Community Building and Social Justice Through Music

“This IS MY FAVORITE WAY TO TEACH—and learn,” says Professor of the Practice Claire Chase of her Freshman Seminar, Community Building and Social Justice through Music. “In my own music education, the transformative moments for me always took place when an elder invited me to do work alongside them—not just for them—and when they invited me into their practice, assuming that I would rise to the occasion. I wanted to invite these freshmen into the process of making work alongside some of the greatest artists of our time. They have more than risen to the occasion.”

Chase commissioned the Houston composer, percussionist, and sound artist Susie Ibarra to create an interactive, virtual musical score with the fifteen students in her seminar.

“Susie has done a number of virtual soundwalk projects—in the Philippines, New York and Pittsburgh, to name a few—but never with students on a college campus. She completely embraced the notion that many of these students would be composing music for the first time.”

The result: Digital Sanctuaries Harvard, a soundwalk app that invites the public to take a virtual musical journey around the Harvard University campus and beyond through an ever-changing musical score.

“Students chose places of importance to them and created original compositions that combined field recordings, vocal and instrumental improvisations, electronic instruments, and original and historical texts,” according to Chase. They form, says description of the app for Digital Sanctuaries, “a dynamic sonic archive of the experiences of a freshman class searching for connection, community and

continued
Harvard students are so good at expressing things with words; in this seminar they learned to express with sound—you can often express more directly, more abstractly, maybe, or more deeply this way.

—Claire Chase

Students Perform Work by Lisa E. Harris

She masterfully found a way to honor and amplify every voice in the class while also communicating a powerful message: that we urgently need to listen to and believe what Black women are telling us.

The work was presented in its world premiere on December 3 at an online public event that also featured IONE, the artist, author, director and spouse of the late Pauline Oliveros, leading students and the audience in Oliveros’ 1971 composition The Tuning Meditation.
Faculty News

Morton B. Knafel Research Professor Thomas F. Kelly published The Liber Ordinarius of the Abbey of Saint Gertrude at Nivelles, a study and edition of a manuscript in the Houghton Library. At the same time he contributed to a volume of essays on the manuscript edited by Jeffrey Hamburger. A conference on the manuscript scheduled for July at Nivelles had to be postponed.


Fanny Peabody Professor Alex Rehding was Robert Samels Visiting scholar (virtual) at the Jacobs School of Music, Indiana University, and he gave a lecture at the University of Bonn. Recent publications appeared in Journal of Music Theory and the edited volume Testing Hearing, ed. Alexandra Hui, Mara Mills, and Viktoria Tkaczyk (Oxford UP). A book he edited, The Oxford Handbook of Critical Concepts in Music Theory, won the Outstanding Multi-Author Publication award from the SMT.

IN THE SUMMER of 1977, NASA rocketed two spacecraft out of Earth’s orbit. Their mission: explore the unexplored. NASA had already been to the moon; with Voyager 1 and Voyager 2, its Jet Propulsion Laboratory wanted to push beyond the outer planets and the Sun’s gravitational pull, and into interstellar space. By 2030, drained of electricity, both ships will lose contact with Earth. But that may not be the last time they’re heard. Affixed to each Voyager is a golden record. The Golden Record. For Professor Alex Rehding—who has written books on intellectual history, sound studies, and media theory—the Golden Record raises seemingly infinite philosophical, biological, and musical questions. Rehding currently teaches a Freshman Seminar in The Golden Record.

In his forthcoming book, “Music from Earth: Alien Listening and NASA’s Golden Record,” Rehding imagines how to analyze music that’s been launched into space and ripped from any semblance of context. Written with co-author Daniel Chua at the University of Hong Kong, “Music from Earth” centers on their proposed “Intergalactic Music Theory of Everything.” The theory provides a new definition of music—one they hope makes as much sense for aliens as it does for humans—and it comes down to frequencies, repetitions, and time. “We need to reduce the idea of music to its most basic components, to bare vibrations,” Rehding wrote in a 2017 edition of Musical Brainfood, an International Musicological Society publication, “and to build it up from there.”

For the US to move past the current racial crisis and achieve substantive change, its racist history needs to be told fully and repeatedly, with all the offensive details intact.

—Professor Carol Oja on Marian Anderson and the Racial Desegregation of Classical Music.

Oja Explores Marian Anderson and the DAR


Ask the Experts. How Ford, Rockefeller, and the NEA Changed American Music

Michael Uy’s new book, Ask the Experts (Oxford, 2020) looks at when exactly the institutional grant became so ubiquitous—such a normalized means of funding the arts in the United States—and how grants have been evaluated, by which criteria and by which experts.

From the end of the Second World War through the U.S. Bicentennial, the National Endowment for the Arts, the Rockefeller Foundation, and the Ford Foundation granted close to $300 million (approximately $2.3 billion in 2017 dollars) in the field of music alone. In deciding what to fund, these three grant-making institutions decided to “ask the experts,” adopting seemingly objective, scientific models of peer review and specialist evaluation. They recruited music composers at elite institutions, professors from prestigious universities, and leaders of performing arts organizations. Among the most influential expert-consultants were Leonard Bernstein, Aaron Copland, Lukas Foss, and Milton Babbitt.

The significance was two-fold: not only were male, Western art composers put in charge of directing large and unprecedented channels of public and private funds, but in doing so they also determined and defined what was meant by artistic excellence. They decided the fate of their peers and shaped the direction of music-making in this country.

Ultimately, this history demonstrates how “expertise” served as an exclusionary form of cultural and social capital that prevented racial minorities and non-dominant groups from fully participating.

“I’ve always been interested in how people talk about ‘good’ and ‘bad’ music,” says Uy. “Ever since I was a child I was influenced by friends who said that this artist was “da bomb,” and that artist was “trash,” but didn’t necessarily explain how or why. Ask the Experts was one way of exploring how individuals took their evaluations of ‘excellent’ music to a massive funding scale, with huge impacts on what music was written, performed, and awarded.”

By asking the experts, the grantmaking institutions produced a concentrated and interconnected field of artists and musicians. Officers and directors utilized ostensibly objective financial tools like matching grants and endowments in an attempt to diversify and stabilize applicants’ sources of funding, as well as the number of applicants they funded. Such economics-based strategies, however, relied more on personal connections among the wealthy and elite, rather than local community citizens. Ultimately, this history demonstrates how “expertise” served as an exclusionary form of cultural and social capital that prevented racial minorities and non-dominant groups from fully participating.

Has anything changed over the past few years as racial bias and white privilege have come under such scrutiny?

“I do believe that some foundations and arts funders are expanding and diversifying the kinds of music and art that they support, but there’s still plenty of room to grow. In order to be more inclusive, however, they should self-reflect on whether their selection processes and systems might be exclusionary because of how they rely on restrictive definitions or understandings of expertise.”

Michael Sy Uy (BA, University of California, Berkeley; MPhil, Oxford University; PhD, Harvard University) is the Allston Burr Resident Dean of Dunster House, Assistant Dean of Harvard College, Lecturer and Associate Director of Undergraduate Studies in the Harvard University Department of Music. His main areas of scholarly research focus on patronage, philanthropy, arts education, cultural policy, expertise, and connoisseurship.

Uy will donate 100% of author royalties to Black Lives Matter, the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, and the Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund.

Send us your news!

Have a new book, conference presentation, concert, baby, or journal publication? We’d love to hear about it. We welcome news at any time, as well as photos and links of interest to our community of musicians and scholars.

Send to musicdpt@fas.harvard.edu
Czernowin’s Opera Streams Through January 2021 on OperaVision

Infinite Now, Professor Chaya Czernowin’s 2017 opera, is streaming, free, through January 2021 on OperaVision. Infinite Now tells two harrowing stories in alternation: one, of the chaos and gore of the First World War; the other, of a Chinese woman trapped in a claustrophobic male realm.

Infinite Now (2017). The opera Infinite Now was written in 2017, a commission of Vlaamse Opera Belgium, IRCAM Paris, and Mannheim Stadthalle. The piece combines/superimposes materials of the first world war with the short story “Homecoming” by Can Xue. This opera was also chosen as the premiere of the year by Opernwelt yearly critic’s survey. Adama (2004/5) with Mozarts’s Zaide (Salzburg Festival 2006), which had a second version written with Ludger Engles with an added choir, presented in Freiburg Stadttheater in 2005.

CHAYA CZERNOWIN’S OUTPUT INCLUDES Chamber and orchestral music, with and without electronics. Her works were played in most of the significant new music festivals in Europe and also in Japan, Korea, Australia, the US, and Canada. She composed four large scale works for the stage. Pnima...ins Inner (2000, Munich Biennale) was chosen to be the best premiere of the year by Opernwelt yearly critic’s survey. Adama (2004/5) with Mozarts’s Zaide (Salzburg Festival 2006), which had a second version written with Ludger Engles with an added choir, presented in Freiburg Stadttheater in 2005.

An Open Letter from the Harvard Music Department

The Harvard Music Department joins millions of Americans and people across the world in condemning the murder of George Floyd by the Minneapolis police on Monday May 25, 2020. We first offer our deepest condolences to the family of George Floyd and his children and grandchildren. The heinous brutality of his murder, captured by a bystander on video, has shed blinding light on the lethal effect of racial discrimination in policing and criminal justice. We support the protesters whose actions and organizing efforts are committed to using noise and physical parameters such as weight, textural surface (smoothness or roughness, etc.), problematization of time, and unfolding and shifting of scale in order to create a vital, visceral and direct sonic experience. Her aim is to reach a music of the subconscious which goes beyond style, conventions, or rationality.


We asked ourselves, what can we do right now? We are inspired by the fact that young people are the most public face of this movement. Some Harvard undergraduate musicians, including some of our concentrators, held an online benefit concert on May 30th to raise funds for community organizing efforts on the ground in multiple cities. They raised over $14,000 among themselves, and asked Harvard faculty to match their fundraising. Members of our community have contributed generously towards this effort, which exceeded its goal.[https://givebutter.com/facultyfundraiser]

We urge you to join us. You, too can contribute directly to this effort by supporting:

- Black Visions Collective, which develops Minnesota’s emerging Black leadership to lead powerful campaigns, implementing transformative justice principles
- Reclaim the Block, an advocacy group for moving money from the police department into other areas of the city’s budget that promote community health and safety, or
- Louisville Bail Fund, a bail-out fund for folks that provides post-release support and focuses on preventative measures for those targeted by law enforcement and threatened with incarceration.

As educators, we affirm vigilance to practicing social justice in our curricula and classrooms, recognizing that much work lies ahead for us all. We urge you to join us. You, too can contribute directly to this effort by supporting:

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Alumni News

Naomi Andre’s (PhD 1996) Black Opera: History, Power, Engagement (University of Illinois Press, 2018), just won the Judy Tsou Critical Race Studies Award at the AMS 2020 meeting in November.

Aaron Berkowitz’s (PhD 2009) new book, One by One by One https://harperone.com/one-by-one-by-one/ brings the reader to the front lines of global humanitarian work in Haiti. “It’s not about music,” Berkowitz writes in an email, “but definitely draws on the ethnography skills I learned during my wonderful years in the Music Department!”

William Cheng (PhD 2013) has been appointed Chair of the Music Department at Dartmouth College. In 2020, he received the Irving Lowens Article Award from the Society for American Music, the Marcia Herndon Book Prize (SEM), and Dartmouth's highest teaching honor, the Jerome Goldstein Award. In Fall 2019, he published Loving Music Till It Hurts and Queering the Field (Oxford University Press).

Lei Liang (PhD 2006) received UC San Diego’s Chancellor’s Distinguished Professorship. Liang is the first music professor—and only the fourth professor from any department at the La Jolla campus—to be so honored. Liang, 47, will receive annual discretionary income to use in his multidisciplinary work. In recent years, he has spearheaded unique collaborations with the UCSD School of Engineering, Scripps Institution of Oceanography and the Qualcomm Institute, which in 2018 appointed him as its first Research Artist-in-Residence.

Tim McCormack (PhD 2019) had his first portrait CD released on the prestigious KAIROS Records. The CD contains three of his pieces (all of which were composed while he was at Harvard), ranging from duo to chamber orchestra. The CD contains studio recordings by Klängforum Wien, Ensemblekollektiv Berlin, and Christopher Otto and Kevin McFarland, who

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have had multiple HGNM residencies over the years as soloists or as members of the JACK Quartet. https://www.kairos-music.com/cds/0018003kai

Roger Neill was awarded membership to the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, class of 2020, as a member of the Music Branch. Roger’s film scores this year include “Unpregnant” for HBO Max, and “Valley Girl,” a feature musical for MGM.

Drew Massey’s (PhD 2010) book Thomas Adès in Five Essays was published this fall by Oxford University Press.

Jesse Rodin’s (PhD 2007) ensemble Cut Circle’s album Johannes Ockeghem: Les chansons has just been released by Musique en Wallonie (cutcircle.org/recording). The recording introduces a new, more intimate approach to the performance of late-medieval song.

Sheryl Kaskowitz’s (PhD 2011) article “Government Song Women. The forgotten folk collectors of the New Deal” was published in the Spring 2020 issue of Humanities magazine, a publication of the National Endowment for the Humanities. The article is based on the research Kaskowitz has conducted over the past four years about the Resettlement Administration’s Special Skills Division and the Farm Security Administration’s 200 disc recordings, nearly all of them recorded by two women—Sidney Robertson and Margaret Valiant—who worked under the music unit’s director, Charles Seeger. The work of these women, virtually unknown today, seeded the folk revival and was, as Special Skills Division Director Adrian Dornbush later recalled in an interview, “the one tangible thing that we did in the Special Skills which has really lasted and boomed.” Kaskowitz’s research was supported with funding from several sources including an NEH Public Scholars fellowship. Read the article: https://www.neh.gov/article/government-song-women/

Natasha Roule (PhD 2018) published “Plague, Revolt, Opera: Lessons from a Bankrupt Opera House in 17th-Century France” in Early Music America (https://www.earlymusicamerica.org/web-articles/plague-revolt-opera-lessons-from-a-bankrupt-opera-house-in-17th-century-france/), and was the guest musicologist at the Blue Hill Bach Music Festival this past July.

Daniel Walden (PhD Nov. 2019) received 1st Honorary Mention from the IMS Outstanding Dissertation Award 2020 for “The Politics of Tuning and Temperament: Transnational Exchange and the Production of Music Theory in 19th-Century Europe, Asia, and North America.”

Craig Wright (PhD 1972) just published his seventh and last book, The Hidden Habits of Genius (Harper Collins), which was the Amazon Book of the Month pick for October 2020.

Sam Wu AB ’17 was first prize winner in the 2020 I SING International Young Artists Festival’s Composition Competition. His song for baritone and orchestra, “Quiet Thoughts by Night” sets a text of the same name by Li Po. The piece will be premiered by the Suzhou Symphony and the festival’s singers in 2021.

Derrick Wang’s AB ’06 opera Scalia/Ginsburg received a radio broadcast in November on WFMT Radio Network, produced by OperaDelaware. Wang is a professor of music and law at Johns Hopkins University.

Annie Searcy’s (PhD 2016) portrait of Cold War cultural exchange was published by Oxford University Press in October.

Roger Neill was awarded membership to the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, class of 2020, as a member of the Music Branch. Roger’s film scores this year include “Unpregnant” for HBO Max, and “Valley Girl,” a feature musical for MGM.

Jesse Rodin and Cut Circle.

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As hard as it is to believe, this issue of our newsletter is the final one written and edited by our beloved Lesley Bannatyne, who will be enjoying a well-earned retirement. Retirement for Lesley will likely mean more travels—world-wide and to local, unusual attractions—and it will mean more time to focus on her own writing and volunteer for important causes.

Lesley first joined the Music Department in 1996 and has been promoted steadily, finishing up as Publications Coordinator. Over these 24 years, she has “published” and “coordinated” a great deal! In addition to our newsletters, she has served as content, copy, and production editor—sometimes also author—for an impressive list of titles issued by the department, including Fest-schrifts in honor of our distinguished faculty and histories of the department: http://music.fas.harvard.edu/book-shelf.shtml. She handles publicity for the department’s concerts, lectures, and other events, and she is also the guru of our website. On top of all that, Lesley is an independent author with a Master’s degree in Creative Writing and Literature from Harvard University Extension Studies. She has published a series of books about Halloween and has been acclaimed as a “foremost authority” on the topic: https://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2017/10/after-writing-5-books-on-halloween-harvards-lesley-bannatyne-is-a-go-to-source-on-the-subject/.

In short, we are grateful to Lesley for sharing with us her distinguished accomplishments as author and editor and publicist—and as a wise observer of people. We will miss her terribly!
Spring 2021 Barwick Colloquia

2.16: Jonathan DeSouza (U of Western Ontario) is particularly interested in questions about music, technology, and embodiment.

3.23: Matana Roberts is an American sound experimentalist, visual artist, jazz saxophonist, clarinetist, composer, and improviser.

3.30: Bonnie Gordon’s (UVA) Voice Machines: The Castrato, The Cat Piano and Other Strange Sounds uses the castrato as a point of departure for the interrelated histories of music, technology, sound, and the limits of the body.

4.20: Yun Emily Wang (Columbia) is an ethnographer of sound and music with a particular interest in transnational migration.

Barwick Colloquia are at 3:00pm and open to everyone and free of charge. Go to http://music.fas.harvard.edu/calendar.shtml to find Zoom links for each event.

Library News

Joseph Kinzer presented “A Musical Mahjar; Early to Mid-Twentieth Century Recordings of the Islamicate World and Arab-American Diaspora” on November 18 for the Alwaleed bin Talal Islamic Studies Program, held virtually for the students. https://islamicstudies.harvard.edu/fall20workshop

Liz Berndt-Morris and Kerry Masteller presented a paper titled “We’re Still Here!: Teaching Research Remotely” at the New England Music Library Association’s Fall meeting.

Peter Laurence shared the updated version of International Bibliography of Discographies (IBD) database at the International Association of Sound and Audiovisual Archives (IASA). He co-published this research tool, which focuses specifically on published discographies. The first iteration of the IBD was published in 2017 on the IASA website. Since then many contributions have been made by individual collectors and discographers, as well as colleagues from peer associations and memory institutions. In April 2020, a new version of the IBD database was published that includes a submission form for future entries. https://www.iasa-web.org/international-bibliography-discographies-worldwide-collaborative-project

Peter Laurence, Joe Kinzer, and Kerry Masteller contributed to the music pages on the Holodeck (for library resources related to the Middle East, Near East, and Judaica). This includes highlights from the collection and support for searching them. https://canvas.harvard.edu/courses/80280/pages/music

1916 Columbia Graphophone Company Disc, “Bashraf al-bitar ’alā takht Na’im Karakand” (Columbia E2950)
Graduate Student News

Nina Barrati was selected by the AMS Eugene K. Wolf Travel Fund to receive support for her dissertation research.

Alex Cowan was granted support from the AMS LaRue Fund for his research project: "Unsound: A Cultural History of Music and Eugenics."

Ganavya Doraiswamy and Professor Vijay Iyer premiered pieces ("soft encounters" and "Inflection Point" respectively) commissioned by the Metropolis Ensemble. Ganavya and Rajna Swaminathan performed on a piece by Puerto Rican rapper Residente called "Antes Que el Mundo Se Acabe," which has been nominated for a Latin Grammy. Ganavya is also working on a production titled this body is so impermanent... directed by Peter Sellars and featuring solo voice, composition, choreography, dance, and calligraphy. The artists will create a film made in real time to be released early in 2021 and distributed to venues including Boston’s MFA, The Metropolitan Museum, and The Getty Museum. The project’s main audience is families in hospice and palliative care centers around the world.

At the 2020 Annual Meeting of the Society for Ethnomusicology, Samantha Jones was awarded the 2020 Nadia and Nicholas Nahumck Fellowship for research on a dance-related subject. She was also awarded the Clara Henderson Prize by SEM’s Dance, Movement, and Gesture Section for her 2019 paper, “Sensory Memory Work in Irish Dance.”

Kelley Sheehan is a finalist for the Christoph Delz Composition Competition. She also was the winner of the Switch-2019-2020 Commissioning Prize.

Uri Schreter was selected by the AMS M. Elizabeth C. Bartlet Fund to receive support for his research on Klezmer music in France.

Henry Stoll spoke at an online event, Afterlives of the Kingdom of Haiti, 1820-2020, marking the bicentenary of the fall of the Kingdom of Haiti. It was hosted by the Courtauld Institute of Art and concluded with a live performance by Haitian-American soprano, Melissa Joseph.

Rajna Swaminathan was commissioned through National Sawdust for JACK quartet, titled “Surface Tensions,” which premiered on Dec 11th as part of the Digital Discovery festival.

Payam Yousefi wrote an entry titled, “Social Distancing, Virtual Performance, and Labor of Compassion in Iran” that was published in the SEM Newsletter, Summer 2020. Payam also acted as a co-editor and co-contributor for three editions of Faramarz Payvar’s works for Iranian chamber ensembles—Hengam Mey, Raz o Niaz, and Shabhaye Neyshabur—that were published earlier this year by the Payvar Foundation.
Undergraduate News

Ian Chan ’23, wrote “Wander” as a student in the Harvard Choruses New Music Initiative. The Choruses premiered the work in their very last days on campus, performing to an empty Sanders Theatre. “Wander” was just awarded as Best Choral Composition by a composer of 21 years or younger, by the SOCAN (Society of Composers, Authors and Music Publishers of Canada) Foundation.

You can listen/share the piece here: https://www.facebook.com/HarvardRadcliffeCollegiumMusicum/videos/624419382877922/

Chloe Levine presented her research on politics, social divisions, and possible “togethernesses” in music at the conference, New Research in Bluegrass.

Joy Nesbitt ’21 released an album on November 20th called Atlas Rising! She has released three singles off the album as well. You can watch the album’s trailer at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1ISP6ZsA23c

And find the singles links here:

Waiting Game: https://open.spotify.com/track/1u3vRLEesj229fHLRdvUxHs?si=vdh81RMiRKCqYqR6WnZqcA

Echo: https://open.spotify.com/track/7x9Dn52HuOgC1SNWtPFK?si=IXwFHRHUQLWXhtYSGwu0Ww

Outside: https://open.spotify.com/track/7jX9Dn52HuOgC1SNWtPF?si=IXwFHRHUQLWXhtYSGwu0Ww

Joy Nesbitt

Julia Riew ’21 wrote the music, lyrics, and book for The American Repertory Theater’s “Jack and the Beanstalk: A Musical Adventure,” a family musical that is currently available for streaming. Ian Chan did the orchestration and arranging, and the cast was comprised of Harvard students. https://americanrepertorytheater.org/shows-events/jack-and-the-beanstalk/


New Radio Operas from Harvard’s Composing Theatre Proseminar

Seven new radio operas composed by Harvard University students were broadcast and archived on Wave Farm, a non-profit arts organization driven by experimentation with broadcast media and the airwaves. Professor Yvette Janine Jackson designed her Composing Theatre seminar to explore narrative sound art, and these final works range in style and approach from meditations on departure to sci-fi horror to a soundscape of the golden age of baseball and beyond. https://wavefarm.org/wf/archive/6613g1
Covid may have changed many aspects of life in the Music Department, but not the annual celebration of Halloween. The department is known campus-wide for its willingness to dress up on the 31st of October.