Shostakovich: The Piano Concertos; Solo Works*.

BEST CLASSICAL SOLO VOCAL ALBUM

Benjamin Loeb (Accompanying '92) received a nomination as the conductor of *Alike – My Mother's Dream* with the National Symphonia Orchestra.

BEST CONTEMPORARY CLASSICAL COMPOSITION

Curtis' former composer in residence and honorary degree recipient **Tania León** was nominated for *León: Raíces (Origins)*.

The 2024–25 composer in residence, **Gabriela Ortiz**, was nominated for *Ortiz: Dzonot*.

BEST ARRANGEMENT, INSTRUMENT OR A CAPPELLA

Addison Maye-Saxon (Trombone '19) received a nomination for his arrangement of the song "Fight On" with fellow members of The Westerlies: Andy Clausen, Riley Mulherkar, and Chloe Rowlands.

seminar. Taking place on her 40th birthday, this marked her sixth appearance as soloist with NYSOS.



This spring **Elena Urioste** (Violin '08) is scheduled to debut with the Academy of St Martin in the Fields, leading Florence Price's Violin Concerto No. 1 from the violin. She makes her Concertgebouw Kleine Zaal debut with the Kaleidoscope Chamber Collective, coinciding with the May release of a Chandos album featuring piano quartets by Johannes Brahms and Dora Pejačević.

2010s

Last spring, **Anastasia Agapova** (Violin '13) was appointed principal second violin of the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra.

Timothy Chooi (Violin '17) was promoted to associate professor of violin and the head of strings at the University of Ottawa. He joined the faculty in 2021.



Abigail Kent (Harp '17) has been appointed principal

harpist of the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra, starting in the 2025–26 season. She was previously a harp fellow at the New World Symphony.

2020s

Eric Tsai (Violin '20) this fall joined the Callisto Quartet as their new first violinist. The ensemble was founded in 2016 at the Cleveland Institute of Music and has since won top honors at the 2018 Fischhoff Competition and second prize at the 2019 Banff International String Quartet Competition. Mr. Tsai replaces Cameron Daly.



Matthew Hakkarainen (Violin '22) this fall joined the Toronto Symphony Orchestra as associate concertmaster.

In May, **Yizilin Liang** (Viola '25) won one of three first prizes at the Washington International Competition for Strings. She took home \$10,000.

Students

In June, organ student **Daniel Colaneri** was a winner of the American Guild of Organists' Regional Competition for Young Organists in Phoenix, Ariz. He will perform at the AGO's national

convention in St. Louis next summer.



In October, opera student **Nikan Ingabire Kanate** won first prize and the audience choice award at the Canadian Opera Company's Centre Stage: Ensemble Studio Competition. The finals took place during COC's annual gala in Toronto, and Nikan sang "Depuis le jour" from Charpentier's *Louise*. Winners receive cash prizes, performance opportunities, and invitations to join COC's Ensemble Studio program.

Opera student **Jennifer Robinson** won third prize at the Gerda Lissner Foundation's 2025 Art Song Competition, held in New York in October. A winners concert is scheduled to take place at Carnegie Hall on April 29.

Faculty/Staff

Bryan Lee (Violin '11, String Quartet '14), second violinist of the Dover Quartet, has joined the Escher Quartet in the same role, the Escher announced in October. Mr. Lee continues to perform with the Dover Quartet, Curtis' Penelope P. Watkins Ensemble in Residence.

Joel Link (Violin '11, String Quartet '14) last July became the new concertmaster of the Cleveland Orchestra. He continues in his role as first violinist of the Dover Quartet. In August, the quartet released its latest album, *Woodland Songs: Music of Jerod Impichchaachaaha' Tate, Pura Fé, and Dvořák*.

Steven Mackey's new saxophone concerto *Ane-mology* was premiered by the saxophonist Timothy McAllister and the Monterey Symphony in October, followed by performances with the Utah and Seattle Symphony Orchestras.

In October, **Midori** won the Pablo Casals Award from the Kronberg Academy in Germany in recognition of her commitment to social and educational projects. The award followed a performance of Mendelssohn's Violin Concerto with the Frankfurt Radio Symphony Orchestra conducted by Michael Sanderling.

In November, pianist **John Mortensen** performed his improvisations at the ImproVision Festival in Hannover, Germany. The festival showcases artists who specialize in period-appropriate improvisation across different musical eras. Mr. Mortensen also led a master class on the art of historical improvisation.

THOSE WE HAVE LOST



The bassoonist **Bernard Garfield**, a pillar of the Philadelphia Orchestra's woodwind section during the late 20th century and a bassoon teacher at Curtis for nearly 30 of those years, died on April 29 at his home in Haddonfield, N.J. His passing at age 100 occurred just as Curtis was concluding its own centennial year.

Mr. Garfield was the Philadelphia Orchestra's principal bassoonist from 1957 to 2000, a stretch that saw its woodwind section rise to the world's top rank. Alongside John de Lancie (Oboe '40), Anthony Gigliotti (Clarinet '47), Murray Panitz, and other prominent members, Mr. Garfield helped define the Philadelphia sound—one that had a darker, richer hue than was common at the time.

Mr. Garfield taught at Curtis from 1975–80 and again from 1985–2009, during which time he became known as a perceptive, straight-talking teacher who challenged students to cultivate a personal voice rather than simply imitate their teacher's playing. In 2009, Curtis awarded him an honorary doctorate.

Born on May 27, 1924, Mr. Garfield studied the piano while growing up in Brooklyn, N.Y. Upon entering New York's High School of Music and Art, he was assigned the bassoon, and quickly formed a reed club with fellow bassoonists, his first foray into what would be a lifelong technical passion. After graduation in 1942, he spent a summer at Tanglewood and studied privately in New York with Simon Kovar, known for bringing

Russian conservatory methods to the U.S. (and who taught at Curtis from 1939–42).

Mr. Garfield played bassoon in the U.S. Army's 70th Infantry Division Band during the final months of World War II and subsequently studied at the Royal College of Music before earning degrees from NYU and Columbia. An ambitious freelancer, he co-founded the New York Woodwind Quintet, performed with major ensembles, and was appointed principal bassoonist of the Philadelphia Orchestra in 1957 after meeting with Music Director Eugene Ormandy.

Mr. Garfield's clean but rich tone was partly the product of his reed-making methods, which involved trimming the cane to produce varying degrees of edginess or mellowness. A 1963 *Gram-*

ophone review of Mr. Garfield's recording of the Mozart Bassoon Concerto lauded his "alert sense of rhythm and a tone that manages to have a well-ground cutting edge to it without anything that could be called a buzz."

Also in Philadelphia, Mr. Garfield taught at Temple University (1957–2004) and played in the Philadelphia Woodwind Quintet. As a composer, he aimed to fill holes in the bassoon repertoire, writing woodwind trios, quartets for bassoon with string trio, and solo works, including his 32 *Etudes for Bassoon*. After retiring from the Philadelphia Orchestra in 2000, Mr. Garfield was succeeded by a former student, Daniel Matsukawa ('92), who also followed him as a bassoon teacher at Curtis.

"By the time I studied with him, he was in his late 60s," says Mr. Matsukawa, who was initially drawn to Garfield's sound. "I was always told that he was a demanding, even tough, teacher. I didn't see that at all. By the time I got to him, he was always very mellow, very kind, and such a gentle soul."

"He put a lot on the students. So, when I asked him, 'How does one do vibrato in their instrument?' He would say, 'What do you mean? Just vibrate.' I appreciated that because it really made me sit down and become a good problem solver. I think that's how he himself was."

"I don't think he ever took a day off from playing," says Mr. Matsukawa. "His work ethic was bar none."

Mr. Garfield is survived by his four sons and six grandchildren. He was predeceased by Betty, his wife of nearly 70 years.

Nina Libove ('46), a pianist and chamber musician who toured widely as one-half of the Libove-Lugovoy Duo, died in New Jersey on December 17, 2024, at the age of 94.

A mainstay of international chamber music series and festivals for more than five decades, Ms. Lugovoy, as she was known professionally, was also a teacher and arts advocate, serving as an adjunct professor of music at New York University.

Ms. Libove's most celebrated role was in the Libove-Lugovoy Duo, which she formed with her husband, the violinist Charles Libove (Violin '40), during their studies at Curtis. The duo's tour-

ing career flourished during the 1960s and '70s, with television appearances (including on PBS, CBS, and the BBC), and on recordings. In 1980, the duo recorded the complete works for violin and piano by Ravel, an album that included the first recording of his recently discovered *Sonata posthume*.

Together with cellist Alan Shulman, the couple founded the Philharmonia Trio in 1962, a group that recorded trios by Henry Cowell and Alexander Semmler.

Ms. Libove was born on January 27, 1929, in the Bronx, N.Y., to Ukrainian immigrant parents who worked as furriers on Manhattan's Lower East Side. She took up the



piano at age four and at age eight, performed at Carnegie Recital Hall (now Weill Recital Hall) and Town Hall under the auspices of the Music School Settlement. She moved to Philadelphia at age 12 to study with Isabelle Vengerova at Curtis. During her studies, she

met Mr. Libove, with whom she performed until his death in 2008.

In 2011, Ms. Libove returned to Curtis to perform in a tribute recital to Karen Tuttle (Viola '48). She is survived by her nieces, June and Marina Lugovoy, as well as friends and extended family.



Carolyn Beatrice Stanford Adams (Voice '58), a mezzo-soprano and educator with deep Philadelphia roots, died on June 15 at the age of 96.

Ms. Adams was active on concert stages throughout the 1960s and '70s, appearing with the Philadelphia Orchestra, Cleveland Orchestra, San Francisco Symphony, and London's Philharmonia Orchestra. Philadelphia's music director Eugene Ormandy hired her on several occasions, and she premiered Bartók's posthumously published Op. 15 songs with the orchestra in 1964.

Born on May 9, 1929, in Darby, Pa., Ms. Adams attended the Philadelphia Conservatory of Music. The young mezzo,

then known as Carolyn Stanford, had one of her earliest breaks in 1957–58 as a chorus member in Broadway's *Jamaica* with Lena Horne and Ricardo Montalban. The show's producer granted her a day off to attend commencement exercises at Curtis, where she received her bachelor's degree. "Then, in the true spirit of the show-must-go-on-business," reported the *New York Times*, "Miss Stanford will return to New York in time for tomorrow night's performance."

After further studies in Vienna, Ms. Adams gave recital tours of North America, Europe, and the Soviet Union. She made her New York City Opera debut in 1968 as Tituba in Robert Ward's *The Crucible* and her

Metropolitan Opera debut in 1973 as Commere in Virgil Thomson's *Four Saints in Three Acts*. Around this same period, Ms. Adams honored her African American roots by performing with Opera Ebony in Philadelphia and on a recital series devoted to Black singers at the Philadelphia Public Library.

From 1978–94, Ms. Adams taught at the University of Miami School of Music, where she chaired the voice department and created a noted musical theater program. In retirement, she actively served her church in various leadership and musical roles. Ms. Adams was preceded in death by her husband, Lawrence E. Adams, Sr., and is survived by her sister and extended family.

THOSE WE HAVE LOST



Barbara (Bobbie) Moskow (Voice '50), a soprano whose career bridged the worlds of opera and Yiddish song, died on June 11 at age 97.

Born in Philadelphia on January 13, 1928, Ms. Moskow was a gifted vocalist from an early age and studied at Curtis with contralto Marion Szekeley Freschi. After graduation, Ms. Moskow made her professional debut as Lucy England in Menotti's opera *The Telephone* with the St. Paul Civic Opera Company.

Ms. Moskow went on to tackle a wide range of operatic repertoire, but by the early 1970s, her focus turned to the music of her Jewish faith. Building on studies with cantor Sidor Belarsky, a bass-baritone, she gave recitals of Yiddish, Hebrew, and classical art songs for Jewish organizations along the East Coast. Much of her work is archived in the Jewish Music Archive at the

University of Pennsylvania and the Recorded Sound Archive Judaic Collection at Florida Atlantic University.

Ms. Moskow later returned to school and earned a master's degree in music therapy from Hahnemann Medical College. While working at Friends Hospital in Philadelphia, assisting seniors with the transitions in their lives, she continued to take part in Yiddish theater performances. After retiring in 1992, she served as a Curtis trustee and wrote several self-published books of poetry and humorous reflections on aging.

Ms. Moskow's legacy endures through the Barbara Moskow Fellowship at Curtis, established in her honor to support promising young vocalists. She is predeceased by her first husband, Herbert Moskow, and second husband, Harry Goldberg. She is survived by her two children.

Yumi Ninomiya Scott (Violin '67), a longtime faculty member and violinist in the Philadelphia Orchestra, died on September 10 at age 82. Ms. Scott was a dedicated member of Curtis' violin faculty for 46 years, training dozens of young musicians—several of whom would go on to play by her side as colleagues in the Philadelphia Orchestra.

Born in 1943 in Japan, Ms. Scott started her violin studies at age four. Following training at Toho Gakuen School of Music in Tokyo, she came to Curtis in 1961 to study with violin pedagogue Ivan Galamian.

In 1966, she made her solo debut with the Philadelphia Orchestra performing Bruch's First Violin Concerto as a winner of the Senior Student Competition—now the Albert M.

Greenfield Student Competition. The following year, she joined the Chamber Symphony of Philadelphia, and from 1969 to 1982, she was a member of the Curtis String Quartet, succeeding Geoffrey Michaels as second violin.

Ms. Scott returned to Curtis in 1970 as a member of the violin faculty, and in 1984, she joined the Philadelphia Orchestra.

During her career, she was also concertmaster of the Main Line Symphony, a member of the Chamber Orchestra of Philadelphia, and participated in the Casals Festival. In 2016 she retired from Curtis, and she and her husband, double bassist Henry Scott, retired from the Philadelphia Orchestra.

Ms. Scott is survived by her husband and their sons, Kenji and Kohji.



Lyric soprano **Benita Valente** (Voice '60) died on October 24 at her home in Philadelphia at age 91.

Praised for her pure and effortless voice, Ms. Valente performed opera, chamber music, and lieder—a genre in which she was among America's great recitalists—on the world's leading stages for nearly four decades.

Born Oct. 19, 1934, in Delano, Calif., Ms. Valente entered Curtis in 1955, studying with French baritone Martial Singher. In 1958, while still a student, she debuted with the Philadelphia Orchestra.

Her connection to Curtis extended beyond music: In 1959, she married Anthony Checchia (Bassoon '51), who would later lead the prestigious Marlboro Music Festival. The pair became one of "classical music's power

couples," according to the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, until Checchia's death in 2024.

Ms. Valente's professional career quickly blossomed. She made her formal debut at the Marlboro Music Festival with pianist Rudolf Serkin in 1960 and debuted with the Metropolitan Opera in the fall of 1973, singing Pamina in *The Magic Flute*. She appeared more than 70 times with the Met, singing leading roles in *Rigoletto*, *The Marriage of Figaro*, *Idomeneo*, *Rinaldo*, and *Falstaff*.

She also garnered wide acclaim for her work as a recitalist and chamber musician, winning a Grammy Award for her recording of Schoenberg's String Quartet No. 2 with the Juilliard String Quartet, and a Grammy nomination for Haydn's *Seven Last Words of Christ*.



Benita Valente in a 1960 class photo at Curtis (back row, third from right).

In 1999, she became the first vocalist to receive the Richard J. Bogomolny National Service Award from Chamber Music America—the organization's highest honor for contributions to chamber music.

After retiring from singing in 2000, Benita devoted herself to teaching, leading master classes at Marlboro, at the European Mozart Academy in Poland, and at the Cincinnati Conservatory's program in Lucca, Italy, among others. In 2001, she received an honorary degree from Curtis alongside Mr. Checchia. Ms. Valente is survived by her son Pete Checchia and her "daughter by choice" Eliza Battle.



David Bahanovich directs cast members of *Jefferson in Paris*.



David Bahanovich

A journey from Merchant-Ivory music director to Curtis' associate provost.

BY BRIAN WISE

THIRTY YEARS AGO, the historical drama *Jefferson in Paris* hit cinemas, depicting the then-disputed premise that Thomas Jefferson had an affair with an enslaved girl named Sally Hemings. The movie, by the legendary filmmaking duo Merchant-Ivory, contained numerous musical details, appropriate to Jefferson's background as an amateur violinist. The film's music director was David Bahanovich, then a freelance cellist, musicologist, and recent graduate of the Peabody Conservatory.

Mr. Bahanovich studied Jefferson's musical interests and oversaw the actors' instrumental coaching, working with Nick Nolte, as Jefferson, and Gwyneth Paltrow, as Jefferson's harpsichordist daughter Patsy.

Other Merchant-Ivory pictures followed for Mr. Bahanovich, including *Le Divorce* (2003) and *The White Countess* (2005). These experiences opened doors to other film, dance, and theater projects. In 2024, he became Curtis' associate provost. A voting member of BAFTA, the British Academy of Film and Television Arts, Mr. Bahanovich is pleased to see so many prominent recent films about classical musicians—even if they don't always get the details right.

Q: How did you get started working with Merchant-Ivory?

David: My story with James Ivory was a simple one: A mutual friend invited James Ivory to a concert

lecture that I was giving. Then, we had lots of dinners afterwards. He asked what I was doing for the next two years of my life, if I could move to Paris in six months—and

if I could start teaching Gwyneth Paltrow next weekend. I said "Wait, I've never put music to a film," although I was sort of a nerdy foreign film teenage guy. I loved Truffaut and Tarkovsky. He said, "I'll teach you filmmaking. I just need your knowledge and your taste."

What is your biggest takeaway from this experience?

I tell students here at Curtis that you'll have similar stories. I'm not singular or unique. You just have to be able to keep an incredibly wide net of individuals in your sphere: It needs to be painters, poets, writers, choreographers, actors, and others, even in areas like finance.

With *Jefferson in Paris*, how did you get Nick Nolte to be a credible violinist?

I got him in touch with a period violinist friend who was at least able to lay out the framework for just getting to know the violin, knowing that he would be playing a period violin. They would video the lessons and FedEx them back to me. I would view them and give them some feedback. Actors are basically extraordinary mimics. I ended up giving Nick a fair number of lessons, dare I say, in the Ritz, which is where he was living.

And Gwyneth Paltrow?

Gwyneth was a fascinating study. She had no musical background. Completely musically illiterate. I had her start with a female harpsichordist [Emmanuelle Haïm], aligned with the sensibilities of an 18th century woman player. Then there were other harpsichord teachers. Gwyneth was literally able to mimic the hand move-

ments, and she did incredibly difficult things: Corelli's *La Folia*, not only the theme but also the last movement.

What do you make of recent biopics such as *Maestro*, *Chevalier*, and *Callas*, or the fictional conductor story *TAR*?

With the film about Leonard Bernstein, I'm delighted that films like that are being made. I'm not someone who is fanatical about the details. It's a wonderful entry point for people who may not know a lot about classical music but just think that Bradley Cooper is really cool. I know lots of people nitpicked about all that, but I thought he did a miraculous job.

With *TAR*, I'm glad it was made. There was clearly attention there. The Chevalier de Saint-Georges film, I did have a little bit of issue with because that could have been approached very differently. It was the same period that *Jefferson* was made, and so all that stuff could have been done with a lot more detail and a lot more care. If Jim Ivory had done it, it would have been a totally different film.

Hollywood is a very different beast, in other words.

No judgment, but previous directors were curious about music. If you look at some of the great directors—Stanley Kubrick, Martin Scorsese—they knew a lot about music. The opening scene of *Casino* is Bach's *St. Matthew Passion*. Scorsese was asked, "Why did you put that in the opening credits of this film about all these thugs and gangsters in criminals?" He said, "My film is about redemption of sinners, and that's what Bach's music is."



Create your Legacy

Many Curtis alumni and friends feel a personal calling to make a difference, to have a lasting impact on the people and places we care about. You can create your legacy at the Curtis Institute of Music by including the school in your estate plans and become 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.



CURTIS INSTITUTE
OF MUSIC
1726 LOCUST ST.
PHILADELPHIA, PA 19103



INSIDE THIS ISSUE

“I can guarantee that over 20 years, you will play for things you don’t agree with. In the end, people want to be in a professional, world-class organization.”

—CHRIS CLARK (TROMBONE '95),
FORMER MARINE BAND MEMBER