

HARTFORD SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA WINTER 2023-2024 QUARTER NOTES

ON THE MOVE WITH HSO'S LEARNING & SOCIAL IMPACT

A new initiative: HSO's Student Transportation Assistance Fund (STAF)

Many years ago, HSO's Discovery Concerts were created to provide school-age children the ability to enjoy specially curated child-based concerts at The Bushnell Center for the Performing Arts. The recent pandemic resulted in a total shut down of the program and when we were finally able to resume school-day concerts last season, we encountered a new challenge. School districts reported they were unable to pay for the buses needed to transport their students to The Bushnell to participate in the concert series.

Although student tickets are dramatically discounted to make music accessible to all children, the cost of transportation suddenly became a

seemingly insurmountable problem. We were determined to find a solution, and we did. The HSO's Student Transportation Assistance Fund (STAF) was created, and it is used exclusively to help schools cover transportation costs for Discovery Concerts. Thanks to an initial grant from the Travelers, this important new fund is yet another example of HSO's commitment to make music accessible and affordable to ALL students.

Upon learning about the need and the creation of the new dedicated fund, individual donors stepped forward to offer their financial assistance as well. Last season, and before the creation of STAF, only a few schools had the funds to transport their students to the Discovery Concerts. But this sea-

son, the availability of the STAF dollars has made all the difference. Our first Discovery concert this season, which took place on December 15, 2023, outsold performances from prior years. As of December 1, 2023, nearly 1,400 students and teachers from ten schools (in five separate school districts) benefitted from STAF. Of the five districts, four are considered "Alliance Districts," defined as districts that require enhanced financial and academic support. Alliance District schools receive 100% funding of their transportation costs from STAF, while non-Alliance District schools receive STAF awards that significantly reduce their travel costs.

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Students enjoying HSO's Cirque Discovery concert, made possible by the Student Transportation Assistance Fund

TO SUPPORT THE HSO IN OUR TIME OF GREATEST NEED, please go to <https://hartfordsymphony.org/individual-support/donate-now/> OR [CLICK HERE TO DONATE NOW](#)



HSO PROGRAMS ARE FUNDED IN PART BY:





Melissa White working with students in Hartford schools



(L to R) – Musicians Lisa Rautenberg, Gary Capozziello, Jia Cao, and Michael Wheeler, at opening of Musicians' Care at Duncaster

HOW CAN YOU HELP?

In addition to your generous gifts to HSO's Annual Fund, **please** consider a separate gift to the Student Transportation Assistance Fund. One hundred percent of gifts earmarked for the fund are used exclusively to cover transportation costs for schools in need. Just \$250 covers the average cost of one bus to bring 50 students to an HSO concert. You may send your check to the HSO, at 166 Capitol Avenue, Hartford, CT 06106 and just note "STAF" in the memo section of the check. Thanks to your generosity, we are making a real difference in the lives of so many children in need!

Update on Melissa White, HSO's Joyce C. Willis Artist in Residence

Since the start of her residency in September, Melissa White, HSO's Joyce C. Willis Artist in Residence for the 2023/24 season, has been on the move. Melissa's residency is not just about performance. Rather, her presence affords many opportunities for positive engagement with the community, with schools and with our partner organizations. In the fall, Melissa visited six different schools, meeting with students from third grade to high school, in Hartford, East Hartford, Farmington, Avon and at a magnet school in Bloomfield. Melissa has led masterclasses with instrumentalists, focusing on everything from technique to self-care, as she coached students at East Hartford High School, University of Connecticut, the University of Hartford and the

Hartt School Community Division. In programs at schools and with partner organizations, such as the Artists Collective, the Legacy Foundation and the President's College at the University of Hartford, Melissa talked about her own personal and musical journey, and the story of Florence Price, whose composition Symphony No. 1 in E Minor, was performed in 1933 by the Chicago Symphony. Price was the first Black woman to have her music performed by a major symphony. Melissa, a champion of Price's work, performed Price's Violin Concerto No. 1 in D major at our second Masterworks concert, October 20-22, 2023.

HOW CAN YOU HELP?


This season is the second of HSO's three-year Black Artist in Residence program, made possible by a generous gift from the Roberts Foundation, and named for Joyce C. Willis, a Roberts Foundation Board member, former HSO Board member, and champion of the arts in our community. Our goal is to raise sufficient funds to allow us to continue the Black Artist in Residence program beyond the three-year period granted by the Roberts Foundation. Last year, our first Joyce C. Willis Artist in Residence, composer/conductor Quinn Mason, prioritized consistent engagement with students and the community, building relationships and supporting the dreams of those who, like Quinn, needed to have positive role models that made them believe in possibilities. Maintaining the exciting momentum created by the Artist in

Residence program is indeed a priority.

Update on Musician's Care

HSO's Musician's Care was designed to bring performances to multiple locations including hospitals, health care institutions, community partners and living facilities, so that those who may not be able to travel can still enjoy the gift of music. HSO's 23/24 Musician's Care program launched this season at Duncaster, with a monthly series that features a variety of HSO ensembles. The October concert featured a String Quartet, and the November program featured the HSO Jazz Quartet. In November, the HSO participated in "Running with Care" at Dunkin' Donuts Park, which was created to provide footwear and medical treatment for those who are homeless or housing insecure. HSO volunteers helped with shoe-sizing and escorted clients through the suite of services offered throughout the day. Gary Capozziello, HSO's new Assistant Concertmaster, performed on violin, and his musical gifts were the perfect accompaniment for the event. We look forward to supporting a variety of individuals and organizations throughout the coming year.

HOW CAN YOU HELP?

Do you know of a facility or organization that might benefit from being part of HSO's Musician's Care? If so, please let us know, and we will reach out to them directly. 

If you are interested in learning more about any of the above projects, or desire to make a gift that supports these programs, please contact Andrew Robbin, Director of Learning and Social Impact. He would love to hear from you. He can be reached via email to arobbin@hartfordsymphony.org.

SAVE THE DATE FOR HSO's 2024 Bravo! Gala: SENSATION!



HSO's annual Bravo! Gala is a favorite in the Greater Hartford community. With an exclusive HSO performance, a musical program that is a well-guarded secret, plus a surprise audience participation component, each year this event draws a diverse audience who delight in sharing the excitement of the evening and the importance of raising funds to support HSO's education and community activities, which ensure that music is accessible for all. Last season's 2023 Bravo! Gala, PULSE, was enjoyed by a near capacity-crowd of over 425.


In 2024, the 80th season of the Hartford Symphony Orchestra, our Bravo! Gala, SENSATION, will honor Joyce C. Willis, a passionate supporter of the arts and former HSO Board member. Joyce sadly passed away from Covid-19 during the pandemic,



Joyce C. Willis

but her devotion to the arts lives on. The generous three-year grant from the Edward C. & Ann T. Roberts Foundation, which established HSO's Black Artist in Residence program, was named in Joyce's honor. Our first selected artist, composer/conductor Quinn Mason, who joined us in the 2022/23 season, made a remarkable difference throughout our extended

Greater Hartford community. In this, our second year of the grant, we are privileged to welcome Melissa White, violinist, who is already making an impact with our audiences and students through our long-standing partnerships with schools and other community organizations. None of these ongoing programs could have been established without the Roberts Foundation, and without Joyce C. Willis, whose dedicated commitment to the arts in Greater Hartford was the impetus for the program. We hope you will join us to honor Joyce's memory and enduring legacy.

Our 2024 Bravo! Gala will be held on April 27, 2024, in the Exhibit Hall of the CT Convention Center, from 6 – 10 pm. For more information, please visit our website at [bravo – Hartford Symphony Orchestra](https://www.bravo-hartford.org). 

STAFF SPOTLIGHT

Andrew Robbin

Director of Learning & Social Impact

Andrew Robbin, Director of Learning & Social Impact, joined the HSO in late August of 2023. After just a few months, we already know he was the right choice for the team. Outgoing, engaged and with an unwavering commitment to making art and music accessible for all, Andrew's career as an educator was excellent preparation for his new role at the HSO.

QN: Tell us a little bit about your family and your journey.

I am a Connecticut native, born and raised in West Hartford and the product of our public school system. I loved music as a child, took piano lessons and then expanded to include electric bass in high school. Sports and athletics were always important. Through basketball, I learned that no matter how good you are at something, there's always someone better. It was an important and valuable lesson to learn as a high school sophomore. I was involved in the school choir, performed in school musicals and together with a group of friends, formed a group called the Shangri-Las, not realizing it was the name of an American girl pop group from the 1960s!

QN: We know you were a public-school teacher and elementary school principal. Please tell us a bit more about your choices.

I didn't always know what I wanted to do. I graduated from Bowdoin College as a history major with an education

minor. All I knew when I graduated was that I didn't want to teach high school. I took a gap year after college, and while in Utah, I



Andrew Robbin and his wife Katie.

ran an after-school youth program for families that were living in a public housing development. I found that I really loved working with kids, and I knew that I could make more of a positive impact by working with kids eight hours a day instead of just two. I knew that elementary education was my path, and I enrolled in a specialized education and internship program at Lesley College in Cambridge, Massachusetts, which really gave me the training and experience I needed. I briefly taught in a private school, but because I firmly believe that every child de-



Andrew and his family.

serves the best possible education, I soon moved to the public schools.

QN: What made you decide to move from teaching to school administration?

The short answer is I wanted to impact even more students. As a classroom teacher (I taught 4th grade in East Lyme and 6th grade in Ledyard), I knew I was making a great difference for the children in my class. I saw the work that is needed to be a force for positive change, and I realized that if I were the school administrator, I could make a bigger difference. I became an assistant principal in Stonington and then spent 17 years as a principal of an elementary school in Canton. I loved

every day and everything about my career.

QN: And yet you opted to leave education and work with the HSO?

I'm incredibly proud of what I accomplished as an educator, but after so many years in the same field, I wanted to see if there were other ways in which I could effect positive change. I didn't know what I would find after leaving education, but I really wanted to try to find something impactful. When I read the job description of HSO's Director of Learning and Social Impact, it perfectly aligned with my values, my life goals, and my desire to make a difference. The HSO's commitment to DEI echoes my own beliefs about access, equity and relevancy. Everyone matters and everyone counts. With the HSO, I get to continue my work with kids and be part of a great organization that is committed to making a difference.

QN: Many people who work at the HSO have some connection to music. We know you played an instrument as a kid, but what about now?

My love of music has continued! I play in a great classic rock band called "The Substitutes." It is a group of former teachers from Canton, and I was invited to join on vocal and keyboards. Another retired teacher is in the band with me, and playing music with your best friends is a gift like nothing else. Currently, he and I typically just play as a duo, even though the full group is larger. We play weekly in the summer, give concerts in the community, and play for the sheer joy of it. I see the impact that music has on people, so being able to work in music full-time at the HSO gives me new and wonderful experiences. There's so much creativity involved in my job and finding ways



Andrew's son Malcolm practicing bass.

to make the HSO even more accessible to all is wonderfully fulfilling. I am so grateful!

QN: Besides music, what are your other interests?

I still love sports and athletics. I'm an avid UConn basketball fan, and even my dog (Kemba) is named after a UConn basketball player. My parents have a beach house in Westbrook, so we enjoy special family time at the shore during the summer. In the winter, we ski! My dad, a fabulous skier, was still skiing black diamonds at 82. Since we are just 20 minutes from Ski Sundown, we try to ski as much as we can during the winter.


QN: Tell us more about your family!

I've been married to Katie for 22

years as of December 22, 2023. We met when we were both teaching at the same school in East Lyme. We have three children, Seth (now 18 and a HS senior, who plays soccer, is the swim team captain and is busy applying to colleges), Ramona (15 and a HS freshman, who loves dance, singing and crew), and our youngest, Malcolm (9 years old and in 4th grade, who loves everything and brims with confidence and unadulterated joy.) We live in Avon and now, with my new position at the HSO, I have time before work to play catch with Malcolm every morning before the school bus arrives.

QN: What is something we should know about you that we don't know already?

I'm fiercely loyal, as a friend, as a sports fan, and in my work. I've been a loyal Red Sox fan (my dad is a Yankees fan) and continued to cheer on the Red Sox even when it looked like they'd never win the series. But they did – and I've watched them win FOUR World Series titles!

I've always been blessed to have amazing people around me. Besides being married to the kindest, most loving and best person in the world, I've been lucky enough to have an incredible family and been lucky enough to encounter greatness throughout my life. In high school, I was dunked on by a future NBA player and scored a soccer goal against a future collegiate athlete. In college, I lived with a future Pulitzer Prize winner. After college, I crashed on the couch of a childhood friend who was part of an alternative music band that continues to tour and make records. These experiences taught me that life brings unexpected gifts, and that hard work and perseverance can enable people to do incredible things. 

SOUND BITES: A SLICE OF HSO HISTORY

Moshe Paranov:

musician, conductor, educator, and creator of a lasting musical legacy in Hartford

Moshe Paranov, born in Hartford in 1895 to Russian immigrant parents, was originally named Morris Perlmutter. He changed his name in his early 20s at the beginning of his career as a professional musician. He began his music studies on violin at age five but switched to piano under the influence of his teacher and future colleague, Julius Hartt.

As a young man, Paranov attended Hartford public schools and earned money by playing for silent movies and various events in the Jewish community. He made his professional debut as a pianist at age 15, at Unity Hall on Pratt Street in Hartford, performing Beethoven's G Major Piano Sonata. Hartt, convinced of Paranov's extraordinary talent, introduced him to the celebrated Swiss composer and teacher, Ernest Bloch (the future Music Director of the newly formed Cleveland Institute of Music), who was then living in New York City. Bloch described a young Paranov as follows:

"My friend Hartt has a young pupil of 21 years.... And I am convinced he is a real genius. This boy, who in 3 days learns by heart a whole Brahms sonata, is a modest and simply boy, humble and without a shadow of pretention. He... does not live except under the inspiration of music."

With Hartt and others, Paranov co-founded the Hartt School of Music in 1920. It began in Hartt's home at the corner of Collins and Sigourney streets, in the shadow of what is now Saint Francis Medical Center. Over the next fifty years, Paranov devoted his life to building the school into a nationally recognized conservatory, which became part of the University of Hartford in 1957.

In 1924, Paranov married his first wife, Pauline, a gifted pianist and daughter of his friend and mentor, Julius Hartt. They had two daughters, Tanya and Nina. After Pauline died in 1981, Paranov married Elizabeth Warner, and they remained together until his death at age 98.

In 1926, when radio was still in its infancy, Paranov, seeing the impor-



Caricature of Paranov by famed artist Al Hirschfeld

tance of radio, joined the music staff of WTIC Radio in Hartford. It was a time when radio stations assembled their own orchestras, and from 1938-1949, he served as the music director of WTIC. In addition, Paranov was co-Conductor of the Hartford Symphony Orchestra from 1947 to 1953, alongside co-conductor George Heck. Paranov also conducted multiple productions by the Hartford Ballet and the Connecticut Opera Company.

When the Bushnell Memorial opened



Photo Credit: Moshe Paranov photograph collection (ARCH129). University of Hartford Archives and Special Collections.

Photo Credit: Paranov family papers (ARCH130). University of Hartford Archives and Special Collections.



in 1930, Paranov conducted the inaugural concert which included the Choral Club of Hartford, the Hartford Oratorio Society and the Cecelia Club, accompanied by members of the Boston Symphony Orchestra.

Upon Hartt's retirement in 1936, the music school he helped to found with Paranov was renamed the Julius Hartt Musical Foundation, and Paranov became dean of the school. Paranov became friends with Alfred C. Fuller, one of Hartford's business titans, who had made his Hartford-based Fuller

Brush Company a nationally recognized brand. Fuller, seeing a kindred spirit in the relentless Paranov, became Hartt's chief benefactor during the next several decades, and the two remained close friends. (When the school moved to the Bloomfield Avenue campus in 1963, the Hartt school was housed in the newly-named Alfred C. Fuller Music Center.)

Throughout his life, Paranov was committed to music and the community. He maintained friendships with celebrated artists, including composer Ernest Bloch, violinist Isaac Stern and cellist Leonard Rose, and he invariably cajoled them into providing master classes for Hartt students for

nothing more than expense money and a home-cooked meal. His national reputation continued long after his retirement from the Hartt School in



1971, and he remained active at the school, teaching and conducting.

Upon Paranov's passing in 1994, at age 98, the obituary in the Hartford Courant, written by music critic Steve Metcalf, a Hartt school graduate and former assistant dean of the school, read, in part, as follows:

"Over the course of his 51-year reign at the helm of the school, Mr. Paranov comported himself like a loving, if sometimes cantankerous, head of a large household. He often reached into his own pocket to lend money to faculty members in need and gave hundreds of private lessons to impoverished students without a fee. In return, he expected his colleagues and students to exhibit the same unswerving devotion to music that he felt."



SPOTLIGHT: LEAVING A LEGACY

**Welcome Stan & Nancy Kemmerer,
HSO's newest Encore Society members!**



process of providing fired employees a safe place, a reasonable hope, and a plan to process the difficult experience of termination, then coaching them in the search for new employment.

A California vacation, which included a small reunion of high school classmates, reconnected Stan with Nancy. A casual friendship that had begun years earlier blossomed into much more. The timing was right for Nancy to accept a promotion with IBM that brought her back to Connecticut and the rest, as they say, is history.

In 1999, with the bursting of the "dot com bubble," there was a spike in Stan's business. Nancy had just

Stan and Nancy were in junior high when they met in Sunday School, and later they attended the same high school as teenagers. They were friends, but not much more than passing acquaintances. After graduation, Nancy moved to California, fulfilling a lifelong yearning. As the west coast area security manager for IBM, she had a wonderful job that allowed her to travel to many of the west coast states.

Meanwhile, Stan became an ordained priest in the Episcopal Church, and he eventually found himself on the front lines of a conflict when the election of an openly gay man, The Rt. Rev. V. Eugene Robinson, as Bishop of New Hamp-

**"Giving back is in
Stan's DNA ..."**

shire, split the Episcopal Church. Those who opposed these actions left the church, and those who remained needed a compassionate ministry. Stan was asked to minister to three different parishes as each addressed the issue of openly gay clergy. Stan was well suited for the task. By that time, in addition to his work in the ministry, he had a successful twenty-five-year career in the outplacement industry, a new field founded by his mentor, James Challenger, whom he described as "a second father." Outplacement is the

recently retired from IBM, and her management skills made her uniquely suited to become Stan's logistics manager. They worked together with great success.

Nancy's only child by her second husband, a former Tuskegee Airman who had also worked for IBM, tragically died three years ago, leaving Nancy's only granddaughter, Scarlette, alone in California. An opportunity arose out of the tragedy. To the delight of all, Scarlette relocated to live with

Stan and Nancy in Connecticut, while she attends CCSU to pursue a degree in cyber security.

Music has always been important to both Stan and Nancy. No matter where he lived or worked, Stan's radio was always "tuned to the classical station." Stan's great-grandfather attended Trinity College in Dublin, was an organist, choirmaster and composer in Ireland, and the family sang in church choirs. Stan's deep love of music is in his genes. Together, they were CT Opera subscribers, when it abruptly closed its doors. Given the option to apply their unused subscription to the Hartford Symphony, they

Music has always been important to both Stan and Nancy.

didn't hesitate. They've been HSO subscribers ever since, enjoying not just Masterworks but Sunday Serenades and more. Summers bring more music, including trips to Music Mountain and Tanglewood.

Giving back is also in Stan's DNA, and Nancy, who grew up with parents that always helped neighbors in need, shares the same values. When things were tight, they still found ways to make donations, but

as finances improved, their level of philanthropy steadily increased. Nancy, now President-Elect of the Board of Directors of the Unitarian Society of Hartford (near the University of Hartford,) gives talks on the importance of giving and explains their view of philanthropy as follows:

"Stan and I have never lacked for anything because of what we gave away. Not once have we gone hungry or truly wanted for anything. If anything, by giving, we became richer in experience and gratitude. Giving is the road to new relationships. By giving, we've met people we never would have met, and enjoyed experiences we never would have had. Giving enriches us, helps someone else, makes us feel great and improves our life."

Stan agrees completely, and added something more:

"I know some people give anonymously. But for us, having our name on a list of donors means that we might be encouraging our friends and our neighbors to become charitable. That's important, because it's not how much you give, but the need to do what you can, according to your means."

Now, Stan and Nancy are thinking about the legacy they will leave for their community and for their granddaughter, Scarlett. In thinking about the organizations that contribute to the quality of their lives and the vibrancy of the community, they knew that the next logical step was to include such organizations in their estate plans. Happily, the Hartford Symphony Orchestra is included. "There is a need for music in everyone's life," explained Stan. "It brings us into


the day, and it takes us out of the day. This morning, I dressed to Beethoven's Violin Concerto!"

For Nancy, Stan and so many others, music is the soundtrack of life. Losing the Hartford Symphony, an important cultural institution, would be unthinkable. "So, we decided to do our part," explained Nancy, "and help make sure that this marvelous symphony will be here for others to find, long after we are gone."

As Encore Society members, Stan and Nancy now receive special invitations for multiple invitation-only events, such as the Opening Night reception that opens each new Symphony season, our Invited Dress Rehearsal & Receptions, and our extremely popular First Rehearsal and Nosh, which affords donors the opportunity to mix and mingle with musicians, enjoy a light supper together and then sit next to the musicians as they begin the FIRST rehearsal of a Masterworks concert. And there's so much more.

Are you interested in becoming a member of the Encore Society?

We invite you to create a living legacy, while enjoying our wonderful membership benefits. For a great conversation about creating your legacy and information about benefits, please contact Eric Hutchinson, Director of Development at 860-760-7321 or ehutchinson@hartfordsymphony.org

Thank you, Stan and Nancy. We extend a warm welcome to the HSO's Encore Society!! 

It's here! HSO's 46th Annual Young Artists Competition.

Together, let's launch the next generation of rising stars!

Thanks to you, our generous donors, HSO's Young Artists Competition (affectionately termed the YAC) has continued without interruption, even during the height of the pandemic. At a critical time, when educational programs and performance opportunities ceased for two years, HSO's Young Artists Competition provided young musicians with direction, focus and an important goal.

After two years of virtual competitions (2020 and 2021), we returned to the stage in 2022 – and again in 2023 – for a live and in person final round of the competition, featuring our five enormously talented finalists. The brilliant virtuosity of each of the finalists is always thrilling. In 2023, our judges had quite a challenge to select our three winners, listed as follows:

First Place winner: Aliza Creel, a senior at Pomperaug High School in Southbury, who performed the first movement of the Walton Viola Concerto.

Second Place winner: Mindy Zhao, a sophomore at Hall High School in West Hartford, who performed the first movement of Mendelssohn's Violin Concerto in E. Minor.

Third Place winner: Eli Gold, a sophomore at Simsbury High School, who performed the third movement of the Creston Concertino for Marimba.

If you missed it, please make sure to mark your calendars for the final round and closing performance of our 46th Competition, which will be held on Saturday, May 18, 2024, at 3 pm at the Theater for the Performing Arts, part of the Greater Hartford Academy of the Arts.

PLEASE COUNT ME IN AS A SPONSOR OF THE YAC!

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

I pledge: ___ \$1,500 ___ \$1,000 ___ \$500 ___ \$250 Other \$_____

to support the HSO's 2024 YOUNG ARTISTS COMPETITION

Please charge my pledge to the following credit card:

___ Am Ex ___ VISA ___ MC ___ Discover

Card No. _____ Exp Date: _____ Code: _____

Name as it appears on card: _____

OR: Please invoice me for my pledge using the following payment plan:

HSO's Young Artists Competition (YAC) is an instrumental competition, open to Connecticut residents in grades 9 – 12. From now through February 1, 2024, candidates are invited to apply online. As soon as the application window closes, we begin the difficult process of selecting those applicants who will proceed to a live semi-final audition. The final round (featuring five finalists) is held in a concert open to the public. As we did last year, the three winners, all of whom will receive cash prizes, will be announced immediately at the conclusion of the intermission, after performances by each of the finalists.

A performance with a professional symphony is an opportunity rarely granted to high school students, making this competition exceptionally important to young musicians. But this competition does not happen without you! Last year, our donors contributed nearly \$40,000, which helped to under-



Aliza Creel, first place winner.




Eli Gold, third place winner.

write the lion's share of the cost.

We cannot do this alone, and to succeed, we need ALL of you. If you missed the fun last year, here's your chance to join the excitement.



Mindy Zhao, second place winner.

All donors contributing \$100 or more receive one complimentary ticket to the final round. Donors of at least \$250 received two tickets and are included in the printed program. Donors of at least \$500.00, also listed in the program, receive four complimentary tickets to the performance. It's the chance to meet and speak with our young, inspiring finalists. And once again, this year, the post-concert reception is generously sponsored by the Hoffman Auto Group. 

Be part of the initiative – it's easy!

Just contact Eric Hutchinson, Director of Development, at 860-760-7321 or ehutchinson@hartfordsymphony.org to say you want be part of this very special event. Or use the simple tear-off sheet on prior page and return to Eric at 166 Capitol Avenue, Hartford, CT 06106.

Let's launch the next rising star – and the next generation of young musicians – TOGETHER.

MUSICIAN SPOTLIGHT

Gary Capozziello

HSO's new Assistant Concertmaster

Gary joined the HSO as a member of the second violin section in 2016. This past summer, he won an extremely competitive audition for the position of Assistant Concertmaster. All of us at the HSO were delighted to welcome him to this new leadership position, which is so well-deserved.

QN: Gary, you know all of us are so thrilled by your appointment as the new Assistant Concertmaster. How did you feel when you won?

One of the best moments of my life was learning I'd won the position! I had worked nonstop to prepare. Beyond musical ability, an audition is a mental challenge for every musician. Auditions are "blind" and held behind a black curtain so the applicant and the judges cannot see one another. Since I have been with the HSO since 2016, I knew I was being judged by my colleagues, which only increased the pressure. After three blind rounds, when the curtain came down, Carolyn Kuan and Lenny Sigal immediately embraced me. What a feeling! My HSO colleagues have become my family. So, receiving their hugs and accolades when the audition was over was emotionally overwhelming. I've made this community my home, so I wouldn't want to be anywhere else in the world.

QN: Tell us about your family.

I grew up in a working-class family in Bridgeport, and my parents, who didn't finish high school, certainly didn't have money for music lessons. Neither of my parents had any exposure to classical music. When a fire destroyed the apartment building where my parents lived, we moved to Fairfield (the Bridgeport side) and just having a different zip code brought very different opportunities. The schools gave me access to teachers and music lessons, which was an incredible gift, as my family could barely afford the increased housing costs. I started violin in school at age 8. I had no private training, but my curiosity prompted me to bring home violin method books from school and teach myself the exercises. I taught myself to play Vivaldi's A Minor Concerto, an intermediate piece well beyond my beginner level skills.



Gary Capozziello

I think my stubbornness kept me going. I became a member of the town-wide orchestra, and the conductor, Debbie Graser, must have seen some raw talent and hunger in me. Everything I've ever achieved is because of Debbie. She coached me through Allstate competitions and youth orchestras, introduced me to my future teachers and remains my mentor, friend, and musical guardian angel.



My family was shocked when I was accepted to SUNY Purchase as a violin performance major, and even more shocked when I decided to pursue my masters' degree at New England Conservatory in Boston. In 2019, I was granted a full scholarship to pursue a doctorate at the Hartt School of Music. I was in the middle of the degree in 2020 when the pandemic hit, my father died suddenly, and my mom became terminally ill. Losing both of my parents before I turned 30 is a trauma that is still hard to process, but finishing my degree and pursuing a musical path was the fulfillment of a promise I made to my mom before she died, because she knew how important music was to me. She wouldn't let me give up on myself.

QN: Beyond performing with the Hartford Symphony, where else do you work?

I teach violin at the Hotchkiss School in Litchfield County, and I am also Concertmaster and Personnel Manager of the Hotchkiss Philharmonic, a hybrid orchestra of the most dedicated students and music professionals from the surrounding area. We perform four concerts a year, which are free and open to the public.

QN: We know you have certain principles that express your views on music and life. Can you share those with us?

My values reflect what Yo-Yo Ma expresses every day of his life: Truth. Trust. Service. He's a musician, a teacher, and above all, a humanitarian. He believes that music can help to heal and improve the world, and I believe that is my calling as well. Beyond service to others, I see music as a lifelong quest. When Pablo Casals was 90 years old, someone asked him why he continues to practice, and he answered, "Because I think I'm making progress." That sums it up.

QN: You've already made a difference with the funds you helped raise during the pandemic. Can you tell us a bit more about that project?

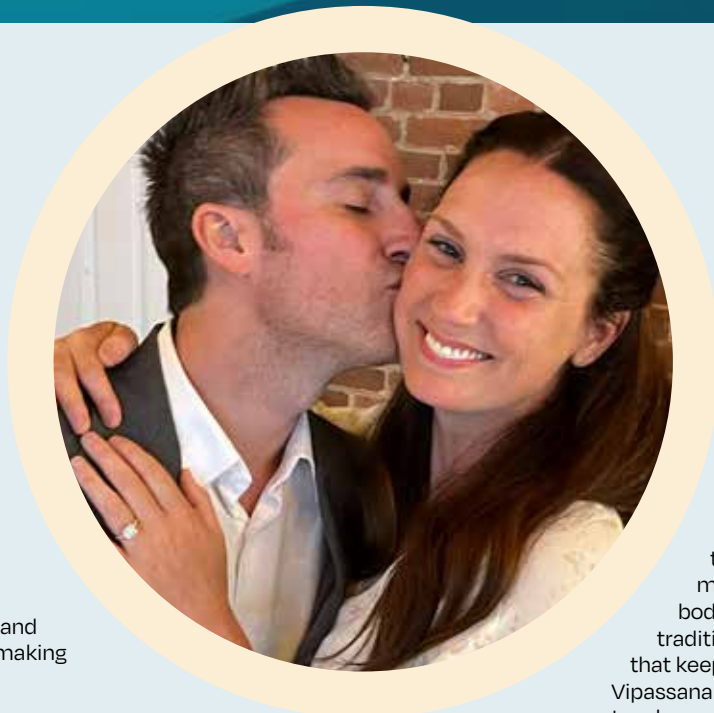
During the pandemic, I contracted Covid-19. Since I was teaching at Hotchkiss, I had income, but others were not as fortunate. To assist my fellow musicians who were struggling, I developed a social media campaign to raise money by posting videos of my own performances. My campaign raised \$7,000, which was donated to the Greater Hartford Arts Council, as they had created a program to make one-time grants to musicians. Others heard what I was doing and contributed more funds to augment my efforts. My campaign grew to \$20,000, which was distributed to musicians in need. I felt enormous gratitude in being able to make a small difference that helped 40 musicians receive outright grants of \$500 each.

QN: What makes your role as an orchestral musician so special?

It's what I've always wanted. Being in this orchestra since 2016 has given me a very close-knit family. Performing music with those you know best, and sharing that with others, is a unique gift, because the musicians and the audience share the experience simultaneously, but differently. It is such a profound experience to perform for an audience and receive back their energy in the same moment.

QN: What music do you prefer?

New composers! I am so lucky that the HSO performs the work of living composers, and I am passionate about championing those



Gary and Caroline

works because THAT is what keeps classical music alive. To keep this art form vibrant and alive, we must be open to new sounds, even if they sound strange to our ears the first few times.

QN: And what music is on your playlist?

My musical tastes are pretty varied! Since I played guitar as I was growing up, I love classic rock like Led Zeppelin.

But now I listen to more "indy rock" such as Lord Huron.

QN: What interests do you have besides music?

Learning as much as I can about natural healing. I have Crohn's disease, and the need to manage my own illness has made me very aware of how the body works. I have a great team of traditional doctors and naturopaths that keep me healthy. I've practiced Vipassana meditation for years and I also teach meditation in a musical framework. In summer workshops with PromiseK Bach+ Workshops, a retreat for violinists embarking on a musical career, I teach mindfulness, the Alexander technique, and of course, violin.

QN: And we know that a wedding is in your future!

Yes! My fiancé, Caroline, and I were engaged on July 30, 2023, and we have planned our wedding to be in June of 2024, on the farm where we now live in Salisbury, CT.

She is an actor and shares my values completely. Since moving here, I've become more involved in the outdoors, as part of my own health, and I've become avid about hiking, cross-country skiing, tending to our garden and paddleboarding. We also hold concerts on the farm, doing our part to bring music into people's lives. Our household includes two cats and a dog. During the pandemic, I adopted two feral cats, Dharma and Jhana, who are bonded sisters. They get along very well with Caroline's dog, Petruccio. Our farm is a very happy and peaceful place.

Thank you, Gary, and we hope our Quarter Notes readers will want to meet you in person. We are proud to share that an article about Gary was recently featured in a Berkshire magazine, *The Artful Mind*. The cover article about him may be viewed here: [The Artful Mind October 2023 issue by harryet candee - Issuu](https://www.artfulmindmagazine.com/2023/10/harryet-candee-interviews-gary-casals/).



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De-Composed: An exploration of the musicians we should know better!

“The last legal slave in America” is the title of a short documentary film about the life of Thomas “Blind Tom” Wiggins, an extraordinarily gifted musician, who was one of the most famous American entertainers of the 19th century and the first Black artist ever invited to perform at the White House. Born into slavery before the Civil War began, Tom was not released from bondage when the war ended. Rather, his former enslavers became his legal guardians, which meant they likely retained all of his considerable earnings.

Thomas Greene Wiggins, born on a plantation near Columbus, Georgia on May 25, 1849, was the third child of Charity and Domingo Wiggins, who were enslaved by Wiley Jones. Charity was 48 years old when Thomas was born. When it was discovered that Tom was born blind, Jones refused to feed or clothe the child who he deemed a useless burden. It wasn't long before Charity's entire family was put up for sale to settle Jones' debts. Charity made a bold plea to General James Bethune, a lawyer and newspaper editor in Columbus, to keep the family together, and the family was sold to General Bethune.

From his earliest years, Wiggins displayed a remarkable ability to mimic any sound he heard, from bird calls to trains, and by age two, could imitate any sung melody with unerring accuracy. In retrospect, many believe that Wiggins had undiagnosed autism, as well as “savant syndrome.”¹ Wiggins' new owners, the Bethune family, had seven musically gifted children, who sang or played piano, and young Wiggins listened as the children practiced. Amazingly, he was able to reproduce anything he heard on the piano and by age four, Bethune recognized the child as a musical prodigy. At first,



Thomas Greene Wiggins

Bethune's daughters were Wiggins' piano teachers, but as he surpassed their abilities, Bethune secured teachers for the boy, recognizing that the child's gifts were a potential source of income. In addition to his talent as a pianist, Wiggins was also a composer, and one of his published compositions, *Rainstorm*, was written when he was just five years old. (It is believed that he wrote over a hundred compositions, but of those only a handful were published. Columbus State University holds a small collection of Wiggins' original sheet

music.)

By the age of eight, Wiggins was taken on the road by an aggressive traveling showman named Perry Oliver, hired by Bethune. Oliver's demanding tour schedule for Wiggins included up to four performances a day. Wiggins became so well-known across the country that in 1860, at age eleven, President James Buchanan invited him to perform at the White House, the first Black entertainer to ever receive such an invitation.

In 1861, Wiggins was on tour in New York when his home state, Georgia, seceded from the Union. Wiggins and his manager, Oliver, returned to the south, but compounding Wiggins' exploitation, a series of events were scheduled for “the blind slave boy” to raise money for the Confederate cause. It is not known how much money was raised for that purpose.

Wiggins was 14 years old when he wrote his most famous composition. Inspired by a discussion he overheard about the Confederate victory at the Battle of Bull Run, Wiggins composed *The Battle of Manassas*, an eight-minute work that used a series of low, rumbling cluster chords to mimic the sounds of cannons and battle. The piece evokes fife and drum marching tunes and bugle fanfares, while the

¹Footnote:

¹The syndrome is defined as a condition in which persons with various developmental disorders, including autism, have astonishing islands of ability, brilliance or talent that stand in stark, markedly incongruous contrast to overall limitations.



Thomas Greene Wiggins at age 10.



high register includes snippets of songs from the times, including *The Battle Hymn of the Republic* and *Dixie*, representing the Union and Confederate armies. A performance of the piece by pianist Jeremy Denk may be enjoyed here: [The Battle of Manassas by Thomas "Blind Tom" Wiggins | Jeremy Denk - YouTube](#) During the pandemic, Jeremy Denk performed the piece during a livestreamed recital from the music venue, Caramoor, in October of 2020.

Wiggins' recall ability was astonishing. He could repeat political speeches he had heard months before, precisely mimicking the vocal cadence of the speaker, even in foreign languages unknown to him. On stage, Wiggins famously played three different tunes simultaneously: *Fisher's Hornpipe* with his one hand, *Yankee Doodle* with the other, while he sang *Dixie*, all in different keys. His performances invariably included a challenge in which an audience member was asked to play the

most difficult piece of music they could. Wiggins would then play the piece back exactly, flaws and all. His performance repertoire consisted of over 7,000 pieces of music, from hymns to popular tunes to classical music. There are countless testimonies to his incredible skills, even though such comments often reek of paternalistic or white supremacist attitudes, such as the comment with this description: "... no better than a highly-trained dog which can perform for the public's amusement."

In 1866, the Civil War ended. General Bethune took Wiggins, then 16, on a European tour, winning praise from many accomplished musicians. According to the biographer Geneva Handy Southall, Wiggins' repertoire included the most technically demanding works of Bach, Chopin, Liszt, Beethoven and other European masters. The composer and pianist, Ignaz Moscheles, deemed

him "a singular and inexplicable phenomenon."

Within a decade, Wiggins had become a touring musical phenomenon, earning up to \$100,000 per year (the equivalent of about \$3.4 million today), enough to make him among the best compensated performing artists of his time. Over Wiggins' lifetime, it is believed that in total the Bethune family received approximately \$750,000 (or \$25.4 million in today's dollars) from Wiggins' talents. At the height of his career, Wiggins received a \$20 monthly allowance, plus room and board. Occasionally his family received a small stipend from their former enslavers, but, in the words of Wiggins' mother, Charity, "they stole him away."

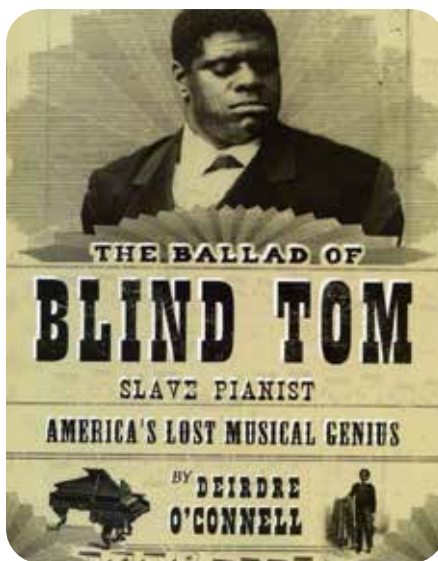
After the Civil War, despite the passing of the 13th Amendment that abolished slavery, Wiggins remained indentured to General Bethune, who convinced Wiggins' parents to sign a five-year agreement that gave Bethune legal guardianship. From that moment on, various members of the Bethune family retained guardianship of Wiggins until his death. Soon after the war, General Bethune transferred guardianship to his son, John, who used Wiggins' considerable income to support his own extravagant lifestyle. John toured the United States with



Wiggins, and in 1869, Mark Twain attended Wiggins' performance in San Francisco. Twain returned three nights in a row, and in an article he wrote for the local newspaper, he had high praise for Wiggins' talents.

In 1884, John Bethune died in a railway accident. Guardianship reverted to General Bethune, but Eliza, John's disgruntled widow, after a very brief marriage, filed for guardianship of Wiggins against her former father-in-law. Eliza, angered that she'd been left with nothing from John's estate, convinced Wiggins' mother, Charity, that they would both benefit financially from her son's earnings. In a highly publicized case in 1887 that was covered by the New York Times, Eliza won. When it quickly became clear that Eliza never intended to honor her financial obligations, Charity left and moved back to Georgia, leaving her son with Eliza.

With some rare exceptions, Wiggins rarely performed during the next two decades. He spent his final years confined to Eliza's home in Hoboken, New Jersey, which was purchased with Wiggins' earnings. He died of a stroke on June 13, 1908, at age 59. His death was a front-page story in newspapers nationwide, including the New York Times, but in a final act of disgrace to his talents and his person, he was buried in an unmarked grave. The brilliant musician who had earned so much for those who exploited him wasn't even allowed a headstone.



Initially, Wiggins was interred in the Evergreens Cemetery in Brooklyn, but some believe he was exhumed and reinterred in Columbus, Georgia. Today, two plaques, one in Brooklyn and another in Columbus (with funds

raised by the people of Columbus), mark the possible resting place of Tom Wiggins.

Tom Wiggins has achieved more recognition in recent years. Elton John's song, *The Ballad of Blind Tom*, from his 2013 album, "The Diving Board," is about Wiggins. The song may be heard at this link: [The Ballad Of Blind Tom - YouTube](#). The lyrics may be viewed here: [Elton John - The Ballad of Blind Tom Lyrics | Genius Lyrics](#). A full biography, *The Ballad of Blind Tom*, by Deirdre O'Connell, was published by Overlook Press in 2009, and several short documentaries about his life are available on line. For two examples, see: [Last Legal Slave in America in CabanTV on Vimeo](#) and [** Blind Tom** How a Blind Slave Boy Became a Piano Prodigy & Musical Genius | #BlackExcellist - YouTube](#)

Source materials include:

[Thomas "Blind Tom" Wiggins - New Georgia Encyclopedia](#);
[He Was Born Into Slavery, but Achieved Musical Stardom - The New York Times \(nytimes.com\)](#);
[Last Legal Slave in America in CabanTV on Vimeo](#);

[Thomas "Blind Tom" Wiggins - Klinkhart Hall Arts Center](#);
[The story of Thomas 'Blind Tom' Wiggins, a 19th-century piano prodigy born into... - Classic FM](#)
[The Tragic Story of America's First Black Music Star | Arts & Culture | Smithsonian Magazine](#)

