

THE MUSIC AND HISTORY OF RHIANNON GIDDENS '00

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Vintage memories and vintage fashions—including the jacket of alumni athlete John Charles '87—resurfaced at Homecoming 2022.

PHOTO BY MIKE CRUPI

ON THE COVER

Rhiannon Giddens: An Oberlin opera singer becomes the voice of America's musical past.

PHOTO BY EBRU YILDIZ





Berlin

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The Power of Mission

THE OBERLIN OF THE FUTURE IS BUILT UPON THE FOUNDATIONAL VALUES OF OUR PAST. Since Oberlin's founding in 1833, we have held true to our mission to educate students and prepare them to go out into the world and change it for the better.

Our growing partnership with the United Nations is a tangible example of this commitment. The opportunity to educate students from around the world and provide a transformative experience to people of various races, creeds, and cultures who otherwise would not have access to the type of education Oberlin provides is both fulfilling and affirming.

If you haven't heard, Oberlin has joined the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR) and the Global Foundation for the Performing Arts (GFPA) in a new partnership dedicated to expanding international student access to world-class academic and musical instruction.

The goal of this collaboration is to apply the benefits of higher education and the arts to enhance the culture and quality of life around the globe. Oberlin is the only institution among those few partnering with the United Nations to focus specifically on undergraduate education. Other institutions within the group formed by UNITAR and GFPA will focus on graduate-level study.

Through this collaboration, students who otherwise could not afford to attend a prestigious U.S.-based college or university with exemplary musical instruction and academics will have the opportunity to apply. If accepted, students will pursue either a bachelor of arts, a bachelor of music, or a double degree; students who attend the other partner institutions will pursue post-baccalaureate degrees. The first students engaged in this program may arrive on campus as early as fall 2023.

As part of our partnership, the conservatory's orchestra and choirs performed in early December for the U.N. General Assembly at Carnegie Hall in New York. I was honored to address the audience from the stage, along with the president of the General Assembly. This event holds a significance that is palpable and powerful. It was an honor to appear in that historic hall, to take in the international language of music, and to mark both institutions' mutual commitment to education, art, and a united world.

The opportunity to change students' lives and prepare them to do good in the world is the passion that drives Oberlin. Embracing humanity, we seek to educate. Through education, we seek to improve humanity. But we are under no illusion that Oberlin can do this work alone. We believe that bold collaborations of like-minded institutions can achieve true, transformational progress.

I invite you to follow our partnership with the United Nations as it grows and supports Oberlin's mission to extend music, beauty, and education to every nation.

CARMEN TWILLIE AMBAR
President, Oberlin College and Conservatory

Oberlin

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POOR CHOICE OF WORDS

I try not to take umbrage or search for offense where none is meant, but [former professor of art] Athena Tacha taught me that language can have hidden biases like “gauche” and “feminine” (“Reaching Maturity,” Summer 2022). “Through their hard work, his parents owned their home and sent Darrick [to private school].” I won’t deny that Darrick Hamilton’s parents worked hard for his success, but in an article that deals directly with the phenomenon of work *not* equaling success, implying that those without success must not have worked hard is a ball dropped. We struggle with the divisive myth that the poor deserve poverty daily as we fight for a thriving wage. “Profits are unpaid wages,” we chant as we call for laws to curb record CEO salaries. If hard work led to success, the world would look drastically different.

AMY HOWARD SCHNEIDER ’99
Medina, Ohio

TOYING WITH TRADITION

As one of many Obies with a Harvard graduate degree, I am regularly infuriated by the way the Harvard alumni magazine hails any idea uttered by a Harvard mouth, no matter how hackneyed, as a discovery of cosmic importance. So I was disappointed to see the estimable toy-piano virtuoso Phyllis Chen written-up (“Like Being a Kid Again and Again,” Summer 2022) as an experimenter outside any tradition, without even a nod to Margaret Leng Tan, the first woman to earn a DMA from Juilliard and a famous collaborator with, and interpreter of, John Cage, whose *Suite for Toy Piano* she performed at Lincoln Center almost 30 years ago. I’m confident that Professor Chen is

aware of her and wouldn’t disparage her sonic explorations with cat food cans. Maybe it’s the Juilliard connection that was too much for the pages of Oberlin’s magazine.

DENNIS GRAFFLIN ’68
Auburn, Maine

MEMORIAL FOR A FRIEND

In our view, no Oberlin graduate typifies both the ethics and the value of an Oberlin education more than Peter Hale Molnar, Class of 1965 (also see Losses in this issue).

A world-renowned geophysicist, Peter’s pioneering work on the physics of the solid Earth literally changed the way we look at the structure and evolution of our “whole world.” The Geological Society of America lauded him with an International Distinguished Career award. “With stunning breadth and clarity, Peter Molnar has revolutionized our understanding of the mechanisms of and controls on Earth’s geologic evolution during the past several hundred million years,” it wrote.

Peter’s modus operandi was always to identify the next most important problem arresting the future progress of Earth science. He possessed an extraordinary ability to identify and gather talented young scientists to thrash out the details of what solutions were needed to understand new geodynamic, climate, or geomorphological problems. He was exceptionally humble, a rarity among people with such enormous accomplishments.

Oberlin helped Peter to grow through exposure to music, art, and culture. A liberal arts education honed his skeptic’s mind to question dogma and to doubt what others might find acceptable. Peter highly valued elegant simplicity.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Peter organized and led an ongoing gathering of more than a dozen close personal Oberlin friends via weekly virtual meetings. These conversations ranged from topics like abortion and the First Amendment to the biology of sex and gender. Peter’s participation exhibited his inexhaustible curiosity, keen intelligence, and humility, and the discussions evoked the essences of Peter’s qualities that were grounded in his Oberlin tradition: focus; get to the crux of an argument; be creative; educate others;

structure arguments with an eye for the essentials of a process or topic. Perhaps most meaningful, he emphasized companionship and conviviality—renewing the longstanding webs of friendship and connections, all of which began on the Oberlin campus in the 1960s. Peter always attributed his success to his liberal arts education at Oberlin, and he credited Oberlin for also instilling a lifelong appreciation of art, music, and the humanities.

His presence and spirit will remain with us and sustain us with memories of the very essence of Oberlin’s liberal education.

CLASS OF 1965 CLASSMATES ARNOLD LAGUARDIA, JAMES JOHNSON, JACOB HERRING, PETER AND ANN ANDERSON, KENT MILLIKAN, LEO AND ROBIN ROMERO, DAVID MOORE, CHARLIE MCDONALD, WILLIAM MCNEILL, LEE WITTERS, JAMES ANDERSON, AND PETER ROTHSCHILD

Send letters to *Oberlin Alumni Magazine*, 247 W. Lorain St., Suite C, Oberlin, OH 44074; or send emails to alum.mag@oberlin.edu. The magazine reserves the right to determine the suitability of letters for publication and to edit them for accuracy and length.

Only@Oberlin

What Winter Term experience altered the course of your life?

Share your favorite Winter Term memory at alum.mag@oberlin.edu.

Please keep submissions to 200 words or fewer—and feel free to include a related photo! We’ll feature responses in future issues and on our social media channels.

Around Tappan Square



The Oberlin Orchestra and conservatory choral ensembles heralded a newly formed partnership with the United Nations in a December performance at Carnegie Hall.



UNITED THROUGH MUSIC

Oberlin Celebrates New UN Partnership at Carnegie Hall

On the fabled New York City stage where musical dreams come true, dreams of a different sort took wing on December 2.

Nearly 200 Oberlin student musicians presented a performance of works spanning three centuries in the magnificent Stern Auditorium at Carnegie Hall. The private gala was held for the 77th General Assembly of the United Nations.

The evening signaled the symbolic launch of an innovative new partnership between Oberlin, the United Nations Institute for Training and Research New York Office (UNITAR), and the Global Foundation for the Performing Arts (GFPA). Oberlin is one of a select number of higher education institutions invited by UNITAR and the GFPA to participate in initiatives intended to improve access to education for students around the world and to enhance quality of life through education and the performing arts.

“Culture matters,” GFPA President Benjamin Woodroffe noted in his opening address to an audience of 1,800 diplomats and invited guests. “The arts can change lives, and the performing arts—music, dance, and theater—can sometimes say things that other mediums cannot. Collaboration is key, and this ensemble behind me has worked solidly and diligently for a number of months in a different part of the country to be here tonight. Music moves people, and a healthy society has a healthy arts sector.”

A MUSICAL EXPRESSION OF UNITY

Titled “A Watershed Moment: Transformative Solutions to Interlocking Challenges,” the evening’s theme acknowledged the critical juncture in the history of the UN, a moment fueled by complex crises including the COVID-19 pandemic, international conflict, climate change, global economic strain, and unprecedented humanitarian challenges.

What transpired onstage offered an affirmation of the transformative power of music to uplift, to fortify, and to heal.

Under the direction of Oberlin professor Raphael Jiménez, the program opened with Fanfare on *Amazing Grace*, Adolphus Hailstork’s triumphal interpretation of the enduringly powerful 18th-century spiritual. It continued with

Around Tappan Square



Sergei Rachmaninoff's Piano Concerto No. 2 in C Minor, Op. 18, featuring soloist Byron Wei-Xin Zhou, a pianist on the artist roster of the GFPA. The evening concluded with Ludwig van Beethoven's Symphony No. 9 in D Minor, Op. 125—widely regarded as a celebration of irrepressible unity, with its iconic "Ode to Joy." The performance called upon the talents of 110 voices, encompassing the Oberlin College Choir and Musical Union and featuring Oberlin alumni vocalists from the New York City area and four celebrated soloists: Oberlin alumni mezzo-soprano Kathryn Leemhuis '05 and tenor Joshua Blue '16 (pictured above, top left), as well as soprano Sarah Tisba and baritone Marco Chingari of Italy.

For the many Oberlin students and alumni who graced Carnegie's stage for the first time, the performance offered an indelible milestone in their musical journeys and an inspirational moment to fuel their continued artistic development.

"Carnegie Hall is something we all aspire to," said second-year soprano Ava Paul of Grand Junction, Colorado. Like many in the ensembles, the trip for Paul marked not only her first visit to Carnegie Hall, but also her first voyage to New York. "When I say

I'm a singer, people always say, 'Oh, are you going to play Carnegie Hall someday?' Now I can say, 'Yes, I actually am.' It's sort of a pinnacle I didn't think I'd get to this soon in my career."

First-year alto Kat Kahler, a musical studies major in the college from Charlottesville, Virginia, once visited Carnegie Hall to take in a performance as a middle-school student. "I can't comprehend that it's actually me on the stage now," she said. "This is not something that a first-year in college normally does, and it's just amazing."

For others, the concert represented a capstone of sorts as graduation nears. Concertmaster Matthew Cone, a fourth-year student from Buffalo, New York, alternated between expressions of resolute focus and giddy exuberance. "It's been an honor leading the orchestra for this concert," said Cone (pictured above, top right, with conductor Raphael Jiménez). "Having this responsibility has been a great experience for me, and I'm super proud of us and all of the progress we have made over the past month. Playing such incredible music at Carnegie is an experience that I'm sure none of us will ever forget."

EMBRACING EDUCATION AND THE ARTS Announced in September, the UN partnership calls for a select number of U.S. institutions to invite applications from students around the world, with accepted students beginning degree programs as early as fall 2023. Oberlin will be the lone participating institution to welcome undergraduate students and, beginning in summer 2023, also will host an annual summer program for English speakers of other languages.

In her remarks from the stage, Oberlin President Carmen Twillie Ambar (pictured above, bottom right) conveyed the institution's enthusiasm to be a partner in the initiative, aligning the work that lies ahead with Oberlin's historical commitment to improving access to education.

"We believe that espousing art and education is an embrace of our common humanity, and this approach is a way to change the world," Ambar said. "But we are under no illusion that Oberlin can do this work alone. We believe that bold collaborations of like-minded institutions can achieve true, transformational progress. This partnership, for us, is about pursuing this effort to do good in the world...together."



REAL WORLD LEARNING

Oberlin Christens Center for Engaged Liberal Arts

OBERLIN'S CENTER FOR Engaged Liberal Arts—CELA—opened in fall 2022, seamlessly connecting a range of experiential learning areas. CELA aims to empower college and conservatory students to pursue opportunities beyond the classroom that complement their academic pursuits and position them to launch into meaningful postgraduate life.

Located on the newly redesigned garden level of Mudd Center, CELA encompasses Academic Peer Advising; the Bonner Center for Community-Engaged Learning, Teaching, and Research; Career Exploration and Development; Digital Portfolio Program; Fellowships and Awards; Entrepreneurship; Study Away; Undergraduate Research; and Winter Term. Through individual mentoring, peer advising, and collaborative programming, CELA staff make visible a wide array of learning options—from Winter Term micro-internships to funded summer research.

CELA helps students plan ahead, craft their educational narratives, and share their stories

throughout Oberlin and beyond. Its programs are organized into a framework of “explore, experience, launch” to guide students through exploration, transformative experiences, and professional pursuits.

David Kamitsuka, dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, articulates the philosophy of engaged liberal arts as an extension of the classical model, attuned to the challenges and opportunities of today.

“Classical liberal arts provide intellectual breadth and depth in the richness of humanistic, scientific, and artistic inquiry, awakening students to the excitement of lifelong learning,” he says. “*Engaged* liberal arts draws on the dynamism of intellectual inquiry and puts it in the service of addressing the challenges of contemporary life.

“Through a model of education that helps students move between the classroom and real-world settings, engaged liberal arts help students acquire the judgment, wisdom, practical skills, and sense of purpose essential for Obies to lead in our complex world.”

OBERLIN IN



JANUARY 2023

Oberlin Conservatory ensembles return to New York City for performances at Dizzy's Club Coca-Cola and Carnegie Hall, as well as a panel discussion at Kaufman Music Center.

Learn more and experience the tour at [OBERLIN.EDU/NYC2023](https://oberlin.edu/nyc2023)

RESEARCH

Student-Authored CBD Study Generates Buzz

CAROLINE MOREHOUSE, A FOURTH-YEAR student majoring in neuroscience and Hispanic studies, was the lead author on a paper published in the neuroscience journal *Behavioral Brain Research* in summer 2022. The article, titled “Cannabidiol (CBD) drives sex-dependent impairments in omission, but has no effect on reinforcer devaluation,” details research conducted in the lab of Oberlin neuroscience professor Chris Howard.

The lead researcher on a team of Oberlin neuro students, Morehouse had devoted more than a year to studying the effects of CBD on lab mice before submitting an initial draft of the report. (The other students involved in the study, Charlie Maddox '22, Rochelle van der Merwe '21, Marwan Ghanem '22, Robert McLaughlin '21, and Jesse Scott '21, graduated prior to Morehouse's involvement.) With guidance from Howard and input from her peer researchers, she supplied an extensive revision of the first draft and braced for multiple more rounds of the same, as she had been advised to expect.

That never happened. The journal approved the piece after a single round of revisions—and named it the editor's choice. “I was crying in my bedroom,” says Morehouse, of Mystic, Connecticut, recalling the moment she learned of the honor. “It was super exciting!”

“As someone who wants to go to medical school and do all these things that feel so far out in the future, this was one of the first times I got immediate gratification for something that I want to put my abilities into. It's important to have that marker for my time here at Oberlin. To have our hard effort validated by an outside entity was just so meaningful to each one of us.”

CBD, which is fully legal and available in everything from deodorant to hamburgers, has earned attention for its potential therapeutic effects in combating anxiety, insomnia, and addictive behaviors. But the link between CBD and addiction—if any—remains unclear. The Oberlin study examined the effects of CBD on habit formation and goal-directed behavior over a period of two



years. Researchers found that CBD had no discernible effect on habit formation, but that it did inhibit behavioral flexibility—suggesting that CBD use has a negative impact on cognitive function.

Even more surprising: The observed decline was more pronounced in males than females—a distinction similar to that seen in studies on THC, the cannabis derivative that fuels the high associated with marijuana. Future iterations of CBD research at Oberlin may further probe the link between the impact of CBD and the sex of the user.

“Whenever somebody asks, ‘Should I take CBD?’ I say, ‘Do your research,’” Morehouse says. “Maybe invest in another vitamin.”

Morehouse's interest in neuroscience research stems from her overarching passion for geriatric medicine. The CBD study focused on processing ability in the striatum, the part

of the brain responsible for decision-making and habit formation and a key factor in the onset of neurodegenerative disorders such as Huntington's and Parkinson's disease.

“Doing research is a really important part of the process of applying to medical school,” she says. “You learn to think creatively and question systems and experiments. I'd like to take what I've learned at Oberlin and apply it to a medical system that is really stagnant and that doesn't tend to change the ways we care for older adults. I can't emphasize enough how well the Oberlin neuroscience department prepares us for real-world research contexts.”

Hear from other Oberlin students about their research across a variety of disciplines in a video series on Oberlin's YouTube channel. Visit www.youtube.com/oberlin-college.



STROKE OF “GENIUS”

Kiese Laymon '98 Wins 2022 MacArthur Grant

Kiese Laymon '98, a writer and educator whose works chronicle the Black experience through the lens of his Mississippi upbringing, was named a 2022 MacArthur Foundation Fellow, one of the nation's most prestigious and lucrative honors.

An English major at Oberlin, Laymon is best known for authoring a pair of books initially published in 2013: the satirical novel *Long Division*, about Black teenagers growing up in post-Katrina Mississippi, and the collection of essays *How to Slowly Kill Yourself and Others in America*. Laymon revised both books for later editions and was honored with a 2022 NAACP Image Award for fiction for *Long Division*.

In 2018, Laymon published the bestselling memoir *Heavy*, a response to the abuse he suffered at the hands of his mother and an examination of the numerous struggles—with eating, addiction, depression—he faced earlier in his life. That book won the Andrew Carnegie Medal for Excellence in Nonfiction and was named one of the 50 Best Memoirs of the Past 50 Years by *The New York Times*, among other accolades.

Laymon is the Libby Shearn Moody Professor of English and Creative Writing at Rice University. One of 25 individuals honored by MacArthur in 2022, Laymon received a grant of \$800,000 with no stipulations on use. Widely known as the “Genius Grant,” the MacArthur recognizes the creative contributions and potential of individuals of wildly varying backgrounds spanning a boundless array of disciplines.

Laymon becomes the 13th graduate of Oberlin College and Conservatory to be honored with a MacArthur Fellowship. The most recent alum to win was musician Rhiannon Giddens '00 in 2017 (see cover story, page 20).

COURTESY OF KIESE LAYMON '98

WELCOME NEW OBIES!

Meet the Class of 2026

OBERLIN WELCOMED THE LARGEST INCOMING CLASS IN ITS history this fall, with 894 students enrolling from an applicant pool exceeding 10,000—also the largest ever.

“When we select a class, we look for students who will shine in and out of the classroom, who will challenge and support each other, and who, because of their unique experiences and backgrounds, will learn from each other and enrich our community,” Manuel Carballo, vice president and dean of admissions and financial aid, told the incoming students during orientation.

The talents and passions of the newest generation of Obies takes many forms: One is the founder of a mental-health awareness organization for her country's youth; another created a facial-recognition program using deep-learning algorithms for his Ring doorbell; and yet another patented a tick-prevention device. There's also a TikTok book reviewer with 23,000 followers, a slew of novelists, and a student-athlete who served as president of their local Future Farmers of America chapter.

Haven't met your Oberlin Class of 2026 yet? Here's some things you'll want to know:

They represent an incredible

53 countries and 42 states

(and the District of Columbia)

2 out of 3

students come from public high schools

29%

identify as students of color

8%

are international students

68

students identify as the first in their family to attend a four-year college

118

will participate on Oberlin's athletic teams



The opportunity to play volleyball is what brought **ZOE KUZBARI '22** from her hometown in New York to Oberlin, but what she found extended far beyond the court. “I’ve been able to form intimate connections with my classmates that simply would not have happened in a bigger community. I love that everyone is learning, creating, and building something, and even though we may be working on different projects, it feels as though we’re working together for something greater. I’ve come to realize that the relationships you make and the connections you form at Oberlin are not just for four years—*they’re forever.*”

In volleyball, Zoe found a micro-community upon which she could rely and a team unified toward a common goal. In Oberlin, she found a college where she could feel challenged and prepared to make the world a better place.

Help preserve the collaborative and cooperative environment for future students by joining with your fellow generous alumni in supporting the Oberlin Annual Fund.

TO MAKE YOUR GIFT TO THE ANNUAL FUND, VISIT [ADVANCE.OBERLIN.EDU](https://advance.oberlin.edu) OR CALL 800-693-3167 TO DISCUSS CREATIVE GIVING OPPORTUNITIES.

MAZEL TOV!

Jewish Studies Celebrates 50 Years

OBERLIN’S JEWISH STUDIES PROGRAM celebrated its 50th anniversary year in October with public events held over two days on campus and remotely.

Panelists for the October 30 presentation “Jewish Studies at Oberlin: Alumni Perspectives” featured Jewish studies alumni David Eaton ’71, Amalia Haas ’91, and Kendell Pinkney ’09, who were followed by a performance by the student klezmer band Shtick-and-Poke (pictured). The following day, the Allen Memorial Art Museum presented a session on “Judaism in Modern and Contemporary Art” led by curator Sam Adams. The Terrell Main Library held an open house on its exhibition *To Find It Again: The Quest for Jewish Life*

JONATHAN CLARK '25



and Jewish Studies at Oberlin College. The program concluded with a faculty talk—“The Present and Future of Jewish Studies at Oberlin”—presented at Johnson House, Oberlin’s Hebrew heritage residence hall.

Associate Professor Shari Rabin, a scholar of modern Judaism and American religions and recent chair of Jewish studies, says the program began because of student activism, and it has continued to flourish because of the ongoing enthusiasm of students, faculty, staff, and community organizations.

“In the last few years, Jewish studies has gained three new faculty members and passed a new curriculum,” says Rabin, who is currently writing a history of Jews, religion, and race in the U.S. South from the 17th century to the present day. “As we enter this exciting new era, it is the perfect time to reflect on the history of the program and what it has meant to generations of Oberlin students.”

COURTESY OF TRAVIS GUILLORY



Conservatory singers Travis Guillory and Ava Paul with Denyce Graves '85 and Dean William Quillen.

CONSERVATORY

Oberlin Joins Denyce Graves '85 to Expand Multiculturalism in Classical Voice

Conservatory student vocalists Ava Paul and Travis Guillory traveled to Howard University in Washington, D.C., in September to participate in the launch of Shared Voices, a new classical music student-exchange program created by Oberlin alumna Denyce Graves '85, an Emmy and Grammy Award-winning mezzo-soprano.

The foundation is dedicated to contributing to a more dynamic and diverse classical vocal arts landscape nationwide. Graves' work is focused on championing the hidden musical figures of the past, while uplifting young artists of

world-class talent from all backgrounds.

Paul and Guillory, both second-year students at Oberlin, were selected from an application round to be among the inaugural cohort of singers for the program, which focuses on shared learning and performance opportunities for the next two years. They join two students as well as faculty and administrators from each of seven other schools in the program, which include Howard University, Fisk University, Morgan State University, and Morehouse College as well as the Juilliard School, Manhattan School of Music, and Peabody Conservatory.

MENTORING

Space to Grow

BY EMILY HALNON

How an Oberlin course at NASA inspired a different kind of exploration.

BY THE TIME RACHEL LEVY '89 reached her senior year, she felt well-equipped to continue down the only path she had seriously considered: teaching English and math, her two Oberlin majors.

"I didn't consider graduate school, and nobody suggested it to me," she says. "So I figured I was not grad school material."

My father was a professor, so "I had access to information. I was also spooked by the math GRE because I hadn't taken the right classes. I walked out without turning it in and never tried again."

In some ways, Levy's crossroads mirrored one encountered by another Obie a decade earlier.

Sylvia Hood Washington '80 had always envisioned a career in engineering. As a young Black woman, she was supported by African American scientists, engineers, and teachers in her Cleveland community—as well as her own brothers, one of whom became a patent-winning research chemist and the other a computer engineer. She applied to Oberlin for its 3-2 engineering program, but learned that only male students were invited to participate at the time.

But opportunities arose for Washington in other ways at Oberlin—most notably through Winter Term experiences. A consumer chemistry project led by Professor William Fuchsman served as an introduction to environmental science and provided a glimpse of ways Washington might work in science outside of academia. And

that's exactly what she did: She landed an early job as an environmental chemist with Cleveland's power company. She went on to complete a master's in engineering through the support of a NASA-sponsored scholarship for women. Her thesis examined optimal load management for the power system onboard the agency's planned space station.

Soon after, NASA recruited the newly minted engineer to help develop the power system for the space station *Freedom* at its Lewis Research Center in Cleveland. (The center was later renamed in honor of Ohio astronaut John Glenn.) The space station was a front-burner initiative announced by President Ronald Reagan in his

State of the Union Address in 1984, and Washington's education and her background in power offered exactly the skillset the agency needed.

At the same time, the agency was looking to develop STEM partnerships with area schools. Washington immediately suggested Oberlin; she knew firsthand how pivotal project-based learning could be. "I wanted to give that back to Oberlin students," she says. "I wanted them to have an opportunity to experience a field early in their academic career."

She designed an on-site math practicum at NASA, a collaboration with Oberlin math professor Bruce Pollack-Johnson

that would offer Oberlin students hands-on experience in applied math. One of those students was Rachel Levy.

Washington aimed to cultivate an environment in which students would feel empowered to believe they could pursue great things—such as graduate degrees in math. She invited the students to help solve an actual problem NASA was puzzling over: how to schedule and manage energy usage on the space station.

"I had all the confidence in the world in these students," recalls Washington, who went on to become the first Black woman in the research center's history to earn the distinction of



journeywoman engineer. “They walked in and lit right up, like little light bulbs. We need to have people in our lives who see something in us and believe in us.”

Levy remembers that moment, too—how incredible it felt to walk into NASA, sporting an official badge, and take on a problem that *mattered*. “We were working on something real—and really exciting,” she says. “Working as a team was necessary and expected, the way it is in the workplace.”

“We came up with a solution that NASA thought was useful. And that was very motivational to me. Until that point, nothing I’d ever done in a math class was anything anybody was ever going to use.”

When the practicum ended, Levy pursued teaching as planned. For a decade, she taught middle and high school English and math in North Carolina, with a break to earn an MA in educational media and instructional design. She never stopped thinking about her NASA experience: how it made her want to learn more about math, and even pursue a graduate degree and career that could combine her passions for communication and numbers. In time, that urge took over.

“Dr. Washington planted a seed that just had to grow,” she says. “It was there, and it informed the future. I was too scared to go to grad school when I graduated, but time and that seed were effective antidotes. The power of suggestion and invitation are something we all hold and can use to welcome and encourage others.”

Levy earned a master’s and PhD in applied math from North Carolina State University and has held many distinguished roles in the field as a researcher, educator, author, blogger, speaker, and program innovator. She was an American Mathematical Society Congressional Policy Fellow in the U.S. Senate, deputy executive

director and staff principal investigator at the Mathematical Association of America, and professor of math and associate dean for faculty development at Harvey Mudd College.

Now at N.C. State, she is a professor and the inaugural executive director of the Data Science Academy, which accelerates data-driven research, teaching, and partnerships. It’s also where Sylvia Washington teaches a virtual course. (“I just wanted a library card!” she jokes.) The two recently reunited after Levy gave a TEDx Talk about her career—in which she credited Washington with inspiring her to pursue a doctorate. Levy called her mentor to express how deeply she had influenced her through that course at NASA.

“That was why I did it,” replies Washington, who went on to lead the engineering program at DeVry University. She was also principal investigator for the National Science Foundation, developing an integrated geographic information system and an environmental epidemiology model of deficient water infrastructure systems in Black communities. Like Levy, she is quick to note that none of it would have happened without the people who encouraged her.

Now Levy is returning the favor, making experiential learning an integral part of the Data Science Academy and the work she does to empower students. “At every stage of my career, I’ve tried to create project-based experiences that were very much like what Dr. Washington created for us at NASA,” she says. “Dr. Washington and Dr. Pollack-Johnson were way ahead of their time. Everyone is trying to do now what they did 30 years ago.”

Emily Halnon is a freelance writer from Eugene, Oregon.

POEM

My Handwashing Explained

BY JON RICCIO '99

If life gives you lemons, render into cleanser.

Leeches, boil the vanity. Lynxes, reformat

your zoo. If sepsis gives you purpose, work

for the CDC. My twenties were bravura:

duets for fixation and support group,

contagions that frazzled like SETI anaphora.

Unproven, they Fahrenheited my derma.

What damage the nerve flimflam?

Pathogens, a steam fugue. If the brain

gives you leopards, atrophy with faucet.

Looking for a leeway, I burrowed through

the citric while my disorder courted sink-

magma. I’m surprised my hands held,

the scald imperatives they received.

From the poetry collection *AGOREOGRAPHY*, published by 3: A Taos Press in June 2022, originally appearing online at *Punt Volat*.



RECIPE

High on the Hog

BY JEFF HAGAN '86

HANNA RASKIN '98 LAUNCHED *THE FOOD Section*—her newsletter exploring food and drink across the American South—in June of 2021. For the James Beard Award-winning writer, the move came after years of covering regional eats for the *Post and Courier* in Charleston, South Carolina; *Seattle Weekly*; *Dallas Observer*; and *Mountain XPress* in Asheville, North Carolina.

Raskin lives in Charleston, but she grew up

in Ann Arbor, Michigan, home to the famous deli Zingerman's and the catalog that sparked her interest in food writing at a young age. A politics and history major at Oberlin, she moved to Mississippi for a newspaper job immediately after graduation. "After studying the region for four years," she says of her time at Oberlin, "I wanted to know what was going on down here."

That exploration continues, though it now passes through the kitchens of the South.

"The great thing about food journalism is it has no limitations," Raskin says. "Every story has a food angle." She had great fun during the 2020 Presidential Primary, tracking which candidate would be the first to eat 12 iconic South Carolina foods. "Plenty of folks who

never turned to the politics pages learned all about Bill de Blasio from my coverage. He's still recalled by my readers as the guy who loves chicken bog."

Raskin believes writing about food is as important as writing about politics and crime. "The most important food stories are inseparable from mortality and taxpayer money, among other urgent concerns," she says. "Remember the infant formula shortage earlier this year? And beyond the food safety, public policy, and climate change considerations central to food production, restaurants play an outsized role in Americans' lives, particularly in the realm of labor, race and gender relations, health, and their shared built environment, which means



the best food writing helps us better understand those issues.”

So what makes Southern cuisine *Southern*?

“I don’t have a cutesy way of summing it up, but for me, the defining aspect of Southern food is how much people care about it. Ask any Southerner to describe summertime’s first tomato sandwich and you’ll get a sense of the depth of feeling I’m referencing. Plus, you’ll probably get a story, which is what makes covering Southern food so much fun.”

For a taste of *The Food Section*, or to sign up, visit thefoodsection.substack.com.

Okra Roll-Ups

ADAPTED FROM FRAN ENNIS

EDITOR’S NOTE: *Since the fall of 2018, every issue of the Oberlin Alumni Magazine has included recipes from people involved in some way with the food world. Those who have offered recipes are invited to submit anything, although it’s been pointed out that every recipe so far has been, like the magazine’s editor, vegetarian. “Because I am an Obie who still chafes at authority, I like the idea of providing the first-ever meaty recipe for the column,” Raskin says. “And how would I stress The Food Section’s Southern bent if I didn’t call for hog?” (She also says Tofurkey slices would work.)*

Ingredients

10 slices rectangular-cut deli ham or ham alternative

½ cup cream cheese

1 jar of pickled okra, store-bought or homemade (see recipe)

Directions

Lay ham slices out on a flat surface. Blot each slice vigorously with a paper towel until it is completely dry.

Using a butter knife, spread each slice with an equal amount of cream cheese, applied evenly so none of the slice is showing.

Trim the caps off the pickled okra. Lay one okra spear across the top of each slice and roll downward, forming a tight bundle with the spear secured. Refrigerate the rolls for 24 hours or until firm. Slice each roll into eight pieces and serve.

PICKLED OKRA

Ingredients

1 quart white vinegar

1 cup water

½ cup non-iodized salt

5 pint jars with lids

5 garlic cloves

5 tsp dill seed

2¼ pounds okra, rinsed twice and trimmed

Directions

Combine vinegar, water, and salt in a pot over high heat. Boil for 10 minutes. Reduce heat slightly and sterilize jars and lids in vinegar solution.

Add one garlic clove and one teaspoon of dill seed to each jar. Pack tightly with okra; pour the brine over the okra, leaving ¼-inch of space at the top of the jar. Process* for five minutes. Cool and refrigerate.

*Says Raskin: “Folks who aren’t proficient at canning (like me) might not want to mess with that part of the recipe. Canners will know processing means to use steam or boiling water, while others could skip the step and accidentally kill themselves.”



3 THINGS ABOUT...

Exploring the Universe

Jillian Scudder is an associate professor of physics and astronomy at Oberlin. Her research focuses on understanding how relatively nearby galaxies operate, studying the contents of their gas, and how they form new stars. She's been writing about space for the general public since 2013 and has published three books with the same audience in mind: *Astroquizzical* (Icon Books), *Astroquizzical: The Illustrated Edition* (MIT Press), and *The Milky Way Smells of Rum and Raspberries* (Icon Books, due out in 2023). In summer 2022, Scudder earned a \$229,000 grant from the National Science Foundation to support continued research on our understanding of galaxies in the nearby universe. Here she shares three things about exploration of the cosmos.

1. We do almost all of our exploring from home. This one is partially for convenience—if your devices are close to home, they're easier to repair—and partially because space is unpardonably huge. With the exception of our robotic explorations of our own solar system, all of our understanding of the larger scope of the universe has been built from observations either from *terra firma* on Earth, telescopes in low earth orbit (like Hubble), or telescopes in stable places nearish to Earth (1 million miles, give or take), where the recently launched Webb Space Telescope was placed. Even to travel 1 million miles, spacecraft take close to a month to arrive; to escape our cosmically small solar system—as the *Voyager* spacecraft have done—we're looking at more like a 30-year journey. Launched in 1977, *Voyager 1* is the most distant artificial object

from Earth, having left the solar system in 2012. In 2022 it celebrated 45 years of continuous operations, making it also the longest space mission still running.

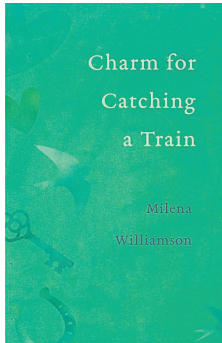
2. Our view of the cosmos changes dramatically depending on what tools we use to look at it. Our eyeballs are relatively tiny observatories of the universe, and are well-matched to the kind of light that our sun produces a lot of—which we have tautologically called “visible light.” But this is only a narrow sliver of the full range of light that objects in space can produce, and so to get a more complete accounting of what's out there, we have to observe using devices that are sensitive to many different kinds of light. From X-rays to infrared, to radio—each one provides a unique view of our universe: X-rays can tell us about profoundly energetic clouds of gas; infrared can see the glow of warm dust and newly forming stars; and radio can see the improbable glow of hydrogen

atoms drifting inside far-off galaxies.

3. We see into the past. Because of the tremendous distances involved between any two things in space, even light—mostly instantaneous on human scales—takes a long time to traverse the void. At 300,000 kilometers every second, it's zippy, but even the sun is roughly 150 million kilometers away; light takes about eight minutes to travel that far. The nearest star is so distant that light takes a little more than four years to reach us—and that's the nearest star in the galaxy we live in. By the time we start looking at other galaxies, the light we receive isn't just minutes out of date; it's often billions of years old. That light has been traveling the spaces between galaxies and stars for so long that we're no longer looking at things as they are, but as they *were*, when the light was released out into space. The more distant objects are also the furthest into the past, and serve as ancient beacons of what the universe was like, eons ago.

BOOKSHELF

Recent Releases

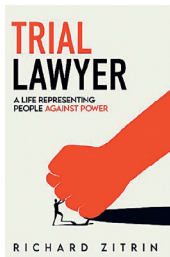


Charm for Catching a Train

Milena Williamson '17

GREEN BOTTLE PRESS

Williamson grew up in Pennsylvania and now lives in Belfast, and the poems in this pamphlet convey not only a strong sense of place, but a strong sense of the spaces between the places, or perhaps on their way to them. The journeys include the silent exchanges of currency and affection, as with the title poem, as well as the crossing of the (quite literally) man-made political border of *An Irish Woman Travels to England*, about the lack of abortion access in Northern Ireland. The travel traverses time, as well, whether through evocations of American and European histories, or in the compressed history we live in daily. In *On Our Last Night in Lancaster, Pennsylvania*, Williamson describes a car passing an Amish buggy: “Each driver looks up from his century/toward the other.”

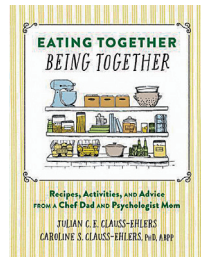


Trial Lawyer: A Life Representing People Against Power

Richard Zitrin '88

POLITICAL ANIMAL PRESS

The fourth book from emeritus professor of legal ethics Zitrin surveys his nearly half-century representing the least powerful against the most powerful. With a storyteller’s eye for detail, he recounts some of his most interesting clients, from his first—Johnny Spain, a member of the “San Quentin Six,” whose murder convictions were overturned twice—to the 98-year-old client whose cheerful disposition before the jury threatened to undermine her claim of suffering. Despite the colorful characters and humor in the anecdotes, Zitrin never loses sight of the bigger issues surrounding his profession.



Eating Together, Being Together: Recipes, Activities, and Advice from a Chef Dad and Psychologist Mom

Julian Clauss-Ehlers P'25
Caroline Clauss-Ehlers '89 P'25

PRINCETON ARCHITECTURAL PRESS

One can imagine that this titular mom-and-dad duo (of a current Oberlin student, no less) discussed the idea of this book over family dinners, and this pairing—like peanut butter and jelly—seems inevitable without seeming obvious. Anyone with kids—from tots to teens—knows that food can be a complicated issue, and *Eating Together* provides welcome advice (not to mention more than 80 recipes) from two expert perspectives. Food for thought, and thought for food.

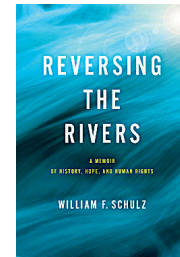


Big Man and the Little Men: A Graphic Novel

Clifford Thompson '85

THE OTHER PRESS

The first graphic novel from the author of 2019’s *What It Is: Race, Family, and One Thinking Black Man’s Blues* tells the story of a Black writer named April Wells, assigned by a high-profile magazine to write about the presidential campaign of William Waters. When she learns some potentially damaging information about the candidate, she worries that publishing it might pave the way to victory for his divisive, anti-intellectual, and narcissistic opponent. Thompson presents two mysteries: the page-turner surrounding the plot, and the bigger question of what doing the right thing means when you’re not sure the right thing will be the result.



Reversing the Rivers: A Memoir of History, Hope, and Human Rights

William F. Schulz '71

UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA PRESS

As head of Amnesty International USA from 1994 to 2006, Schulz has seen firsthand the challenges to human rights, including genocides abroad in Rwanda, Bosnia, and Sudan, as well as the use of torture by the United States after 9/11. The book documents his own adventures—from the dangerous (dodging an assassination threat in Liberia), to the delightful (collaborations with celebrities like Patrick Stewart)—while also wrestling with the questions of how to deal with evil in society. In the final chapter, he shares how he retains hope in the face of the horrors he’s witnessed.





BY JEFF HAGAN '86

RHIANNON GIDDENS' AMERICAN TUNES

The musician and writer
wants to change how
we think about our nation's
music—and its history.



Rhiannon Giddens concert is part old-time string band music, part opera recital, part blues jam, and part seminar. Her set list is as carefully curated as the songs are meticulously crafted. And while she is not content to be merely an entertainer, she held a sold-out crowd at Finney Chapel completely rapt on a recent autumn afternoon, even—or perhaps especially—during a spirited, bluesy solo ... on kazoo.

A 2000 graduate of Oberlin, Giddens was trained as an opera singer under Marlene Rosen, and so the opera part is easy to understand. But it was after she returned home to North Carolina that she took a deep dive into traditional folk idioms. When she discovered that the banjo is an instrument derived from Africa, everything changed.

In 2017, Giddens delivered the keynote address to the International Bluegrass Music Association about diversity in the genre, a speech that still gets talked about in and out of bluegrass circles. “The question shouldn’t be how do we get diversity into bluegrass,” she told her audience, “but how do we get diversity *back* in bluegrass.” It positioned Giddens as the advocate for and practitioner of an approach to music history as an approach to history through music, one that attempts to recover the Black musical heritage that was appropriated, interpreted, exploited, and transformed, mostly by white performers and entrepreneurs, mostly for white audiences.

While the speech was pivotal in the public perception of Giddens, the impulse to acknowledge the racism and white supremacy behind that appropriation was apparent early on. Even the name of the band she formed in 2005—the Carolina Chocolate Drops—and the title of its Grammy-winning third album, *Genuine Negro Jig*, evoked and poked at the history and legacy of minstrelsy, a complicated story Giddens continues to tease out in her work and on stage. She resists any claim of expertise about the history and insists

she’s learning along with her audience, and that makes her a particularly effective teacher.

In her research, Giddens came across a 1932 song originally called “Under the Harlem Moon,” a minstrel tune satirizing the transformation of Black backwoods Southerners to fancy New Yorkers. “They don’t live in cabins like the old folks do,” went the song. “Their cabin is a penthouse up on Lenox Avenue.” But then Giddens heard a version of the song by the Black performer Ethel Waters, who had renamed it “Under Our Harlem Moon,” reclaimed the song from its minstrel roots, and recast it as a celebration of Black attainment and arrival. “Once we wore bandanas, now we wear Parisian hats,” Waters sang. “Once we were barefoot, now we wear shoes and spats.” It was this interpretation Giddens sang, followed by explanations of some of the lines and their significance to American history, musical history, and her own.

Giddens herself has certainly arrived.

She has won multiple Grammy Awards—including Best Folk Album for *They’re Calling Me Home*, with multi-instrumentalist Francesco Turrisi—and garners nominations with alarming frequency. She’s the artistic director of Silkroad, the nonprofit founded by Yo-Yo Ma that is dedicated to cross-cultural collaboration. She hosts an acclaimed opera podcast, *Aria Code*, co-presented by the Metropolitan Opera. She’s an actress (including past roles on TV’s *Nashville* and *Parenthood*); a sought-after speaker on topics ranging from gender and racial equity to global warming; a writer of celebrated children’s books; and a composer for opera and ballet—and even a video game (that’s her “Mountain Hymn” in *Red Dead Redemption 2*). In 2017, Giddens became Oberlin’s 12th graduate to earn a MacArthur Fellowship, a sizable, no-strings-attached prize awarded to extraordinarily talented and creative individuals as an investment in their potential.

Backstage before her October show in Oberlin, for which she was joined by Turrisi and bassist Jason Sypher, Giddens was briefly startled to learn her picture would be taken (“You need to tell a girl!”). But she acquiesced easily, explaining that she’s already dressed for her performance anyway. By her own description and obvious example, she is “anti-diva,” but she projects power nonetheless with her voice: as a singer, a spokesperson, an interpreter, and an activist—another word she uses to describe herself. She has reached a point where her talent is the only signifier she needs. When she steps onto the stage in Finney, she is at home, comfortable but commanding, and barefoot.

OAM: What was the first music that you remember responding to?

RG: I'd have to say my family's music: my dad, my sister, my mom. We used to sing a lot of folk revival stuff, you know, like '60s. I remember that.

OAM: What did you listen to as a teenager?

RG: Weirdo stuff. I was a They Might Be Giants fan. I'm completely explained by what I listened to as a teenager. They Might Be Giants, the Police and early Sting, Tom Lehrer. I started getting into Sondheim when I was 17, and Disney soundtracks, a lot of bits and pieces, you know, pop music and whatever. Take Six for example. I had one classical CD of Yo-Yo Ma playing a Hayden cello concerto, and Dvořák, which I could sing by heart. And country music, I started listening to country music. So yeah, it was just a complete odd box.

OAM: What ended up drawing you to opera?

RG: I watched an opera on TV. Literally, I'd never seen an opera. I bought an opera compilation CD with Domingo and people like that on it, and that's all I knew of opera. I just knew they sang all the time, and in musical theater they had to talk on stage. And I was, like *I hate speaking in public*, so I'm gonna go with opera. Like literally, this is what I knew.

I did not know what the hell I was doing. I didn't know how to read music. The whole nine yards. My teacher that I'd been studying with in [high school] said, "If you get into Oberlin, you should study with Marlene Rosen." And then Marlene Rosen reached out to me after I did my audition and said that she wanted me to be in her studio, and I was like *That's obviously a sign*.

OAM: I'm gonna take a little side note here. You talked about not really wanting to do the talking part, but you're now known for a good amount of talking.

RG: The irony does not escape me. If you'd have told me then that I'd be making speeches now, I'd be like *you're crazy*. But, you know, here we are.

OAM: I think of opera as something that people must have grown up with in order to actually perform later because it's so alien to me. So to have someone who's just sort of listening on a random CD or seeing opera on TV and then getting into Oberlin—it's kind of an interesting path.

RG: It's a little odd, but I feel like it's really allowed me to do what I do because I approached it as someone who was taken by it and not someone who was kind of inculcated or just surrounded by it and just like *Well, of course I'm gonna do this*.

I chose it. So when I got here as a freshman, it was simultaneously terrifying and overwhelming. I have very clear memories—I talked to Ms. Rosen about this a few years ago—of going into her studio crying because I couldn't learn the music that she had assigned me because I didn't know how to play the piano, I didn't know how to read music. And I didn't really know how to access the library yet to listen to the recordings, because how I learn is by ear. And she made a tape for me of the songs. She sang them for me so that I could learn them. It's amazing. It was such a completely new thing.

I was so happy that I didn't have to do math or science. All they do is music. I remember, I was in with a bunch of second-years in the music history class. They're all sitting in the back, a lot of 'em know a lot of that stuff. And I'm in the front row, with my computer, so eager to learn everything. And I remember it was [Professor Sylvan] Suskin—he's gone now, he passed some years ago—Mr. Suskin was so happy to see this shiny happy freshman in the first row, you know? I was in love with it. All I had to do was learn about music. I was like *What's wrong*



with y'all? Why are y'all like so jaded? I was like This is amazing, you know?

But then I'm in my theory class dying because I'm in remedial theory. Everybody else who is in remedial theory only missed the cutoff by like two points. And I like, got zero, you know, and I'm like *Hey, wait, slow down, slow down. What's a parallel fifth?* I didn't know what a parallel fifth was for a long time, so it was definitely a wow experience.

OAM: How did you get to the music that you ended up playing with the Carolina Chocolate Drops?

RG: Well, it's interesting because when I was here I was pretty elite, hardcore opera. I did a bunch of operas while I was here, which is not common. There's only so many roles for women in opera. I was kind of lucky enough to be one of the folks who got cast. So I had a lot of experience seeing opera, even though I came to it at the last minute, and I loved it. I

loved it so much. But then I remember at the end of my time here going like *What am I gonna really add to opera that like a million other people can't already do better than me?* I'm like this baby singer.

I loved opera, but I didn't like the world of opera. I didn't like the elitism of it. I didn't like having to wear high heels and makeup and all this shit. I was at my happiest when I was in a role in a costume, acting and singing. That was when I was happiest. All the rest of it was just torture for me. I mean, you see me: I don't wear makeup. I just was not that person—I just want to sing and perform. I don't wanna have to send off audition tapes and beg people for a job.

I went back home to North Carolina and started contra dancing, which I had discovered up here [in Oberlin] actually. They were trying to recruit students. There was the contra dance weekends here for many years called the Dandelion Romp, which I actually never went to, oddly

enough. But I got into contra dancing here because they put a flyer up and I thought it was Jane Austen English Country dancing.

I fell in love with it. That's literally how the whole trajectory of my life changed, because I fell in love with old-time banjo. That's where I started hearing old-time music. Not bluegrass, but old-time, which is the earlier stuff, like when the banjo is a very much more rhythmical thing. And I started dancing. I learned how to call dances, and then I wanted to play, so I got fiddle and banjo and ... was mostly self-taught. I had a few people to kind of guide me a little bit, and then I just sort of banged my head against the wall with the fiddle and the banjo.

And then I learned that the banjo was an African American instrument. That was it. I was like *Here is my purpose*. I met Joe Thompson, an 86-year-old African American fiddler, the last person in his family to play the music. One of the last traditional Black fiddlers left alive. That's where the Chocolate Drops formed, around playing with him.

And so that was kind of like *Don't turn back*. But opera, classical music, still stayed with me.

OAM: You weren't just playing music though. Your approach seemed to have almost a sociological or anthropological aspect to it.

RG: Yeah, for sure. I've always been interested in history. It was one of the things I liked about opera. Whenever I got a role, I would go research why they wrote the opera, the story that the opera's based on, the time period.

Like I remember when I did [the Massenet opera] *Manon* here, I was reading about the time period that she came out of, [wondering] why is she thinking this way? And that was really interesting to me for preparation for roles. And so that kind of extended when I learned about the banjo, and I was just so shocked that it was 100 percent

A student of Marlene Rosen, Giddens was a standout on the opera stage at Oberlin.



opposite from something I've been told my whole life.

I started going, *What else have they been lying about?* Right? *What other stories are not true that we've been fed with our Wheaties?*

So that really got me kind of in an activist frame of mind too. Then you start studying. When you study the banjo and the history of the banjo as a natural progression, you have to study slavery.

So that's what got me into studying. I'm not really interested in music history. I'm interested in the history of music, I guess. It's different—the history that surrounds the music that's being made and affects the music that's being made. So I just started getting books and kind of going, *Oh my God, this is really incredible. This is really important*

stuff. And then it started creeping its way in. I wasn't a songwriter or anything. I was just an interpreter. And through studying that music, I started writing songs from those perspectives of history.

OAM: There's a lot of weight in what you choose to perform, sing, and write. Do you feel that that's a responsibility? A burden? A gift?

RG: All three? Totally. And there's times when one of them wins out. It's a lot. Yeah. It's a lot. And what I realized is that I can't do it forever. 'Cause it takes a toll, you know?

I did *Porgy and Bess* in January, and that's something that has a lot of weight to it. Regardless of how you feel about the Gershwins, the

story is heavy and it's coming out of a very heavy time. But portraying Bess was amazing because then you take the dress off and you put it down, and you walk away and then you're yourself again. Whereas with the music that I do every night in my shows, it's a lot harder to do that, because I'm not putting a character on; I'm channeling a certain thing or a vibe or ancestral spirit. I'm trying to learn how to not carry so much of that weight.

Because it is difficult, and I'm talking about things in a way to mostly white people, trying to explain things in a way that doesn't drive people away. It's really hard to do it in a way that's authentic and it's not pandering, but is also not denying what it is, you know?

And I think I've found good

ways to do that. I've been doing it ever since the Chocolate Drops. You have to figure out how do you talk about minstrelsy? How do you talk about slavery? How do you talk about rape? How do you talk about all of these things, and then sing a song? I think I'm good at it, but it does take its toll, and so I am tired.

OAM: It does seem like a lot of people can project on you and have expectations. Do you ever feel like that's unfair?

RG: No, I feel kind of lucky because people don't know what the fuck to do with me.

I mean, to be honest, I'm now becoming known for like, *Oh, is there something about the banjo or slavery? Talk to her*. Which is fine, because I feel like I'm a good representative because I know what I don't know. I know when to punt. I'm not there because I wanna be known as a know-it-all. I'm there because I know I'm gonna shepherd and make sure that the right people are involved. So I do feel that responsibility. And I'm happy to have it, because I feel like I know what I don't know, and I think that's the number-one step, you know?

OAM: Is there a throughline in all of the things that you do, or is it just what interests you?

RG: No, no, no. This is what I tell young people, because I'm starting to now go in and do workshops and mentor people. I love talking to students because I represent something that a lot of classical students now are interested in, which is somebody who crosses over in a very profound way. But what I tell people is no matter what you do, you need to have a thesis statement to your life, to your career, and sometimes you have to put one on—try one on for size—and if that's not what you wanna do, OK. You're always growing and you're honing.

This is something my mom told me years ago. Whenever I was writing anything, she'd read it and she's like *But what's your*

thesis statement? What is your central tenet? All the rest of everything is supporting that one thing. You should be able to say in one sentence: What is this about?

And I feel that if you want a successful multiyear career that doesn't depend on a hot single, that doesn't depend on getting that role [or]...the review that just blows you up, if you just want a steady career, building it slowly... a 40-, 50-year career—you need a thesis statement. No matter what I do when I book shows, people come. I never play the same songs from one tour to another. Most of the time, if you get a hit or something, you're tied to your record cycle and you have to play the song. But I just do what I do and just have faith that I've built slowly over the years a fan base that just shows up for what I put on.

Because my thesis statement is very clear. What I do is, I shed light on undiscovered or erased or suppressed stories. That's what I do. I do it with the banjo. I do it with my own shows. I do it with my songwriting. I have a TV series, a PBS series is coming out next year. I have a children's book. I'm working on an adult book. Everything that I do is tied to that central tenet, so my brand is very, very clear.

OAM: When did you develop that thesis statement?

RG: With the banjo. It's not enough to go *Oh, let's talk about the banjo being an African American instrument*. We also have to talk about *Why don't we know that?* That's the corollary. So you'll always have to have that second part, otherwise you're never gonna get to the truth of it. And then you never connect it to what's going on now. All of this is because every time I dig into the history surrounding this music, today is explained. The deeper I go, the less I'm surprised.

OAM: You seem very comfortable showing flaws, showing shortcomings.

“HOW DO YOU TALK ABOUT
MINSTRELSY?
HOW DO YOU TALK ABOUT
SLAVERY? HOW DO
YOU TALK ABOUT RAPE?
HOW DO YOU TALK ABOUT ALL
OF THESE THINGS, AND THEN
SING A SONG?
I THINK I'M GOOD AT IT, BUT IT
DOES TAKE ITS TOLL, AND SO
I AM TIRED.”

RG: Oh, yeah. I have many. I think I'm good at being uncomfortable and finding the people to work with. I think I'm good at throwing myself into a situation where I don't know what the hell is going on, but figuring out *What am I bringing to it that is special?* I think that's what I'm good at. I'm good at finding people to fill the gaps of the stuff that I don't know. I like collaborating. I'm given stuff. I'm given talents. But I did not make those. You know what I mean? I don't take any responsibility for the fact that I'm a really good singer. I was given a voice and I've worked on it, sure, but that was given to me.

There's this quote that was from [famed soprano] Leontyne Price. She's like *Sometimes I like to drink a glass of red wine to my voice*. And I love that. Some

people might think that that's arrogant. I actually think it's putting it right where it belongs. She's not saying ... *to me*. She's saying ... *to my voice*, because she was given that voice. We're all given things, you know? So I just think the more that we get into *What is the thing? What are the things that I was given to do in this world?*—there is a responsibility.

If I was good at anything over the years, it's that I've honed the art of saying yes to that thing that I didn't know I could do until I did it by finding the person who's gonna help me do it. ■

More from Rhiannon Giddens: Why she returned to voice lessons, crocheting in Hall Auditorium, and the one thing she still needs to do. Visit go.oberlin.edu/giddens-extra.



Meet Joe Smith

The 1986 graduate developed friendships along with his photos.

“All you’ve got to do is stick your hand out and say, ‘Nice to meet you.’”

That was Joe Smith’s approach to making friends and taking photographs, both of which he did prodigiously as an Oberlin College student in the 1980s.

Smith ’86, now a computer network engineer in the Cleveland area, arrived on campus with a Nikon he received from his mother as a high school graduation gift. “You rarely saw me on campus without a camera,” he says. When he wasn’t shaking people’s hands, he was taking their photos, amassing hundreds of images that capture—through mostly straight-ahead portraits—the look of an era, and sometimes more. “I’ve got people’s entire relationships on film,” he says, adding that he can’t share some of them because he doesn’t want to upset his friends’ current spouses. He took pictures of his fellow students, teachers, and campus staff members.

Oberlin’s campus of the 1980s was sometimes divided by race, subculture, clique, or class, but Smith constantly crossed divisions to seek out people to get to know. For that, he became well-known himself—“Oberlin famous” before that term existed.

“You’d be amazed what an introduction can do,” he says.



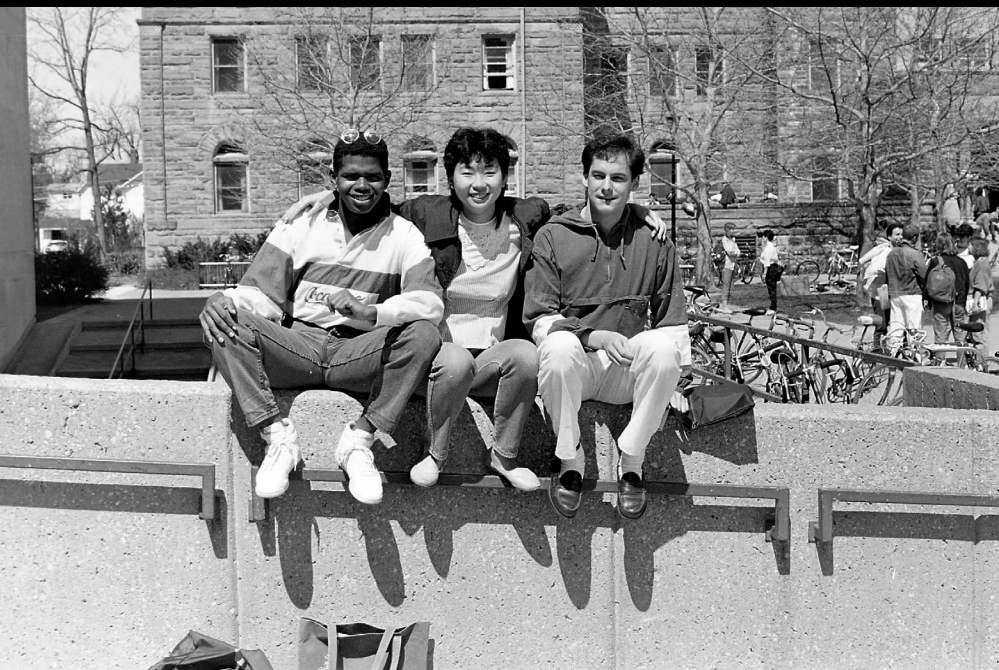
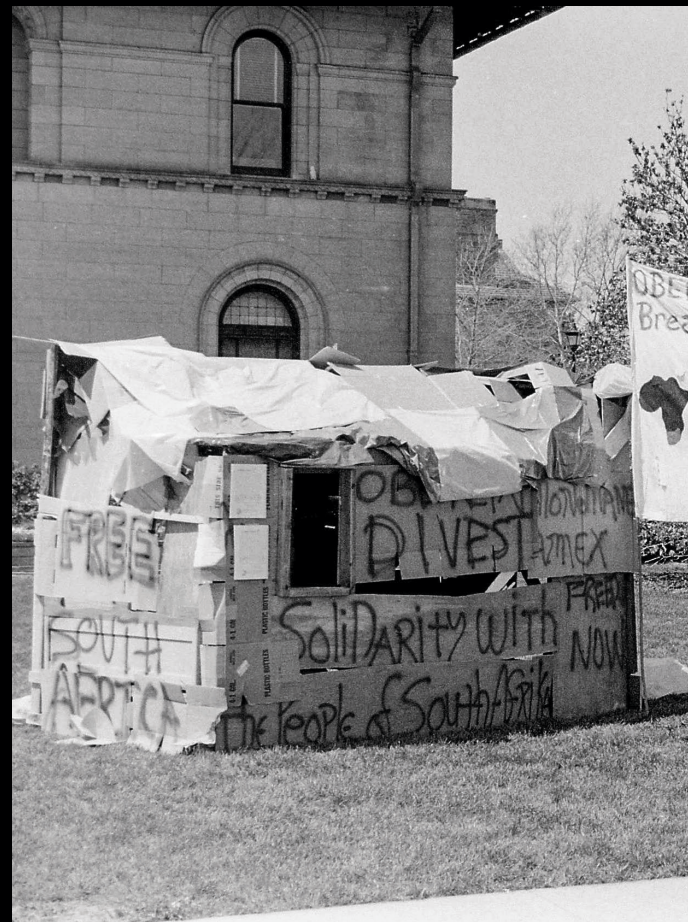


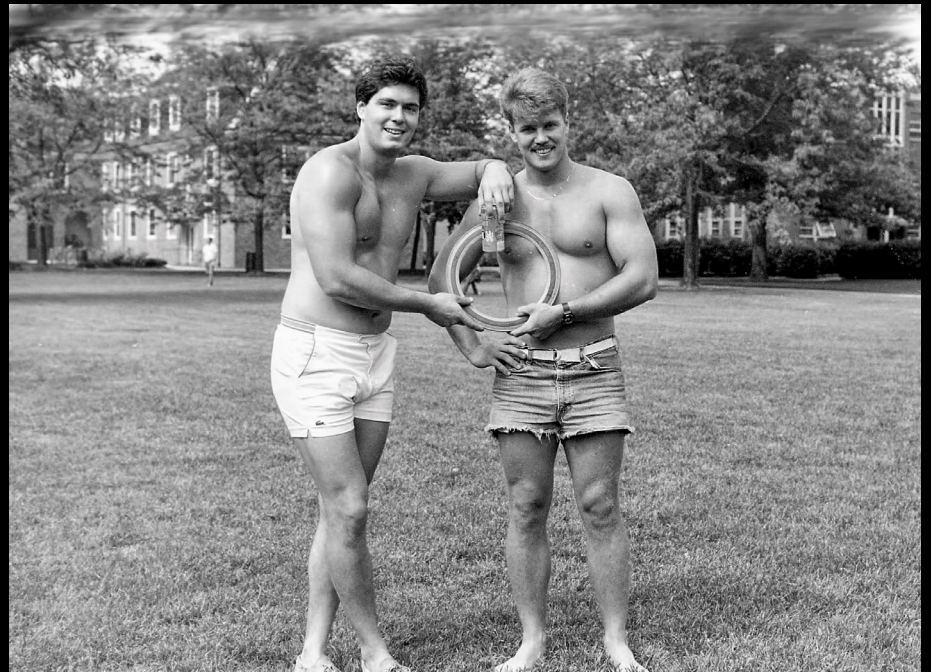
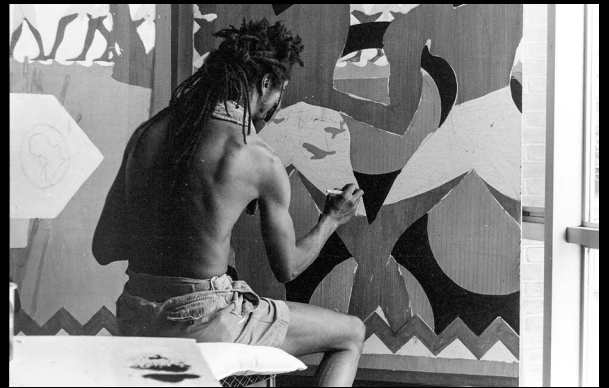






For more Oberlin moments captured by Joe Smith, visit go.oberlin.edu/joe-smith. See yourself or fellow Obies? Share your memories at alum.mag@oberlin.edu.





*STILL
HOT,
STILL
COOL*

Jim Neumann cleared the way for jazz at Oberlin as a student in the 1950s. Seven decades later, he's delivering once again.

BY ERICH BURNETT | PHOTOS BY NATHANIEL SMITH



IN SOME WAYS, Jim Neumann '58 still pictures Oberlin as he did in the mid-1950s, back when he was an undergrad studying science and obsessing over jazz on a campus that, at least outwardly, greeted such music rather coolly.

To some, jazz signaled a decadent departure from the European masters who had inspired the work of conservatory faculty and students for more than a century. But there were also students smitten by the form, and there was a student organization empowered to deliver jazz greats to Oberlin's stages, much as the Oberlin Jazz Society does today.

Among those leading the charge was Neumann, a suburban Chicago kid who toted his ever-expanding record collection to campus and spun them on "Jazz Hot and Cool!" the WOBC radio program he hosted from the third floor of Wilder Hall.

Neumann himself doesn't remember exactly how it all started, but it happened sometime around high school. That's when a throughline of jazz took hold and hasn't eased up in the seven decades that have followed.

"My folks were very disappointed that I was interested in jazz," he says, still the slightest bit sheepish about the topic. Neumann went on to a career managing the family metalcraft business, but his unyielding passion persisted. With his wife, Susan, he amassed a cache of recordings and memorabilia that is widely considered the largest privately owned jazz collection in the world. "I'm a passionate collector," he notes with a wry smile. "It's a problem I have. You have people that don't and people that do. I was obsessive. Let's put it that way."

In 2011, he established the James R. and Susan Neumann Jazz Collection at Oberlin, made up of some 100,000-plus LP records, as well as photographs, books, posters, autographs, and more—an exhaustive archive of jazz history, housed in the conservatory's Kohl Building and placed at the fingertips of Oberlin researchers. Thousands of additional artifacts—most notably Neumann's similarly voluminous CD collection—remain in Chicago for now, awaiting their journey to Oberlin.

But the Neumanns' largesse has taken on a considerable new dimension.

In early 2022, they further amplified the awesome potential of jazz study at Oberlin with a gift of \$1.6 million that provides for the ongoing appointment of a postdoctoral fellow in jazz history. It's the first role of its kind at Oberlin, a sort of key to unlock the boundless potential of the Neumann Collection.

The first Neumann Postdoctoral Fellow is John Petrucelli, a saxophonist, composer, and educator whose two-year appointment began in fall 2022. Honored in 2019 by the Jazz

"I'M A PASSIONATE COLLECTOR. IT'S A PROBLEM I HAVE."

Education Network for outstanding contributions to the profession, Petrucelli arrived with big plans for the Neumann Collection. His research here includes a deep dive into Bee Hive Records, the label Neumann founded with his wife in the mid-1970s, which will serve as a case study for the influence of small American record labels on the global jazz tradition. Petrucelli has devised two courses, including Music, Media, and the Archive: Jazz Collections at Oberlin, through which students research and curate public exhibitions using artifacts from the collection.

"I feel as though I'm coming to Oberlin College and Conservatory with a blank slate," says Petrucelli. "What is most intriguing about this opportunity is the ability to collaborate with world-class faculty across the college and conservatory while pursuing new avenues in my research, pedagogy, and performance practice that will be inspired through the Neumann Collection."

The Neumanns' endowment of the fellowship coincides with news of a newly developed minor in African American music, created in tandem with the conservatory and the College of Arts and Sciences. Last spring, musicologist Courtney-Savali Andrews was appointed to a new tenure-track faculty position in African American and African diasporic music.

When it comes to jazz, Oberlin has long since lost its resemblance to the campus Neumann knew as a student. And Neumann himself is delighted to see his lifelong love now stoking the passion of new generations.

"The fact that Oberlin has embraced this the way it has, it's been an incredible inspiration to know this stuff will live on past me," he says. "It's unbelievable. It's something you just can't put into words." ■

The postdoctoral fellowship in jazz history continues Oberlin's ongoing efforts to expand curricular diversity and support inclusion. Learn more at www.oberlin.edu/presidential-initiative.



Hear a young Jim Neumann interview pianist John Lewis of the Modern Jazz Quartet on the airwaves of WOBC, and explore music and artwork from the Neumann Collection. Scan the QR code or visit go.oberlin.edu/jim-neumann.





Jim Neumann's Chicago home reveals nothing of his lifelong musical love—until you get to the basement, which is home to shelf after shelf of meticulously categorized jazz CDs, books, autographs, framed art, and more. In the years ahead, it will be reunited with the rest of Neumann's jazz collection, which was transferred to Oberlin in 2011.

DIZZY IN THE HEAD

Four simple lines would carry Jim Neumann through the moment. Just four simple lines he had painstakingly committed to memory.

As head of Oberlin's student jazz club, a young Neumann had been instrumental in bringing a who's-who of jazz luminaries to campus—a roster that included Dave Brubeck, Woody Herman, Count Basie, the Modern Jazz Quartet, Duke Ellington, and Stan Kenton.

But no fish was bigger than famed trumpeter Dizzy Gillespie, who had just returned with his orchestra from a tour of South America. And Neumann was determined to introduce the act himself on the evening of October 11, 1957, from the stage of a packed-to-the-rafters Finney Chapel.

A jazz fanatic the likes of which Oberlin likely hadn't seen before, Neumann knew this moment was coming. And so, in the days leading up to the concert, he penned a greeting of four tidy sentences, and he set about the task of memorizing them. With proper planning, he figured, it would all be over before his butterflies swallowed him whole.

As the pews of Finney swelled to capacity, the fourth-year student took the stage, cleared his throat, and ...

"I couldn't remember a thing."

An excruciating silence fell over the room as Neumann's butterflies flitted about.

"I remember my roommate in the crowd mouthing the words, 'Say something!' And I couldn't," he recalls today. He also remembers the flash of cameras from the newspaper photographers who had come from as far as Pittsburgh, seemingly to immortalize his meltdown.

After a few moments that unfolded like years, Gillespie himself emerged from the backstage door, to the right of the silent emcee.

"Dizzy came out and put his arm around me, and he wouldn't let me off the stage," Neumann says. "I wanted to die. I felt so humiliated. But he happened to be a very nice person. He was exceptionally warm and engaging." The jazz master himself had defused Neumann's bomb, and the evening could proceed at last.

After the show, Gillespie proved to be exceptionally accommodating once again: When Neumann produced a copy of the new record *Dizzy in Greece*, the bandleader and his fellow musicians happily signed it. One of the earliest pieces of Neumann's collection, it also remains one of his most beloved (see page 11).

"I was overcome by fright and embarrassment," he remembers, "but Dizzy saved the day."

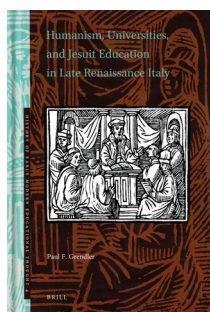
Class Notes

1950s

1954

George Harding and his wife, Carol, met with **George Andrews** and wife Pete at the Andrews' Kendal at Oberlin cottage, followed by a get-together at Kendal that included **Thelma Morris, Pam Alexander Lenz, John '53** and **Anne Elder '53**, and Emma and **Del Mason '56**. "What a great evening!" writes George H. "It was entertaining conversation and a delightful dinner. Thanks George A. and Pete."

1959

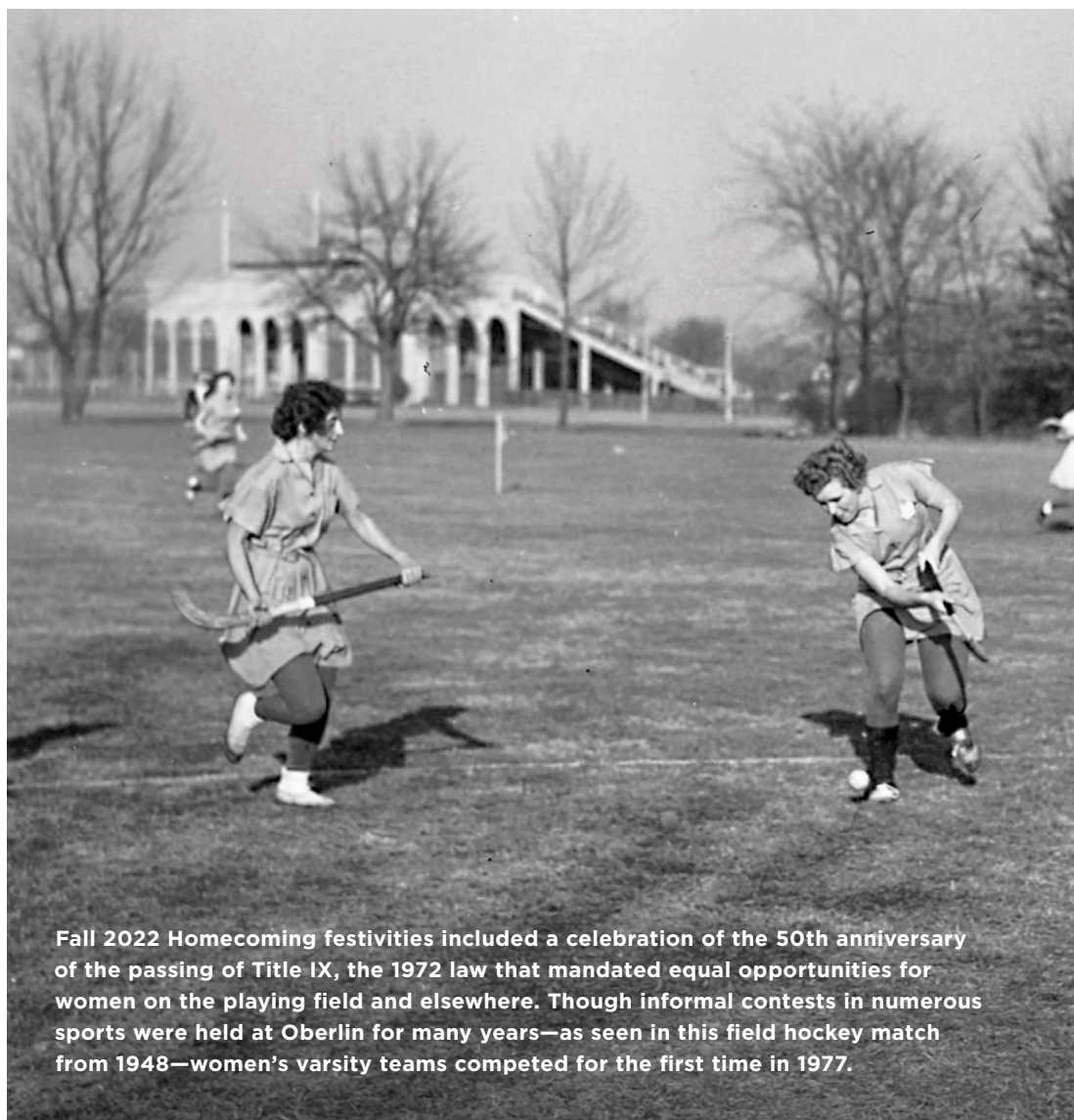


Paul Grendler published his 12th book, *Humanism, Universities, and Jesuit Education in Late Renaissance Italy* (Leiden: Brill, 2022). A professor emeritus of history (Italian Renaissance) at the University of Toronto, Paul now lives in Chapel Hill, N.C.

1960s

1960

Judd Kessler reports he is "one of your few nutty classmates still 'working.'" On his 84th birthday in April, he received a message to suspend work from the disputing parties in his very last international commercial dispute because the sides were in settlement talks, which he took as "time to retire, sort of." Judd says that doing commercial cases and "investment" cases (where one of the parties is a sovereign government) "has been a great joy" and the capstone of his career. He still reads and writes (essays, op-eds, and letters), and until recently was president of the InterAmerican Bar Association. After two "practice marriages," he married Californian Carol Ann Farris, a Pomona grad with a PhD in biochemistry and a long career with the EPA. Their son Samuel Farris Kessler was born in 1990. "Despite the many challenges of an ADD kid, we're seeing him grow and flourish. Stealing a line from folksinger Tom Rush, I decided to



Fall 2022 Homecoming festivities included a celebration of the 50th anniversary of the passing of Title IX, the 1972 law that mandated equal opportunities for women on the playing field and elsewhere. Though informal contests in numerous sports were held at Oberlin for many years—as seen in this field hockey match from 1948—women's varsity teams competed for the first time in 1977.

cut out the middleman and have my own grandkids." Now living in Bethesda, Md., Judd welcomes Obie friends who come to the D.C. area.

1964

Garry Stone reports that distribution of the book he cowrote with Paul W. Schopp, *The Battle of Gloucester, 1777*, began in July through Westholme Publishing. He sent a signed copy to the Oberlin College library. [w] www.westholmepublishing.com/book/battle-of-gloucester-stone

1968

William McClintock has written the biography *Commodore Reigart Bolivar Lowry*, about a 40-year career naval officer who

played an active role in Navy operations from 1840 to 1880, including the Civil War. William, the great-great grandson of Lowry, was intrigued by the large collection of letters and other documents left by Lowry, which led to further research. William holds a master's degree in U.S. history from New York University.

1970s

1970

Stewart Edelstein published his fourth book, *An Alphabetical Romp Through the Berkshire Botanical Garden: From Agave to Zinnia*, which, Stewart says, "answers such questions as how the sunflower knows to



turn toward the sun, how plants photosynthesize, how often squirrels find acorns they bury, what plants take advantage of the Fibonacci number to thrive, what makes the hyacinth’s fragrance so ethereal, and how carnivorous plants capture and devour their prey.” Proceeds



Edelstein '70

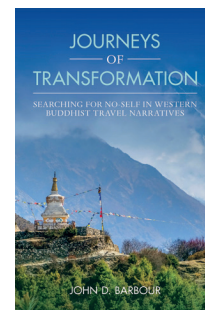
from the sale of the book benefit the Berkshire Botanical Garden in Stockbridge, Mass. Stewart teaches adult-ed courses on etymology, plays the French horn in a woodwind quintet, and, until the COVID pandemic, taught weekly squash clinics for adults. [e] stewedelstein@gmail.com

1972

Roger Sherman, who entered with the Class of 1972, earned a BA in Music in '84 and a BMus in 2016, was awarded the American Guild of Organists President’s Award, a lifetime achievement presented biennially to recognize outstanding contributions to the art of the organ in the United States. The award was presented “in gratitude for his distinguished career as a

musician and educator, his lifelong commitment to the King of Instruments, and his wide dissemination of organ music through acclaimed recordings and popular radio broadcasts.” Roger is the owner and president of the Gothic Catalog, which records, produces, and distributes recordings of organ and choral music through numerous labels. Recording artists include—besides Roger—several current and former Oberlin faculty members and alumni. For nearly three decades, he has been the host of the *Organ Loft*, a one-hour radio program broadcast over KING-FM (98.1 Seattle) and the University of Oregon radio network, KWAX-FM.

1973



John D. Barbour wrote *Journeys of Transformation: Searching for No-Self in Western Buddhist Travel Narratives*. The book illustrates how travel can elicit self-transformation and is a compelling exploration of the

journeys and religious changes of both individuals and Buddhism itself.

1974

Kofi Lomotey has published *Justice for Black Students: Black Principals Matter* (Myers Education Press).

1975

Keith H. McCown, an attorney at the Boston law firm Morgan, Brown & Joy, was recognized by *Best Lawyers* for 2023.

1976

Randall Vemer followed a 20-year career in music with another 20-year career in visual



Vemer '76

Class Notes

art. He has mounted a national exhibition, film, and book tour that involves 40 paintings and includes musicians around the world, QR codes to hear them play, Haiku poetry, a 90-page book, instruments, and a film with original music.

[w] www.VemerPainter.com

1977

Roger Albin, who codirects the Parkinson's Disease and Movement Disorders Division and is director of the Udall Center at the University of Michigan, wrote *Parkinson Disease* as part of the Contemporary Neurology Series. The text includes a broad overview of the disease, stresses the multisystem nature of it and the importance of its non-motor features, and highlights the need to recognize and manage multiple aspects of the disorder.

1978



Davidson '78

Eric "Ric" Davidson has released the book *Science for a Green New Deal: Connecting Climate, Economics, and Social Justice* (Johns Hopkins University Press). Ric

is a professor with the Appalachian Laboratory at the University of Maryland Center for Environmental Science. ■ In June 2022, **Carol Feather** performed during the Music at Midday recital series at National City Christian Church in Washington, D.C. Her program highlighted Oberlin composers—living and deceased. Selections included *Healing* by **Angela Kraft Cross '80**, *On the Name of Maurice Durufle* by **David Hurd '71**, *Quodlibet on SLANE* by **Christa Rakich '74**; *The Pyramids of Giza* by **David Arcus '81**, *Reverie* by **William Grant Still (Hon. '47)**, and *An Exalted Ritual* by **Calvin Hampton '60**. ■ **Vic Thomas**, associate entertainment director of Milwaukee World Festival Inc.—Summerfest, was one of six people to receive a World Citizen Award from the International Institute of Wisconsin in October 2022 in Milwaukee.

1979

Lorin Burte and Cathy Ziff Drucker were married this fall. Cathy graduated from Ohio State and earned a master's in social



work from Case Western Reserve University. Lorin can be reached via email.

[e] lorinburte@gmail.com

1980s

1980

Frank Dobbin is coauthor of *Getting to Diversity: What Works and What Doesn't* (Harvard University Press).

1982

Asma Afsaruddin was named the Class of 1950 Herman B. Wells Endowed Professor

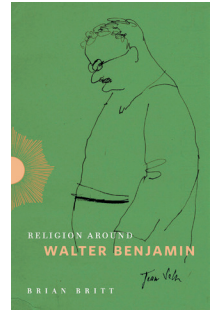
in the Middle Eastern languages and cultures department at Indiana University, Bloomington. Asma won a 2021 Trustees Teaching Award at Indiana and was inducted into the Johns Hopkins Society of Scholars in recognition of the scholarly and professional distinction she has achieved in her field. Her newest book *Jihad: What Everyone Needs to Know*, was published by Oxford University Press (2022). ■ **Paul Marthers** published *Managing the Whole Student Life Cycle* (Academic Impressions). Paul is the vice provost for enrollment management at Emory University. ■ **Pamela Wax** published her first book of poetry, *Walking the Labyrinth*, which was a finalist for the Main Street Rag Poetry Book Award. "The book reflects my journey through grief following my brother's death by suicide in 2018," says Pamela. It can be purchased through mainstreetragbookstore.com or, for a signed copy, directly from Pamela. [e] pwax@bcn.net

1984

Cedric Merlin Powell, a law professor at the University of Louisville Brandeis School of Law, is the inaugural Earl C. and Anna H. Broady Visiting Endowed Chair at Howard University School of Law for 2022-23. He



Sword '85



Britt '86



Gelles '88

will teach professional responsibility in the fall and critical race theory in the spring in a seminar focusing on his forthcoming book, *Post-Racial Constitutionalism and the Roberts Court: Rhetorical Neutrality and the Perpetuation of Inequality* (Cambridge University Press, 2023). ■ In July, a group of alumni gathered for brunch at the Belmont, Mass., home of **Phil Rossoni** and Christine O'Neill. Pictured clockwise from left: **Nancy Sieber '85**, **Jack Sieber '86**, Christine, Phil, **John Hiebert '85**, and Becca Hiebert. ■ See **Roger Sherman** in 1972 notes.

1985

New York-based songwriter **Anton Sword** leads an indie/synth/dance/new-wave project with a shifting lineup that has toured the eastern U.S. twice and Europe 10 times. His recent singles include “Falling Side by Side” and “Near,” both of them follow-ups to last year’s double-sided single, “Song of Stings”/“Waiting for You.”

1986

Brian Britt published his fifth single-authored book, *Religion Around Walter Benjamin* (Pennsylvania State University Press).

1987

Dan Furman wrote the book and original music and lyrics—with additional lyrics by Mary-Liz McNamara—for *Impossible But True*, an immersive tavern musical based on the tale of Rip van Winkle and presented by Brooklyn Tavern Theater at the Old Stone House in Brooklyn, N.Y., in October and November. Dan, the director of the theater, also provided musical direction for the show.

1988

Milestones Autism Resources, the Cleveland-based nonprofit cofounded by **Mia Buchwald Gelles**, celebrated its 20th year in the fall of 2022. The organization provides support, evidence-based methods, and coaching for families and professionals to help autistic individuals reach their unique potential. Oberlin is among the many organizations with which Milestones has worked. Mia is the organization’s operations director. [w] www.milestones.org ■ **Sarah Pillow**’s early music ensemble, Galileo’s Daughters, has released an independent feature-length film titled *Perpetual Motion: Revolutions in 17th-Century Science and Music*. Narrated by best-selling author Dava Sobel, the film

explores a moment in history in which science, human thought, and music intersected. It’s available as a digital download and on DVD, with a companion CD titled *Sounds of Galileo’s World*.

[w] www.galileosdaughters.com

1989

The design firm of **Mikyong Kim** won the American Society of Landscape Architects’ Firm of the Year Award, the organization’s highest honor for landscape architecture firms. Mikyong’s firm was honored for its impact on the direction of the profession and for recognition of its work by the design community and the general public.

1990s

1990

Katie Rae was named one of 50 Tech Power Players in Massachusetts by the *Boston Globe* “for investing in touch tech” approaches to the world’s biggest problems and mentoring a generation of entrepreneurs. Katie is the founding CEO and managing partner of The Engine, a venture capital firm launched by MIT that invests in early-stage companies, and



BLUE IN THE FACE

Dear Obies,

My Oberlin swim coach, Dick Michaels, likes to tell a story about an athlete who swam for him back in the 1990s. One day the swimmer decided to compete while covered with green body paint. After the meet, Coach asked him to refrain from painting himself green. And so at the next meet, he wasn't painted green. He painted himself blue. Later that season at the national championships, the coach from Johns Hopkins sidled over to inquire about the painted swimmer. Coach Michaels was incredulous: "How'd you hear about that?" The Hopkins coach replied, "How did I hear? Heck, the whole country is talking about it."

Fast forward to 2023, and it feels like the whole country is still talking about Oberlin, only this time we're not just the earnest outliers on the American liberal arts scene. Oberlin has become a target for right-of-center journalists looking for an excuse to complain about the state of youth today. These unflattering stories have some Obies asking *What's going on over there?*

Let me assure you. Oberlin hasn't changed. The mailroom smells the same, so much so that I've come to suspect that there's a biological process happening in the carpets that cover the floor and walls, fed by generations of student stress and hormones. The minute hands on the wooden analog clocks in Mudd library still advance with an ominous ker-chunk sound, as if to warn sleepy students that time's a-wastin'. When I was on campus in October, I watched students demonstrating in Wilder Bowl, just as my classmates did when we protested Oberlin's lack of progress on South African divestment.

I think rebellion is a developmental stage, mainly because I have a 20-something son who seems to spend an inordinate amount of time and energy rebelling against me and questioning my life choices. It's exasperating, but my job is to listen to him and acknowledge his feelings, while also providing the boundaries that allow him to learn, thrive, and grow. It's a tricky task, but in my calmer moments I have to admit that I'm learning a lot from him.

Similarly, I think of Oberlin as a developmental sandbox, where young adults leave home and experience freedom for the first time, where students are given the chance to find their Obie voices. Yes, they may seem awkward or rub you the wrong way, but these are baby steps. If you're concerned about the character of current Oberlin students, go find a recent grad and talk to them. I'm betting that you'll see an earlier version of you.

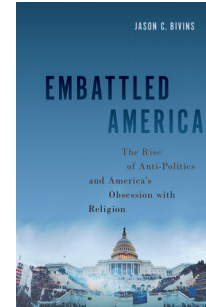
To the cultural pundits who like to make fun of Oberlin, let me say this: Look at all of the stories in this magazine of Obies bending the world toward justice. You need us more than you know. You may not thank us, but your grandchildren will.

And to the painted swimmer, I've been dying to ask: Please tell us why you painted yourself. Was it for art? Was it a political statement? Twenty-five years of Oberlin swimmers want to know.

Young Kim '85
President, Oberlin Alumni Association

cofounder of Project 11 Ventures. She also served as managing director of Techstars Boston.

1991



Bivins '91

For the second time in three years, *Savoy* magazine has recognized Comerica Bank Chief Community Officer **Irvin Ashford Jr.** as one of its Most Influential Black Executives. Irv, who also earned this accolade in 2020, oversees community reinvestment nationally and all associated activities, including community development and investments, volunteerism, and data analysis, and ensures adherence to fair and responsible banking practices. ■ **Jason Bivins** published his fourth book, *Embattled America: The Rise of Anti-Politics and America's Obsession with Religion* (Oxford University Press). It draws on religious studies and political theory to make a normative argument about American public life in parlous times. Jason is a professor in North Carolina State University's philosophy and religious studies department. The book draws on political theory and religious studies to argue for changing the subject rather than try untying the Gordian knot of conservative religion.

1993

The Translator, the latest film from **Rana Kazkaz**, is available on Amazon, VUDU-Fandango, and Hoopla, after premiering at the Toronto International Film Festival and being released to cinemas in Europe. Named one of five action films to stream now by the *New York Times*, *The Translator* tells the story of Sami, who returns to Syria to find his brother and learns the value of having a voice. It follows the success of Rana's internationally awarded short film *Mare Nostrum*, which was selected for the Sundance Film Festival. A professor of narrative cinema at Northwestern University's campus in Qatar, Rana was recently named Roberta Buffett Visiting Professor and member of the Académie des César. Her next film, *The Hakawati's Daughter*, is in development.



1994

Jen Breen Rose-Wood reports she had a fantastic visit with **Amina Chaudhri** and her partner in Chicago in June. “We enjoyed lots of laughs, walks, talks, and of course, exchanged book recommendations—we’re still English major geeks at heart!” Jen was delighted to meet conservatory grad **Gervis Myles '22**, who was performing at the prestigious Newport Jazz Fest. This fall, she is starting a new teaching job at her dream school, Boston Arts Academy—the city’s only public arts school. She says the switch from working in a suburban district to an urban one was one of the hardest but best career moves she ever made “and 100 percent in line with skills and beliefs learned at Oberlin.”

1996



Levine '96

In June, **Josh Levine** and his New York City-based band Cuarteto Guataca released their first recording, featuring salsa and Són Montuno

classics, plus their own originals. Josh began his professional music career playing

on West Broadway in SoHo with the Flying Neutrinos of New Orleans 30 years ago. He drew on that experience during the pandemic and played in New York City parks with Puerto Rican vocalist and percussionist Jainardo Batista, Israeli flutist and tréps guitar player Itai Kriss, and Colombian vocalist María Raquel Sandino. The group began playing at the outdoor spaces of city music venues, at which Venezuelan pianist Gabriel Chakarji and Puerto Rican vocalist and flutist Jeremy Bosch became staples of the group. PBS All Arts channel aired a mini-doc about the band’s experience performing during the pandemic in June. Among musicians in the Caribbean, guataca means “play by ear.”

[w] www.joshlevinemusic.com ■ **Angela Miller** relocated with her family from Washington, D.C., to Arizona “in search of sunshine, cheaper housing, and better services for my youngest son, Miles, who is autistic. Miles talks very little, but is learning to spell to communicate. Today he looked down at his shirt and, unprompted, spelled ‘Oberlin.’ We are all enjoying the desert environment and welcome visitors!” Angela reports she is still holding on to her old email address. **[e]** angmill08@hotmail.com



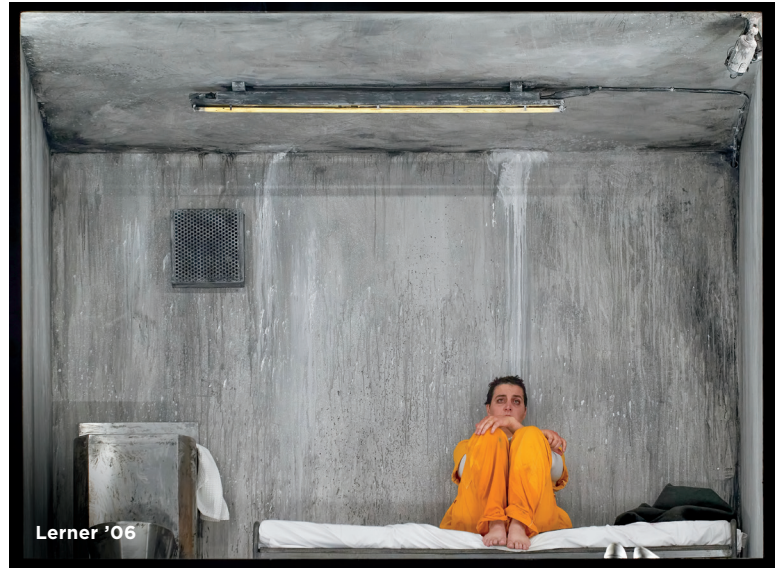
1999

Ian Demsky has taken a new role as senior science writer and editor for Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center in New York City.

2000s

2000

Debra Nagy, founder and artistic director of the period instrument ensemble Les Délices, was awarded a 2022 Cleveland Arts Prize in the mid-career artist category. The award is presented annually to two Northeast Ohio artists whose work received



regional and national recognition. ■ **Daniel Stevens** is the new head of the music department at Mississippi State University. Daniel had been a tenured professor at the University of North Alabama, where he also was director of orchestral studies and a viola teacher. He has a master’s degree from Oklahoma State University and doctoral degree from the University of North Texas, both in music performance.

2001

Leif Aruhn-Solen celebrated 25 years as a professional soloist in December with his New York Philharmonic debut, singing the prestigious five traditional *Messiah* concerts at Lincoln Center’s David Geffen Hall. He also returned to the San Francisco Symphony Orchestra, starring as the tenor soloist in Handel’s *Messiah*. Leif made his debut as tenor soloist with a professional symphony orchestra when—on short notice—he sang the Evangelist and arias in Bach’s Christmas Oratorio with Malmö



Symphony Orchestra in 1997. While still a student in the Artist Diploma program, he debuted with Oslo Philharmonic Orchestra, City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, Gothenburg Symphony Orchestra, Lancaster Symphony Orchestra, and Cleveland Orchestra. ■ Wishing to create a “summer camp for coders” in New York’s Adirondack State Park, **Peter Lyons** and his partner Christella Kay opened Focus Retreat Center in Malone, N.Y., which hosts immersive retreats where people can work on creative projects such as coding, writing, or sewing among supportive peers. The pair bought and renovated a large old schoolhouse and opened for business in early summer 2022. [w] focusretreatcenter.com

2003

Commercial real estate and franchise law attorney **Laura L. Wallerstein** joined the law offices of McDonald Hopkins. Laura, who lives in Akron, Ohio, earned a JD and MBA from the University of Akron.

2004

Ethnomusicologist and pianist **Courtney-Savali Andrews** was appointed to a newly created faculty position that focuses on African American and African diasporic musics at Oberlin.

2006

Sean Gill was nominated for a 2022 Primetime Emmy for Outstanding Picture Editing for a Structured Reality or

Competition Program for his work on Netflix’s *Queer Eye*. ■ **Katherine Lerner** debuted Kundry in *Parsifal* at the Landestheater Linz this year, as part of her fifth and final season as a dramatic mezzo in the ensemble there. In September she won the 2022 Österreichische Musiktheaterpreis for best supporting female role for her work in a staged version of Turnage’s monodrama *Twice Through the Heart*, also with Landestheater Linz. Katherine’s pivot to a freelance career begins with an appearance in June as Klytämnestra/Elektra with Baadisches Staatsthear Karlsruhe.

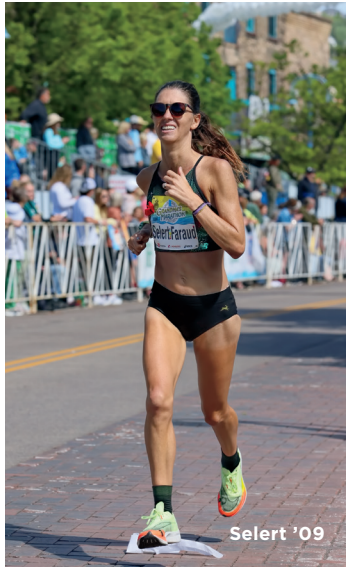
2007

Brendan Kelley is the director of Ohio’s Climate and Clean Energy Coalition (CCEC) through his firm, Leading Innovations. In this role, he will develop, manage, and strengthen the coalition by providing guidance and support to members and pursuing collaborative campaigns to further CCEC’s equity and inclusion, clean energy,





Greenberg '08



Selert '09



Abramson '10



Brown '11

and climate objectives. Brendan led Clean Fuels Ohio's Drive Electric Ohio initiative, the organization's comprehensive approach to accelerating electric vehicle adoption. Before joining Clean Fuels Ohio, he spent almost 15 years in local and state government and electoral politics.

2008

Jessica Greenberg was married on August 29, 2021, in Maryland, prompting a reunion of three generations of Obies in the family. Pictured from left are **Jackelyn Orabone**, grandmother **Marjorie Weingold '51**, Jessica, groom **Dov Hoffman**, Jessica's aunt **Beth Plavner '77**, and **Jackie Bousek**. ■ **Christopher Sanders** left the federal public defender for the Western District of Washington and joined the litigation group at the Pacifica Law Group in Seattle, which represents municipalities, government agencies, and nonprofits. "I look forward to connecting with everyone soon."

[e]: chris.michael.sanders@gmail.com

2009

Kir Selert qualified for the 2024 Olympic Marathon Trials, running a time of 2:36:18 at Grandma's Marathon on June 18, 2022. Kir credits her years at Oberlin with initiating her relationship with distance running, and looking to carve out space that was fully hers. And, as a student of neuroscience, she has always been intrigued by and sought to understand the boundaries of the mind, while respecting its power. ■ **Max Strasser** was named editor of the *New York Times*' Sunday Opinion section in July 2022.

2010s

2010

Daniel Abramson married Dara Adams in April 2022. Wedding-party alumni included **Kate Riley**, **Andrew Watiker**, and **Margot Hanley**, along with Daniel's sibling **Lily Zimmerman '13** and her partner **Shawn Clancy '14**. **Shayne Wells '11**, **Sergio Sanchez**, and **Nancy Nguyen '08**, also attended.

2011

Anna Brown married Simon Kanter ("Grinnell class of 2011, but don't hold it against him!") on July 30, 2022, in



Standardsville, Va. There were 23 Obie guests in attendance. Anna and Simon live in Washington, D.C., with their dog Bagel. From left to right (top to bottom when people are directly in front of each other): **Jacob Baron '12**, **Nathan Harris**, **Mike Craig**, **Nikki Mitchell '12**, **Monica Volk**, **Laura Tully-Gustafson**, **Joe Brophy**, **Will Georges '12**, the groom and bride, **Ryan Head**, **Carrie Fowler '12**, **Danny Spencer**, **Cora Allen-Savietta (née Allen-Coleman '12)**, **Poy Winichakul**, **David Petrick '10**, **Kelly Allen-Savietta (née Savietta '12)**, **Mary Willems '12**, **Leta Davis '10**, **Liza Harbison '10**, **Martina McLnan '10**, **Sandhya Raman '10**, **Sophia Chen '12**. Also in attendance but not pictured was **Tom Hamburger '74**.

2013

Sophia Bamert joined the English faculty at Brooklyn College as a doctoral lecturer in composition. She completed her PhD in English at the University of California, Davis in 2021 and spent a year as a postdoctoral fellow and lecturer in the engagements core curriculum at the University of Virginia. She says she's been thrilled to have Obie colleagues, professors, and friends at each of those places, and she looks forward to reconnecting with Oberlin alumni in New York. ■ Artist **Sarp Yavuz** gave a talk to Oberlin studio art students in the spring of 2022 and had an exhibition of his work, *Garden of Turkish Delights*, open at the New York City gallery Trotter & Sholer in June. Sarp received the 2019 Leslie Lohman



Museum Artist Fellowship; the 2016 Palm Springs Photo Festival Emerging Photographer Award, presented by Leica Camera; the 2013 New Artists Society Award from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago; and the 2013 Leah Freed Memorial Prize from the Oberlin College Department of Gender and Sexuality Studies. In 2013, he became the youngest artist to be included in the permanent collection of the Istanbul Modern Museum. He lives and works between New York and Istanbul.

2016

Louise Ling Edwards won the Walter Rumsey Marvin Grant, awarded to an Ohio writer age 30 or younger who has yet to publish a book.

2017

Helen Kramer is the assistant director of Resetting the Table, which the *Washington Post* showcased last summer for the group's work bridging political divides in faith communities. "My work today is greatly informed by projects I started at Oberlin, where I was a leader in the Interfaith Student Council and Kosher Halal Co-op, and where I served for several semesters as chair of the Peace and Conflict Studies Student Group," says Helen. In July 2022, she married **Jason Heitler-Klevans** in Ellicott City, Md. Their celebration included many Obies; pictured above, from left: **Ariel Flavin '00**, **Kirsten Vail**, **Rachael Schwartz**, **Linda Manning '85**, **Willa Kerkoff**, **Jason**, **Helen**, **Ari Heitler-Klevans**, **David**

Heitler-Klevans '88, **Jenny Heitler Klevans '88**, former Oberlin math professor **Bruce Pollack-Johnson**, and **Linda Pollack-Johnson**. [w] www.resettingthetable.org

2020s

2020



Game designer **Pearse Anderson** successfully crowdfunded *Critters & Companions*. "It's a nonviolent companion book to classic tabletop role-playing games like Dungeons & Dragons, which blends my double majors of creative writing and environmental food studies," says Pearse. A speculative fiction author and journalist, he previously published the food game Recipe on Kmiydish Paper, worked in gardening communications, and investigated the origin of sexy Colonel Sanders. [w] www.pearseanderson.com

Class Notes are prepared from a variety of sources, including news media reports, press releases, and other material sent to us. Send your news—and high-resolution images—to alum.mag@oberlin.edu.



MIKE CRUPP

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OBERLIN
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Losses

Faculty, staff, and friends

John Richard Thompson followed his service in the U.S. Army during the Korean War with a PhD in psychology from the University of Colorado. In 1964, he and his family moved to Oberlin, where he was a psychology professor and the first director of student psychology services. He also had a private practice and was the board president overseeing the county's mental health center for many years. In 1991, he retired to Chapel Hill, N.C., where he joined the Church of Reconciliation and fought for the ordination of LGBTQ individuals. Dr. Thompson enjoyed camping, reading, architecture, classical music, history, cars, good food, and martinis. He died June 1, 2022, leaving his wife of 71 years, Wynona; four children; five grandchildren; and seven great-grandchildren.

1938

Esther Cooper Jackson was a civil rights activist and feminist who spent decades at the forefront of the movement for racial justice. She was active with the Progressive Party, the Civil Rights Congress, and the National Committee to Defend Negro Leadership. Working alongside W.E.B. DuBois in the 1960s, she cofounded and served as managing editor of *Freedomways*, a quarterly journal that showcased Black intellectuals. In the 1940s, she volunteered with the Southern Negro Youth Congress, organizing voter registration drives and becoming the organization's executive secretary. Ms. Jackson received her master's degree in sociology from Fisk University. She died August 23, 2022, leaving two daughters, a grandson, and two great-grandsons. Her husband, James E. Jackson Jr., died in 2007.

1946

Marjorie Merrill Skott had two distinguished careers. She was first a librarian, working in book acquisitions, reference, and cataloging in libraries worldwide while living abroad for extended periods with her first husband, Martin Gilbert, and their two sons. In the U.S., she worked at the Library of Congress and in libraries in Michigan, Virginia, and Washington, D.C. At age 50, she entered the C.G. Jung Institute in Zurich, Switzerland, where she met her second husband, Preben Skott. Upon graduation, she kept a private practice on

the Isle of Man from 1980 to 1984, returned to the U.S. the following year, and spent 25 years in private practice in Montpelier, Vt., retiring at age 85. She died March 17, 2022. She leaves two sons, five grandchildren, and five great-grandchildren.

1947

Margaret Mellinger Denison earned a master's degree in education and taught first through third grade in rural Oregon. After retiring, she volunteered in AIDS education and accompanied her husband, Bill Denison '50, on mycological expeditions to Bhutan and Pohnpei. Ms. Denison died June 30, 2022. She is survived by four children and four grandchildren and was preceded in death by her husband.

1950

Mabelle Ting-Mei Hsueh grew up in China before moving to the U.S. to study at Oberlin. She earned a master's degree in English language and literature from the University of Michigan and a second bachelor's in music and piano. She worked in the University of Michigan School of Education office for many years. Following the 2012 death of her husband, Robert Pao-chung Wu, she moved to Connecticut to be closer to family. She wrote poems, an unpublished novel, and short stories that appeared in literary journals like *Ploughshares* and *Triquarterly*. Ms. Hsueh died June 18, 2022, survived by two grandchildren and two great-grandsons. Her husband and daughter predeceased her.

1951

Muriel Carleton Siddall enrolled at Oberlin after an eventful childhood as the daughter of missionaries and educators in Turkey, Syria, and Lebanon. Upon graduation, Ms. Siddall and her husband, Dr. John B. Siddall '50, made a home in the Columbus, Ohio, area, where Muriel was a quiet inspiration as a wife and mother. She died July 22, 2022, leaving four children, 11 grandchildren, and four great-grandchildren. ■ **Joann Finley Elder** was active in many socially progressive causes. She was an opponent of the Vietnam War, an early member of Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays, and a member of the Society of Friends (Quakers). She met her future husband, Joe Elder '51, while attending Oberlin, and after graduation, the couple sailed for Madurai,

India, on a Shansi teaching fellowship. They later returned to Oberlin for their master's degrees. They had three children, including Shonti Elder '73. Ms. Elder died August 25, 2022, just weeks after celebrating her 71st wedding anniversary. She leaves her husband, three children, four grandchildren, and two great-grandchildren.

1953

Sally Crum Yocom taught music in public schools in Columbus, Ohio, and piano for 55 years and was an assistant pianist for the Columbus Symphony Orchestra. She was a fan of Ohio State football and women's basketball and loved traveling, especially on riverboats in the U.S. and Europe. Ms. Yocom died on July 5, 2022, leaving three children and two grandchildren.

1954

Bruce C. Daube worked for the YMCA for almost 20 years, later becoming an accountant for the Boy Scouts of America. He and his wife, Anne Vaughan '55, met at Oberlin. An avid gardener and hiker, Mr. Daube took special joy in Sunday afternoon family walks. He died September 10, 2022, leaving three children, five grandchildren, and three great-grandchildren. He was predeceased by his wife of 56 years in 2011. ■

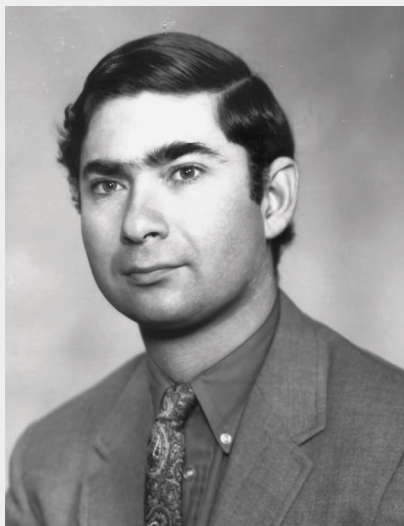
Shirley Constance Penty Wolfe was a teacher, mother, wife, and musician. At Oberlin, she lived in one of the first co-ops, where she met OSCA co-founder Arthur Wolfe '52 while washing dishes together. They married after her graduation. She obtained a master's in education at the University of Michigan and taught in Micronesia for four years with her husband. Ms. Wolfe volunteered extensively, facilitating overseas adoptions and promoting racial justice and education equity. She played violin in local orchestras and enjoyed camping with her family. Ms. Wolfe died on August 14, 2022, leaving five children, including Nancy Louise Wolfe '79 and Christopher Penty Wolfe '91, and eight grandchildren, including Laurel Wolfe Wawrzynek '18 and Fiona Dance Wolfe '22.

1957

A native of Sweden, **Kenneth I. Lindfors** came to the U.S. on a refugee ship during WWII. He earned a master's degree at Harvard University, worked as an educator,

MEMORIAL MINUTE

Bob Piron, 1935-2022



Bob Piron died in Oberlin on August 16, 2022. At the time, he was recuperating from a fall and undergoing treatment for cancer. He has no surviving near relatives but lots of adoring former students, whom he considered his “kids.” He will be interred in a family burial plot on Long Island, New York.

Bob was born to Fruma and Elie Piron in TianJin, China, in 1935. His maternal grandfather ran the Belgium-owned Tientsin Tramway and Lighting Company, which supplied both transportation and electricity to northern China from 1914 until it was taken over by the invading Japanese army in 1943. His parents bribed their way out of China in 1941 and eventually settled in Brooklyn, New York. As a boy, Bob was a bat boy for the Brooklyn Dodgers, a team he had rooted for all his life, despite its move to Los Angeles in 1957. In his teens, he learned tennis and became good enough to teach on the public tennis courts in Brooklyn. During this time, he also learned to play piano with a renowned piano teacher whom he

claimed was a secret lover of Arthur Rubinstein. Once he realized he was not good enough to be a concert pianist, he decided to become an economist. He obtained a BA from New York University and then a PhD in economics from Northwestern University. In 1961, he joined the economics faculty at Oberlin College, his only employer until he retired in 2008.

Bob began his academic career studying the micro-foundations of macroeconomics. But he was eclectic, and in his later years, he both did research in the economics of the performing arts and behavioral economics and taught courses in experimental economics well before it became an accepted subfield of the discipline. Bob came to Oberlin to teach economics, but he stayed because of the conservatory’s piano department and because he was allowed to coach the college tennis team. While he was coach, the Oberlin men’s tennis team won the Ohio Athletic Conference Championship. In the 1970s, under the direction of Billie Jean King, he started the Oberlin Tennis Camp, which later became an Oberlin Nike Tennis Camp. Hundreds of high school students attended the camp over its 30-odd-year life, and many eventually enrolled in the college.

In 2005, Bob cofounded CleanAlert to commercialize a filter clog detector invented by Jacob Fraden, the inventor of the infrared ear thermometer. He was chairman of the board until shortly before his death. He will be missed by many of his former students, colleagues, and tennis campers.

Luis Fernandez
Emeritus Professor, Economics

and eventually became headmaster at Suffield Academy in Connecticut. During his 11-year tenure, the school’s endowment increased sevenfold, applications for admission more than doubled, and three chairs to honor excellence in teaching were established. In 1987, he was appointed president of ASSIST Inc., a scholarship program connecting talented international students with American independent secondary schools. He mentored thousands of young people for more than 50 years. He died September 13, 2022, leaving Betsy Dunnet Lindfors, his wife of 62 years; their two daughters; and a granddaughter.

1964

With a master’s degree in organ performance from New England Conservatory, **Terry Oliver Decima** dedicated more than five decades to serving on the school’s faculty. He was on the staff of the vocal program at Tanglewood and frequently coached the Tanglewood Festival Chorus. As head organist for First Parish Church in Weston, Mass., he became known for his recitals before and after services. In 2016, the church celebrated his 50th anniversary as its head organist. Mr. Decima died March 26, 2022.

1972

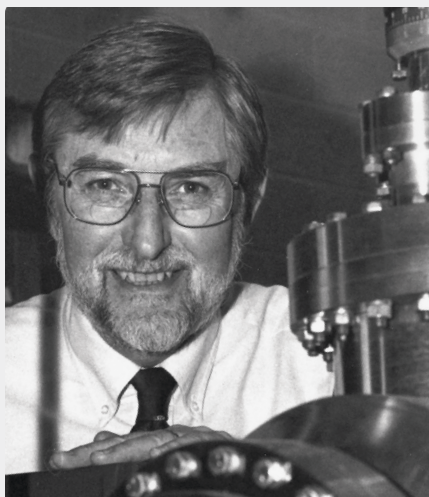
Theodore Arthur Hagg of Wurtsboro, N.Y., was a lover of machines and mathematics. He earned a master’s degree from the University of Rochester and an MBA from the Wharton School. Mr. Hagg spent 15 years in investment banking on Wall Street, taught college math, and worked as an intelligence analyst in South America. He was nearly assassinated while running for local public office; he bought and protected more than 250 acres of forest in New York State; was inducted as a peyote shaman into the Huichol Tribe of Central Mexico; and founded Ableman Management Services. He is remembered as a force of nature. He died July 13, 2022, leaving his wife, Leigh Ann Waldvogel; their daughter; his two sisters, including Dr. Sigrid Hagg ’65; and two stepsons.

1975

Mark Rea died in St. Petersburg, Fla. He leaves behind his partner, Andree Clearwater.

MEMORIAL MINUTE

Richard Schoonmaker, 1930-2021



Richard Schoonmaker was born in 1930 in Schenectady, New York, and grew up in a working-class neighborhood during the Depression and World War II. He remained forever grateful to his parents for their love and encouragement and for the values they instilled, including respect for education.

He attended Yale on an ROTC scholarship and earned a bachelor's degree in chemical engineering. After a year of graduate study at Princeton in the same field, he served three years as a naval officer, mainly on ships at sea and eventually as chief engineer on a destroyer. Near the end of this service, he married Dina Bikerman, a Bryn Mawr senior whom he had met during his time at Princeton. The couple moved to Ithaca, New York, where they started raising a family while Dick was in the PhD program in physical chemistry at Cornell.

In 1960, at the end of a year of postdoctoral research in the physics department at Columbia, Dick was offered faculty appointments in two chemistry departments: Columbia's and Oberlin's. He and Dina together chose Oberlin. Dick was aware of the strong history of Oberlin's chemistry

department, but he also thought he could help modernize its curriculum and increase the amount of student-faculty research. One reason he chose Oberlin was that the Kettering Hall of Science would be completed the year after his arrival and would include more space for research.

Dick held high standards for himself and his students. His lectures were models of organization and presentation. In the laboratory, he made a point of interrogating students to instill habits of active observation and interpretation. He spent his first sabbatical leave in a quantum chemistry group at Oxford to broaden his command of this portion of his teaching repertoire.

During his first dozen years at Oberlin, Dick researched the vaporization of inorganic solids at high temperatures. From about 1970 to the end of the century, his research focus was surface science. His Oberlin experiments in the latter field elucidated the dynamics of gas-surface interactions and the mechanism by which gaseous alkali halide molecules condense onto crystals of sodium chloride. For these demanding experiments, he constructed an apparatus that enabled him to vary the angle at which a molecular beam of the gas impinged on a specific surface of the crystal in an ultrahigh vacuum.

Surface science is an interdisciplinary field. Dick used sabbatical leaves to collaborate with other surface scientists at their laboratories. During his year at the University of York in England, he did research using techniques that were new to him. At the University of California in Berkeley and the Fritz Haber Institute in Berlin, his experience with gas-surface interactions contributed to investigations of the mechanism of one of the most

important reactions in all of chemical technology: namely, the catalytic synthesis of ammonia at the surface of iron. Three years after his retirement in 1993, Dick spent a second year in Berlin on this research. He published 10 articles on research performed at Oberlin and 10 on research done elsewhere after 1970. All 10 of the former included students as coauthors.

Dick was deeply aware of the importance of institutions and took responsibility for preserving and strengthening them. He served on the editorial advisory board of *Accounts of Chemical Research*, a review journal of the American Chemical Society. His most important institutional service was to Oberlin College. He served as chair of the chemistry department and was elected to the College Faculty Council many times. In 1989-90 he led a comprehensive study of the science division's space needs. Although Oberlin did not fund the proposed remedies then, the study raised awareness of acute needs and eventually led to the construction of the Science Center.

Vigorous physical activity was important to Dick. His workday noontimes frequently involved competitive sports or running with colleagues. When knee damage caused him to replace running with bicycling, he estimated that he had run about 15,000 miles. Dick and Dina, sometimes accompanied by children Karen, Dirk, Timothy, or Jonathan, enjoyed long hikes, cycling, and skiing together.

A sound mind in a sound body, an able and dedicated teacher and scientist, a person of integrity and good judgment—this is the man whose life we celebrate and whose presence we miss.

Terry Carlton
Emeritus Professor, Chemistry

1978

Richard James Aitson II was a Kiowa-Kiowa Apache bead artist, curator, and poet from Oklahoma who taught Native American literature at Anadarko High School and art as an adjunct professor at Bacone College. Originally a painter, Mr. Aitson learned beading after being invited to join the Kiowa Gourd Clan. He went on to create beaded dance regalia for the Native American community and bead art for collectors and museums. He died June 24, 2022, leaving his partner, Linda Blackburn.

1981

Michael Grossman was a librarian who devoted more than 17 years to the Harvard College Library. He worked in Armenian, Georgian, and Perso-Arabic script languages of South Asia in the Middle Eastern Division and later in the Middle East, Africa,

and Asia Division. During his tenure, he acquired a portion of the Haroutune Hazarian Library, instituted an exchange program for Armenian resources with the National Association for Armenian Studies and Research, and acquired some 23,000 titles in Perso-Arabic script. Mr. Grossman is remembered as a polymath: an avid cook, a lively host, an active member of the Amalgamated Printers' Association, and a founding member of the Arbalest Press. He died June 22, 2022.

2001

Joshua Adler traveled extensively, living in France, Dublin, and San Francisco. His job leading wine tours ignited a passion for the drink and led to his appointment as wine director at Bi-Rite Market, where he helped found 18 Reasons, a nonprofit community cooking school. He eventually returned to

France and became wine director at Restaurant Spring in Paris. In 2012, he founded the Paris Wine Company, which elevates producers who work their estate vineyards, practice organic or biodynamic farming methods, and use native yeast and minimal intervention during vinification and élevage. Mr. Adler died February 25, 2022, leaving his wife and two sons.

2017

Eric James Hager worked for Strategies for Wealth in New York City. He befriended one of the partners, who subsequently left the firm to start the Kilter Group, a boutique firm Mr. Hager helped build from the ground up. After four years, he left Kilter and began working as a contract employee for BNY Mellon. His time at Oberlin was marked by his love for and success in lacrosse. He died June 11, 2022.

Peter Molnar '65

Oberlin Honorary Degree Recipient and Earth Science Pioneer

A family trip from their New Jersey home to the Rocky Mountains at age 8 began Peter Molnar's lifelong love of mountains and led to a distinguished career studying how mountains are built and, eventually, how movements in the Earth's crust affect climate.

A pioneer in plate tectonics, Dr. Molnar was a geophysicist with an anthropologist's heart, a contrarian animated by a desire to prove widely held notions wrong, and a scientist driven by a curiosity that found him challenging himself as much as conventional wisdom.

Though he eventually became fluent in French and Russian, it was English that he first struggled with at Oberlin, earning eight C's, nearly all for classes that required writing. He found his métier in math. He believed that most ideas could be reduced to general principles. To gain an understanding of any topic, he believed this explainable part had to be paired with an emotional part: *Does it feel right?*

During fieldwork that took him from the high terrain in Asia to the Southern Alps of New Zealand, Dr. Molnar embraced opportunities to learn about other cultures. He took delight in upending what was in the textbooks because, he told an interviewer, "You know you're onto something good. It's most fun when nearly everyone is wrong because that's when you can make a breakthrough."

Possessing an active mind always on the move, he learned geology to study plate tectonics and the formation of continents before delving into climate study and, finally, biology. He wrote *Plate Tectonics: A Very Short Introduction*, in which he discusses how plate-tectonic processes were recognized by young scientists while geology's "established giants" were busy looking at the moon. A beloved mentor to younger scientists and a generous collaborator, he enjoyed numerous wide-ranging and fruitful partnerships. In 2014, he won the Crafoord Prize in Geosciences, among the world's most prestigious scientific honors.

Dr. Molnar was born in Pittsburgh in 1943. He earned a PhD in geophysics

from Columbia University in 1970, followed by a postdoc appointment at the University of California at San Diego and an exchange scientist position in the USSR. He was appointed a professor at MIT in 1974. Though he left his faculty position in 1986, he remained a senior research associate at MIT until 2000. He also held visiting appointments at Grenoble, Montpellier, Oxford, Caltech, and Santa Barbara. In 2001, he joined the University of Colorado at Boulder as a geological sciences professor and fellow at CIRES, a collaboration between the university and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

Oberlin College awarded Dr. Molnar an honorary doctorate in 2010. His father, Julius P. Molnar, Oberlin Class of 1937 and later a trustee of Oberlin College, received an honorary degree from Oberlin in 1967.

Dr. Molnar died June 23, 2022. He leaves his wife, the writer Sara Neustadt; a son; a daughter-in-law; and two grandchildren.

For a personal tribute to Dr. Molnar from his friends and classmates, see page 3.

Learning, and a Labor of Love

ON A RECENT SUNDAY, I CAUGHT MYSELF SCANNING THE *NEW YORK Times* Book Review for names of Oberlin alums—either as authors or as bylines. I had to remind myself I needn't do that anymore. I had already turned off my Google alert for the phrase "Oberlin College." The next day, for the last time, I drove to my Oberlin office from my home in Cleveland (yes, all of my sentences were commuted). This is my final issue as editor of the *Oberlin Alumni Magazine*. I am moving on to become the communications director for In the Public Interest.

I first arrived at Oberlin 40 years ago, having been intrigued by an admissions brochure featuring pictures of student activists protesting. "What is this place?" I wondered. A more recent admissions brochure pointed out that Oberlin students question *everything*—including Oberlin itself. Oberlin has meant and will always mean a million things to me. That it is sometimes a punching bag and sometimes a punchline doesn't bother me—to me, it means we stand for something in the public's imagination. May it be forever true.

I've always held that the alumni magazine shouldn't be judged on a single issue of the publication, but if you feel it doesn't represent Oberlin in two consecutive issues, I'm not doing my job. I hope our readers see themselves in the magazine and thus feel seen by the magazine. I've tried to include voices that hadn't been heard from enough, stories that hadn't been told enough, and topics that touched real lives.

There are many stories I wish I'd gotten to. Some are on the light side: Mudd's iconic ball chairs that people mistakenly call womb chairs, which are also a thing, just not at Oberlin. (Sure, they're both designed by Finns named Eero, but think: Are wombs perfectly round?); the history of bikes on campus and alumni-led bike co-ops off campus; the fact that the average Oberlin alum knows more puppeteers than the average person who did not attend Oberlin. Other stories are more meaningful: the death of a student at the hands of another student during my own college years, the mourning for which still feels incomplete and unresolved; the lawyer who clawed his way back from addiction to regain his law license and his life; and the stories contained in so many obituaries that I wish I'd known about when the deceased were alive. I was probably too hesitant to have heartbreak in the magazine—perhaps the state of the world during the last decade and a half favored avoiding it, or perhaps I did.

I've also made mistakes, some of which made their way into print and were caught by our readers. After an early issue, I pinned to my wall a graphic explaining the differences between palate, palette, and pallet (to be safe, I've avoided any reference to any of the three). And we placed into our obituaries an alum who was not only very much alive, but had a lively sense of humor ("Reports of my death are greatly exaggerated," she wrote). But there were some mistakes of a different type. I once wrote a classics scholar was "born a slave," and an astute reader pointed out that no person is brought into this world as the property of another. The *Oberlin Alumni Magazine* is lucky to have so many readers who understand that words matter.

In 1938, the editor of this magazine, upon her departure, wrote, "Yes, editing an alumni magazine has its problems. The hide becomes thicker and thicker, and after nine years of it, you wear the orchids and smile serenely when the pin jabs you." I'm sorry she felt that way, since I feel I have had more orchids than jabs from Oberlin alumni. For the most part,



Outgoing editor Jeff Hagan '86, with son Will '21 and spouse Marcia Egbert.

our readers have been gentle, and I have tried to learn from them.

I was also fortunate enough to be rejuvenated with cycles of younger people, whether they worked in our office or were the children of my Oberlin peers. Scattered around the country are young alumni who graduated in the last 15 years, whose struggles I feel deeply and whose successes I celebrate. I have learned something from each and every one of them, and I cherish their friendship. One of those now-former students, my son, Will Hagan '21, continues to teach me every day. These younger people give me hope for the future of Oberlin and the future in general.

I've learned an incredible amount from alumni who allowed our magazine to peer into their lives and their work, to ask probing—and sometimes dumb—questions, and to share their stories with our readers. Twice, interview subjects even rejected the premise of my questions. Fair enough. I learned, and I think the reader learned, from their responses.

What I have felt most from Oberlin folks over the last nearly 14 years, and in fact through the four decades, is warmth and support. I can't imagine another place that boasts a higher concentration of amazing people. Per capita, Oberlin is perfect.

It's been a privilege to return to campus. I still didn't take full advantage of everything the college and conservatory have to offer, but really, who can at a place this robust in its offerings? But I still learned so much during both of my stints here.

To Oberlin professors, alumni, students, parents, and colleagues, thank you. It has been an education.

JEFF HAGAN '86 P'21
Editor, *Oberlin Alumni Magazine*

Photo by Dale Preston



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