Oberlin Opera Theater honored the centennial of Leonard Bernstein with a production of *Trouble in Tahiti*, featuring Shawn Roth ’20 and Gabriela Linares ’20 (pictured), paired with a Bernstein revue in fall 2018.

PHOTO BY YEVHEN GULENKO
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Oberlin Conservatory Magazine

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PHOTO BY FADI KHEIR
PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY NICOLE SLATINSKY
Of Note
The stories that shaped the year at Oberlin Conservatory
Conductor Robert Spano ’84 visited campus in December for a collaboration that joined the forces of students, faculty, and alumni: the world premiere of Da Pacem, a cello concerto written by Oberlin composition professor Stephen Hartke. It was performed by the Oberlin Orchestra, under the direction of Spano, with faculty cellist Darrett Adkins ’91.

Spano is the multiple-Grammy Award-winning music director of the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra, from which he will retire at the end of the 2020-21 season after 20 years at the helm. A professor of conducting at Oberlin, he also serves as music director of the Aspen Music Festival and School, a post he has held since 2012.

“Birthing a new piece is always exhilarating, but having a soloist of such virtuosity and commitment as Mr. Adkins, a piece as inspired as this one from Mr. Hartke, and students as accomplished as those in the Oberlin Orchestra made this premiere deeply moving and memorable for me,” Spano said of the experience.

Hartke—also a Grammy winner—wrote the work as a sort of companion piece to his 2017 piano concerto Ship of State, which was intended as a distress signal for modern civilization. With Da Pacem, he was a bit more reflective.

“I had a lot of fun writing the piano concerto,” Hartke told Cleveland Classical. “But that was more of a violent roller coaster, while this piece seeks closure.”

Hartke quotes the protest song “Ain’t I Got a Right to the Tree of Life?” in the third movement—an artistic decision that proved eerily prescient. “While I was working on the close of this section,” he says, “the news came about the massacre at the Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh, turning what had begun as an abstract musical elegy into a very real one.”

Adkins also was the soloist in a performance of Da Pacem at the 2019 Aspen Music Festival in July. His spring preparation for that engagement offered time for reflection on the Oberlin premiere.

“As I get ready for the Aspen performance, I’m finding the work to be deeper and even more rewarding than last time,” Adkins said, recalling his strenuous, exhilarating final weeks of preparation for the premiere with Hartke.

“I was learning music as fast as he could write it!”
When the Cleveland Museum of Art got the green light to proceed with a series of new music commissions, the first artist it sought was Pulitzer Prize-winning composer and instrumentalist Henry Threadgill.

Threadgill, who won the Pulitzer Prize for Music in 2016 for Zooid’s album *In for a Penny, In for a Pound*, has been called “perhaps the most important jazz composer of his generation” by *The New York Times*. Such accolades notwithstanding, he is something of a musical chameleon whose complex yet accessible creations defy easy categorization.

Threadgill and Zooid spent the week leading up to the premiere in Oberlin, working in daily rehearsals with CME and conductor Timothy Weiss. Their final on-campus session together served as a preview performance in Clonick Hall.

“To my mind, the only organization to do this sort of collaboration anywhere is CME,” says Tom Welsh, the museum’s director of performing arts. (Not coincidentally, conductor Weiss was a driving force behind the decorated new-music groups International Contemporary Ensemble and Eighth Blackbird, both of which trace their origins to Oberlin.) “My secret hope was for this to be a match made in heaven, and I think that’s turned out to be true.”

A *DownBeat* magazine review called the premiere “a daring, unpredictable and compelling performance that somehow simultaneously managed to remain accessible” and “a testament to discipline, flexibility and open-mindedness.”

For the classical musicians of CME, Threadgill’s emphasis on improvisation presented new challenges during their week together, which consisted of rehearsals lasting up to six hours daily.

“I use the German concept of ‘rehearse,’” Threadgill said in a conversation leading up to the premiere. “What we do in the U.S. when we have a rehearsal is we have people play from left to right, and if they did it right they get up and go home.

“But the German word for ‘rehearse’ means *explore*, and that’s what we do when we rehearse. The students do what they want to do. I offer them an entry into the music that is based on improvisation. They look at the
Oberlin Hosts Oboe Celebration

For 137 years, the F.Lorée company has ruled the oboe world. In December, Oberlin honored the company’s rich legacy with Lorée Oboe Day, organized by Professor of Oboe and English Horn Robert Walters.

The celebration included visits from oboe masters from across the country and a master craftsman from across the ocean: Alain de Gourdon, president of the Paris-based F.Lorée company and the developer of the Caldwell model Lorée oboe, named in honor of the legendary Oberlin oboe professor James Caldwell.

Founded in 1881, F.Lorée is the world’s oldest manufacturer of oboes and is widely considered the best. Many of the world’s top oboe performers play F.Lorées; Walters himself has played one since age 15.

Among the guests were Eugene Isotov, principal oboe of the San Francisco Symphony; Frank Rosenwein and Corbin Stair, principal and second oboe, respectively, of the Cleveland Orchestra; and William Welter, a 2018 Oberlin Conservatory graduate—and a former student of Walters—who already has ascended to principal oboe of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra.

Festivities included a recital featuring Walters, visiting artists, and Oberlin students; a repair forum with specialist Carlos Coelho of Indianapolis; a display and discussion about F.Lorée instruments and the history of oboe making by Gourdon; a reed-making class with English hornist Christopher Philpotts of the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra; and a master class hosted by Isotov.

The performance was part of Oberlin’s annual oboe studio recital, which happens each year in memory of Caldwell, who died in 2006.
TIMARA Presents (T)echs Machina Festival

Computer music has had a welcome space at Oberlin since back when the computers themselves took up nearly all the space.

Half a century later, Oberlin’s TIMARA Department—short for Technology in Music and Related Arts—presented a spring-semester celebration that honored that past while keeping an eye ever trained on the future.

(T)echs Machina (the name derives from the Latin term ex machina, meaning “from a machine”) consisted of performances, workshops, and talks featuring TIMARA faculty, alumni, and esteemed guests. It happened over three days in March 2019, on the eve of the department’s 50th anniversary celebration in 2019-20.

“TIMARA is an exciting world of music, technology, innovation, and imagination,” says faculty member Aurie Hsu ’96, who performed a piece she created with composer Steven Kemper. “(T)echs Machina invites the campus and community to celebrate both these beginnings and the endless possibilities that arise when we combine music, technology, and performance.”

In addition to a pair of concerts featuring creations by TIMARA faculty, friends, and alumni, events included a workshop on processing led by Eli Stine ’14, who will teach at Oberlin in 2019-20; a lecture and demonstration of composition using light and sound presented by Alex Christie ’09; and a demo by inventor-performer Onyx Ashanti (pictured) on “sonocybernetics”—wearable electronics that allow him to produce laser-light projections and sounds via specific movements.

Computer music pioneer and Columbia University professor George Lewis presented the most-attended sessions of the
festival, including a talk on situational forms and a Q&A and demo of Seismologic, a 2017 commission for bassoon and computer sound processing performed by Dana Jessen, an Oberlin Conservatory associate professor of contemporary music and improvisation.

Studio art visiting faculty member Beverly Acha performed a piece with TIMARA Technical Director Abby Aresty.

Christie is a doctoral student at the University of Virginia, where he strives to expand the ways in which audiences experience his work by employing elements such as video, lighting, and real-time audio processing.

“In some ways, electronic music is more accessible now,” he says, a reference in part to the popularity of dance music.

“But that also comes with a new set of expectations. I never really thought of what I do as weird, but sometimes people tell me that it is!”

‘Shadow of War’ Elicits Campus-Wide Collaboration

In the span of one week during November 1918, the Austro-Hungarian Empire and Germany conceded defeat to the Allied Powers, finally drawing to a close the War to End All Wars.

In commemoration of the 100th anniversary of the armistice, Oberlin College and Conservatory joined forces with the Allen Memorial Art Museum in September 2018 to present a series of faculty recitals and discussions focusing on the wildly diverse creative output of that period.

“Creative Arts and Music in the Shadow of War: Commemorating the Centenary of World War I” was the brainchild of Professor of Violin Sibbi Bernhardsson ’95. His inspiration stemmed from his love of music of that era as well as his appreciation for the considerable fount of artistry at his disposal at Oberlin.

“When I came to Oberlin, one of the things that attracted me was all of the great resources we have here, especially in terms of our faculty and the museum and the college,” says Bernhardsson, a former member of the Pacifica Quartet who began teaching at the conservatory in 2017. “At Oberlin, we can put together what would often be considered large-scale projects somewhat easily because we have all of these resources here.”

Some two dozen conservatory faculty took part in chamber music performances featuring music written between 1914 and 1918, as well as panel discussions and lectures spanning two days. They were joined by colleagues from the Allen Memorial Art Museum and the Oberlin College faculty, as well as esteemed guests.

Bernhardsson continues his thematic programming with a fall 2019 series called “End of Life, End of Time,” a celebration of death and dying across the artistic spectrum, with faculty chamber music performances, lectures, and museum gallery talks. It opens the season September 7 and 8.
Violinist and Entrepreneur ‘Centralizes’ Outreach in Boston Shelters

Violinist Julie Leven ’83 is the founder and driving force behind Shelter Music Boston, a nine-year-old nonprofit created to deliver classical music—and by extension vital support—to residents of homeless shelters and recovery centers near her hometown.

The program’s success can be attributed to its emphasis on performance, but even more so to its emphasis on forging connections. “The concert is not the endpoint,” says Leven, a self-styled “social entrepreneur” who also maintains an active performing career. “It’s not about me playing my violin. The concert is about, ‘I am offering you something of great beauty and complexity, and I want to know what you think. I value your opinion.’”

And it is working. Leven sees evidence in the burgeoning passion for music that ignites before her eyes at Shelter Music Boston’s performances. She also sees it in the shelters that are saving money on security and repairs that come with caring for displaced populations.

Leven shared her story in a spring presentation for professor Jody Kerchner’s Art Behind Bars class, part of Oberlin’s Division of Pedagogy, Advocacy, and Community Engagement, or PACE. She also led an open session called “Working with Vulnerable Populations.” In both, she described her process of involving audiences in the composition process and ultimately performing those “workshopped” pieces back for them, alongside works by Mozart or Bernstein or other masters. “The music inherently has dignity in it,” she says. “It has intensity, it has creativity, and it has passion.

PACE Students Bring Music to Area Schools

Oberlin’s Division of Pedagogy, Advocacy, and Community Engagement (PACE) prepares students for fulfilling careers in a virtually unlimited array of settings. Those who take Jody Kerchner’s Community Music Engagement in the Schools class benefit from immersive opportunities with area youngsters. They visited two grade schools during fall semester 2018, teaching basic music lessons to enthusiastic audiences and demonstrating their instruments.

“The experience was incredibly gratifying,” says Danny Huerta ’19, a musical studies and history double major in the college. With his concentration in culturally responsive pedagogy, the Chicago resident is preparing for a career in teaching. “I strive to be a music teacher post-Oberlin, so these experiences fit right in. I had always wanted to teach the upper levels such as high school, but working with kindergarten and fourth grade has shifted my options.”
Each year, Oberlin Opera Theater’s winter-term production presents an opportunity for contemporary pieces to be staged in unconventional places.

The January 2019 offering was composer Missy Mazzoli’s Proving Up, which probes the notion of the elusive American dream through the experience of a 19th-century Nebraska family throttled by the false hope instilled by its land claim under the U.S. Homestead Acts. The work premiered one year earlier with Washington National Opera at the Kennedy Center.

Mounted in partnership with Cleveland Opera Theater, Proving Up was presented in five performances in late January and early February in Wilder Main, located in the center of Oberlin’s historic student union at the heart of campus.

To Mazzoli, the hardships endured by settlers can be likened to the trials of those who tread water in modern-day America. It’s a theme she expounded on during a January visit to campus to work with the production’s cast and crew, an experience that left an indelible mark on students.

“Performers collaborating with composers has been a crucial part of the classical music work model since the beginning of Western music—and it’s easy to forget that when the vast majority of programmed composers are no longer around,” says cast member Shawn Roth ’20, a tenor from Johnstown, Pennsylvania, who praises Mazzoli’s creative approach to learning the music. “I can honestly say it was some of the most valuable instruction I’ve ever received as a musician. It reminded us all that classical music is very much alive and requires that we treat it as such if it is to survive.”

Mazzoli was joined by Proving Up librettist Royce Vavrek, who also visited campus in early 2018 in conjunction with Oberlin’s winter-term production of the Pulitzer Prize-winning opera Angel’s Bone by Du Yun ’01. Both operas were directed by Christopher Mirto.

Each performance of Proving Up concluded with a talkback session with the audience, one of which included Mazzoli and Vavrek.
Superstar mezzo-soprano Joyce DiDonato gave a Finney Chapel audience all it had hoped for and more in a February 27 performance as part of the Artist Recital Series. And then she gave even more to Oberlin voice students at a special meetup after the show.

On the road in support of a wide-ranging “classical fusion” album that shreds the script used by most operatic divas in the studio, DiDonato and her onstage collaborators (pianist Craig Terry is pictured below) chatted late into the night at the Birenbaum—about forging careers in music, about patience, and about staying...
The remarkable life of late piano professor Frances Walker was celebrated in September by former students, faculty, and countless others in a public memorial service in Warner Concert Hall. Included were performances by violinist Gregory Walker (son of Pulitzer Prize-winning composer George Walker ’41, the late brother of Frances Walker) as well as pianists Kevin Sharpe ’81, Bill Billingham ’82, Joseph Williams ’15, Cliff Jackson ’77, and Vincent Craig ’90.

Walker, who became the first black woman to be granted tenure at Oberlin, died in June 2018, mere months after taking part in a well-attended birthday celebration in her honor. She taught at Oberlin from 1976 until her retirement in 1991.

Tributes were offered by Dean of the Conservatory Andrea Kalyn, former Dean of the Conservatory David Stull ’89, Professor of Piano Peter Takács, and Lee Koonce ’82, a former student of Walker’s and a longtime friend.

“Frances Walker was a trailblazer, paving the way for generations of classical musicians of African descent and women,” says Koonce (pictured fourth from left, next to Oberlin College President Carmen Twillie Ambar). “Her love of all of the classical literature for piano expanded even further when she began to champion the compositions of composers of African descent. She was one of the first to bring this extraordinary music to the general public’s attention, and her jam-packed Carnegie Hall recitals in the 1970s are legendary.

“Beyond the music,” Koonce adds, “Ms. Walker was a dear and longtime friend to her many devoted students—nearly all of whom she remained in contact with up until her passing. She was probably the one person in each of our lives who you could trust to always tell you exactly what she thought. A year or so before her passing, while having one of our hours-long conversations at her kitchen table, she said to me, “You’re not so perfect” and began to list some of the ways she thought I fell short. And it was exactly what I needed to hear. I miss her dearly.”
Two Singers Earn Marilyn Horne Rubin Scholarships

Soprano Whitney Campbell ’19 and tenor Shawn Roth ’20 were named Rubin Scholars for 2019, an honor extended by opera legend Marilyn Horne after her annual residency at Oberlin.

Now in its sixth year, the Rubin Scholarship is made possible by philanthropist Stephen Rubin, a longtime friend of Horne’s. The famed mezzo-soprano has worked with singers at Oberlin for the past 14 years. Campbell and Roth each were awarded $5,000, which is intended to support their continuing professional development.

Originally from New Orleans, Campbell took part in four main-stage productions by Oberlin Opera Theater during her career on campus, including Poulenc’s Dialogues of the Carmélites in spring 2019 (pictured). In her December 2018 master-class performance for Horne, she sang “Czardas” from the Strauss opera Die Fledermaus.

“It was a life-changing experience, and I still can’t believe it happened,” Campbell says. “One of the coolest things she said to me was that I reminded her of herself at a young age, which was the best compliment I could ever wish to receive. I’m still reeling from it!”

Among Roth’s credits are leading roles in Oberlin Opera Theater’s Trouble in Tahiti as well as a pair of winter-term productions, Angel’s Bone by Du Yun ’01 and Proving Up by Missy Mazzoli. He has appeared as a soloist with the Cleveland Orchestra on two occasions.

“I’ve never been more nervous than when I was waiting backstage to go on stage for Ms. Horne,” says Roth, who, like Horne, hails from rural western Pennsylvania. “As the most established living American mezzo, she’s one of the most intimidating people to sing for on the planet… at first. Once I got out there and she started asking me about my pieces, she made me feel right at home.

“She’ll ask you to do things no one else will, and as a result, can improve your performance in ways no one else can.”

Oberlin Celebrates World Voice Day

World Voice Day was established in April 1999 to foster enthusiasm for vocal science, pedagogy, and health. This spring, Oberlin honored the occasion with a celebration in partnership with Cleveland Clinic Voice Center.

One of some 400 such celebrations that took place across the globe, Oberlin’s festivities included performances by singers representing both the college and conservatory who offered songs in genres ranging from classical and jazz to folk, spirituals, and musical theater.

Members of the Voice Center took part in a presentation on vocal health and acknowledged the center’s four-decade partnership with Oberlin, which included a symposium for vocal performance and pedagogy held on campus in 2014.

“Oberlin Conservatory remains a leader in the region for its 40-year association with Cleveland Clinic,” says voice professor Lorraine Manz, the driving force behind Oberlin’s World Voice Day event. “It has been a great synergy and will continue to be so.”
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What happened 30 years ago with Jazz Studies at Oberlin? It’s a matter of degree. By Erich Burnett
There was a time when Jazz at Oberlin referred to a Dave Brubeck record and not a whole lot more. Officially speaking, anyway.

But to those who were part of a scene taking shape in the early 1970s and throughout the 1980s, jazz at Oberlin meant breathing life into an often maligned art form in a mostly forgotten corner of campus.

They were Oberlin College students with a yen to improvise. They were conservatory students unbounded by their classical pedigrees. They were kindred spirits making music considered all but taboo at a place long revered for its legacy of filling the ranks of major orchestras.

They made it happen in the bowels of moribund Hales Gymnasium, the de facto home base for their studies.

And they were squired by perhaps the only man who could have made it all happen in the first place: Wendell Logan, a professor of African American music and the architect of what became Oberlin’s Division of Jazz Studies. It certainly didn’t happen overnight.

For decades, Brubeck’s 1953 live recording in Finney Chapel was regarded as the album that delivered jazz out of the nightclub and onto the concert stage. But for so many decades afterward, that album was nowhere near enough to deliver Oberlin jazz from the shadows of campus.

That finally happened in the 1988-89 academic year, when Jazz Studies was declared a major course of study in the conservatory, thanks in large part to the determination of the many students who championed the music for years.

It happened two generations after Brubeck lit up the stage for Jazz at Oberlin, using a piano rented by students because he had been forbidden to use one housed in Finney Chapel.

And for Logan, a widely beloved but stubborn force of nature who refused to see his vision fail, it happened after what seemed like a lifetime of struggle against the will of Oberlin administrators and the tides of conservatory tradition.

In 2019, as the degree in Jazz Studies celebrates its 30th year, jazz at Oberlin has come to be a world removed from its second-class status of decades gone by. Today it thrives in ways its earliest advocates only dreamed about.
THINK SMALL

When it came time to get his new quartet rolling, Theo Rosenfeld did what Oberlin jazz students have done just about forever: He asked everybody to talk it over. “Older generations of Oberlin students would invite any and all people who happened to be in the building at the time to please come in and listen,” says Rosenfeld, a jazz sax and politics major from Silver Spring, Maryland. When his quartet, rounded out by three conservatory friends, was invited to play the Monterey Jazz Festival’s Next Generation competition in spring 2019, they needed all hands on deck.

Oberlin’s artistic universe is built around small ensembles just like Rosenfeld’s. And that universe can be glimpsed each week at the iconic Cat in the Cream Coffeehouse, Oberlin’s longtime home base for small ensemble experimentation. It’s where Jazz Forum happens every Friday around the noon hour, when student groups coached by faculty perform for audiences made up of their musical mentors, peers, and anybody else who craves a packed roomful of jazz for lunch.

At Jazz Forum, thoughtful praise and insightful criticism are the rule; bolstered confidence, musicianship, and comfort in collaboration are the results. It’s a culture that extends well past the halls of Oberlin. And it’s how players like Rosenfeld—a newly minted graduate in May 2019—already have enjoyed opportunities to connect with the likes of drummer Kassa Overall ’06 and pianist Sullivan Fortner ’08, two of many successful Oberlin jazz alumni who have returned to campus in recent years to mix with students.

“We kind of took a forumesque approach to our rehearsals,” Rosenfeld says, “and we got a lot of good results out of that.” Though they had not previously played together as a quartet, they shined in their Next Generation performance, where they were the only ensemble that played solely original tunes— and seemingly the only one with an unbridled lust for sonic adventure.

“We wanted to sound different,” Rosenfeld says, conceding that they were all but alone among competing bands in this respect. “The vibe we all came to this with was that these are all original compositions, so let’s make them sound original. Let’s make someone believe this.”

Ultimately they discovered that they had been road-tested for their Next Generation experience at Oberlin, long before they ever hit the highway.

“Anyone who goes to Oberlin can attest to this,” Rosenfeld says. “Oberlin is an incredibly unique and special place. Oberlin fosters the courage to be yourself and to really put that out there to everyone.”

The unmistakable spirit of adventure that permeates Oberlin jazz also extends to the conservatory’s contemporary classical musicians and certainly to its TIMARA department. Students there are encouraged to experiment, to take calculated risks, and to envision careers that may not hew to tradition. But for those who came of age in Oberlin jazz’s formative days, it wasn’t always that way.

THE GOOD FIGHT

“OBERLIN JAZZ WAS A DIFFERENT WORLD when I was a student. Jazz was not welcome in the Con,” says James McBride ’79, a tenor saxophonist, songwriter, and best-selling author whose novel The Good Lord Bird won the 2013 National Book Award. A musical studies major in the college, McBride arrived at Oberlin in the fall of 1975, two years after Professor Logan set about the task of building a jazz program out of nothing. For decades, that fledgling program was relegated to dank and dilapidated Hales Gymnasium, and jazz students were instructed to practice wherever they could.

“Professor Logan had to constantly fight for rehearsal space for us,” McBride recalls. “He wasn’t always successful. Often, if we were rehearsing in the orchestra room, any violinist from the orchestra could walk in and demand the room, and we’d have to leave.”

Other accounts assert that, in its earliest days, Logan’s Oberlin Jazz Ensemble was granted one hour per week in the conservatory’s large ensemble practice room. Sixty minutes, from setup to breakdown. Still in his Oberlin honeymoon, Logan was left to seek out space wherever he could. Eventually, the restrooms and locker rooms of Hales became unlikely practice spaces.

“Jazz enjoyed the same kind of ambivalence that reflected black life in America,” McBride says. “Yes, it’s important but…we’re Oberlin. We do have standards.”

Bobby Ferrazza, then a 25-year-old former student of the legendary guitarist Bill DeArango, was one of four musicians brought on board to teach prior to the fall semester in 1988.

“When I started teaching here, my instructions were to go into Robertson Hall and pick out a practice room that wasn’t being used by students that day, and that’s where I would do my lessons,” Ferrazza recalls. “And it went on that way for years.”

Several years into his Oberlin career, Ferrazza tuned in to a public radio interview with Oberlin College’s president. “They asked him if there was guitar at Oberlin, and he said no.”

Today, Ferrazza is the longtime director of Oberlin’s Division of Jazz Studies and a rare link to the program’s formative days. As he ponders what lies in his rearview mirror, he remembers that the culture of yesterday didn’t dampen the spirits of faculty or students.

“We talked about how things were hard, but none of us really lingered on that,” he says.

“It didn’t even bother me that we were struggling at the time with acceptance, because our students—from the first second we started—were always incredibly passionate. We were incredibly passionate about the music, and our students were incredibly passionate, so those other things were sort of just comedy. We didn’t care about it.”

Student photographer Sam Lawrence ’11 documented the program’s final two years in Hales Gym through the book Jazz at Hales: The End of an Era. (See photos from that book on pages 16-17 and 19.)

“The story of jazz in Hales is not dominated by feelings of frustration but rather by expressions of joy and triumph,” he observed at the time. “It is a story of students and faculty so dedicated to their music and each other that they have transcended the inadequacies of this gym and built a home.”

“We talked about how things were hard, but none of us really lingered on that,” says Bobby Ferrazza.
Wendell Logan (top, with the Oberlin Jazz Ensemble circa 2009) once admitted his embarrassment at guiding the families of prospective students through the halls of Hales Gymnasium, the dilapidated longtime home of jazz at Oberlin. PHOTOS BY SAM LAWRENCE ’11
POWERED BY KOHL

OBERLIN JAZZ WELCOMED A NEW ERA MOST visibly not with the creation of the Jazz Studies major, but with the construction of the Bertram and Judith Kohl Building, a gleaming beacon that the division has proudly called home since its star-studded christening in 2010. Named for the parents of lead donor Stewart Kohl ’77, the Kohl Building was feted with performances by Stevie Wonder and alumni luminaries, among them McBride, trumpeters Michael Mossman ’81 and Theo Croker ’07, and bassist Leon Lee Dorsey ’81, who served as the celebration’s artistic director.

McBride views the building’s arrival as a key moment of healing in the conservatory’s history. “The inception of that place, and the efforts of the Oberlin community and generous alumni, brought a lot of peace to the hearts of those of us who remembered the conservatory with such bitterness,” he says. “It was one of the greatest efforts of any undergraduate institution I have ever heard of to make amends for the shortcomings of the past. It’s why Oberlin is Oberlin. It’s why Oberlin is special. It was testimony that Professor Wendell Logan’s faith in Oberlin was not misplaced.”

Ferrazza recalls a hardhat tour of the Kohl Building he took with Logan (pictured lower right). The structure’s frame was complete but the interior walls had yet to rise, yielding the sense that the space was even more mammoth than it actually was.

In that moment, Ferrazza turned to Logan and asked him how it felt, after all these years, to finally see a true home for jazz take shape. Logan replied without quite answering the question. “He said that his dream was that one day a student could audition at Oberlin Conservatory and be accepted on improvised music,” Ferrazza remembers.

In that way, Logan’s dream-come-true was already decades old: Students had been admitted to Oberlin on the basis of their improv chops since even before the days of the Jazz Studies degree.

Logan died just weeks after the Kohl Building’s grand opening, a celebration that was just as much about him as it was about concrete and steel. Another decade later, Logan’s dream lives on today through an incredibly robust Jazz Studies curriculum that includes immersive experiences that are virtually unrivaled among undergraduate programs. Its evidence can be seen in no shortage of ways:

- In the roster of guest artists who routinely settle on campus for residencies with Oberlin students, among them Maria Schneider (pictured far right), Billy Childs, Vijay Iyer, Henry Threadgill, and Terence Blanchard—each one of them in the past two years alone.
- In the long line of standout graduates, including those who predate the creation of the Jazz Studies degree—pianists Stanley Cowell ’62, Jon Jang ’78, and Fred Nelson III ’81, just for starters—and generations who came later, from drummer Neal Smith ’96 and trumpeter Peter Evans ’03 to Grammy Award-winning pianist Sullivan Fortner ’08. In the 21st century, these and other Oberlin jazz alumni continue to push boundaries—innovating and thriving in ways previous generations likely wouldn’t have envisioned. And they’re taking newly minted graduates along for

The arrival of the Kohl Building in 2010 was instrumental in elevating the profile of jazz at Oberlin. “It was testimony that Professor Wendell Logan’s faith in Oberlin was not misplaced,” says James McBride.
the ride, incorporating them in their ranks and exposing them to the front lines of today’s jazz world.

- In the accolades earned by current students and recent graduates: In 2018, pianist-composer Michael Orenstein ’17 and trombonist Caleb Smith ’19 both earned DownBeat Student Music Awards, Orenstein for Best Undergraduate Composition for Small Ensemble and Smith for Best Undergraduate Jazz Soloist.
- In Oberlin’s Performance & Improvisation ensembles, in which students from all corners of the conservatory explore the space between classical and jazz.
- In the advent of the major in jazz voice, which began in 2016 and whose students have fast become staples of ensemble performances at Oberlin.
- In the Oberlin Jazz Ensemble’s Finney Chapel performances and the many small ensembles that offer a steady diet of innovative sounds at the Cat in the Cream Coffeehouse.
- In the Birenbaum Innovation and Performance Space, a newly created hub for interdisciplinary teaching by day and for music by night. While the Birenbaum has been a welcome host to music and events of all kinds, jazz has quickly found its groove in the subterranean space—part of the Hotel at Oberlin complex—at the nexus between campus and community.
- In the newly formed Oberlin Sonny Rollins Jazz Ensemble, whose membership consists of outstanding student-citizens and whose mission revolves around serving the world through music. The ensemble owes its existence to the legendary saxophonist, who recognized Oberlin for its commitment to providing academic opportunities for people of all backgrounds and for its legacy of service.
- In the nascent Oberlin Gospel Choir, a collection of college and conservatory voices led by jazz voice teacher La Tanya Hall that debuts in spring 2020.

**SEASON TO CELEBRATE**

The spring semester of 2019 served as an unforgettable showcase of Oberlin jazz in all its forms.

The excitement began in January with the New York City debut of the Sonny Rollins Jazz Ensemble, which delivered a most auspicious premiere performance: two scintillating sets at a sold-out Dizzy’s Club Coca-Cola, part of the Jazz at Lincoln Center complex. From there, the ensemble got down to business with two days of engagement with students in schools across the region, playing and teaching and igniting sparks of inspiration wherever they went.

“Traveling to these schools was a reminder for all of us of how music can really impact lives and be used as a tool to give back to the communities around us,” says double bassist Eli Heath ’19 of Haydenville, Massachusetts. “I think I’m starting to develop a better understanding of how my role as a musician fits in the broader world around me. When Sonny spoke with us, he emphasized the importance of serving humanity through music. After spending a year in the Sonny Rollins Ensemble, I feel like I am closer to figuring out how to do that with my own life and music.”

March brought the arrival of composer and bandleader Maria Schneider, a musical chameleon who has summited jazz’s highest peaks over a career that spans three decades. The five-time Grammy Award winner devoted a week to exacting rehearsals and sessions with conservatory students on composition and arranging as well as a talk about intellectual property rights entitled “Take Control of Your Work.” It culminated in Schneider conducting a performance of her music by the Oberlin Jazz Ensemble.

“Seeing her conduct the big band was absolutely incredible,” says Celine Opdycke ’21 of Seattle, who studies jazz voice and biology. As the jazz correspondent for the conservatory’s official WOBC radio program Making CONnections, Opdycke interviewed...
“One of the happiest days of my life was witnessing the Oberlin Sonny Rollins Jazz Ensemble make its debut appearance at Dizzy’s Club Coca-Cola in New York City in January of 2019. It was like a dream. The level of musicianship, the honesty, the purity, the studied skill and talent of those Oberlin students far surpassed anything I’ve ever seen on the collegiate level. They were playing not from their hearts, but from history—Oberlin history, American history, history rife with difficulty and struggle and purpose. They played as students who understood the deeper purpose of music and what Mr. Rollins—and by extension Professor Logan and all of the faculty at Oberlin—have always demanded of their students since the school’s inception: to give back to others. It was one of the most fulfilling moments I’ve ever experienced in my life. Many alumni who were there, I believe, felt that spirit as well.

“That’s why Oberlin jazz will always be special to me. The jazz department was never born to be an industrial-strength machine that pumps out players who can play the wallpaper off the walls. It’s a place that teaches music as a fundamental right of human existence. Because one song—any song, in any style of music—can change the world. That, I believe, is the Oberlin musical legacy. It’s one we’ve earned together. And one of which we should all be proud.”

MUSICIAN AND AUTHOR JAMES MCBRIDE ’79
Marking 30 Years was made possible through the generosity of James R. Neumann ’58 and his wife Susan. As a student at Oberlin, three decades before the advent of the Jazz Studies degree, Neumann was a member of the Jazz Club and a WOBC radio host who helped book artists of great stature to perform on campus. Drawn to Oberlin in part because of the Brubeck concert of a few years earlier, he played a pivotal role in developing the culture of jazz at Oberlin.

Throughout his life, Neumann amassed what has come to be regarded as the country’s largest private collection of jazz memorabilia. In 2011, he began donating that vast collection—which numbers more than 100,000 recordings and more—to Oberlin.

“It’s hard to put into words,” Neumann says of the symposium, in which he was a featured panelist. “I never expected to have this opportunity, and I’m just so grateful that Oberlin has embraced jazz in this way.”

The power of the moment wasn’t lost on students, who witnessed the rare convergence of Oberlin’s entire jazz faculty for an electrifying concert in Finney Chapel.

“I have never seen a performance that was such a learning experience,” says Opdycke. “I learned so much from just sitting there and watching them.”

The following afternoon, Oberlin’s jazz faculty reconvened for a delightfully unfiltered panel discussion about their careers in music. For nearly two hours, Stull Hall resonated with tales of life on the road with jazz’s all-time great performers and exhortations for students to remain true to themselves as they navigate their own paths in music.

“Oftentimes in conservatories, we get so wrapped up in technique and doing well and performing well and ‘doing it right,’ so to speak,” says Opdycke. “That panel was such a good reminder that, first of all, things will work out.

“I had questions like ‘I don’t know what I’m going to do!’ and everyone was like You will find your people. You will find your way, just as we did. The more you do it, the easier it gets, and sometimes it’s just so easy to forget that if you keep doing what you’re doing, things will make sense after a while.”

Now 30 years into the Jazz Studies degree, things are making plenty of sense.
YOU ONLY GET ONE NEW YORK CITY DEBUT.
AND 160 FRIENDS TO MAKE IT WITH YOU.

WHEN JANUARY ARRIVES AT OBERLIN, OBERLIN HITS THE ROAD. EVERY YEAR, WINTER TERM MARKS THE TIME WHEN STUDENTS ARE ENCOURAGED TO EXPERIENCE WORLDS FAR REMOVED FROM THEIR BEATEN PATHS. SOMETIMES THAT MEANS A DEEP DIVE INTO RESEARCH OR IMMERSSION IN DISPARATE CULTURES SPANNING ALL CORNERS OF THE EARTH.

FOR MORE THAN 160 COLLEGE AND CONSERVATORY STUDENTS, JANUARY 2019 MEANT A RUNOUT TO THE EPICENTER OF THEIR MUSICAL DREAMS. THE MONTH WAS MARKED BY INTENSIVE PREPARATION ON CAMPUS THAT GAVE WAY TO PERFORMANCES ON A PAIR OF SINGULARLY SPECTACULAR STAGES. IT BEGAN WITH THE OBERLIN SONNY ROLLINS JAZZ ENSEMBLE, A NEWLY FORMED UNIT OF STANDOUT PLAYERS WHOSE NEW YORK CITY DEBUT CONSISTED OF TWO UNFORGETTABLE SETS AT DIZZY’S CLUB COCA-COLA, PART OF THE LEGENDARY JAZZ AT LINCOLN CENTER COMPLEX.

THREE DAYS LATER AND JUST AROUND THE CORNER FROM DIZZY’S IN MIDTOWN MANHATTAN, THE OBERLIN ORCHESTRA AND OBERLIN COLLEGE CHOIR JOINED FORCES FOR A SIMILARLY POWERFUL ENGAGEMENT AT VENERABLE CARNEGIE HALL. IN BETWEEN, THEY IGNITED THE PASSION OF YOUNG MUSICIANS THROUGH VISITS TO AREA SCHOOLS AND MUSIC PROGRAMS.

FOR THOSE FEW DAYS IN JANUARY, OBERLIN STUDENTS OWNED NEW YORK. FOR EVERY DAY AFTERWARD, THEY’LL OWN INDELIBLE MEMORIES OF THE EXPERIENCE.
When January arrives at Oberlin, Oberlin hits the road.

Every year, winter term marks the time when students are encouraged to experience worlds far removed from their beaten paths. Sometimes that means a deep dive into research or immersion in disparate cultures spanning all corners of the earth.

For more than 160 college and conservatory students, January 2019 meant a runout to the epicenter of their musical dreams.

The month was marked by intensive preparation on campus that gave way to performances on a pair of singularly spectacular stages. It began with the Oberlin Sonny Rollins Jazz Ensemble, a newly formed unit of standout players whose New York City debut consisted of two unforgettable sets at Dizzy’s Club Coca-Cola, part of the legendary Jazz at Lincoln Center complex.

Three days later and just around the corner from Dizzy’s in Midtown Manhattan, the Oberlin Orchestra and Oberlin College Choir joined forces for a similarly powerful engagement at venerable Carnegie Hall. In between, they ignited the passion of young musicians through visits to area schools and music programs.

For those few days in January, Oberlin students owned New York. For every day afterward, they’ll own indelible memories of the experience.
“The Sonny Ensemble” was created in 2018 with the establishment of the Oberlin Sonny Rollins Jazz Ensemble Fund. Membership is awarded through audition to outstanding Oberlin student musicians who exhibit exemplary commitment to serving humanity. For its New York debut on January 16, 2019, the ensemble played original works and arrangements, including charts by Rollins, as well as some post-bop and hard-bop tunes.

ENSEMBLE LINEUP

Bobby Ferrazza, director
Georgia Heers ’21, voice
Camille Vogley-Howes ’20, violin
Ben Oglesby-Davis ’20, guitar
Birsu Chatterjee ’19, saxophone
Caleb Smith ’19, trombone
Michael Spearman ’19, trombone
Benjamin Bock ’19, piano
Eli Heath ’19, bass
Ari Smith ’19, bass
Jacob Swedlow ’19, drums
The Oberlin College Choir and Oberlin Orchestra shared Carnegie Hall’s Stern Auditorium stage on Saturday evening, January ’19. Director Gregory Ristow (left) led the choir, soloists, and accompanying ensemble in Tarik O’Regan’s three-movement Triptych: Mystery, Remembrance and Unity with first-year soloist Risa Beddie (bottom left). The centerpiece of their program was a rare performance of Stravinsky’s dramatic Les Noces—sung entirely in Russian. The unusual orchestration for Les Noces featured four Oberlin student pianists and an extensive percussion battery (top right). Soloist roles in Les Noces were sung by mezzo-soprano Perri di Christina ’16, soprano Katherine Lerner Lee ’19, tenor Nicholas Music ’18, and baritone Kyle Miller ’19 (bottom right, from left).
After intermission, the Oberlin Orchestra and conductor Raphael Jiménez (above) opened the second half with the New York premiere of a work by Oberlin composition professor Elizabeth Ogonek (pictured during her bow on the podium, right). Her piece *All These Lighted Things* was written for and debuted by the Chicago Symphony Orchestra in 2017. The orchestra brought the evening to a rousing close with Debussy’s seminal *La Mer*, which provided moments to showcase every hue and value in Debussy’s score and every section in the ensemble.
Each of the ensembles performed preview concerts on campus before hitting the road to NYC. The choir was pumped for its last outing in Oberlin before seeing the brighter lights of Carnegie Hall (top left). The Sonny Ensemble grabbed a slice (top right) between school outreach performances in Manhattan at the Elisabeth Irwin School and the Kaufman Music Center (bottom center). Meanwhile, Raphael Jiménez went across the bridge to New Jersey to work with students in the Union City Music Project (bottom right). This program is based on the Venezuelan music education model known as El Sistema, from which Jiménez received his training. On Saturday afternoon, orchestral students warmed up wherever they could find a spot and enjoyed the chance to snap section photos on stage before the show (bottom left).
SECOND FIDDLE OF THE FIRST ORDER

JAMES EHNES ALREADY PLAYS A STRADIVARIUS VIOLIN. THIS TIME HE PLAYED OBERLIN’S.

BY ERICH BURNETT

OBERLIN’S HISTORY WITH A MOST remarkable instrument began with a very generous gift made in 1989 by a man with virtually no ties to the conservatory.

Edwin Sherrard, an emeritus professor of violin at Dartmouth College, had intended for his beloved Stradivarius to wind up in the capable hands of Andrew Jennings, a former member of the Concord Quartet whom Sherrard had come to know well through the ensemble’s extensive residency at Dartmouth. Jennings, as it turned out, was also a visiting faculty member at Oberlin.

And so Sherrard’s instrument, the “ex-Vallot” made by Antonio Stradivari in 1722, was gifted to Oberlin shortly before Sherrard’s death, with the stipulation that it remain in the hands of a gifted professional violinist chosen by Oberlin. For many years, that violinist was Jennings.

“The violin is truly heavenly,” Jennings wrote to Dean of the Conservatory David Boe in April 1989, shortly after taking possession of the instrument. “And when I have had the time to look, I see that my feet are usually a good eight inches above the floor!”

Jennings continued to play the Oberlin Strad for a number of years, often alongside cellist Norman Fischer ’71, a former Oberlin and Dartmouth faculty member who had also been a member of the Concord Quartet. Over time, the Stradivarius had become unstable as a result of very old repairs that had deteriorated, affecting the instrument’s playability and compromising its long-term health. Because of this, the violin was not played for many years.

In 2015, Oberlin sought the expertise of John K. Becker of Chicago, one of the world’s most widely respected violin restorers. Becker happens to be the master craftsman who tends to the violin of celebrated performer James Ehnes: the “ex-Marsick” Stradivarius of 1715.

Becker determined that Oberlin’s Strad would benefit from a full restoration in order to return it to its previous glory. And so the instrument was completely disassembled, and all of its previous deteriorated restorations and repairs were removed and replaced. The painstaking project was one of the most extensive ever undertaken by Becker’s shop.

Ehnes himself previously had been invited by Oberlin violin professor Marilyn McDonald to play the conservatory’s Strad. McDonald had known Ehnes since he was a boy, intersecting with him at summer festivals and following his astounding career every step of the way. When he caught up with him at a master class held in conjunction with a Cleveland Orchestra performance several years ago, he said he would be honored to oblige.

Later, on a visit to Becker’s shop for some work on his own instrument, Ehnes happened to encounter the Oberlin Strad. “He saw ours and played it,” McDonald recalls, “and he said, ‘Oh yeah, I’ll play that!’”

The perfect opportunity arose when Ehnes was invited to take part in the 2018-19 Artist Recital Series on campus.

With Becker’s restoration complete, the “ex-Vallot” was returned to Oberlin in September 2017. But before it could be used in performance, it would require a period of playing in, in part to allow its long-dormant wood to wake up, thus yielding a richer tone and greater resonance.

“I said, ‘I would like one thing,’” McDonald recalls: “I would like to be the person to break it in.” And so she played the Strad for the next year. “And it was terrific, right from the start.

“One thing that really struck me is that it’s a rather large Strad,” says McDonald, who often plays on models dating from 1685 to 1690 in performances with the Smithson String Quartet, of which she is a longtime member.

“It’s strong—very strong, and over the time I’ve been playing it, it has developed more color. It’s been great fun working on it!”

Ehnes received the violin from Oberlin several days in advance of his Finney Chapel performance, providing him an opportunity to become acquainted with it. After Ehnes, the Strad would eventually make its way to the hands of other gifted violinists, the next in Oberlin’s line of succession to be conferred the honor of playing the instrument. During spring semester, it was used several times by professor David Bowlin ’00.

But first there was Ehnes, for one night only. “It is a great honor to be able to present the ‘ex-Vallot’ in public for the first time in so many years!” he said prior to his October 14 performance in Finney Chapel. “I was able to play on it pretty much immediately after it had come out of its restoration, and I fell in love with the beauty of the sound and the range of tonal possibilities. I greatly look forward to spending more time with the instrument and discovering more of its secrets.”

Donated instruments are a vital resource for Oberlin students and faculty. If you have an instrument you would like to have considered for use at Oberlin, please contact giving@oberlin.edu or call 440-775-8545.
“I FELL IN LOVE WITH THE BEAUTY OF THE SOUND AND THE RANGE OF TONAL POSSIBILITIES.”
T A K E  
Y O U R  
S E A T

WHAT’S IT LIKE TO BE AN ORCHESTRAL MUSICIAN? 
IT DEPENDS ON THE ORCHESTRA—AND THE MUSICIAN.

BY JEREMY REYNOLDS ’15 | PHOTO BY TANYA ROSEN-JONES ’97

There’s no such thing as a typical orchestra career. There are vast differences in salary and lifestyle between large and small orchestras, and between those in large cities compared to smaller ones. Some players make a living from their orchestra jobs alone. Most channel their artistry into teaching and chamber music on the side. Some might perform Baroque music or jazz or bluegrass to diversify their output. Others take on leadership roles in the ensemble or local union. Many develop creative ways to recharge…like the Oberlin Conservatory alumnus who restores Wisconsin prairie land in his time away from the Chicago Symphony Orchestra. While there may be no standard career path, there are common touchstones in every player’s journey, from auditioning, to earning tenure, to lending support during contract negotiations, and eventually to stepping aside so that someone else’s journey may begin.

There are hundreds of Oberlin graduates in orchestras around the world. In conversations with a number of them, a cohesive snapshot of the lifestyle emerges. Oftentimes, an orchestral career begins well before the first audition. Before graduation, even.

It begins with a choice.
Prelude; Variations on a Theme

Most music students who dream of life in an orchestra don’t win those prized jobs by commencement day. Many cobble together careers freelancing with a string of smaller ensembles and working day jobs until they earn that first full-time gig.

Horn player Darcy Hamlin ’92 studied music education at Oberlin after her parents—also Oberlin graduates, along with all four of her grandparents—suggested that it would be a more marketable degree. Hamlin always knew—really knew—she wanted a performance career. She’s now third horn in the Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra, but it took her nine years to get there after finishing a master’s degree at the Cleveland Institute of Music.

“I put a lot of miles on my Honda Civic,” she says, enumerating the teaching jobs and office work and waiting tables she did between gigs. “I drove all over creation to play in every possible orchestra I could. It’s a very difficult lifestyle to sustain.”

What kept her chugging along in pursuit of an orchestra job? “I had this formative moment my freshman year at Oberlin when I realized there really wasn’t anything else I wanted to do this badly,” she says.

Life, after winning the Milwaukee job, felt like a vacation.

“I only had one job instead of a dozen. My commute was 10 minutes instead of an hour. Having health insurance is amazing. Having dental insurance is amazing.” Even now, she continues to teach to supplement her income, and she tells her students that if they can imagine doing something else, they should pursue music and that second goal to keep themselves multifaceted.

Violinist Wyatt Underhill ’13 had a moment of clarity similar to Hamlin’s. He spent the summer after finishing his graduate studies at the Juilliard School deciding between a career in chamber music with his string quartet and an orchestra job. “I was very serious about the quartet, but it came down to the fact that I thought I could live without playing chamber music at that level,” Underhill says. “I knew that I couldn’t live without playing orchestral repertoire at the professional level. And I could only have known that if I’d played a lot of it, which I had the opportunity to do at Oberlin and Juilliard.”
PLAY THE REPEATS

Orchestra life, for many, is more than just a passion. It’s an identity. An all-consuming drive. A hunger. So after you’ve chosen it, what comes next? Auditions, auditions, and more auditions.

“I’d been told over and over by many different people that auditions are a crapshoot and that you have to take 5,000 auditions before you win one,” says Underhill, who won his first major audition—with the Baltimore Symphony—mere months after graduating. (Two years later, he won the assistant concertmaster job at the San Francisco Symphony, where he currently performs.) But it’s far more typical for graduates to have a gap period between school and that first big gig.

For some, transitioning into a training orchestra program such as the Civic Orchestra of Chicago or the New World Symphony in Miami provides a buffer between school and the freelancing lifestyle. This fall, violist Marlea Simpson ’17 begins a three-year appointment with the New World Symphony, which includes housing and a weekly stipend to help defray the costs of traveling for auditions.

“New World has like a 95 percent success rate in getting people jobs before they finish the program,” Simpson says. “The organization brings in musicians from around the country to do mock auditions and professional development workshops. I’m really excited to get some feedback.”

Simpson, who recently completed her master’s degree at the Yale School of Music, performed in summer 2019 with the Grant Park Orchestra in Chicago, a professional ensemble that presents free concerts in Millennium Park.

As for the auditions themselves? They require more than mere musical skill. Boris Allakhverdyan ’06 would know. Formerly principal clarinetist of the Metropolitan Opera Orchestra in New York, he is currently the principal clarinetist at the Los Angeles Philharmonic, where he also helps adjudicate auditions.

“It’s interesting to be on the other side of the screen,” he says. Given that vantage point, he now cautions all of his students against playing warmup noodles too loudly during the audition—it’s not good form, apparently. “Sometimes we hear a great player, but sometimes he or she just doesn’t suit the position. Or maybe it’s a great player, but the audition is for the second clarinet position and they won’t match the principal perfectly. It’s tough.”

Auditions can be arduous, with multiple rounds of playing for a few short minutes interspersed with hours of waiting and delays. “You can tell a lot about a person by the way they pace their audition,” Allakhverdyan says. “You can tell if they’re...
prepared or smart in how they react to unexpected things. It’s a little like a psychological game.”

“I feel like I learn something from every audition,” says Simpson, who has taken nearly a dozen of them already. “The biggest lesson came at the Chicago [Symphony Orchestra] audition last year. There were these horrible group warm-up rooms, and I showed up and there were some really big-name [violists] in the room. And I remember walking in and thinking, ‘Why the hell am I here? I have no business being here.’ I had already given up before I even walked onstage.”

Simpson says she’s getting more comfortable with herself, and she’s learning how to schedule the day in terms of when to eat and how to warm up. “Timing food is hard,” she says, a reference to yet another thing she has learned: “Don’t play hungry.”

Even winning an audition is less than a guarantee of employment. “The winner should ideally get a trial period in the orchestra,” Allakhverdyan says. Such periods often last a week or two, and in some instances can be a month or more, with principal candidates often enduring longer trial periods than section players. Even after the trial period, most players are offered probationary contracts before earning tenure, to ensure a good fit.

In Underhill’s case, he played with the Baltimore Symphony for a week and then was offered a 16-month probationary period. “I kind of regarded it as an Oh my gosh I got something! moment and wanted to hold on tight,” he says. He received updates from time to time about his standing in the process, with his tenure committee offering occasional suggestions.

If all goes well, as it did for Underhill, a tenured position is awarded.

**THE SYMPHONY**

Orchestras combine a grand mix of generations, backgrounds, worldviews, and personalities, as well as one common bond: the music. Everyone is doing something they love. As with any job, occasional personality conflicts arise, but being united in such a common purpose tends to blunt some of the edges. “It’s just not kosher to be a jerk,” says Robin McKee ’76, associate principal flutist in the San Francisco Symphony. “The majority of people are there to enjoy making music, and any outlier eventually figures out that it’s more fun to focus there.”

Almost as often as inevitable conflict, romance also blooms among players. McKee joined the orchestra in 1984 and is married to its principal flutist, Tim Day ’74, whom she met back when she was deciding where to attend college. (One of their children also attended Oberlin and now works as a pianist in San Francisco.)

At the time, Oberlin’s coed dorms struck McKee’s mother—also an Oberlin graduate—as curious, and she wanted to know more. “It was important to know the place wasn’t a hotbed like Sodom and Gomorrah, so my mother invited Tim out to tell us about the place because he knew my grandfather,” McKee says.

“One of the challenges of being a principal player is not being selfish,” says flutist Tim Day ’74 of the San Francisco Symphony.

There are a lot of married couples in orchestras, and honestly it’s just like anything else. It has moments of being a pain in the ass when you’re together all the time. But there are some really wonderful benefits to sharing the peak experiences together.”

“Also like any job, there are hierarchies within an orchestra, with leadership responsibilities delegated to principal positions, and with accordingly higher pay. In his leadership roles with the Baltimore Symphony and San Francisco Symphony, Underhill has learned that while leading a section is an honor and a privilege, it also has its challenges. At one meeting, he was gently chided for taking “too professorial” a tone with his section.”

“It was funny,” he says. “As a young guy telling people what to do, I can easily see why people would respond that way. I’ve learned that when you address your section you never say you. It’s always we. We’re in this together.”

Hamlin is no stranger to leadership roles, having performed extensively as a principal player before winning the audition for third horn in the Milwaukee Symphony. “I’ve come to love third horn,” she says. “It’s still a warm seat, but it’s not the hot seat.”

Each instrumental section in the orchestra has its own unique relationships between individual positions. “The first horn player is like a prima ballerina, with lots of high tightrope walking,” Hamlin says. “You’re definitely the soloist and leader. Second horn is like the acrobat and the principal’s chief of
As a harpist, you’re the only person doing your thing,” she says. “Sometimes I like the weightlifter or the sumo wrestler of the orchestra to an opera orchestra. It’s a difference from a symphony orchestra is that, while you’re still alive?” Allakhverdyan says. “It was a difficult decision to relocate.”

It’s also common to launch careers with smaller orchestras and continue taking auditions in hopes of making the leap to a larger organization. Allakhverdyan started his career as associate principal clarinetist in the Kansas City Symphony before heading to the Metropolitan Opera Orchestra. Eventually, however, he decided that he preferred performing in a symphony orchestra to an opera orchestra. It’s a preference he developed in part thanks to an oboe professor at Oberlin.

“Robert Walters, who left the Met Orchestra for the Cleveland Orchestra, told me, ‘Life is short. Operas are long,’” Allakhverdyan says. “Someone else told me, ‘You’re going to spend a lot of time underground; why spend it while you’re still alive?’”

“Joking aside, though, I loved it, and I learned so much. In opera, the repertoire is fantastic, but it recycles a lot. The main difference from a symphony orchestra is that, in the opera orchestra, you’re more often in the supporting cast. In a symphony orchestra, you are driving in the solos. In opera, most of the time you are not a driver; you’re more of an accompanist.”

Cellist Paul Kushious ’83 also jumped fairly early in his career, from the Columbus Symphony to the larger Cleveland Orchestra. “It wasn’t as much of a no-brainer as it might seem,” he says. Before the move, his wife was a flutist with the Columbus Symphony. Although Kushious’ salary jumped in the Cleveland Orchestra, his family took an overall pay cut when they left Columbus. He cited the stability of the Cleveland Orchestra as one of the main factors in his family’s decision to relocate.

“The Columbus Symphony contract negotiation process was always based on threats,” Kushious says. “We were never sure what was going to happen. It was a difficult move; at the time we were very happy with the music director in Columbus.”

Collaboration; Improvisation
Once your career reaches cruising altitude, what’s next? Bureaucracy, of course! Necessary, vital-to-the-profession bureaucracy, that is.

One of the most essential realities of an orchestra job—apart from performing—is a committee assignment. Almost all young players join a local musicians’ union near the outset of their careers. “Pretty much the minute you join a union orchestra with a collective bargaining agreement, you’re involved,” says Lewellen, vice president of the American Federation of Musicians Local 57 and a proud lifelong union supporter.

Some committees are temporary assignments and can range from placement in working groups focused on auditions, to marketing, to technology, to contract negotiations. “We wouldn’t have anything that we have without unions,” Lewellen says. “It would be great if there were more emphasis on this in school. I’ve experienced orchestras without a union contract or orchestras with bad contracts. It can be a mess. There are so many things the unions provide that we take for granted.”

Negotiating an orchestra’s collective bargaining agreement is one of the union’s most important functions. Around the country, orchestra musicians consistently engage in heated contract discussions with their respective managements; in recent seasons, the Lyric Opera Orchestra in Chicago, Philadelphia Orchestra, Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra, Fort Worth Symphony Orchestra, and others have found themselves on the brink of a strike. Most orchestras emerge from contentious labor disputes battered but solvent, while others are unable to survive the upheaval.
A 2018 German study published in *Music and Science* found that more than half of the 2,536 musicians surveyed suffered from a physical problem related to or affecting their playing. One of the realities of an orchestra player’s life is being constantly vigilant for signs of injury. Even something small can develop into something serious.

“I looked at a colleague recently and said, ‘This is so strange to be healthy,’” says cellist Paul Kushious of the Cleveland Orchestra, who in May 2018 underwent shoulder surgery to repair tears in his rotator cuff. “Something probably happened when I was younger, and over time it degraded,” he says. “I probably waited a little too long to have the surgery. My surgeon went in, and it was messy. He had to relocate my biceps tendon. But aside from the surgical pain, right from when I woke up I realized there was this absence of pain.”

After eight weeks of rest, Kushious started playing just a little bit at a time and building stamina. He had originally hoped to resume rehearsing and performing with the orchestra at the six-month mark. “But I decided I could benefit from some extra time off, and that was key for my recovery.” Waiting for long-term disability pay to kick in, he adds, takes careful financial planning.

When Kushious did return, he started by playing half concerts, something now being called a “work-hardening” period.

“It would be nice if people could get used to thinking about taking care of themselves for the long run so we’re not playing so much defense later,” Kushious says. “I would love it if there were companion programs in schools that offered physical therapy for musicians and dancers.” — Reynolds
 Earlier this year, members of one of America’s greatest ensembles, the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, were on strike for a full seven weeks. CSO Assistant Principal Flute Richard Graef ’64, a 51-year veteran of the orchestra, served on the negotiating committee in the ’70s and ’80s, and walked the picket line during the most recent work stoppage.

“Being on a negotiating team at a major orchestra, you realize it’s about more than just your orchestra: You’re negotiating for the entire music profession,” Graef says, explaining that smaller orchestras generally try to achieve a percentage of what the larger flagship ensembles stake out as fair compensation.

Before and during the CSO strike, Graef says, the union’s negotiating team repeatedly compromised, but management would not budge. “It’s a very hard thing to negotiate. But we’ve come a long way. When I first joined the union in ’68, it had a very gangster union boss, always swearing and yelling in negotiations. There was...a lot of profanity. Several of us in the orchestra decided we needed to change everything if this was going to work, so we started wearing suits and ties. We said No more foul language. No more cigar chomping. At first the management lawyer was taken aback. He wasn’t sure how to deal with this.”

Voting to strike is never a step taken lightly, as it’s a lose-lose proposition, with players sacrificing salary and the organization suffering a hit to its reputation in the community. “It’s always a point of desperation, a moment of failure,” Graef says. In the face of such adversity, he cautions, solidarity is essential in keeping the organization together. And in the case of CSO, outgoing mayor of Chicago Rahm Emanuel ultimately stepped in to help mediate a compromise. No one was happy. But the organization survived.

Committee work isn’t all dramatic negotiations and strife, however. Kushious says he’s proud to have championed the unofficial “donut rule” at the Cleveland Orchestra, which requires players who show up late to rehearsal to bring donuts for the whole orchestra at a future rehearsal. “Sometimes I have no idea how I would have gotten through this day without these donuts,” he says, adding that other orchestras have adopted the practice as well.

### WHEN THE MUSIC STOPS

Between the stress of negotiating a new contract every few years and the repetition of repertoire, most players stay invigorated by developing passions away from their ensembles. “Don’t ask something of the orchestra that it can’t deliver,” says Kushious, whose own diversions from the Cleveland Orchestra have included coaching chamber music at Oberlin. “It’s tragic when life is out of balance due to this.”

Many players teach, and some, like Lara Turner ’94, develop other musical outlets. Principal cello of the South Bend Symphony Orchestra in Indiana, Turner discovered a love of Baroque music at Oberlin while studying with Catharina Meints, who enjoyed a 35-year career with the Cleveland Orchestra in addition to teaching.

Turner performs with early music ensembles as well as duo gigs with her husband, a clarinetist. “We started playing arrangements of Italian opera favorites at an Italian restaurant for free pizza,” she says. Since then, they’ve premiered music written for them in library and museum performances, and in a residency at the Banff Music Center.

Some orchestra members, like Kushious and Graef, enjoy activities completely distinct from music. “I’m like a salmon,” says Kushious, who owns a home in Vermont that keeps him active. “I have to return to New England every year. So I go back to Vermont. Manual labor is so unburdening.”

Graef, also an outdoorsman, plays a mean chainsaw. He owns property in a remote part of Wisconsin where he’s been restoring native prairie land for the past 15 years or so. “People here in Wisconsin are shocked when they find out I’m a professional musician,” he says. Among his accomplishments, Graef has partnered with the department of natural resources and the local fish and wildlife department to preserve an endangered species of frog.

“Being a flutist in the Chicago Symphony won’t be my legacy, though of course I loved it,” he says. “Saving the cricket frog will be my legacy.”

After more than five decades in the orchestra, Graef plans to focus on his environmental pursuits full time. At 76, he’s started experiencing some hearing loss related to sound exposure. “This is an issue with every orchestra,” he says. “The sound levels on stage are dangerous. OSHA has come in and tested, and their needle is in the danger zone, no question.” Still, he’s well aware that he chose a profession that often comes with some hearing loss.

“It’s a hard job to leave, especially in a job like Chicago. I still love the orchestra and the music. It’s a very strenuous job. In many ways it’s a young person’s job.”

On the West Coast, Day and McKee are also preparing to give their final bows. “How many more Brahms symphonies do we need to play?” Robin wonders. “It doesn’t make sense to hoard the experience when other folks need to have the opportunity.”

Like Graef, the pair have been orchestral musicians since their early 20s. Once players reach their 60s, it becomes more difficult to maintain the excellence needed to perform with an orchestra.

“I have this idea of exactly how I want to turn a phrase, and that’s getting harder to get exactly right as I get older,” says Day, adding that he looks forward to opening up his position to the next generation of players.

“It’s tough to think about not getting that nice paycheck,” he says. “But you don’t ever want to sound bad.”

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**JEREMY REYNOLDS ’15 IS THE CLASSICAL MUSIC CRITIC FOR THE PITTSBURGH POST-GAZETTE. HE STUDIED CLARINET PERFORMANCE AND ENGLISH LITERATURE AT OBERLIN.**
THE DAUNÉ MAHYWAY
The revered voice professor feels the love she shared for four decades.

BY ERICH BURNETT
Daune Mahy’s teaching career at Oberlin spanned an incredible 39 years and an exponential number of young singers. Each one of them left an imprint on Mahy, and Mahy undoubtedly did the same in return.

On Mother’s Day 2019, as the professor of voice prepared to step away from the conservatory she has called home for half her life, many of those singers honored their mentor and friend with a celebration in Warner Concert Hall. An afternoon of emotionally charged performances included the return to campus of two prominent operatic voices, both alumnae from Oberlin’s Class of 2002: soprano Marcy Stonikas and mezzo-soprano Elizabeth DeShong.

“When I think back on all of the people who helped shape me as a young singer, Ms. Mahy is always the first person to come to mind,” says DeShong, who performs worldwide with the Metropolitan Opera, the Washington National Opera, Lyric Opera of Chicago, and numerous other renowned companies. “Daune provided me with a solid vocal foundation that set the stage for the rest of my professional career. She corrected what needed to be corrected, gave praise when it was deserved, provided me with a set of personal goals that I should aim to achieve, always made herself available when a specific performance required extra attention, and has continued to be my cheerleader and mentor throughout my professional career. “This kind of generosity of spirit is nearly impossible to find. She is my teacher, my friend, and my family.”

Themes of Mahy’s generosity and unwavering support reappeared in virtually every tribute, including those of
“When I think back on all of the people who helped shape me as a singer, Ms. Mahy is always the first person to come to mind.”

—ELIZABETH DESHONG ’02
The Walter E. Aschaffenburg Prize
Awarded to a graduating senior for outstanding music composition.

Oliver Kwapis '19
Composition

The Louis and Marguerite Bloomberg Greenwood Prize
Awarded to graduating students excelling in cello, piano, violin, or voice.

Kyle Miller '19
Voice

The Faustina Hurlbut Prize
Awarded to an outstanding graduating student in cello, piano, violin, or voice.

Katherine Lerner Lee ’19
Voice & French

Jerry Xiong ’19
Violin & Chemistry

The Theodore Presser Undergraduate Scholarship
Awarded to an outstanding returning student for excellence in musicianship.

Rachel Gibson ’20
Percussion & TIMARA

The Louis and Annette Kaufman Prize in Violin
Awarded to an outstanding student of violin.

Jerry Xiong ’19
Violin & Chemistry

The Piano Faculty Prize in Accompanying
Awarded to a graduating senior who has demonstrated excellence in accompanying singers and instrumentalists.

Zheyu Crystal Jiang ’19
Piano

Raphael Boden ’19
Cello & French

The Carol Nott Piano Pedagogy Prize
Awarded to an outstanding graduating senior for continued study in piano pedagogy.

Dani Braga ’19
Piano

The James H. Hall Prize in Musicology
Awarded to a graduating senior for excellence in work in musicology.

Catherine Lytle ’19
Musical Studies & East Asian Studies

BMI Student Composer Award
Awarded to young composers of classical music in recognition of superior compositional ability and to promote further study.

Liam Kaplan ’20
Piano & Composition

The Faustina Hurlbut Prize
Awarded to an outstanding graduating student in cello, piano, violin, or voice.

Katherine Lerner Lee ’19
Voice & French

Jerry Xiong ’19
Violin & Chemistry

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BMI Student Composer Award
Awarded to young composers of classical music in recognition of superior compositional ability and to promote further study.

Liam Kaplan ’20
Piano & Composition

The Fulbright Scholar Program
Awarded to students for their academic merit and leadership potential with the opportunity to study internationally.

Phoebe Durand McConnell ’19
Harp (Switzerland)

Carson Fratus ’19
Percussion (India)

Catherine Lytle ’19
Musical Studies & East Asian Studies (South Korea)
The John Elvin Piano Prize
Awarded to a student judged by the piano department to be the most talented in the junior class.
Liam Kaplan ’20
Piano & Composition

The Earl L. Russell Award in Historical Performance
Awarded to a worthy student majoring in historical performance to assist with the purchase of a musical instrument.
Ruby Brallier ’19 MMHP
Baroque Cello & Viola da Gamba

The Ernest Hatch Wilkins Memorial Prize
Awarded to a returning student who has demonstrated academic excellence in the three preceding years.
Liam Kaplan ’20
Piano & Composition

XARTS Grants
Awarded to college and conservatory students to support the development and execution of collaborative, multidisciplinary artistic projects to be implemented during winter term or summer.
Conservatory winners:
Helen He ’20
TIMARA, Computer Science & Math
Claudia Hinsdale ’22
TIMARA & Independent Major
Kari Watson ’20
Composition

The Selby Harlan Houston Prize
Awarded to a graduating senior whose performance in organ and music theory is of distinguished quality.
Natalie Mealey ’19 BM/MMHP
Organ & Harpsichord

Flint Initiative Grants (FIG)
Awarded to innovative and motivated conservatory and double-degree students to develop imaginative artistic projects.
Will Bertrand ’21
TIMARA & Independent Major
Elizabeth Hall-Keough ’22
Cello & Independent Major
Charlotte Hill ’21
Piano & Politics
Liam Kaplan ’20
Piano & Composition
Soomin Kim ’19
Composition
Ellie MacPhee ’20
Violin
Natsumi Osborn ’21
Composition & Independent Major
Sophia Shalit ’21
TIMARA & Computer Science
Drew Smith ’21
TIMARA
Kari Watson ’20
Composition
Ellie MacPhee ’20
Violin

The Marilyn Horne Rubin Scholar
Awarded to an outstanding student of voice to support professional development.
Whitney Campbell ’19
Voice
Shawn Roth ’20
Voice

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Awarded to an outstanding student of voice to support professional development.
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Shawn Roth ’20
Voice

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Awarded to an outstanding student of voice to support professional development.
Whitney Campbell ’19
Voice
Shawn Roth ’20
Voice

The Pi Kappa Lambda Prize for Musicianship
Awarded to students judged to be the most outstanding of those elected to Pi Kappa Lambda.
William Adams ’19
Flute
Soomin Kim ’19
Composition
Katherine Lerner Lee ’19
Voice & French
Michelle Ravitsky ’19
Voice
1900s
The complete piano works of Canadian-American composer, organist, pianist, choral director, and music professor **Nathaniel Dett 1908** have been recorded by Clipper Erickson for the album *My Cup Runneth Over* (Navona Records), which garnered a Critic’s Choice nod from *Gramophone* Magazine. Dett’s piano compositions were the subject of an interview with Erickson on *The Cunningham Piano Show* in May 2018 and were performed numerous times in the past year.

1940s

1960s
**Jan Ewing ’62** is a former voice major who transitioned from an early career in theater to desktop publishing. He created textbooks and reference books for New York publishers until retiring in 2014. Now he produces, directs, and reviews plays and musicals. His comedy *Nursery Rhymes* was performed at the Hudson Guild Theatre as part of the NY Winterfest 2019 Play Festival.

Producer and club owner **Todd Barkan ’68** earned the nation’s highest honor in jazz—the NEA Jazz Master Award—in April 2018. He was also presented with the A.B. Spellman NEA Jazz Master Award for Jazz Advocacy at a Kennedy Center celebration. Barkan returned to Oberlin twice in the past year: In May 2018, he emceed and co-produced “Oberlin Overture—Synergies: Gown, Town, World” during Commencement Reunion Weekend. In April 2019, he joined jazz students, faculty, and other guests for “Marking 30 Years: A Celebration of Oberlin’s Jazz Studies Degree.”

1970s
**Cincinnati Opera** is the latest presenter of *As One* by composer **Laura Kaminsky ’78**. Inspired by the experiences of film director Kimberly Reed, it tells the story of a transgender woman’s journey to self-acceptance. Scored for string quartet and two singers, *As One* has been performed by more than 20 companies worldwide.

**Viola da gambist and barbershop singer Marcy Jean Zimmermann Brenner ’79** performs these days as a member of Savannah Baroque, with whom she participated in a January 2019 residency at the Savannah Classical Academy, a project supported by an Engagement Award from Early Music America. The ensemble worked with students from second grade through high school on the importance of musical, historical, and cultural literacy. Since 2015 Brenner has also been a member of RareSong, a Florida-based group that plays early Spanish music from the time of the founding of St. Augustine. She performs and participates in barbershop singing competitions with the Sapphire Quartet.

**Tenor and voice professor Colenton Freeman ’79** was invited by the Conservatoire de Musique in Lyons, France, to serve as guest juror for voice exams in June 2018. Freeman is on the faculty of the University of Kassel in Germany.

**Community choirs from Binghamton, N.Y., united in May 2019 to celebrate the work of famed composer, arranger, organist, pianist, and choral director Moses Hogan ’79. Countertenor Derek Lee Ragin ’80, Hogan’s Oberlin classmate, also performed.**

**Beth Orson ’79** has been the Vancouver Symphony Orchestra’s assistant principal oboe and English horn since 1990. She also teaches on the faculty of the University of British Columbia School of Music. In February 2019, Orson and fellow members of the VSO performed on the Candlelight Concert Series at Westacres, a farm in Maple Ridge, Vt.

1980s
**Cellist Steven Isserlis ’80** and pianist Olli Mustonen released *Shostakovich & Kabalevsky: Cello Sonatas* (Hyperion) in February 2019. Praised for its “stylish playing, bursting with character throughout,” the album made *Gramophone’s* monthly list of the best new classical recordings.

**George Preston ’82** was named VP and general manager of Chicago classical music station WFMT in March 2019.

**Tim Riley BA ’83, BM ’85** has collaborated with music theorist Walter Everett on a new book and multimedia
release. *What Goes On: The Beatles, Their Music, and Their Time* (Oxford University Press) blends historical narrative, musicology, and music analysis to examine how the Beatles redefined pop music. Videos on a companion website offer definitions and performance demonstrations of musical concepts, with interactive listening guides that illustrate track details. The book traces the Beatles’ development, marking their involvement with world events, and delves deeply into their body of work, introducing the concepts of musical form, instrumentation, harmonic structure, melodic patterns, and rhythmic devices in a way that is accessible to musicians and non-musicians. Riley is a member of the journalism faculty at Emerson College. He is a music critic for NPR’s *Here & Now* and *On Point*, and contributes to *The New York Times*.

**Howard Fredrics ’84**, sound designer and composer for the Off-Broadway play *Sanctuary*, shared his work at the 2019 Prague Quadrennial.

**Robert Spano ’84** made his conducting debut with the Metropolitan Opera in the world premiere of Nico Muhly’s *Marnie* in the fall of 2018. “He highlighted intriguing details, brought out myriad colorings, kept the pacing sure and never covered the singers. Where has he been?” wrote *New York Times* critic Anthony Tommasini. Soprano Denyce Graves ’85 portrayed Marnie’s mother, and Rebecca Ringle Kamarei ’03 appeared as Marnie’s Third Shadow. Spano’s Deutsche Grammophon recording *There’s a Place for Us* was named to WQXR’s 2018 Best Classical Albums list.

**Andrew Glendening ’87** has been named director of the School of Music at Northern Illinois University. He previously served as dean of the School of Music at the University of Redlands.

**Mike Canning ’88** has been named leader of Deloitte Consulting’s government and public services practice, which provides consulting, risk, and financial advisory services to 47 states, cabinet-level agencies in the U.S. government, and to higher education and nonprofit organizations. Canning earned degrees in organ performance and economics.

**Victoria Theodore ’89** and Derek Dixie arranged and orchestrated a version of “America the Beautiful” that was performed by Chloe and Halle Bailey at Super Bowl LIII in Atlanta in February 2019.

**1990s**

Organist Helen Cha-Pyo ’90 is artistic director and conductor of the New Jersey Youth Symphony. She is a frequent guest conductor and clinician for festival orchestras throughout the country and this summer is conducting at Vermont’s Kinhaven School and at the Ithaca College Summer Music Academy.

Pianist Jeremy Denk ’90 covers seven centuries of classical music in his two-disc album *c.1300-c.2000* (Nonesuch), which was released in February 2019. Performing works by Machaut, Ligeti, and a number of known and unknown composers in between, Denk invites listeners to “experience this sweep and arc in one sitting” through 24 carefully selected pieces. He will join the San Francisco Conservatory of Music piano faculty in the fall of 2019. Highlights of his latest tour schedule include cross-country performances with the Academy of Saint Martin in the Fields and a tour with Joshua Bell and Steven Isserlis ’80.

**Geoffrey Hudson ’90** brings climate change to light with his new oratorio *A Passion for the Planet*, which was premiered by the Illuminati Vocal Arts Ensemble and Hampshire Young People’s Chorus at Smith College in June 2019. The work features texts of former Oberlin environmental studies and politics professor David Orr. The performance featured soprano Alisa Pearson ’91 and baritone Dashon Burton ’05.

Apollo’s Fire, the Baroque orchestra that includes conductor Jeannette Sorrell ’90, Johanna Novom ’07, Rene Schiffer ’96, Karina Schmitz ’02, and Rebecca Landell Reed ’11, won Best Classical Solo Vocal Album at the 61st Grammy Awards for *Songs of Orpheus—Monteverdi, Caccini, D’india & Landi*, an April 2018 release on Avie Records.

**Will Chase ’92** starred as Fred Graham/Petruchio in Roundabout Theatre’s Tony Award-nominated revival of *Kiss Me, Kate* at Studio 54 on Broadway. The former percussion and conducting major “aces the dual roles... with a powerful voice and...”
acting chops to match,” according to NY1.com. Chase is also known to fans of the ABC drama Nashville as country music superstar Luke Wheeler.

The documentary A Tuba to Cuba follows New Orleans’ famed Preservation Hall Jazz Band on a tour that traces its musical roots. The film features bassist and creative director Ben Jaffe ’93, who says, “You get more out of life when you believe in building bridges.”

Nell Flanders ’94 has joined the Princeton Symphony Orchestra as assistant conductor. She is also on the violin faculty of the Manhattan School of Music Precollege and teaches at the Hoff-Barthelson Music School in New York.

Russian-American operatic soprano Dina Kuznetsova ’94 joined the Cleveland Institute of Music voice faculty in 2018.

The American Composers Orchestra honored violinist Jennifer Koh ’97 at its annual gala in March 2019. Selected for her creativity and for dramatically expanding the contemporary violin repertoire, Koh performed Missy Mazzoli’s Tooth and Nail with the composer in attendance.

Soprano Martha Guth ’98 was named assistant professor of voice at Ithaca College in fall 2018. During her first academic year, she was the featured soprano in Brahms’ Requiem with the Richmond Symphony and Mozart’s Mass in C Minor with the Grand Rapids Symphony, the latter featuring Dashon Burton ’05 as bass-baritone soloist. Guth is also co-director of Sparks & Wiry Cries, a global platform for art song spanning dissemination, performance, and commission of new works.

Baritone Christopher Holmes ’99 returned for his fourth season with the Utah Festival Opera & Musical Theatre, where he performed the roles of Count Almaviva in Le nozze di Figaro and Joseph Pulitzer in Newsies. During the 2018-19 season, Holmes appeared as Escamillo in Carmen at Pine Mountain Music Festival, Belcore in a touring production of L’elisir d’amore with Vermont’s Opera Company of Middlebury, Pirate King in The Pirates of Penzance at Rimrock Opera/NOVA, and Bartolo in Il barbiere di Siviglia at Western Plains Opera.

In December 2018, ACRONYM released its eighth CD, The Battle, the Bethel, and the Ball, which explores music composed or credited to Heinrich Biber. The ensemble includes violinists Adriane Post ’07, Beth Wenstrom ’03, Edwin Huizinga ’06, and Johanna Novom ’06; cellist Paul Dwyer ’07; gambist Loren Ludwig ’99; and gambist/cornist Kivie Cahn-Lipman ’01.

Thomas Rosenkranz ’99 joined the piano faculty of the University of Missouri-Kansas City Conservatory of Music and Dance, where he serves as associate professor and chair of keyboard studies. He continues to perform in the U.S. and China, and he is a member of the piano faculty at the Amalfi Coast Music Festival in Italy.

Singer Pyeng Threadgill ’99 released the album Head Full of Hair, Heart Full of Song in July 2018. It’s a collaboration with drummer Kassa Overall ’06.

2000s

Violinist Yue Deng ’00 launched the 2019 Ojai Art Center season of chamber music with cellist Virginia Kron in Glière’s Eight Pieces for Violin and Cello. An artist in residence at the University of Alberta, Deng can be heard on recordings by Barbra Streisand, Barry Manilow, Diana Krall, Josh Groban, Johnny Mandel, Willie Nelson, and Dionne Warwick, and on film soundtracks for No God No Master, Invictus, and In Her Sleep. She also appears on the recordings Ogermann: Violin and Piano Works with pianist Jean-Yves Thibaudet and the jazz album Both Sides Now, featuring music by Grammy Award-winner Roger Kellaway.

Rhiannon Giddens ’00 and Italian multi-instrumentalist Francesco Turrisi released the album there is no Other (Nonesuch). The duo also composed music for the ballet Lucy Negro Redux, which was premiered by the Nashville Ballet in February 2019.

Sara Holliday ’00 published her first novel, A Thousand Dances: A Novel of the British Blues Boom (Coral Press), which draws on musical passions that range from 1960s British rock to Episcopal choral music and Gilbert & Sullivan. “There may never have been a time and place when so many people cared so passionately about music,” she says. “Writing about it is a distant second-best to living it, but it’s the best I can do.”

In June 2018, pianist Spencer Myer ’00 made his seventh tour
of South Africa since winning the 2004 UNISA International Piano Competition in Pretoria. It included eight recitals as well as performances of the Grieg Concerto with the Cape Town Philharmonic orchestras. Myer then opened the 2018-19 seasons of the Omaha Symphony, Windsor Symphony, and Northeast Pennsylvania Philharmonic, and gave the inaugural recital on Baldwin Wallace University’s new Kulas Keyboard Series. He also appeared on the cover of the January/February issue of Clavier Companion.

San Francisco’s Circus Bella has been performing spectacular feats to the tunes of local music legend Rob Reich ’00 for a decade now. The band of improvisers—led by Reich on accordion—puts a spin on traditional circus music, mixing in the flavors of early jazz and swing, tango and waltzes, and cartoon and film scores that animate Reich’s compositional style. Reich, as pianist, also released the album Rob Reich Swings Left in January 2019.

Composer Huang Ruo ’00 and playwright David Henry Hwang collaborated on An American Soldier, an opera about U.S Army soldier Danny Chen, who took his life in 2011 after enduring harassment from his peers. Directed by Matthew Ozawa ’04 and conducted by Michael Christie ’96, it was debuted in June 2018 by Opera Theatre of Saint Louis, a production praised by The New York Times.

David Schotzko ’00 was named artistic director of Toronto-based Arraymusic in fall 2018. Also a soloist and collaborative percussionist, Schotzko has premiered more than 300 works by composers worldwide.

Flutist Claire Chase ’01 signed with the management firm HarrisonParrott in July 2018. She is the founding artistic director of the International Contemporary Ensemble and a professor at Harvard University’s music school.

The American Composers Orchestra presented the U.S. premiere of Where We Lost Our Shadows by Pulitzer Prize-winning composer Du Yun ’01 and visual artist Khaled Jarrar at Carnegie Hall in April 2019. The multimedia work for orchestra, film, and vocalists documents the refugee crisis in Europe.

Composer and instrumentalist Aurora Nealand ’01 was interviewed by New Orleans public radio station WWNO in spring 2019 about the scope of her art and her numerous ensembles. Among them are the traditional storytelling of the Monacle, the twisted jazz of the Royal Roses, the punk sound of the Jessicas, a duo cabaret show with pianist Tom McDermott, and the rockabilly of Rory Danger and the Danger Dangers. “No one encapsulates the idea of musical shape-shifting as adroitly as Nealand does,” the piece proclaimed. Her latest project is a jazz collaboration.

The Renaissance Piano Duo, featuring Lan-in Winnie Yang ’02 and Tzu-Yi Chen, debuted at Weill Recital Hall in April 2019. The performance featured the world premiere of Yang’s Sketches of Taiwan.

The early music ensemble Wayward Sisters released a second CD, A Restless Heart, based on the theme of traveling composers. Praise from Early Music America noted that the Sisters are “able to achieve an empathetic, even telepathic, collegiality” in their playing. Oberlin alumni make up three-quarters of the lineup:

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have been performing as a duo for nearly 20 years. Their tours have taken them across the U.S., South Korea, and Europe. In May, they were profiled by *Korea Times* in advance of their concert at the Far East Art Hall.

**Aaron Helgeson ’05** was named executive director of New York City’s Look and Listen Festival in December 2018. The annual event pairs contemporary music with fine art galleries.

Pianist **Rebecca Helm ’06** and her sister, cellist **Natalie Helm**, released the album *Sorella Duo: Holidays* in November 2018. They have performed all over the world with such artists as Lindsey Stirling, Celine Dion, Il Divo, and Yo-Yo Ma. Rebecca serves as director of Go Go Allegro Music School in Boston.

**Drummer Kassa Overall ’06** presented a seven-month residency at the Jazz Gallery in New York City. “Time Capsule” featured seven performances for piano and drums—including a collaboration with **Sullivan Fortner ’08**. Overall also released his debut album, *Go Get Ice Cream and Listen to Jazz*, in January 2019. The New York *Times* calls it “one of the few genuine-sounding, full scope amalgams of contemporary hip-hop and jazz to surface in recent years.”

Baritone **Edward Parks ’06** and conductor **Michael Christie ’96** won Best Opera Recording at the 61st Grammy Awards for Santa Fe Opera’s 2017 premiere production of Mason Bates’ *The (R)evolution of Steve Jobs*, one of the company’s highest-grossing productions.

**Montana Levi Blanco ’07** was profiled in February 2019 by the New York *Times*, a story that called him “a costume designer with low budgets and high style.” Blanco designed for Vineyard Theatre’s production of Jeremy O. Harris’ *Daddy* at the Pershing Square Signature Center, *Ain’t No Mo* at the Public, *Djembe!* at the Apollo Theater Chicago, *Skylight* at Princeton’s McCarter Theatre, and *A Strange Loop* at Playwrights Horizons—all in the spring of 2019. He was an oboe and history student at Oberlin when he saw a museum exhibit called *Black British Style* while studying in London in 2004. “It was the first time that I’d ever thought about the stories that clothing can tell,” he said.

Blanco also earned an MA in public humanities from Brown University and an MFA in design from the Yale School of Drama.

**David Matchim ’07**, director of bands at Centennial High School in Ellicott City, Md., was selected from more than 1,000 candidates as the Music & Arts Music Educator of the Year for 2018. He was also honored with the Howard County Arts Council’s 2018 Outstanding Arts Educator award. Since Matchim’s arrival at Centennial in 2011, the school’s band program has doubled in size and added multiple ensembles.

On January 7, 2019, tenor **Kevin Ray ’07** made an unexpected debut with the Metropolitan Opera as a last-minute replacement for the Messenger in Verdi’s *Aida*. He was praised by *Bachtrack* for “his focused and clear voice.” Ray covered roles in two additional productions at the Met this season, Puccini’s *La Fanciulla Del West* and Wagner’s *Das Rheingold*. He returned to Oberlin in June 2019 to present a recital for the Vocal Academy for High School Students.

In the fall of 2018, tenor **Alek Shrader ’07** joined the voice faculty at the University of Notre Dame, where he also serves as artistic director of Opera ND. This past season, Shrader sang Count Almaviva in *The Barber of Seville* with the Minnesota Opera, Don Ottavio in *Don Giovanni* with the Washington National Opera, and Emilio in *Partenope* with the San Francisco Opera.

**Mandy Wolman ’07** and the Crossing Choir won Best Classical Choral Performance at the 61st Grammy Awards for their recording of Lansing McLoskey’s *Zealot Canticles*. In 2018-19, the ensemble made debuts with the New York Philharmonic, Park Avenue Armory, and as part of Montclair State University’s Peak Performances.

Section violinist **Yuncong Zhang ’07** of the Boston Symphony Orchestra shared in the orchestra’s Grammy Award for Best Orchestral Performance at the 61st installment of the awards. The ensemble was praised by *The High Arts Review* for its “charismatic,” “faultless” playing on the live-performance recording.
Shostakovich: Symphonies Nos. 4 & 11 “The Year 1905,” with conductor Andris Nelsons.

Pianist Sullivan Fortner ’08 teamed up with singer Cécile McLorin Salvant to explore the vocal-piano duo tradition in The Window, released in September 2018. The recording was included in Jazziz Magazine’s “10 New Jazz Albums You Need to Know About” and won Best Jazz Vocal Album at the 61st Grammy Awards. Fortner and Oberlin faculty percussionist Jamey Haddad also collaborated on singer-songwriter Paul Simon’s 2018 album In the Blue Light, which revamps 12 of Simon’s lesser-known compositions. Fortner joined the Oberlin Sonny Rollins Jazz Ensemble in its New York City debut at Dizzy’s Club Coca-Cola in January.

Farkhad Khudyev ’08 is one of eight American conductors to win a 2018 Solti Foundation U.S. Career Assistance Award.

Cellist Gwen Krosnick BM ’08, BA ’09 joined the faculty of the Kneisel Hall Chamber Music Festival in the summer of 2019.

Maxwell Pipinich ’09 joins the Kansas City Symphony as second bassoon in fall 2019.

The Dallas Chamber Symphony presented Bach’s Brandenburg Concerto No. 2 in October 2018, featuring Principal Trumpet Kyle Sherman ’09 in the infamously menacing trumpet solo. Sherman also serves as principal of the Fort Worth Symphony Orchestra and trumpet specialist for Houghton Horns. He is a recitalist and master clinician throughout Texas and beyond.

2010s

Minjia Liu ’10 has been named professor of oboe at the Colburn School. He is also principal oboe with the San Francisco Opera and Second VP at the International Double Reed Society.

Elisa Rega ’10 became assistant principal viola of Symphony Tacoma in May 2019.

Lin Ma ’11 became principal clarinet with the National Symphony Orchestra in fall 2018, following an appointment as assistant principal with the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra.

Asha Tamirisa ’11 has been appointed assistant professor at Bates College. She completed an MA in modern culture and media as well as a PhD in computer music and multimedia at Brown University. Much of her work revolves around improvisation, multimedia art, and site-specific performance.

Beyond Bach and Vivaldi: Rare Unaccompanied Works for the Baroque Violin by Augusta McKay Lodge ’12 earned a place on WQXR’s 2018 Best Classical Albums list. “The true gem here is the bold, yet nuanced technique of Augusta McKay Lodge,” the station wrote. “Hers is a name to watch.”

Lodge’s quintet, Ensemble Voyage Sonique, which includes Baroque violinist Jeffrey Girton ’15, won second prize at the Lyceum Club International de Suisse 40th Music Competition in October 2018.

Jessica Saw ’12 was called a “high-tech difference maker” in a Champaign News-Gazette profile in September 2018. When asked about her path to science, Saw recounted a journey that started with an introductory neuroscience class in her first year as a piano and neuroscience student at Oberlin.

Since then, she has completed three years as a medical student at the Mayo Clinic School of Medicine and is now working on a PhD in molecular and integrative physiology at the University of Illinois.

Shanghai Camerata, an early music ensemble co-founded by theorbo/recorder player and countertenor Menglin Gao ’13, has been called “China’s first historically informed period instrument baroque band.” The ensemble (pictured above, at a post-concert CD signing) also includes violinist Ruqi Ren ’16, harpsichordist/organist/harpist Parker Ramsey MMHP ’15, and Baroque cellist/viola da gamba player Eric Tinkerhess ’13.

The New York Youth Symphony Orchestra premiered Electric Agitation Fanfare, a First Music commission by composer Theo Chandler ’14, at Carnegie Hall in March 2019. Chandler also helped the Cleveland-based, Oberlin-bred period ensemble Les Délices celebrate its 10th anniversary season with the premiere of his new chamber work The Elements in three northeast Ohio concerts in April. Obie performers included oboist and recorder player Debra Nagy ’00, MM ’02 and gambist Steuart Pincombe ’10.
Soprano **Meryl Domínguez ’14** joined Piper Anselmi Artist Management in fall 2018. She is completing the final year of her residency at the Academy of Vocal Arts (AVA) in Philadelphia. Her recent engagements include Violetta in Verdi’s *La Traviata* and Zerbinetta in Strauss’ *Ariadne auf Naxos* with AVA and her Santa Fe Opera debut as Naiad in *Ariadne auf Naxos*. In February 2019, Domínguez appeared as guest soprano in the title role in Donizetti’s *Lucia di Lammermoor* with Knoxville Opera. It included a collaboration with Knoxville Symphony Orchestra Principal Flutist **Hannah Hammel ’15** on the infamous Act III “mad scene” duet.

**Ethan Phillion ’14** won the top jazz prize at the International Society of Bassists’ biennial double bass competition in 2019. He also completed his MM at DePaul University.

Violinist **Alana Youssefian ’14** made a surprise return to the Bay Area Philharmonia Baroque Orchestra (PBO) & Chorale in February 2019 when the scheduled soloist had to withdraw. Youssefian made her PBO debut in 2018, performing concertos by Vivaldi. She is a member of the early music ensemble Voices of America and serves as associate concertmaster of Teatro Nuovo. She has a solo date with PBO in March 2020.

Palaver Strings, a Boston-based, musician-led orchestra and nonprofit that includes violinist **Josie Davis ’15** and cellist **Chava Appiah ’14**, devoted a week to performing and teaching in California in June 2018. Palaver was in residence at the Boston Center for the Arts for the past year and continues its longstanding residency with Bay Chamber Concerts in Rockport, Maine.

**Chris Cabrera ’15** was appointed associate principal timpanist of the Hawaii Symphony Orchestra in fall 2018.

Mezzo-soprano **Kayleigh Decker ’15** was awarded a 2019 Sara Tucker Study Grant by the Richard Tucker Foundation. The announcement was made just as Decker was finishing her first year with the Ryan Opera Center at Lyric Opera of Chicago. In January 2019, she participated in Carnegie Hall’s new program SongStudio, led by opera star Renée Fleming.

Organist **Katelyn Emerson ’15** presented the winner’s recital at the 2018 American Guild of Organists National Convention. In fall 2018, she relocated to Germany on a DAAD grant to begin a master’s program at the Hochschule für Musik in Stuttgart. She is managed by Karen McFarlane Artists.

**Organist Jillian Gardner ’15** was appointed director of music ministries and organist for Huntsville First United Methodist Church in Alabama. She also serves as the national convener for the American Guild of Organists Young Organists and maintains a busy schedule across the U.K., Canada, and the U.S.

**Pianist San Jittakarn ’15** earned third prize at the 73rd Geneva International Competition in Switzerland, performing Beethoven’s third piano concerto in the final round.

Double-bassist **Casey Karr ’15** serves as assistant principal bass for the San Antonio Symphony.

Tenor **Daniel McGrew ’15** joined fellow singers and renowned collaborative pianist Martin Katz in the Brooklyn Art Song Society and Five Boroughs Music Festival’s Dichter Project in May 2019. McGrew also made his debut with the New York Festival of Song this summer in a revival of *Manning the Canon*.

Tenor **Joshua Blue ’16** joined IMG Artists in May 2019. He was a Domingo-Cafritz Young Artist at Washington National Opera in 2018-19 and has spent the summer with Wolf Trap Opera, Opera Theatre of Saint Louis, and the Seiji Ozawa Matsumoto Festival in Japan.

**Thomas English ’16** was named assistant principal bassoonist of the National Symphony Orchestra in September 2018, mere months after finishing his master’s degree at Juilliard.

Violinist **Rachel Halvorson ’16** earned first place at the American Viola Society’s Orchestral Audition Seminar and the Collegiate Division of the Youth Solo Competition in June 2018. In May 2019, she was named principal violist of the Sarasota Orchestra.

Soprano **Elissa Pfaender ’16** joined Sarasota Opera as an apprentice for winter 2019. In March, she was awarded the Sarasota Opera Guild’s Anne J.

**Alexander Baker ’17** won Early Music America’s first Margriet Tindemans Early Strings Scholarship, which supports graduate study outside North America that focuses on Medieval, Renaissance, or Baroque stringed instruments and awards up to $25,000. Baker earned an MM in viola da gamba and modern and Baroque cello from the University of Michigan in May 2019. He will attend the Royal Conservatory of the Hague to study with Mieneke van der Velden and plans to conduct research on ornamentation.

**Shilvi Guitian ’17** joins the Kansas City Symphony as associate principal and second clarinet in the fall of 2019. He just completed his master’s degree at Rice University’s Shepherd School of Music.

**Dana Johnson ’17** was named principal second violinist with the Arctic Philharmonic in Tromso, Norway, while finishing up her master’s degree at the University of Michigan. She started on June 1.

**Silvio Guitian ’17** joins the Kansas City Symphony as associate principal and second clarinet in the fall of 2019. He just completed his master’s degree at Rice University’s Shepherd School of Music.

**Margaret Klucznik AD ’18** was one of five violists chosen to participate in the 2019 Institute for Orchestral Studies at the National Arts Centre in Ottawa. It runs for four weeks each January and offers orchestral training to select musicians from around the world.

When **William Welter AD ’18** began his appointment as principal oboe of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra last fall at the age of 24, it made him one of the orchestra’s youngest principal musicians ever. Chicago Classical Review named him Best New Player in its 2018 year-end wrap-up.

**Harpist Anya Garipoli ’19** was one of three winners of the 2019 Lyon & Healy Awards, which took place in Chicago. Catherine Lytle ’19, an honors student in Oberlin’s musical studies department, presented her paper “Memories of Silence: Music and Privilege in Communist Czechoslovakia” at the Midwest Chapter of the Society for Ethnomusicology conference in Dayton, Ohio, in March 2019. She was awarded the 2019 JaFran Jones Prize for Best Student Paper.

In January 2019, oboist **Cassie Pilgrim AD ’20** was appointed principal oboe of the Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra. Though her new career began in June, she plans to complete her artist diploma at Oberlin.

**Zoie Shuk-Yi Tse ’20** earned second prize at the 2018 New York International Piano Competition in June. The honor includes $6,000 and concert engagements.

The Cleveland Composers Guild awarded **Natsumi Osborn ’21** first prize in the sixth annual Collegiate Composition Contest. In addition to a cash prize, Natsumi earned performances and a recording by the Cleveland Chamber Choir of her winning choral piece, *Autumn Reflections.*
Tuba teacher Dennis Nulty is the featured soloist on the Detroit Symphony Orchestra’s fifth recording of concertos by John Williams for Naxos Portara. Conductor Leonard Slatkin led the orchestra in the live performance, which was later released on February 8, 2019—the composer’s 87th birthday. Nulty has served as principal tuba of the Detroit Symphony since 2009.

Visiting assistant professor Tiffany Chang ’09, conductor of the Oberlin College Arts & Sciences Orchestra, was selected to participate in the Dallas Opera’s 2019 Linda and Mitch Hart Institute. The multifaceted program provides training and support for talented women conductors on the cusp of major international careers.

Assistant Professor of Music Theory Bryan Parkhurst won the Emerging Scholar Award for 2018 from the Society for Music Theory. The honor was given for Parkhurst’s article “Making a Virtue of Necessity: Schenker and Kantian Teleology,” which was published in the April 2017 issue of the Journal for Music Theory. The review committee praised Parkhurst’s in-depth study of the theories of Heinrich Schenker as “a rigorous philosophical inquiry into the ideal of ‘musical science.’”

The International Society of Bassists honored Oberlin bass teacher Tracy Rowell with the 2019 Special Recognition Award of Young Bassist Ambassador for furthering the ISB’s mission to inspire, educate, and connect.

TIMARA professor Peter Swendsen ’99 attended the Kennedy Center’s Millennium Stage performance of Coldness and Lightness, his co-creation with dancer Ashley Thorndike-Youssef, incorporating sound, visual design, and movement that sends eight dancers through a tenuous landscape.

Emeritus Professor of Ethnomusicology Roderic Knight published “Elisha Gray and the Musical Telegraph” in the spring 2019 edition of the Galpin Society Journal LXXII. Gray, an 1864 graduate of Oberlin College, invented the world’s first electric musical instrument—a small keyboard—in 1874 and taught at Oberlin from 1880 to 1900. Knight also mounted an exhibit on Gray in Oberlin’s Science Center.

Jonathan Moyer served as visiting professor of organ at the Hochschule für Musik in Lübeck, Germany, during his spring 2019 sabbatical. In addition to concerts in Hannover, Bielefeld, Lübeck, Norden, and Alkmaar, he recorded on the 1637 Stellwagen organ in the church of St. Jakobi in Lübeck.

Percussion professor Michael Rosen was inducted into the Percussive Arts Society Hall of Fame in recognition of his contributions to the field.

Musicology professor James O’Leary was awarded the John W. Kluge Fellowship to support a year of research at the Library of Congress. He will be there from February to December 2020 working on his next book, a history of the Federal Music Project.

TIMARA Technical Director and Lecturer Abby Aresty taught a workshop on multimodal interactive storytelling for 40 college students from around the world as part of a summer institute on humanitarian entrepreneurship at Lingnan University in Hong Kong.

New voice faculty member Katherine Jolly will release the album Preach Sister Preach in August. It features the soprano performing new works by Evan Williams, Katherine Bodor, and Evan Mack, whose titular song cycle was inspired by the energy of the first Women’s March and celebrates the voices of 10 powerful women, including Lucille Ball, Mae West, Tina Fey, Simone de Beauvoir, and Ellen DeGeneres. Jolly’s Oberlin career began in the summer of 2019.

Assistant Professor of Music Theory Andrew Pau published the article “Common-Tone Tonality in Bizet’s Carmen” in the October 2018 issue of Music Theory Spectrum. It explores ways in which a harmonic analysis of Georges Bizet’s score can illuminate the work’s dramatic structure. A second article, “The Harmonic Theories of Jean-Adam Serre,” appeared in the March 2019 edition of Intégral. It argues for a reevaluation of the theories of Serre, a native of Geneva who published three essays on the principles of harmony in 1753.

Associate Professor of Music Theory James O'Leary was awarded the John W. Kluge Fellowship to support a year of research at the Library of Congress. He will be there from February to December 2020 working on his next book, a history of the Federal Music Project.
Composition professor Elizabeth Ogonek was awarded the 2019 Walter Hinrichsen Award in Music by the American Academy of Arts and Letters.

Piano professor Angela Cheng performed with Pinchas Zukerman and Amanda Forsyth as the Zukerman Trio in concerts in England, Denmark, Russia, Germany, Italy, Brazil, and throughout the U.S. She also made a solo appearance with the Akron Symphony in Mozart’s Piano Concerto No. 21 in C Major, presented a master class and solo recital on Baylor University’s Lyceum Series, and gave a recital for the Louisiana Music Teachers Association conference. Off stage, Cheng served on the juries of the Cliburn Junior Competition and the e-Piano Junior Competition.

Piano professor Alvin Chow gave master classes at Mannes Prep in New York, the Music Institute of Chicago, and the Hong Kong Academy in the past year. He performed recitals with Angela Cheng at the Toronto Summer Music Festival, Eastman School of Music, University of Montana, Montana State University, and in Wuhan, China. He also performed at Morningside College and St. Petersburg College with his original duo partner, twin brother Alan Chow.

In September 2018, musicology professor Steven Plank published “Music and the Armed Services Edition” in Notes, the journal of the Music Library Association. The article, originating in research in Oberlin’s James Newman Collection, studies musical literature published during World War II in editions intended for the armed services, describing them bibliographically and interpreting their content in terms of tropes of Americanism and wartime sentiment. In March 2019, Plank also presented a recital of 17th-century organ music at First United Methodist Church.

Public Services Librarian Kathy Abromeit collaborated with Holling Smith-Borne of Vanderbilt University on a presentation about creating an inclusive environment for transgender and gender-fluid music library users at the Music Library Association’s February 2019 conference in St. Louis. They gave a similar presentation called “It’s More than Boy George’s Gender Pronouns” at the Library Collective in Knoxville, Tenn., in March. Abromeit’s article “Outreach for Music Librarians” was published by the Music Library Association A-R Editions Inc.

Violin professor Sibbi Bernhardsson ’95 gave recitals and master classes throughout the U.S., Scandinavia, and in 14 cities across China with fellow faculty member Darrett Adkins ’91 and the Lions Gate Trio. He also released the complete works for violin by composer Thorkell Sigurbjornsson on the label Bad Taste. In May he was artist in residence at the Central Conservatory in Beijing.

In December, Kalyn stepped down from her post to become president of New England Conservatory in Boston. Kalyn arrived in Oberlin in 2005 as associate dean of academic affairs. In 2014 she was appointed dean of the conservatory, a position she held for five years. In her time at Oberlin, Kalyn led the development of numerous initiatives designed to prepare students for vibrant and fulfilling careers. She created the Creativity & Leadership Project (now known as the Center for Innovation & Impact), a cross-campus program that fosters entrepreneurship among students in both the college and conservatory, as well as its companion program, the business accelerator LaunchU.

She was also the driving force behind the construction of the William and Helen Birenbaum Innovation and Performance Space, a club-like venue that opened in the lower level of the new Hotel at Oberlin in 2016. The hotel identifies a new dean.

Under Kalyn’s leadership, the conservatory established the Division of Pedagogy, Advocacy, and Community Engagement (PACE), which builds upon Oberlin’s legacy of excellence in music education with a 21st-century emphasis on social justice and arts advocacy. She also facilitated the creation of the Oberlin-Como Piano Academy, a partnership with the famed Italian institution dedicated to nurturing the development of young pianists.

In honor, the bright and spacious conference room in the Conservatory Annex was named the Andrea E. Kalyn Meeting Room.

“The ethos of this extraordinary institution—the commitment to excellence, the culture of experimentation, and the preparation of students to create change and value in the world—will forever resonate throughout my work and life,” Kalyn said.

“I have learned so much from the Oberlin community, but most profoundly from my conservatory colleagues, who inspire me daily with their talent, devotion, and care.”

In January, William Quillen, previously the conservatory’s associate dean for academic affairs, assumed the role of acting dean. Quillen will serve in that capacity through spring 2020, while a search is conducted to identify a new dean.
Clarinet professor Richard Hawkins was inducted into the University of Michigan Hall of Fame in 2019.

Mike Telin '84, a visiting teacher of music journalism at Oberlin, moderated a February panel at Baldwin Wallace University about creating new opera and contemporary vocal music. Part of Cleveland Opera Theater’s New Opera Works [NOW] Festival, the discussion included composers Jake Heggie and Griffin Candey, soprano Ann Moss, and Oberlin Opera Theater assistant professor Christopher Mirto.

In fall 2018, Professor of Piano Dang Thai Son was presented with the Gold Medal “Merit to Culture” from the Ministry of Culture of Poland, the nation’s highest distinction awarded for contributions to Polish culture and heritage. Dang’s recording of Chopin’s Nocturnes on an 1849 Erard piano was selected by the label Deutsche Grammophon for its special-edition album Chopin on Period Instruments.

From the first Baroque Performance Institute through its 17th year, cellist August Wenzinger was a pivotal figure and the international celebrity who many came to see and hear. Catharina Meints, associate professor of viola da gamba and cello—and a co-founder of BPI—has commemorated those days with a new memoir, Oberlin Baroque Performance Institute: The Wenzinger Years. Available on iTunes, the ebook includes archival photos and programs as well as complete rosters of BPI attendees from those years. Also embedded are audio clips of numerous live performances and recordings from the 1970s and ’80s.

Professor of Music Education Jody Kerchner was a Bonner Center Research Fellow this academic year and was elected to the International Society for Music Education Board of Directors. Recent presentations included a seminar in the Czech Republic where she spoke on “What I Learned from Prison: Practice Teaching with Community-Based Learning Partners” for the Music in the Schools & Teacher Education Commission. She joined several Oberlin colleagues in Chicago as part of a panel at the Imagining America conference and served as a co-organizer of the Bennett Reimer Aesthetic Music Education Legacy Conference at Northwestern University. Kerchner also led a winter-term trip to Hong Kong that focused on environmental and cultural sustainability, a project supported by a Luce Foundation/LIASE grant.

Classical guitar teacher Stephen Aron composed Three Suites for solo guitar and performed the pieces in recitals and at guitar festivals in North Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, California, Michigan, Pennsylvania, and Ohio. The works will be released on CD.

Music theory professor Kara Yoo Leaman received a fellowship from the Center for Ballet and the Arts at New York University, an international research institute for scholars and artists of ballet and its related arts and sciences. She will be applying the latest tools of music analysis and digital video editing along with her own music-based movement notation to illustrate how Balanchine replicated patterns from musical scores in his dances and constructed other patterns to complement the music.

Timothy Weiss, professor of conducting and director of contemporary music at Oberlin, is also the director of the Aspen Contemporary Ensemble at the Aspen Music Festival. In the past year, he conducted performances at the Bergen International Festival; gave performances of the scenic cantata Comala by Ricardo Zohn-Muldoon at the May Festival in Guadalajara, Mexico; collaborated with La Coperacha Puppet Theater Company in his role as conductor of the Zohn Collective; and conducted the recording of an orchestral version of Philip Glass’ Descent into the Maelstrom with the Arctic Philharmonic Sinfonietta, the Norwegian ensemble for which Weiss serves as music director. A documentary about the project recently premiered at the Berlin Film Festival.

Voice faculty Kendra Colton ‘83 continues to record all of the soprano arias and duets from Bach’s cantatas. Her newly released fourth CD features duets with baritone William Sharp and oboist Peggy Pearson.

Ethnomusicology and anthropology professor Jennifer Fraser presented “Dangers of Fieldwork & Dangers of Sex Work: Erotics in/of/and Ethnomusicology” as part of a panel called “Access, Risk, Safety, and Gender in Ethnomusicological Fieldwork: Reflections, Analysis, and Directions in the Age of MeToo” at the 63rd annual Society for Ethnomusicology conference in Albuquerque, N.M. Fraser’s paper was about her #MeToo moments of sexual abuse and harassment, part of her ethnomusicological research in Indonesia during the past 24 years, and the ways it shaped her career.

Professor of Musicology Charles McGuire ’92 continues his work on the Musical Festivals Database, which collates information about concert programs and performers at work in Great Britain from 1695 to 1940. In December, Oxford University Press published an essay within the volume The Oxford Handbook of Music Listening in the 19th and 20th Centuries that drew on data generated by the project. The essay examined how the idea of the concert listener developed in the early 19th century. McGuire also presented pre-concert lectures for all four concerts of the Cleveland Chamber Choir’s 2018-19 season and for the Trinity Cathedral Choir’s Good Friday Concert in April 2019. He leads a practicum for students on how to write program notes for such organizations.
Harp professor Yolanda Kondonassis made the world-premiere performance and recording of Jennifer Higdon’s Harp Concerto, written for her and performed with the Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra and conductor Ward Stare. It appears on the album American Rapture (Azica), which was broadcast on Sirius XM’s Symphony Hall and American Public Media’s Performance Today and included interviews and commentary by Kondonassis. Higdon’s concerto was a consortium commission from the Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra, Harrisburg Symphony Orchestra, Baton Rouge Symphony Orchestra, Fargo-Moorhead Symphony Orchestra, Lansing Symphony Orchestra, and Oklahoma City Philharmonic—and Kondonassis performed the work with all six of them during the 2018-19 season.

Voice professor and baritone soloist Timothy LeFebvre regularly performs a wide repertoire of oratorio works around the nation. The past season’s most notable performances included Britten’s War Requiem with the Wichita Symphony and Bach’s St. John Passion at the 2019 Spoleto Festival in Charleston, S.C.

‘How can I help?’

“I haven’t had a moment to think about what July looks like,” says Mary Gray on a mid-June afternoon in her Bibbins Hall office. She has been serving conservatory students as associate dean for student academic affairs for the last seven years. Now, just this side of her retirement that was to begin July 1, she reflects, “Oberlin has been my favorite job.”

That job started 15 years ago, after stints at Interlochen Arts Academy, the Professional Children’s School in New York City, and the Juilliard School. Gray came to Oberlin as the director of conservatory development. She worked closely with then-dean David Stull for six years, raising money for initiatives including the construction of the Kohl Building for jazz studies and several endowed professorships. From there, she worked with Andrea Kalyn as co-director of the Creativity & Leadership Project, supporting student entrepreneurship. After two years in that role, she seized the opportunity to work more closely with conservatory students, for whom she had such deep affection.

Gray’s understanding of talented young musicians began with her own study of piano while growing up in North Dakota. “I had an amazing college education at the University of North Dakota, but I got my first real glimpse of professional training when I started working at Interlochen,” Gray recalls. “As a staff accompanist, I loved to see that magic thing that happens between a student and teacher.”

It also became clear to her then that for students to really be ready for the profession, they need to hit certain benchmarks well before they reach college age. And that’s when she realized her own path in music: She wanted to help students navigate their journey through school. “It’s a serious contract that we make with students when we say, ‘We are the best place for you to realize your dreams.’”

“How can I help?” is the first thing I ask when working with students and parents. I always want to understand their perspective, and I think about ‘Who would I want my daughter to be sitting across from?’ So I’ve approached this work with empathy and respect. And everyone has something to teach me.”

That sentiment has been apparent. Along with making sure that hundreds of students hit their marks and earn their degrees, Gray has been a regular in Oberlin’s concert halls and attended almost every senior recital. “It’s intentional. I wanted to make sure I saw the students performing, that they know I understand the big picture, and that whatever the challenges have been, those don’t define my experience with them.”

When asked what comes next, Gray thinks she could get used to the idea of a real vacation. And then she muses, “I’ve been really lucky. I’d like to find where I could be valuable and useful.”

—Cathy Partlow Strauss ‘84
In July 2018, jazz trumpet teacher Eddie Henderson released the album Be Cool (Smoke Sessions Records), about which DownBeat wrote: “The album proves that, for all its coolness, Henderson’s horn can plumb the emotional depths.”

Assistant Professor of Ethnomusicology Kathryn Metz presented on a panel titled “Reflections on the Past, Present, and Future of Popular Music Scholarship” at the 63rd annual Society for Ethnomusicology conference in Albuquerque, NM.

Composition professor Stephen Hartke’s chamber concerto for piano and 20 players, Ship of State, had its Lincoln Center premiere at Tully Hall in November 2018 with soloist Xak Bjerken and the Riverside Symphony, conducted by George Rothman. It was also featured in June at the Buffalo Festival, which included performances by the Buffalo Philharmonic of Hartke’s works Pacific Rim and the Grammy-winning Meanwhiile: Incidental Music to Imaginary Puppet Plays.

Music theory professor Megan Long gave a talk called “What Do Signatures Signify? The Curious Case of 17th-Century English Key” at the University of Toronto in January.

Dana Jessen, the conservatory’s director of professional development and associate professor of contemporary music and improvisation, performed with Alarm Will Sound, the Walden School Chamber Players, and alongside TIMARA’s Peter Swendsen ’99 with the N.Y.C.-based Pam Tanowitz Dance Company in the new work Five Small Dances for Cleveland. Jessen’s chamber ensemble Splinter Reeds released its second full-length album, Hypothetical Islands (New Focus), and performed at Vancouver New Music, InterMusic SF Festival, Cornish College of the Arts, and the Frost School of Music in Miami. She was also a presenter at the International Society for Improvised Music conference and a guest performer at the 2019 Doek Improvisation Festival in Amsterdam.

Longtime curator of harpsichords Kathie Stewart toured Ireland, England, and Italy in summer 2018 as principal flute and recorder player for Apollo’s Fire, the Baroque ensemble founded by Jeannette Sorrell ’90. In February 2019, Apollo’s Fire earned a Grammy Award for the album Songs of Orpheus. Stewart’s other noteworthy performances included concerts at Tanglewood, the Ravinia Festival, and the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City. She concluded her tenure at Oberlin in summer 2019.

Faculty violists Peter Slowik and Kirsten Docter ’92 led master classes at the 2019 American String Teachers Association Conference in Albuquerque, N.M., in March. Slowik taught the collegiate viola master class, while Docter coached the chamber music master class.

Double bass professor Peter Dominguez was an adjudicator and clinician at the fifth annual InterMusic SF Festival, Cornish College of the Arts, and alongside harpist and cellist Jaap ter Linden created a two-CD set, Beethoven: The Music for Piano and Cello, which was recorded in Clonick Hall in 2014 using instruments from Breitman’s own collection. “Breitman and ter Linden’s poised, flexible playing and musicianship offer it all up as narrative, not musicology,” Early Music America wrote, adding: “Clear acoustics and engineering at Oberlin Conservatory of Music’s Clonick Hall provide an ideal vehicle for it all.”

Historical performance professor and fortepianist David Breitman and cellist Jaap ter Linden created a two-CD set, Beethoven: The Music for Piano and Cello, which was recorded in Clonick Hall in 2014 using instruments from Breitman’s own collection. “Breitman and ter Linden’s poised, flexible playing and musicianship offer it all up as narrative, not musicology,” Early Music America wrote, adding: “Clear acoustics and engineering at Oberlin Conservatory of Music’s Clonick Hall provide an ideal vehicle for it all.”

Composition faculty member and multi-instrumentalist Jesse Jones has released his third album, Eclipse, with his musical duo partner, bassist Craig Butterfield. On the album, Jones plays mandolin as well as guitar, banjo, piano, and an octave mandolin. Inspired by roots music, the release brings both musicians’ classical training and compositional background to the fore. They believe their work together is equally influenced by chamber music and bluegrass. The album was recorded in Oberlin’s Clonick Hall.

The Association des Collectionneurs d’Instruments de Musique à Vent—France’s Association of Musical Wind Instrument Collectors—recently held a competition for “the most beautiful wind instrument of its members.” Michael Lynn, Oberlin’s professor of recorder and Baroque flute, won the award for his Buffet Coché conical Boehm flute, which was featured in an issue of the association’s journal, Le Larigot. Lynn gave a talk on the flute at the conference on Artistic Research in the Field of Early Wind Instruments at the Royal Conservatory of Brussels in February.

Associate Professor of Music Theory Jared Hartt edited A Critical Companion to Medieval Motets (Boydell and Brewer), a volume of essays that is the first to be devoted exclusively to medieval motets. It includes chapters by 17 leading scholars from around the world.

Jazz voice teacher La Tanya Hall joined Steely Dan on tour this year, including a nine-show residency at the Venetian Resort Las Vegas in late April. Beginning this year, she will serve as director of the newly formed Oberlin Gospel Choir, which welcomes singers from the college and conservatory.
Baritone Broke Opera Color Barrier

ANDREW FRIERSON (1924-2018)

Andrew Frierson’s first experience with Oberlin came in 1973, when the acclaimed baritone stepped away from the New York City stage lights to become an associate professor of singing in the conservatory and coordinator of the Oberlin Black Ensemble. But just two years later, the stage beckoned once again; Frierson returned to New York, where decades earlier he had launched a groundbreaking career in opera.

Born the youngest of seven children in Columbia, Tennessee, Frierson served in the U.S. Army during WWII, then heeded his mother’s advice to “leave the South as soon as you can.” He traveled by bus to New York City to take a successful audition at the Juilliard School; by the time he graduated in 1950, he had already made an acclaimed debut at Carnegie Hall.

Frierson married fellow singer and Juilliard graduate Billie Lynn Daniel in 1953, in the midst of an eight-year run with the New York City Opera. In a newly desegregated opera world that offered few opportunities for black male singers, he came to be synonymous with the roles of Porgy in Porgy and Bess and Joe in Show Boat. He performed solo and with orchestras across the U.S., Canada, and Europe.

Frierson was well aware of his trailblazing career path, and he embraced his role as a civil rights activist. He was asked to sing at the 1963 March on Washington, where Martin Luther King Jr. delivered his iconic “I Have a Dream” speech.

From 1969 to 1973, Frierson served as director of the Henry Street Music Settlement in Manhattan. In 1970, he and Daniel completed master’s degrees at the Manhattan School of Music and began performing together as a duo. Among the highlights of his Oberlin tenure were performances of the song cycle Ice and Fire, which had been written for the couple by colleague Wendell Logan, a newcomer like Frierson in the fall of 1973 who became the architect of the conservatory’s jazz program. In March 1975, they debuted Ice and Fire to critical acclaim at New York’s Alice Tully Hall.

After two years in Oberlin, they returned to New York to teach lessons and perform. In the early 1980s, Frierson joined forces with colleague James Kennon-Wilson to form Independent Black Opera Singers, which fostered the careers of black musicians. In 2000 the National Opera Association presented Frierson the “Lift Every Voice” Legacy Award in recognition of his efforts to promote diversity.

By 2013, Frierson returned to Oberlin to live at the Kendal retirement community, where he presented a recital on his 92nd birthday in March 2016. He died at age 94 on December 6, 2018, leaving a daughter and grandson. He was preceded in death by his wife.

Cellist Emphasized Expressive Playing

GEORGE NEIKRUG (1919-2019)

By the time George Neikrug joined the Oberlin faculty in 1965, he had long since cemented his reputation as one of the world’s outstanding cellists. In the three decades that followed—most of them as a member of the string faculty at Boston University—he became similarly revered for his free-spirited style of teaching, an approach that echoed the unfiltered expression that for so many years had poured out through his playing.

“As humans, many of us are taught not to attract attention to ourselves,” he told a Boston University newspaper before a performance in 2000. “But as a performer, you have to go out and use your instrument to cry and scream. Many of the great musicians are those who haven’t lost that childlike quality.”

A native of the Bronx, Neikrug built his reputation in part on remarkable performances presented in his hometown, beginning with his professional debut at Town Hall in 1947. A 1960 Carnegie Hall performance of Bloch’s Schelomo with Leopold Stokowski and the NBC Symphony gave way to their seminal recording of the work together for United Artists. Early in his seven-decade career, Neikrug took part in the creation of Spartacus and other film soundtracks with the Paramount and Columbia recording orchestras. He later served as principal cellist of the major orchestras in Baltimore, Pittsburgh, and Los Angeles, and performed as a soloist throughout the U.S. and Europe.

At age 24, Neikrug began a 15-year period of study with Demetrius Dounis, a gifted teacher, player, and physician who was renowned for guiding string players through technical challenges and injury. Neikrug became a major voice in spreading the “Dounis Method” of teaching, which emphasized maximum, instinctive expression and focused on rooting out technical deficiencies one at a time, so that they could be more efficiently unlearned. From 1942 to 1945, Neikrug’s performance career was interrupted by service with a U.S. military air transport division in North Africa.

Neikrug joined the Oberlin faculty in 1965 and performed with the Oberlin String Quartet. His 1966 solo recital at Town Hall marked his first New York appearance in 17 years and was the first of eight Oberlin concerts in New York in honor of the conservatory’s centennial. He continued to perform well into his 80s.

In 1995 Neikrug received the Artist-Teacher Award from the American String Teachers Association. The following year, he was presented with Indiana University’s Chevalier du Violoncelle, a lifetime achievement award.

Neikrug died March 8, 2019, one day after his 100th birthday. He was married to Olga Zundel, and he is survived by two sons.
Pulitzer Prize-Winning Composer
George Walker ’41 Spoke Out Against Discrimination

Apart from Mother’s love of hymns and Father’s self-taught piano skills, the Walker household wasn’t an especially musical one until the family’s 5-year-old son began tinkering at the keyboard of the piano they had placed in the parlor of their Washington, D.C., home.

Soon, the boy’s playing led to nightly accompaniment to his mother’s singing. Before long, it led to much more.

The young man was George Theophilus Walker, whose prodigious achievements in youth led him to Oberlin Conservatory when he was barely a teenager. From there he crafted a remarkable career as a pianist, composer, and teacher, winning the Pulitzer Prize for Music in 1996—the first African American to do so—and earning adulation from countless musicians who followed in his path.

Walker was also an outspoken critic of discrimination in the music world—discrimination he routinely experienced firsthand. Like his late sister, acclaimed pianist and Oberlin professor Frances Walker ’45, George Walker was a gifted student who forged a life of firsts: He graduated from high school by age 14 and four years later completed his Oberlin degree. In 1945 he became the first black graduate of the Curtis Institute, where his teachers included Rudolf Serkin. At that time, he found himself focused on developing a career as a concert pianist. In short order, he made his New York debut at Town Hall, performing his Three Pieces for Piano. He became the first black musician to present a recital at Carnegie Hall. In the same year, he also became the first black instrumentalist to perform with the Philadelphia Orchestra—an experience, he later told The New York Times, that resulted in his first encounter with “the stigma of race.”

In 1950, Walker became the first black instrumentalist to secure major concert management. In performances in America and Europe—he toured seven countries across the continent in 1954—Walker earned praise for his work at the piano, but found his opportunities limited by gatekeepers who frequently selected white performers over their black counterparts.

Walker also became a prolific composer of orchestral and chamber works, writing nearly 100 pieces during his lifetime. Among those for which he is best remembered is Lyric for Strings, which he wrote in 1946.

After years of writing and performing, Walker resumed his education. In 1956 he became the first African American to earn a doctorate from the Eastman School of Music; upon graduating, he was awarded a Fulbright Fellowship to continue studies in composition with Nadia Boulanger in Paris.

Walker began a 32-year teaching career in 1960, first at the New School for Social Research and later at Smith College, where he became the first black faculty member to earn tenure. By 1969 he joined the faculty of Rutgers University and remained there until his retirement in 1992.

In 1996, at age 73, Walker won the Pulitzer Prize for his song cycle Lilacs. Set to Walt Whitman’s poem “When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom’d,” the 16-minute work was premiered that same year by the Boston Symphony Orchestra. Other works by Walker were commissioned by the Cleveland Orchestra and the New York Philharmonic, and Walker himself often played their premieres. He claimed to The Washington Post in 2015, however, that despite the notoriety brought about by his Pulitzer, opportunities to have his works performed “materialized in nothing.” His many firsts notwithstanding, Walker aspired foremost to be considered an accomplished pianist and composer without regard to his race. That notion was challenged from an early age, when he was often pigeonholed by teachers who expected him to bring a jazz sensibility to his playing. Even Serkin, Walker later recounted to The New York Times, asked him to play Beethoven sonatas “like jazz.” (Walker often lamented that black classical musicians routinely took a back seat to their jazz counterparts.)

Especially early in his career, Walker’s creations hewed closely to the modern classical tradition. By the late 1960s, however, he began to embrace allusions to jazz in his writing, albeit through clever devices buried in complex, atonal pieces. In a 1987 radio interview, Walker described the duality of his role as a trailblazing musician.

“I’ve benefited from being a black composer in the sense that when there are symposiums given of music by black composers, I would get performances by orchestras that otherwise would not have done the works,” he said. “The other aspect, of course, is that if I were not black, I would have had a far wider dispersion of my music and more performances.”

Walker earned two Guggenheim fellowships, a Fulbright Fellowship, a John Hay Whitney Fellowship, an American Academy of Arts and Letters Award, and honorary doctorates from six institutions, including Oberlin in 1983.

Walker died August 23, 2018, near his home in Montclair, New Jersey. He is survived by two sons, violinist Gregory Walker and playwright Ian Walker, and three grandsons. He was married to Helen Siemens.
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JAMES McBRIDE ’79, MUSICIAN AND AUTHOR