

Noteworthy

The University of Tennessee School of Music, 2020

NATALIE L. HASLAM MUSIC CENTER

**We're in This
Together**



In September 2018, the School of Music began celebrating the works of Ludwig van Beethoven as the 250th anniversary of his birth approached in December 2020. A series of concerts and events focused on the masterpieces of this legendary composer throughout the 2019-20 academic year. One of the feature performances was Beethoven's 9th Symphony by the UT Symphony Orchestra and Choirs at the historic Tennessee Theatre in February 2020.



The UT Symphony Orchestra and Choirs performed Beethoven's 9th Symphony at the historic Tennessee Theatre in February 2020. Photo by Vicki Nguyen



From the Director

I've always waited until the very end of the publication process to write these notes, and this year is no different. But that's where the commonalities stop this year.

Anyone who has lived through it (and as we know some have not) will never forget it. As an academic year goes, all was fine until December 2019. Little did we know the force the COVID-19 virus would place on our entire world. Then, although not a new phenomenon, George Floyd, unfortunately, became a household phrase. I don't need to rehash the derailment both these events brought and continue to bring to our society.

2020 was a year no one in the world will ever forget, and it will rank for Americans like 1929, 1968, 2008, and we now all know 1918. We've collectively survived all of these challenges and in some way come out stronger. I believe we will do so again.

For our School of Music, 2020 was one of great change, loss, and successes. Each is found within these pages. I am prouder than ever of our faculty, students, and staff.

Jeffrey Pappas
Director of the School of Music

- 4 150 Years of the Pride of the Southland
- 8 We're in This Together
- 12 How We Continue to Thrive
- 18 Diva Extraordinaire
- 22 Student Achievements
- 27 Alumni Accolades
- 28 A Bid Farewell
- 30 Faculty Accomplishments
- 32 It's Never Too late
- 34 Absorbed in Opera

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CELEBRATING 150 YEARS OF THE PRIDE OF THE SOUTHLAND MARCHING BAND

Photo courtesy of Betty Myers



Homecoming 2019

150 YEARS OF THE PRIDE OF THE SOUTHLAND





WE'RE IN THIS TOGETHER

By Jeffrey Pappas | Photo by Andrew Tessier

The School of Music is committed not only to diversity, equity, and inclusion of every human being but also to equipping our students to apply their art to changing times.



Director Jeffrey Pappas visits with students Rylee Worstell (left) and Joseph Beller (right), while maintaining social distancing.

How can we put the past months in perspective, when the road ahead remains so uncertain? Everyone is obviously unaware and unsure what the future holds.

As fraught a challenge as that is, we as a school must understand what is going on around us and adapt to it.

As the School of Music has dealt with the COVID-19 pandemic and our nation's ongoing crucible of racial injustice, we have been changed forever.

Facing a Pandemic

First, the pandemic. As the university made the decision to take its instruction online, our faculty rose to the challenge. I don't remember hearing any complaining. Our faculty never whined, and they made it work. Given lemons, they made lemonade. They had to do it and they did, with a can-do attitude and creative solutions to difficult problems. When things change, they were ready to change with them.

This is what makes a quality, effective faculty in the first place, and that's what came through last spring and throughout this fall semester. It has not been easy, and there is much we continue to address in the lives of students and their studies. We have all had feelings of isolation that human beings are simply not wired for. The School of Music is committed to being there for our students when they need help coping with these difficult situations.

We Stand Together

As 2020 churns on to be a year none of us will forget, quite frankly, COVID-19 is not our only virus. We are again in the midst of another virus, one that has been around much longer than COVID-19. Systemic racism must stop. We already have a vaccine for it, and it is found in the hearts of everyone around us. We must choose to allow it to work.

Systemic racism must stop. We already have a vaccine for it, and it is found in the hearts of everyone around us. We must choose to allow it to work.

Near the end of the spring semester, I called on everyone in the School of Music—our students, faculty, staff, donors, friends, and all other supporters—to join with us to condemn systemic racism, and the oppression and hate that fuels it.

It was a time to remind everyone what we stand for: We are wholly committed to diversity, equity, and inclusion of every human being. We are in it for the longer haul for this, in part because we as artists and scholars have always played an important role in influencing the society around us.

As a school of music, it is easy for us to rely on the musical and academic messages that our art form provides. This is not enough.

Yes, we can spread messages of inclusivity, equality, and

human rights through our performances and lectures. That works. But we need to do more.

Making a Difference

Last spring, I formed a task force comprising students, faculty, staff, and community members to lead us in initiatives that go beyond the traditional concert hall and outside our classrooms, so we don't solely rely on these safe spaces to condemn this ongoing brutality.

Musicians have always had a voice. People have looked to us for reflective insights. Now, I'm suggesting we, as artistic leaders in Knoxville and beyond, take a stand to promote love, inclusion and common decency among all peoples. This will not cost us anything. We can't say that for those we've lost and those who continue to suffer. We do not have to wait

for a vaccine, we know that diversity, equality, and inclusivity will heal us.

We can provide outlets, specifically to the young people we are molding, to be proponents of social justice and change. That is what we will do—by being proactive, peaceful, and thoughtful change agents.

I'll say it again: The School of Music is wholly committed to diversity, equity, and inclusion of every human being.

Please join us in supporting this thought and in our future efforts to invoke the changes necessary by being leading voices in this effort. Our positive actions against all of our 2020 challenges will be successful with unity and compassion for each other.



Top left: Allison Adams leads a socially-distanced saxophone lesson with student Darius Edwards.

Top right: Viola faculty Hillary Herndon gives a socially-distanced lesson with student Emily Martinez in one of the newly-placed tents outside the School of Music.

Bottom: From left to right, Director Jeffrey Pappas, Rylee Worstell, Jackson Guthrie, Joseph Beller, Josie Campbell, Jackie Yong, and Claire Sudarshan stand together outside the Natalie L. Haslam Music Center.



HOW WE CONTINUE TO THRIVE

COVID-19 has presented many challenges since its emergence, but the School of Music continues to find creative ways to keep music alive and well in our community. The following pages include some stories and scenes from the School of Music's efforts during the pandemic.

The UT Singers perform in the Sandra G. Powell Recital Hall while wearing masks and being properly socially distanced.

Photo by Jeff Roberts

VIOLA STUDENTS PERFORM FOR SENIOR LIVING COMMUNITY

By *Brian Canever*

Four weeks into social distancing, music performance student Zach Miller felt close to his breaking point. Away from his campus routine, he spent most of the day alone or in online classrooms. His recitals and performances were canceled or switched to a digital submission format.

“I felt stripped of human interaction,” says Miller, a junior violin and viola student from Maryville, Tennessee.

Erin Parker, a senior music education major, was also struggling. One of her favorite classes included a hands-on jazz emphasis in the second half of the semester, and it wasn’t the same not being there in person to interact with her teacher and classmates.

The difficulties were obvious to Hillary Herndon, associate professor of viola at the School of Music. Through March and April, as the faculty worked with undergraduate and graduate students to plot a way forward when COVID-19 forced classes online, her students were finding themselves adjusting—many for the first time—to life conducted over Zoom.

“Music is a performance art; it’s not meant to be done by your-

self in a room,” says Herndon. “To be able to interact with an audience, even if it’s thousands of miles away—that opportunity is very important for all musicians.”

While listening to her Aunt Dottie recount a Zoom conversation she and other residents at a senior living community in Long Island, New York, had shared with a dog, Herndon hatched an idea.

“If they’re willing to spend time on Zoom with a dog they can’t pet, and I’ve got students who want to perform for somebody, maybe we could fill a need from both sides,” she thought. She emailed her viola studio students with three options for the juried performance that made up their final exam: a digital submission, a one-on-one performance for her over Zoom, or playing for the senior living community residents.

The plan came together on April 28 when five UT viola studio

students performed over Zoom for Dottie and the other 13 residents of Jericho, New York’s Encore Luxury Living community. Beyond serving as the students’ final exam, the performance provided a social opportunity for people facing the isolation of COVID-19 in one of the country’s hardest-hit regions. And it was made possible only because of the willingness of Herndon and her students to learn and serve others at a time when many people are in dire need of connection.

Miller was second in the day’s lineup. He performed selections from Carl Stamitz’s Viola Concerto in D Major and Johann Sebastian Bach’s C Major Suite.

“I’m standing in my living room, and I’ve just finished playing and I’ve got applause coming through my laptop—that doesn’t happen in an academic setting,” Miller says.

Community engagement events and outreach to retirement communities, hospitals, and local schools are routine for faculty and students in the School of Music. In February, Herndon and other faculty members played for residents at Parkview Senior Living in Maryville.

“But this is the first time we’ve done something like this using technology,” Herndon says. “Because of that, it was the first time we were able to reach outside of our physical community. It was an opportunity to reach out and help by providing what we could do.”

The benefit was twofold: seniors had an opportunity to enjoy an afternoon of music, while

students experienced an escape from feeling isolated. At the end of each student’s section, residents engaged and asked questions.

One resident asked Miller where he saw himself after finishing music school.

“They had a good idea of what we go through as musicians,” Miller says. “Getting to talk to each other made the interaction feel a little more human.”

For students who chose the group performance option, Herndon extended an invitation to their family and friends, who typically are permitted to attend only public recitals.

“It really touched my heart to have my family there, especially during this time when we’re all feeling disconnected,” says Parker, who lives in Maryville and hasn’t seen her mom or stepdad—who attended the Zoom call along with her sister,

niece, and nephew—since social distancing started. Parker performed Mark Summers’s “Julio-O” and Bach’s Viola da Gamba Sonata in G major.

Behind the scenes, Herndon had worked with Shayla Superior, social director for Encore Luxury Living, to organize the performance. She created a program, as she would for any recital, while Superior created a poster and promoted the event to the center’s 14 residents, who all attended.

“Residents are really confined to their rooms right now,” Superior says. “They aren’t able to enjoy their lives as they once were.”

As COVID-19 intensified, community administrators canceled all trips and temporarily closed the dining halls. Residents, who must wear masks at all times and are not permitted to have visitors inside the building, have meals delivered to their rooms and rely on drivers and staff to pick up prescriptions and groceries. Nassau County, where the community is located, has experienced nearly 40,000 confirmed coronavirus cases and more than 2,000 deaths (as of May 2020).

Although the performance wasn’t without its complications—Superior had to find the right speakers, a setting accessible for Wi-Fi, and a screen to project the performance on—she couldn’t help smiling behind her mask as the students played.

“It was a wonderful afternoon,” says Superior, who had hors d’oeuvres for residents to enjoy during the performance. “They love classical music. There was a sense of community, even though they understood it’s not our community here in New York.”

The performance was Superior’s first experiment organizing an activity over Zoom. But its success has led her to plan virtual yoga, cooking, cocktail creation classes, and hopefully additional musical performances in the future.

Parker, who is currently seeking out student teaching opportu-

nities and plans to start an event ensemble, has been inspired to organize her own Zoom concerts for family and friends she hasn’t seen in months.

Miller sees the virtual concert as an extension of the spirit he experienced on campus.

“There are conservatories across the US that are filled with incredibly talented people. But UT—we’re still here. We have this really special aura,” he says. “Being able to share the Volunteer spirit with somebody outside of Tennessee, outside of the Southeast—I never thought I’d be able to share what I do with people this way.”

This summer he has been invited to train with both a viola professor at Vanderbilt University’s Blair School of Music and the principal violist at the Nashville Symphony, using Zoom and online learning tools.

Herndon hopes to incorporate more virtual activities in future semesters for her students. Virtual performances may not substitute for a live performance in front of a crowd, but they demonstrate a creative way forward in a time when audiences are unable to gather.

“It’s just like interacting over Zoom isn’t the same as being in the same room together,” Herndon says. “But knowing what we know now, we see what is possible.”



Read this story online at noteworthy.utk.edu.



Viola student Zach Miller performs via Zoom for senior living community members.

COVID-19: A PERSPECTIVE FOR THE ARTS & HUMANITIES

Nathan Fleshner, assistant professor of music theory and composition, wrote the following article for *The Polyphony* (March 18, 2020) regarding the challenges and the opportunities for the arts and humanities field.

The world is reeling from the shock of the proliferation of the SARS-CoV-2 virus that leads to Coronavirus Disease 2019, better known as COVID-19. As we remove ourselves from social situations and even eliminate interpersonal interactions altogether in an effort to slow the spread of infection, we are entering a new period of fear and uncertainty that threatens the stability of our health, financial, social, and education systems as well as our emotional and physical well-beings. To complicate matters, misinformation abounds. There has been a rise in misinformation, resulting in conflicting and confusing perspectives, fostered by new cultural terminology like “fake news” and “alternative facts.” In such a time as this, facts are critical. Without facts on which to solidify confidences in our ability to overcome this viral onslaught on our world’s health and stability, fear abounds.



my last day of face-to-face instruction, I heard several groups of students discussing the virus and their uncertainty as to their safety and how the remainder of their semester might unfold. In a similar state of uncertainty, my colleagues across the United States and I turn our thoughts toward transferring the remainder of our courses to an online format—a task that many of us have never considered and some have even considered a threat to their own positions as instructors. This will no doubt be a burden for many, but I see it also as a tremendous opportunity. I’m grateful that our semesters were not fully cut short, but have the possibility of continuing through various guises of online delivery. The important thing to me is that I will still have contact with my students and thus an opportunity and an important role in helping them through this time. The remainder of this essay expounds the reasons I see this as so important.

My research and teaching specialty is music theory. I have had several crises of confidence in my career choice and its importance to the world and humankind. I have pondered my wife’s career as a nurse; friends who are medical doctors, mathematicians, and linguists who maintain our most basic skills to communicate and compute within and about our world; scientists studying biology, chemistry, and physics; along with virologists and epidemiologists who may be ultimately responsible for the protection of life on this planet. Art, music, and the humanities are important, too—arguments for which abound and are beyond my focus here. To be clear, I’m quite certain of the importance of the practice and instruction of the arts and humanities. Suffice it to admit, however, that I have sometimes struggled with my own understanding of my profession’s importance in the world.

I have overcome these crises of confidence, concluding that what I truly teach is thinking and logic and coming to the realization that, while I certainly want my students to learn about music and its organization, what I really want them to gain in my classes is a sense of how to observe data and its relationship with other data and create well-formed, logical interpretations of that data. Like our sister disciplines of the visual, theatrical, and literary arts, music, as an art, requires a certain amount of subjective interpretation, a common thread throughout much of the humanities. And music theory is no

stranger to this subjectivity. The analysis of a musical composition involves an act of creativity and interpretation. One examines a piece of music—either visually or aurally, observes its musical components, formulates an interpretation of how those musical components are structured both individually and in coordination with other musical components in the piece, and repackages that in a narrative that is logical, cohesive, and understandable (and therefore useful) to other musicians.

“Students with this kind of experience in thinking have a powerful tool to use as they process the daily updates and new information about COVID-19.”

While this activity is certainly subjective, there are strong threads of objectivity that must be present in any interpretation of music. There are no “alternative facts” in music theory. There are factual elements on which we can and must ground our interpretations. We cannot say, for example, that a note is a C, when it is actually a C sharp. As data points accumulate, however, things begin to become murkier. We have to weigh information with new information encountered in a piece. We reinterpret old data in light of that new information. As we look at a musical composition, the pitch, C, might seem important, but then we encounter an A and reconsider the original C as perhaps connected to this A as a single unit, perhaps creating part of an A-minor triad. But a third data point, the pitch F, might enter the picture, and it is only now that we understand that original C to be the top part of an F major triad. Mahler’s famous Adagietto, the fourth movement of his Fifth Symphony, opens in exactly this way, with these exact notes. It’s not until the third measure before we finally get the F, the root of the chord, and know exactly where we are tonally in the movement. I’ve used this as an example of this kind of music analysis, but also because it is one of my favorite moments of peace in the musical literature. I highly recommend listening. You’ll hear C’s and A’s sustained in the strings and arpeggiated downward in the harp. It’s not until the downbeat of the third measure where the double basses and harp pluck the F that grounds the opening harmony, and we finally feel aurally home. You can hear the cellos descending and the first violins ascending toward this F during this opening—all leading toward that third measure where the melody truly gets going in the first violins. It’s a beautiful moment of tension and then peace. May it bring you peace as well.

That’s an example of the kind of observational thinking I aim to teach in my discipline, but every subject in the arts, humanities, and sciences alike could likely come up with a parallel disciplinary example. Students with this kind of experience in thinking have a powerful tool to use as they process the daily updates and new information about COVID-19. In this

period of rapidly changing data, our students are bombarded by seemingly endless information, much of which is labeled as or assumed to be factual information. They are confronted with a sea of armchair epidemiologists and an even larger sea of information spewing from many sources, some traditionally trustworthy, only to have it contradicted and/or corrected right after. They have to assemble multiple observations and test them against one another to solidify them into strong, well-formed analyses. And they must be vigilant to make sure that information comes from reliable sources based on factual observations.

Much as with the opening of Mahler’s Adagietto, understanding is of course altered as we observe new data that replaces old data or reframes that old data in a new perspective. It is allowed to change, and it should change when presented with new information. And while we join together as a planet in a common purpose to overcome COVID-19, our ability to rapidly observe, organize, and interpret data has never been so critical. It can be a source of confidence, peace, and mental stability in our lives in this difficult time. That’s how science works. That’s also how the arts and humanities work, or at least, perhaps, they should. That’s what I’d like my students to get from the remainder of this semester within a world in crisis and the time beyond when we ultimately return to the new normal on the other side. Hopefully, our classes can remain a beacon of organized, logical hope to overcome fear in these difficult times.



Read this story online at thepolyphony.org.

An Opportunity for the Arts, Humanities, and Sciences

Like most universities across the United States and abroad, my school has transitioned to fully online instruction for the remainder of the semester. As I walked out of the building on

DIVA EXTRAORDINAIRE

By Brooks Clark | Photo by Scott Suchman

With her Met Opera National Council Auditions victory, soprano Alexandria Shiner ('16) hit a high note.

On a cold evening this past March, Alexandria Shiner stood on an Amtrak platform in New York's Penn Station. She had just won the Metropolitan Opera National Council Audition's Grand Final and was heading back to her home in Washington, DC, for the last few months of her three-year Cafritz Young Artist fellowship with the Washington National Opera. She saw an email pop up from the US Judiciary. It was from Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg's assistant. Ginsburg heard Shiner sing several times, met and talked with her, and knew about Shiner's coup de grace at the Met. "As I said at the court," wrote Ginsburg. "You go from strength to strength."

"I felt a chill go up my spine," recalls Shiner.

Just a couple of months before, Robert Ainsley, the director of the Cafritz Young Artist Program, had introduced Shiner to The Business Council, a group of Fortune 500 CEOs and DC bigwigs, at the Kennedy Center by noting proudly that he "found her working as a barista at a Starbucks in a mall in Knoxville, Tennessee." As it happened, Starbucks CEO Kevin Johnson was there and happily took a picture with her. "I didn't quite understand the gravity of that moment," says Shiner. "If four years ago someone had said these things were going to happen to me, I would never have believed it. I could never have imagined this."

There’s a Voice in This Kid

“I always loved singing,” says Shiner, who grew up in Waterford, Michigan. “My elementary school music teacher told my mom, ‘There’s a voice in this kid.’” Shiner enjoyed roles in all her high school musicals. In her freshman year she played Agatha in the Salvation Army chorus in *Guys and Dolls*. In her junior year, after *The 1940s Radio Hour and Godspell*, she started taking voice lessons, in time for *Schoolhouse Rock Live* her senior year. “I wanted to do musical theater, but it didn’t work out,” she says. She tried out for several musical theater programs but didn’t get an offer. When she auditioned for the voice program at Western Michigan University in Kalamazoo, she got in.

The summer before her senior year at WMU, Shiner attended a six-week program at the American Institute of Musical Studies in Graz, Austria, where she met UT Professor of Voice Marjorie Bennett Stephens. “In my very first lesson at AIMS,” says Shiner, “I sang ‘Si, mi chiamano Mimi’ from *La Boheme*. She said, ‘OK.’ Then she helped me open up my sound and find my voice. I was singing high and light and sounded like a little girl. She helped me find more colors in my voice than I’d ever had. With each lesson, I appreciated her teaching more and more. She seemed like the right teacher for me.”

She graduated from WMU with a Bachelor of Music in voice in December 2013 and decided to work in the university concerts office to earn money for graduate school auditions. In March 2014, she received a Facebook message from Stephens. Shiner got right back to her. “Well, that was fast,” said Stephens. “Do you want to come to grad school for free? We have an open assistantship that’s yours if you want it.”

“I had really only driven through Tennessee on the way to Florida,” says Shiner, who found an apartment online and was in Knoxville by August.

She and Stephens quickly got to work. “She’s a tough teacher,” says Shiner. “If I had known what I was getting into working with her, I wouldn’t have believed it. Knowing the work that I would do and where it led me, the training and performances—she helped shape me into the artist I am today.”

In 2014, by invitation of Manhattan Concert Productions, Shiner performed in the Fourth Annual Collegiate Honors Recital at Carnegie Hall. In 2016 she placed second in the Young Artist division of the Orpheus National Music Competition for Vocalists and competed as the Mid-South Regional Winner in the National Association of Teachers of Singing Artist Awards in Chicago.

With UT Opera Theatre productions, she sang the roles of Donna Elvira in *Don Giovanni*, Magda Sorel in *The Consul*, and the Queen of the Night in Mozart’s *Die Zauberflöte* (The Magic Flute). In a review in the Knoxville Mercury, critic

Alan Sherrod effused poetically: “Aided by spiky headdresses and a sumptuous atmosphere of stars, Shiner had perfected the required contrast between the Queen’s disingenuous lament in her Act I aria and the raw vengeance of her Act II appearance. [Her] portrayal went a step further, though, with a gorgeous coloratura, amazing depth and power, and a stunningly vivid dramatic portrayal.”

In these and other roles, Shiner was coached by UT’s Director of Opera James Marvel. She describes the experience as “coming into an environment that felt supportive, where you were given the room to try things and fail, to make mistakes and improve.

“The acting and musical training with James has continually helped me to approach each audition, competition, and performance with an edge and confidence that has made all the difference so far in my career. It was a safe and nurturing environment, and it gave me the tools to be where I am today. UT was such an important place for me, as a singer, as a person, and as an artist,” she says.

From Starbucks to the Washington National Opera

After graduating with her Master of Music in voice in 2016, Shiner wanted to save money as she had after her undergrad degree. “I was working at a Starbucks at West Town Mall,” she said. “I got a Facebook message from Rob Ainsley: ‘I am the director of the Cafritz Young Artists Program, and I’d love to talk to you and see if you are in DC or NY in the coming weeks.’”

After Christmas, Shiner was a finalist in a round of auditions for the program, received 45 minutes of coaching from Ken Weiss, the program’s principal coach, and started a three-year fellowship in 2017. The Cafritz Young Artists Program is one of many DC-area cultural mainstays supported by the Morris and Gwendolyn Cafritz Foundation.

The program immerses 12 singers on the verge of international careers in voice lessons, language classes, career guidance, and master classes with Washington National Opera staff and guest artists. The singers perform at the Kennedy Center as well as at various community concerts, recitals, and events throughout the DC area and beyond. For the emerging artist performance of *Alcina* in November 2017, Shiner sang the title role. In May 2018, she sang the role of Berta in Rossini’s *The Barber of Seville*. That fall was the role of Kayla in the world premiere of Sankaram’s *Taking Up Serpents*, for which the Washington Classical Review praised her “powerful soprano voice with precise intonation and a broad range of dynamics and color.” She capped the 2018–19 season singing Mirra in the North American premiere of Liszt’s lost opera *Sardanapalo* and the title role in *Ariadne auf Naxos* with Wolf Trap Opera. In December 2019 she

traveled to Moscow to sing at the Bolshoi Theatre.

“It’s been a wild whirlwind of different experiences,” says Shiner. “The Washington National Opera is amazing, and my colleagues are wonderful to work with and listen to all the time. To be able to bump into major singers and get to know them and listen to them in rehearsal has been a critical part of my development. Angela Meade, just to hear her and watch her, just watching and covering [understudying] her. I’ve worked with Renée Fleming many times. Nothing compares with being in the same room with an operatic voice.”

Shiner met Justice Ginsburg, who passed away in September 2020, after a 2018 performance at the Supreme Court. “We talked, and she said I keep going from strength to strength.” Ginsburg came to most of the opera dress rehearsals and the season-opening party at Calvin and Jane Cafritz’s Georgetown home. In January 2020, Shiner sang at Ginsburg’s induction into the Only in America Gallery and Hall of Fame at the National Museum of American Jewish History in Philadelphia. Those earlier experiences made Ginsburg’s kind words after the Met auditions even more meaningful.

Showdown at the Metropolitan Opera House

By February, Shiner was a semifinalist in the 2020 Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions. For more than 60 years, this annual competition—which starts with regional auditions around the country—has helped launch the careers of some of opera’s greatest stars. No UT opera graduate had ever made it to the semifinals.

Stephens journeyed from Knoxville to New York to watch her former student compete. “Marjorie was just there to support me,” says Shiner. “My big cheerleader. It was very special for both of us that she was able to be there for both rounds.”

Shiner sang two arias in each round. Her first two arias got her into the Grand Finals Concert with just nine other singers. In the Grand Finals, she sang, “Dich, teure Halle” from Richard Wagner’s *Tannhäuser* and “To this we’ve come” from Menotti’s *The Consul*. Shiner had performed the role of Magda Sorel in *The Consul* with the Washington National Opera and the UT Opera Theatre and had learned both with Stephens. “Do you remember when I did them in Knoxville?” she asked Stephens afterward.

By any measure, Shiner was in the zone. Stephens reflects on that moment, “What an absolute joy it was to watch and hear this young lady own the stage at the Met. “With great poise and elegance, she rocked the house.”

While she was performing, Shiner says she thought to herself, “This is how singing is supposed to feel.”

Shiner was one of five winners, each of whom received a cash prize of \$20,000. “We had the opportunity to sing in front of countless industry professionals on the Met stage and were able to sing with the Met Orchestra,” says Shiner. “The exposure is astronomical.” Afterward, when Shiner thanked Stephens for all she had done for her, Stephens said, “I didn’t do anything.”

“I’m so grateful to have met her,” says Shiner, “because without her I would not be where I am today.”

Back in DC’s Takoma Park, Shiner is finishing her third year in the Cafritz program. “This is yet another demanding and rewarding and busy year of my life,” she says. Pre-COVID, she was scheduled to make her debut with the Met Opera in December, singing the role of Berta in *Il barbiere di Siviglia* (*The Barber of Seville*). That production has been rescheduled for March 2021 as the Met postponed the opening of its upcoming season to January 2021, but Shiner is hopeful. “Any opportunity to sing on the stage of the Metropolitan Opera is a gift, and one that I plan to make the most of.”



Alexandria Shiner (pictured far right) stands with other winners of the Met Opera National Council Auditions. Photo by Richard Termine/Met Opera

Student Achievements

Kirstine Anderson (BM, music education) was the recipient of a 2020 University of Tennessee Chancellor’s Outstanding Professional Promise award. During 2019–20, she served as East Tennessee president for Tennessee CNAfME.

Hyowon Bong’s (MM, composition) work *Preludes for Piano* was selected for performance at the Society of Music Theory/CMS Regional Conference in Nashville. She was the recipient of a \$10,000 Thomas Grant to compose an opera that will be performed by the university’s undergraduate opera program, VolOpera, in the 2020–21 academic year.

Jonathan Bradshaw (BM, composition) was accepted to study at the 2020 Sewanee Summer Music Festival.

Cullen Burke (BM, composition) collaborated with Louisa Trott, UT digital projects librarian and film archivist, in conjunction with the McClung Library, on the silent film *Silents in Motion*. The film was presented at the John C. Hodges Auditorium on October 10, 2019.

Aaron Hunt’s (MM, composition) composition “If it Bends it Breaks” was selected for performance at the New Music on the Bayou Composition Symposium at Louisiana Tech University in Monroe, Louisiana, and the Society of Music Theory/CMS Regional Conference in Nashville, where it won the 2020 CMS Dennis Kam Student Composition Prize. Aaron’s paper “Multi-Narrativity in Music: An Analysis of John Corigliano’s Symphony No. 1, Apologue: Of Rage and Remembrance and Its Use of Intertextuality” was selected for presentation at the Society of Music Theory/CMS Regional Conference in Nashville, where it won the 2020 CMS David Kushner Student Paper Award.

Vicki Nguyen (BM, composition) was offered full graduate teaching assistantships at the University of Georgia, Michigan State University, and Bowling Green State University, as well as significant funding offers from Mannes in New York. She was awarded multiple scholarships to support her Master of Music in composition studies at New York University, where she is now continuing her studies. She was also made an at-large board member of the National Association of Composers, USA (NACUSA)

Wayd Odle (MM, vocal performance) was a studio artist with Wolf Trap Opera in summer 2020 where he performed the role of Parpignol in Puccini’s *La Boheme* and also covered the role of Rodolfo. Odle was also a winner of an Encouragement Award from the Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions (North Carolina District) in Charlotte in January 2020.

Kelvin Ying (MM, collabroative piano) won an audition to join the US Army Field Band as a pianist for the concert band and Solders’ Chorus. Once he completes basic combat training, he will officially join the US Army and the Field Band.

Cydnee Young (BM, music education) was one of the School of Music’s representatives at the June 2020 NAFME Collegiate Advocacy Summit “Hill Day,” which was held virtually. Young served as vice president/public relations officer for Tennessee CNAfME.

Jacob Zerega (BM, music education) was one of the School of Music’s representatives at the June 2020 NAFME Collegiate Advocacy Summit “Hill Day,” which was held virtually.

2019 Honors Convocation Awards

Celebration of Excellence Competition

Part of the college-wide Exhibition for Undergraduate Research and Creative Achievement (EURēCA).

School of Music winners:

First place: Caleb Cannon (bass trombone)

Second place: Josie Campbell (cello)

2020 Student Research Contest in Music

First place: Emily Williams for her paper “When the Instrument is Deficient: Creating Access through Instrument Prosthetics”

Second place: Holly Tumblin for her paper “I Am the Goddess: Empowered Femininity in a Bachata Music Video”

College Music Society David Kushner Student Paper Contest

2020 winner: Aaron Hunt

Student Ambassadors

2020–21: Paul Davis, Carolyn Gahan, Jackson Guthrie, Rachel Mekdeci, Karagen Peck, Rylee Worstell

Outstanding Graduating Seniors

Chosen by the faculty in their individual areas, recipients must have a 3.5 GPA, show professional promise, and have made a significant overall contribution to the program.

Kirstine Andersen (BM) music education

Nicolette Caswell (BA) music & culture & (BM) sacred music

Moriah Franklin (BM) woodwind performance

Bailye Hendley (BM) brass performance

Brandon Jackson (BA) applied music

Zachary Jerome (BM) string performance

Bernell Jones II (BM) studio music & jazz

Vicki Nguyen (BM) theory & composition

Zhen Zhang (BM) piano performance

Sigma Alpha Iota—Collegiate Honor Award

Presented to a member of SAI for outstanding musicianship, scholarship, and service.

Abby Newberry

Sigma Alpha Iota Scholastic Award

Presented to a member of SAI for holding the highest grade point average.

Becca Blevins

Gerald W. Barnes Fund for Excellence in Woodwind Award

Established by the Arkansas Community Foundation to reward excellence in woodwind studies.

Bernell Jones II

Presser Scholar

Presented annually to a music major who is a rising senior with a high grade point average and at least one-third of his or her classes outside the field of music. The award is voted on by the faculty.

Josie Campbell

Pi Kappa Lambda Honor Society

The only music organization recognized by the Association of College Honor Societies. Dedicated by its founders to the fostering of scholarly interest in the theoretical and historical aspects of music and to the pursuit of eminent achievement in performance, composition, music education, and research.

2020 New Members: Laura Buckner, Adrian Hartsough, Terrence Mitchell Leve II, Julia Stewart, Joshua Sumter, and Jacob Zerega

Viola Student Participates in Pacific Music Festival

Dragana Loncar (BM, viola performance) represented the School of Music at the 30th annual Pacific Music Festival in Sapporo, Japan, in June 2019. Dragana was the first UT student to participate in the prestigious festival.



Grad Student Wins Research Award to Have KSO Musicians Play His Works

By Amy Blakely

At 46, in the midst of a successful career as a commercial musician, music director, teacher, and performer, Dennis Belisle decided to enroll in UT's School of Music to pursue a new dream—being a composer.

He completed a bachelor's degree in sacred music in spring 2018 and immediately began working on his Master of Music in composition degree with a theory pedagogy certificate.

Belisle graduated in December 2019, and wrapped up his studies on a very high note: members of the Knoxville Symphony Orchestra performed his musical compositions during a concert in fall 2019, at the Sandra G. Powell Recital Hall in the Natalie L. Haslam Music Center.

Belisle received the inaugural Robert W. Pedersen Memorial Research Award to fund the performance. Pedersen, a UT alumnus, left money to the university in an endowment earmarked “for awards for outstanding performance by students and/or faculty.”

“The support of this grant allowed me to follow through with my plans to have professional musicians perform and record my compositions,” said Belisle, who now works as music director for Rio Revolution, a non-denominational church in Maryville, Tennessee, with more than 2,000 members. “This concert made a significant impact on my professional reputation as a composer and helped to make a long-lasting impression as a graduate of UT.”

Belisle said he decided to come to UT because he aspired to accomplish even more than he had in the first half of his career. His dream is to become a film score composer.

“I knew that there was more for me to learn, a bigger artistic world for me to explore, and a drive to do the work necessary to move to the next stage of my professional life.”

Throughout his studies, he's been mentored by Assistant Professor Andrew Sigler.

“For the last two years, Dr. Sigler has guided me and helped me shape my own compositional voice,” he said. “For my thesis I chose to compose a string quartet, a musical form which stands alongside the symphony and concerto as one of the most challenging tests of a composer.”

As Belisle saw his compositions coming together, he organized a string quartet ensemble from the Graduate Strings Studio at UT to perform a piece at the New Sound concert in April 2018. When that went well, he decided to go a step further.

“As I embark on a career as a composer at the midpoint of my life, it is in my best interest to document as many of my compositions as possible with performances by professional players, including my 20-minute string quartet.”

Belisle reached out to members the Knoxville Symphony Orchestra to see if they'd be interested in performing his work—and



Dennis Belisle (MM '19)

“The support of this grant allowed me to follow through with my plans to have professional musicians perform and record my compositions.”

how much it would cost to stage a concert.

“Sean Claire, violinist and longtime KSO member, listened to and reviewed my work and informed me that he was personally interested in performing at my recital, indicating that ‘I wouldn’t miss this performance—you have a great piece of music here.’

“He also informed me that my woodwind quintet pieces, which I also submitted for performance, were so well received by the orchestra’s woodwind quintet that they had asked for permission to perform those works as part of the symphony’s Q-Series concerts as part of their upcoming season. Needless to say, I was thrilled with the interest in my music.”

For his concert, Belisle wanted members of the KSO to perform his string quartet and three woodwind quintet pieces as well as three mixed chamber pieces incorporating the string quartet, the woodwind quintet, and voice.

He was told the cost for the rehearsals and the performance would fall somewhere between \$3,300 and \$4,075. The research grant covered it all—or at least most—of the expense.

Belisle said Sigler was a constant source of support as he planned the concert.

“From guiding me through the contracting process, steering me through the publishing details as well as how to record the event to achieve the highest possible results, he has been there,” Belisle said.

Sigler said Belisle’s story “is a really wonderful example of the possibilities for graduate students at the university in general and the School of Music in particular. His hard work and willingness to seize and capitalize on opportunities serve as a blueprint for us all. I couldn’t be prouder of his achievements and can’t wait to see what’s in store for Dennis going forward.”



Assistant Professor Andrew Sigler works with graduate student Dennis Belisle

Portraits of an Epidemic

Recording Techniques Class Creates 4-Track Album

By Jeff Roberts

Each year, the recording techniques class that Jorge Variego teaches completes a final project that comprises a complete album production. This year was no different, though the efforts to complete the album production were more challenging because of COVID-19. Students compose original music; create a budget for the costs of recording, distributions and marketing, and record and mix the audio. The final product is then presented to the class.

“This spring in the midst of the pandemic, we worked with the same goals and high standards as always,” Variego said. “It amazed me how the students managed to make something beautiful out of the current state of things. That is what highly creative people do; they reinvent reality.”

A group of four students decided to create a four-track album centered around the COVID-19 pandemic titled *Portraits of an Epidemic*. The group, who labeled themselves Tunstall and the Trubadors, includes John Tunstall, Cullen Burke, Zach Ward, and Andrew Stanley.

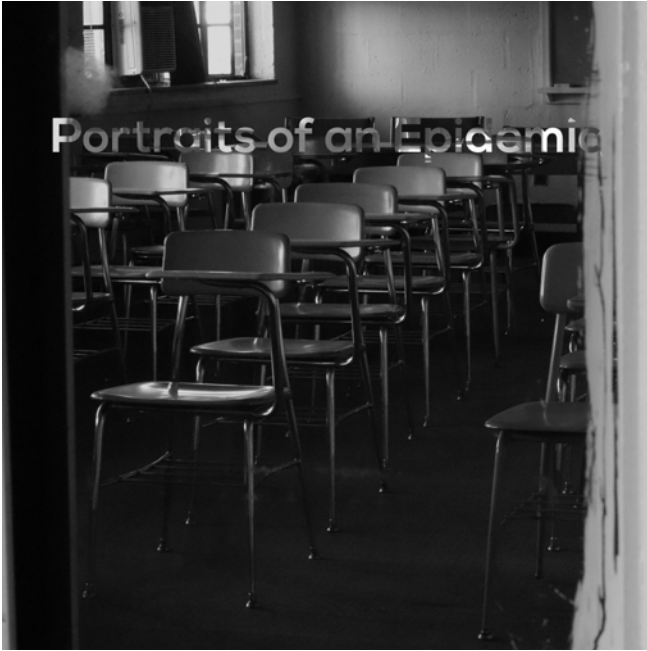
“To me the project was about how each of us was responding to the global pandemic at the time,” said Stanley, a double major in music theory and English. “Our limitation of not being able to see one another in person was ultimately what created the idea of having different perspectives next to each other on the album.”

The group had to use their own or rented recording equipment, and they created their songs asynchronously. The songs were then compiled and edited to create the cohesive atmosphere heard on the album.

“I think it was a great opportunity to work with one another, and it forced us to move outside of our comfort zone and work on music that we ordinarily would not work on,” said Ward, a double major in jazz studies and kinesiology. It really helped broaden our horizons.”

The final product and how they worked together during challenging times is what stood out to Variego. “This outcome shows the resilience of the students of the School of Music,” said Variego. “That was a special class for sure.”

To listen to the album, visit bandcamp.com and search, “**Portraits of an Epidemic**,” in the search bar.



“It amazed me how the students managed to make something beautiful out of the current state of things. That is what highly creative people do, they reinvent reality.”

Alumni Accolades

Grace Baugher’s (MM ’19) new work for wind ensemble, *Remembering the Remarkables*, was published by Murphy Music Press.

Logan Campbell (MM ’20) joined the Illinois Symphony Orchestra for the 2020–21 season, pending COVID-19 procedures. He will serve as the assistant conductor for the Illinois Symohony Orchestra, as well as the Music Director for the Illinois Symphony Youth Orchestra Association, conducting their top two ensembles, and will conduct the Illinois Civic Orchestra.

Lafe Cook (BM ’90) completed his two-year term as president of the Tennessee Music Education Association in May 2020. He is director of bands at Dobyns-Bennett High School in Kingsport, Tennessee.

David Dayoub (MM ’20) was admitted to the University of Kansas to pursue his doctoral degree in tuba performance. He was also awarded a full teaching assistantship with the UK tuba/euphonium studio.

Skye van Duuren’s (MM ’18) commision for orchestra, *Jubilation Overture*, was premiered by the Sierra Vista Symphony Orchestra in January 2020.

Brian Gee’s (MM ’15) commission for orchestra will be premiered by the Scruffy City Orchestra in 2021.

Daisey Kludt (BM ’20) was admitted to the University of Florida School of Music to pursue her master’s degree in euphoni-um performance. She was also awarded a full teaching assistantship with the University of Florida tuba/euphonium studio.

Christian McNeal (BM ’20) won an audition to join the United States Army Bands system and attended boot camp in the summer of 2020 before beginning his first post in upstate New York.

Elena Stabile (MM ’18) was accepted to begin her DMA at the University of Minnesota in fall 2020.

Sorab Wadia (MM ’08) has been a successful working actor performing in New York and throughout the world. Recently he did a series of concert performances with Apollo’s Fire. He has many film and tv credits in addition to his long list of stage and concert performances.

In Memoriam Dan McGehee

Dan McGehee passed away on October 29, 2019. As an avid supporter of the School of Music, Dan was all in. He took his volunteer role seriously and never lost sight of sharing his love of music and doing everything he could for the School of Music. He was an active member of our Board of Advisors and chaired our Development Council.

For all this, he will be missed—not to mention his wonderful smile and sense of humor. We are also grateful to be a beneficiary of his philanthropy. Rest well, my friend.





A BID FAREWELL

The School of Music had some wonderful faculty members retire this academic year. To help us reflect on their outstanding careers, we asked what stood out to them during their time at UT.

Mark Boling
jazz guitar

I think about all the people that I have worked with in my 39 years of teaching at the UT School of Music. First, I am very appreciative of the dedication and professionalism of the SOM faculty, staff, and administration, for establishing a positive and supportive work environment. Second, my collaborations with our extraordinary jazz faculty resulted in the high points of my performing career. Playing music and teaching with these gentlemen was a constant source of inspiration and joy. Most importantly, I was blessed to help and watch as so many talented young people find their way in music. It is exciting to hear the things that they are doing now. I will miss working with all of these people, and I am thankful to have played a part.

Donald Brown
jazz piano

There are so many wonderful things I've enjoyed during my 32 years of teaching at UT. First, I've encountered the greatest group of students you can find anywhere in the world! They were talented, but most importantly great human beings. I treasured the chance to help shape young minds and send them out in the professional world as teachers and performers. Second, it was a big joy to work with faculty members who were excellent teachers and virtuosos respected around the world. I will especially miss our prestigious jazz faculty, who are world-renowned performers and have sent many of their students to perform with some of the biggest names in the jazz world. And lastly, I will miss our many department chairmen we've had over the years, especially Jeff Pappas, who besides being the ultimate professional, is one of the most kind, warm, and giving persons I've met.

Lorraine DiSimone
voice

In reflecting upon my 15 years at UT, I am most proud of helping establish and develop VolOpera, the student organization undergraduate opera workshop. In our first few years we met weekly and presented a final evening of staged opera scenes with piano. Fast forward to spring 2019, when VolOpera presented a shortened version of Mozart's *Marriage of Figaro* with orchestra and narration! I was the primary stage director and also provided much of the costumes and stage pieces from KARMS, my own closet, or with the help of the University of Tennessee Opera Theatre.

What made it all so gratifying was knowing that young singers were getting important first experiences singing on a stage. Watching them grow each year and seeing their confidence and creativity and abilities develop was a joy to my heart! It was a highlight of my time at UT and something I will never forget and always cherish in my memories.

Cathy Leach
trumpet

For me there was no single high point, no single biggest surprise, no single thing that made me happiest about teaching at UT. What I loved about teaching at UT was simply that it allowed me to do what I wanted to do every day—help young musicians with their trumpet playing. The daily teaching activity and all that goes with it, is what I loved. Additionally, frequent collaboration with fellow faculty was energizing through the years. For me this was most often with the faculty brass quintet, which was constantly out in the schools performing and teaching throughout Tennessee and surrounding regions. I am grateful to have been a part of all of this.

Faculty Accomplishments

In summer 2019, **Kevin Class** (piano/conducting) returned to Asia for solo piano recitals and masterclasses at the Philippine Women’s University in Manila and UCSI University in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. His performances featured complete performances of Liszt’s *Annees de Pelerinage* (Years of Pilgrimage) volume II, as well as works by Malipiero and Fracalanza. Class also conducted Beethoven’s Symphonies Nos. 2 and 7 with the UCSI Symphony Orchestra, and gave masterclasses in orchestral playing and conducting during his residency in Kuala Lumpur. Class spent July and August 2019 in Berlin, Germany, conducting a production of Mozart’s *Don Giovanni* for OperaFest–Berlin Opera Academy. These performances took place in the historic Theater im Delphi, the theatre featured prominently in popular Netflix series *Babylon Berlin*.

In October, Class returned to Asia for solo recitals and series of masterclasses for pianists at the prestigious Philippines High School for the Arts in Los Banos, The Philippines, and at the Yong Siew Toh Conservatory (National University) in Singapore.

In April 2020, in response to cancellation of performances due to COVID-19, he was invited to film a 30-minute performance at the Tennessee Theatre for East Tennessee Public Broadcasting Service with Knoxville Symphony Orchestra’s concertmaster William Shaub. The program was streamed online on ETPBS’s Passport website, and was broadcast on ETPBS television on June 20.

James Fellenbaum (orchestra) conducted the Sinfonietta Orchestra during the 2020 Texas Music Educators Association All-State Clinic and Convention, in a program that included Tchaikovsky’s *Dance of the Tumblers* and Mussorgsky/Ravel’s *Pictures at an Exhibition*. He also completed his second season as Music Director of the Brevard Philharmonic, his ninth season as music director of the Knoxville Symphony Youth Orchestra, and his 14th with the Knoxville Symphony Orchestra, where he serves as resident conductor.

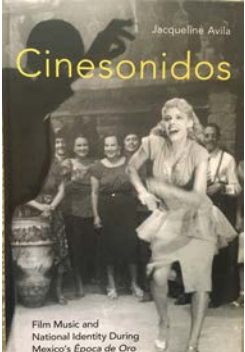
Nathan Fleshner (music theory) presented papers at three international conferences in Austria, Portugal, and England (delivered virtually). The papers covered topics on songwriting as therapy, connections between the creative processes in psychoanalysis and music analysis, and current sociopolitical themes portrayed in a 1967 album by Malvina Reynolds. He also served as secretary of the South Central Society for Music Theory.

Katie Johnson (horn) released a 10-track album (Summit Records) with pianist Kirstin Ihde in May 2020 entitled *La Loba*. The album celebrates select pieces of music from a canon of works written for famed Norwegian hornist, Frøydis Ree Wekre. Works written for Wekre come from varied sources of inspiration, but all rise to her masterful abilities on the horn. These pieces all stood out to Johnson because the composers have so eloquently juxtaposed strength and beauty through their music.

New Book Release: Jacqueline Avila

Jacqueline Avila (musicology) published her book *Cinesonidos: Film Music and National Identity during Mexico’s Época de oro* with Oxford University Press in September 2019.

It is the first book to examine film music practices and its connection with cultural identity politics in the Mexican film industry. She also accepted the position of book review editor for the journal *American Music* and was an invited speaker for the Distinguished Lecture Series at UCLA, University of California–Riverside, and the University of Colorado.



Faculty Accomplishments

Alexander Lapins (tuba/euphonium) was awarded an SEC faculty travel grant to present a guest masterclass and recital at the University of South Carolina and also presented solo recitals at the University of Kentucky, Lee University, University of Tennessee–Martin, and Vanderbilt University, all in fall 2019. He adjudicated the Artist-Level Solo section of the 2019 Spanish Association of Tubas and Euphoniums’ composition contest. Lapins was also invited to be a featured performer as a tubist of Quintasonic Brass at the International Trumpet Guild’s 2020 international conference and as a recital soloist at the International Tuba/Euphonium Association’s 2020 Midwest Conference, both rescheduled to 2021.

James Marvel (opera) directed Puccini’s *Suor Angelica* for Marble City Opera, which was named “Most Memorable Opera of 2019” by Arts Knoxville. He also directed Puccini’s *Suor Angelica* and *Gianni Schicchi* for the Indiana University Jacobs School of Music in February 2020.

David M. Royse (music education) presented the session “Legal Issues for School Music Programs” during the September 2019 Tennessee CNAfME Fall Kickoff at Middle Tennessee State University. He co-presented with Molly Royse (UT Libraries) and Paul Royse (MM, composition) on the poster session “Open Access Initiatives: Challenges & Opportunities” during the January 2020 18th annual Hawaii International Conference on Arts & Humanities in Honolulu. He served as the University of Cincinnati, College-Conservatory of Music’s external reviewer for their Music Education graduate program in fall 2019. During 2019–20, he completed his two-year term as state CNAfME advisor for the Tennessee Music Education Association.

Andrew Sigler (composition) was commissioned for world premiere performances of “After the Sheepdog Trials” for violin and piano and “Big Bad Mr. Smart” for wind ensemble. His work “Parenthetical” was released on the Phasma Recordings/Naxos Direct album *Spectrum* as well as on the Petrichor Records imprint *New Music by Living Composers*. Sigler’s work “The Gentle Churches” (commissioned by Cathy Leach) premiered at UT and was a finalist for the American Prize in Music Composition in the professional chamber music category. After having served as an at-large board member for eight years, Sigler was elected president of the National Association of Composers, USA (NACUSA) and will serve a four-year term. Sigler was invited to attend international performances of his work at the Clazz International Music Festival in Italy and Dot the Line International Music Festival in South Korea as well as domestic performances at the University of South Florida New Music Festival, University of South Carolina, University of Kentucky, University of California–Riverside, CSU Stanislaus, and the NACUSA National Conference in Portland Oregon.

Gregory Tardy (jazz saxophone) had engagements with Grammy Award-winning guitar legend Bill Frisell, which included performances at the famed New York City jazz clubs The Village Vanguard and the Blue Note; and also included performances in New York City to celebrate Tardy’s release of *More Than Enough*—a collector’s edition vinyl release on Newvelle Records. In Knoxville, the duo’s recorded performance for *Live at Lucille’s* aired on ETPBS. Tardy was also featured on Hungarian drummer Ferenc Nemeth’s newest release *Freedom*; a recording project that recently won Best Jazz Instrumental Album from the 2020 Independent Music Awards. Internationally, in late fall he completed a European tour with the Ferenc Nemeth trio, and in January he performed for three weeks at the Jazz at Lincoln Center Shanghai club in China with the Richard Johnson Quintet. In March, he was a featured soloist on a Dexter Gordon tribute featuring Deborah Brown at the Carlson Center in Kansas City. This concert featured the music of jazz great Dexter Gordon, along with educational programming including a talk by Gordon’s widow, Maxine Gordon, who is the author of the book *Sophisticated Giant: The Life and Legacy of Dexter Gordon*. Tardy was also included in the clarinet division of *DownBeat* magazine’s 84th annual readers poll and was slated to be a featured soloist at the International Clarinet Association’s ClarinetFest, which unfortunately was canceled due to COVID-19. Tardy also leant his talent to the Joy of Music School’s fundraiser.

Andrew Skoog (voice) performed his forty-fourth performance of Carl Orff’s “Carmina Burana” with the Atlanta Wind Symphony on March 8 in Atlanta, Georgia. This fall, Skoog will serve as the guest conductor/clinician for *Only Men Aloud!*, a festival for men’s cho- ruses sponsored by the Chattanooga Boys Choir.



It's Never Too Late

SCHOOL OF MUSIC GRADUATE COMPETES IN INTERNATIONAL PIANO COMPETITION AFTER JUST TWO YEARS OF PLAYING JAZZ PIANO

By Jeff Roberts



She has only been playing jazz piano for a little over two years now, but recent School of Music graduate Holly Moyer was invited to compete in one of the most prestigious piano competitions in the world in January 2020.

The University of South Africa (Pretaria, South Africa) International Piano Competition has been held annually for the past 14 years, with pianists and jury members from all over the world. This year's competition included 30 total participants—14 in jazz piano and 16 in classical piano.

Moyer never had her eyes set on competing in a such a prestigious competition, especially since she is still so early in her professional career. "A friend of mine that had placed in the competition before suggested that I apply for it," said Moyer. "I submitted three videos of three different styles of tunes and pieces."

There were thousands of applicants from over 50 countries hoping to be chosen for this year's competition. "I honestly didn't think I would get chosen," said Moyer. "When I found out that I was selected, I was in shock. I was honored to be part of something so special."

The competition, which is televised across Africa, includes four rounds and is split into two categories—jazz and classical. Solo piano pieces played during the competition included works from well-known composers John Coltrane, Theolonius Monk, and Mulgrew Miller. Competitors were also required to play a South African work by Bokani Dyer.

"Overall it was just an incredible experience," said Moyer. "The competition was beyond words. There are so many wonderful musicians that I was able to learn from while I was there, and most of them were already touring professionally. For me to get the opportunity to learn from them, it was a big deal for me being so new to this."

"There are so many wonderful musicians that I was able to learn from while I was there, and most of them were already touring professionally. For me to get the opportunity to learn from them, it was a big deal for me being so new to this."

It wasn't just the musical experience that Moyer will cherish, it was the cultural side, too. She was able to spend time with the other competitors, and learn about the other countries represented in the competition and the culture in South Africa.

"It was really interesting to hang out with the other participants, and it was fascinating to experience all of the different cultures," said Moyer. "I definitely made some lasting connections and still stay in touch with some of them through social media."

Though she didn't place in the competition, being selected after only two years playing jazz piano is an accomplishment on its own. Recently retired jazz piano faculty Donald Brown played a huge role in preparing her for both this competition and her forthcoming professional career.

"I'm so grateful for Donald Brown's guidance and the School of Music for allowing me to experience this competition," said Moyer. "I never expected to get this far, this fast."

Moyer is currently living in New York as she continues her studies and career in music as an artist-in-residence and music director at Five & Dime NYC.

"It took people believing in me first and then believing in myself," said Moyer. "You can't wait until you think you're ready to do something. It's never too late to take a chance and believe in yourself."

ABSORBED IN OPERA

A gift of Tosca tickets led to the Charles L. and Therese A. James Endowment

By Brooks Clark

In his career in high-tech medical equipment sales, Chuck James spent his working weeks on the road, returning on weekends to his wife, Terry, and their home in Inverness, Illinois. On Saturdays, while he did paperwork and prepared for the following week, James listened to the Metropolitan Opera on Chicago's WFMT. "It was his quiet time after a tough week," remembers Terry, who was then a corporate buyer at UARCO Business Forms in nearby Barrington, Illinois.

"I always enjoyed the Texaco Met Opera quiz at intermission led by quizmaster Edward Downs with panelists identifying operas from short snippets," Chuck remembers.

One day Terry mentioned to one of her suppliers that her husband listened to opera on Saturdays. The supplier had season tickets to the Lyric Opera of Chicago and offered her two tickets to *Tosca*. "It couldn't have been a better opera for us to see," says Terry.

"We love both the music and the singing," says James. "It was just the whole thing. To me it's just mind blowing how you can put on a production with the singing, the orchestra, the acting. It was wonderful, marvelous. It just totally absorbed us."

The Jameses were hooked. They bought season subscriptions to the Lyric Opera for 15 years, enjoying Samuel Ramey in the title role in *Mefistofele*, Placido Domingo as Idomeneo in *Idomeneo*, Richard Leech as B.F. Pinkerton in *Madame Butterfly*, Bryn Terfel as Figaro in *Le nozze di Figaro*, and Renee Fleming as Alcina in *Alcina*. "The list goes on and on," says Terry.

Opera wasn't a part of everyday life in the midwestern towns where Terry and James grew up. Born in Elgin, Illinois, in 1944, Terry grew up in nearby Fox River Grove, where her mom ran a gift shop and was the village clerk. Her dad was a handyman, electrician, and ran an appliance and repair shop. James, a year younger, was born and raised in Wyandotte, Michigan, on the Detroit River between Detroit and Lake Erie. His dad was a barber, and his mom worked as a receptionist at the YMCA.

They met in 1972 when they both worked at UARCO. Terry was one of first women to break into the field of corporate buying, and James was in the credit department. They started dating after he left the company to pursue medical equipment sales, and they married in 1977. Terry eventually rose to supervise multimillion-dollar accounts for UARCO while James became a sales vice president for Transonic Systems Inc., a specialty company targeting open heart and neurosurgery technology.

In 2004, James was traveling with one of his salespeople in Nashville, who said he had calls in Knoxville the following day. "I told him I would tag along because I had never been to Knoxville," says James. "It was one of the few areas of the country I



From left to right: Director Jeffrey Pappas, Charles James, Terry James, and Director of Development Christopher Cox enjoy an evening at the School of Music's Donor Reception and Recital in fall 2019.

hadn't seen. We were at the old Baptist Hospital standing in the Cardiac Lobby, and I was looking across the river at Calhoun's and Neyland Stadium, and I thought, 'What a nice town.' Later that day we went to Blount Memorial in Maryville, then took a short trip to Townsend and the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. That evening I called Terry and told her I found a place for us to retire."

When James was playing golf the following weekend in Illinois, a friend asked him where he had traveled the past week. "I said, 'Knoxville,' and he replied that someday he was going to retire to a place called Tellico Village." Three months later Terry and James visited Tellico Village and bought a second home there. "My company didn't care where I lived," says James, "so within a year we moved to Tellico Village, where I worked another six years."

They had imagined they would satisfy their passion for opera with trips to Chicago or New York, but they were pleasantly surprised to discover that Knoxville had an opera company, with which they both became involved as volunteers. James joined the Knoxville Opera Guild board, became its president, and was then selected to be on the Knoxville Opera Board.

During their 12 years of involvement with Knoxville Opera, they were exposed to the University of Tennessee's opera program and enjoyed meeting many of the students, including Kevin Richard Doherty, his wife Sarah Fitch, and Brandon Gibson. When they and Kathryn Frady-Marvel started the Marble City Opera company, James served on the board. He and Terry became friends with Frady-Marvel's husband, Associate Professor and UT Opera Director James Marvel, as well as Professor of Voice Andy Wentzel, who has often gone fly fishing with James in the Smokies.

In 2017, James was invited to the UT School of Music Advisory Board, which he now chairs. The couple's love for opera and understanding of the importance of developing young talent led them to establish the Charles L. & Therese A. James Endowment for Opera at UT.

"We feel that UT offers an excellent opera program," says James, "and we are proud to be able to contribute to it. We encourage alumni and others to consider giving something to the School of Music. We are forming a new subgroup, Friends of Opera, to help with the financial needs of the UT Opera Theatre through yearly fund raising and setting up an endowment for the future. We appreciate everybody who can help out. Every little bit makes a difference."



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