

# HARTFORD SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA WINTER 2024-2025 QUARTER NOTES

## ON THE MOVE WITH CLAYTON STEPHENSON, HSO's 24/25 JOYCE C. WILLIS ARTIST IN RESIDENCE



**Clayton Stephenson**



Pianist **Clayton Stephenson** working with Students at the Ana Grace Academy of Arts, Bloomfield

This year, Artist in Residence Clayton Stephenson is continuing the excellent work of his two predecessor artists, and with our new season now underway, Clayton has already met and worked with so many students in the Metro-Hartford community.

On September 18, Clayton worked with the students of the Ana Grace Academy of the Arts, a magnet school in Bloomfield that draws students from 30 different Connecticut towns. To an enraptured audience of 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> graders, Clayton described his own journey and his passion for music, explaining that his first piano was one that had been discarded by a local organization. When the children performed some prepared selections, they were delighted to find he could accompany them on piano. At Clayton's urging, the children played a song in a major key and then played the same song in a minor key to illustrate how key changes can alter the emotions conveyed through music.

Those who met Quinn Mason or Melissa White know that HSO has had extraordinary musicians participate in our Artist in Residence program. The program is made possible by a generous grant from the Roberts Foundation For The Arts, in loving memory of Joyce C. Willis, a staunch advocate for diversity in the arts, and a former Board member of both the Hartford Symphony Orchestra and the Roberts Foundation.



Grace Academy draws students from 30 different towns

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HSO PROGRAMS ARE FUNDED IN PART BY:





Clayton's selfie with East Hartford Mayor Connor Martin



Clayton with East Hartford piano student



Master class at Hartt School Community Division

The next day, Clayton was again in the classroom, but this time with middle school students in East Hartford who were surprised to encounter his ability to play any genre of music on the piano, including hip-hop. Clayton and the students welcomed East Hartford Mayor Connor Martin to the session. Throughout all, Clayton's message was simple: while it's important to play what your teachers recommend, you should also play what you love, because that's how you improve and that's what keeps your passion alive.

On November 12<sup>th</sup> Clayton shared his journey and his music with a piano class at the Charter Oak Cultural Center, and later that day, worked with 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade orchestras at the Lincoln Middle School in

Meriden. He spent the afternoon of November 13<sup>th</sup> at the Greater Hartford Academy of the Arts, and the next day included visits to South Windsor High School and a master class for piano students at the Hartt School Community Division. Clayton's week ended on November 15<sup>th</sup> with a visit to Hall High School and Cedric Middle School.

Beyond his important work in our community, Clayton was featured as the soloist on HSO's December masterworks performing Tchaikovsky's Concert for Piano No. 1 in B-flat minor. Did you miss it? If so, you'll have a second chance to enjoy Clayton's electrifying musicianship in June, when he will perform Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue*. To




Clayton and students at Lincoln Middle School in Meriden



Clayton with students of the Greater Hartford Academy of the Arts

whet your appetite, click the link to watch Clayton perform the solo version of Gershwin's iconic work. [Clayton Stephenson plays George Gershwin: Rhapsody in Blue](#) Bear in mind that in June, he'll be performing the orchestral version with the HSO. Get your tickets now!!

Can we lure you in with an extra treat? Here's Clayton performing one of his favorite encores: [Clayton Stephenson plays an encore, "Tom and Jerry Show" by Hiromi Uehara.](#) 



# MEET CELLIST ESTHER BENJAMIN, one of HSO's new fellows!

**A**s detailed in the Summer 2024 issue of *Quarter Notes*, the start of HSO's 2024-2025 season heralded a special initiative that was in the planning stages for over a year: the inauguration of a fellowship program specifically for string musicians from historically underrepresented racial and ethnic groups.

Musicians whose racial and ethnic identities reflect the community we serve make our performances, education and social impact programs more meaningful and impactful for the audience and community members we strive to reach. A fellowship program of this nature is supported by the League of American Orchestras, many other orchestras and rostered members of symphonies throughout the world. The fellowship supports pathways for more musicians of color into the world of symphony music. Although our model is our own, it mirrors similar initiatives now in place at some of the larger symphonies.

For the HSO, the process of selecting fellows involved a competitive audition process that brought us two gifted musicians, cellist Esther Benjamin, and bassist Samantha Donato. You have already seen them on the stage as they performed on the opening masterworks of the season. In this issue of *Quarter Notes*, it is our pleasure to introduce you to Esther.

The youngest of three daughters, Esther was born in London, England, where much of her extended family still resides. Her immediate family relocated to the United States when she was five years old, and eventually settled in Huntsville, Alabama. Her father, a theologian,



Esther Benjamin (second from left) with her parents and teacher, Michael Reynolds (second from right.)

accepted a position with Oakwood University, an historically Black Seventh Day Adventist institution. Esther attended K-12 instruction at Oakwood Academy, a school affiliated with the college. Her mother works as a nurse.

Esther's interest in music began playing the piano by ear, and she started her formal musical journey with piano lessons. She briefly experimented with violin as part of the school's program in 4<sup>th</sup> grade, but quickly decided that the resonant sound of a "big" instrument – the cello – was better suited for her.

Music education at Oakwood Academy was contracted to a local music school run by Dr. Renee Collins, and it was Dr. Collins who nurtured Esther's musical discovery, who encouraged her to audition for the Huntsville Youth Orchestra and who helped her prepare for the audition process. After starting cello lessons in 9<sup>th</sup> grade, Esther was elated when she won first chair in the junior-level orchestra, and she proudly recalls that she was principal cellist of the senior-level orchestra during her last two years of high school.

It was never Esther's plan to follow a path in music. She had her sights set on becoming an astro-physicist and planned to study mathematics in college. But somehow, music continued to draw her closer. During her college years at Oakwood University, she joined the premier choir, The Aeolians, a group she'd heard perform as a child, under the direction of Jason Max Ferdinand. In addition to performances with the choir, Esther continued cello lessons with Ariana Arcu, the assistant principal cellist of the Huntsville Symphony Orchestra. By the time graduation rolled around, Esther had changed her career goals. She wanted to pursue music. Immediately following graduation, she began graduate studies at Boston University and her cello professor, Michael Reynolds, is Snow Director of the School of Music at BU.

Coming from a small university and a very small southern town, the



Esther and HSO's A Piacere Quartet in performance on Nov. 2, 2024 at the American Mural Project.

move to Boston was overwhelming. "Culture shock," says Esther, "doesn't begin to explain it. There were suddenly so many great musicians, so much competition. I knew that whatever I thought was my best was not enough. I had to top that, learn more music in a shorter amount of time, and try to catch up to the other students who I believed were ahead of me." The real challenge was juggling everything: working at the local Apple store to support herself, studying, learning more music and spending late night and early morning hours in the practice rooms to make up for lost time. Esther spent five years in Boston, securing a Master's Degree in cello performance and music education certification.

In the final year at BU, Esther spent time teaching general music at a local Boston charter school but decided that she wanted to continue her academic studies. She was accepted at the Hartt School of Music, and is now in her second year there, pursuing a DMA, with graduation expected next year.

If you thought Esther was only interested in cello, you'd be wrong. Her choir director from Oakwood, Jason Max Ferdinand, the director of Choral Services, now Choral Director at the University of Maryland, has formed a separate choir, the Jason Max Ferdinand Singers, and Esther has been a member of that choir, in addition to her work as a cellist. As a member of that elite singing group, Esther appeared on Saturday Night Live with Jacob Collier and Coldplay, and earlier this year, the group sang at the famed BBC Proms in Royal Albert Hall in London. Esther is working hard but she is also having



Jacob Collier (left) with Esther (center) and Coldplay's Chris Martin (right) at their SNL performance

the time of her life. A one-minute snip from the SNL appearance may be viewed here and you can see Esther, who is front and center: [SNL with @coldplay !!!! | TikTok](#)

Esther knows she is lucky to have the full support of her family. While both of her parents love all forms of music, she is the only one in the family to have music as a profession. As a child, a career as a classical musician was the furthest thing from Esther's intentions, but her parents have always supported her. They attended each of her recitals in Boston, and when she performed



Esther and the Jason Max Ferdinand Singers at the BBC Proms in Sept. 2024




with the Hartford Symphony for the first time in September 2024, they were in the audience.

Esther was thrilled to win the audition which led to her fellowship and now, she feels even more confident when her first professional audition presents itself. She sees a real future in music, combining teaching and performing. She was delighted to find two Boston University friends at the Hartford Symphony: Michael Duffet (HSO Principal Second Violin) and HSO's other fellow, Samantha Donato (bass.) It is a small world indeed.

Esther is busy! Between school, performing and her work at the Apple Store in West Farms Mall, she has almost no "down time." An avid reader, finding time to read is a luxury, but she somehow manages to indulge her other interests: art, photography and history.

In addition to her work on our "mainstage", Esther has also been performing with various ensembles as part of our work in the community. She has already performed as part of HSO's *A Piacere* string quartet at Duncaster, as part of the HSO's Musician's Care program, bringing music to those with mobility issues, and the quartet also performed as part of the American Mural Project on November 2, 2024. More performances are already lined up for the spring 2025.

Welcome to the HSO, Esther! We know how lucky we are to have you with us. 

# HSO EXTENDED

## Introducing HSO Extended – the newest HSO series!

On November 5, 2024, an enthusiastic crowd of all ages filled the house to capacity at Hooker Live in downtown Hartford to enjoy *I Want My 80s*, a musical tribute to the 1980s. The event was the first in our newest series, *HSO Extended*. With drinks in hand and nibbles to enjoy, patrons clapped, whistled and sang along to "hits from the 80s." Four great onstage musicians, violinists Simon Bilyk and Candy Lammers, violist Michael Wheeler and cellist Adam Willson, took turns engaging with the audience, introducing the music and encouraging audience participation, which triggered energetic and lively responses from the gathering.

*HSO Extended* is part of HSO's deliberate plan to create engaging and relevant programming for our diverse community. The series builds on last season's hugely successful "I'm Every Woman" concert that honored female recording artists during Women's History Month in March of 2024. HSO's programming in the community reflects the symphony's commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion and intentionally includes music selections that reflect the community in which we live and work.

Our next offering in the *HSO Extended* series, *Say It Loud*, will take place on February 4, 2025, and, in honor of Black History Month, will feature Black artists whose music will make you want to tap your feet and sing out loud. If you missed the first one, you won't want to miss the next! Join us!

***We thank our HSO Extended sponsors, wonderful community partners BUDR and Minuteman Press Hartford!***



DE  
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**De-Composed: An exploration of the musicians and composers we should know better.**

Works by **Ulysses Simpson Kay**, a highly regarded African American composer of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, are rarely performed these days, even though Kay composed more than 140 pieces for orchestra, chorus, chamber ensembles, piano, voice, organ and band, plus five operas and scores for film and television. Kay was the first Black American to win the Prix de Rome, an honor he received *twice*. The good news is that today, several orchestras and musicians have begun to rediscover his work and his legacy.

**K**ay was born into a musically talented family in Tucson Arizona on January 7, 1917. His mother, Elizabeth Kay, was the church pianist, his stepbrother played the violin, and his stepsister played piano. His maternal uncle was the internationally acclaimed jazz trumpeter King Oliver, who was a mentor to Louis Armstrong. Kay was surrounded by music at home, and, with the encouragement of his famous uncle, he began to learn piano at age six and violin at age ten, adding alto saxophone at the age of twelve. As a youngster, he formed a jazz quintet and performed on saxophone while composing and arranging music for the group. While in high school, he belonged to the glee club, the marching band, and the jazz band, and attended performances of every imaginable style of music.



Ulysses Simpson Kay

Kay enrolled at the University of Arizona, initially as a liberal arts major, but changed his area of study to music with encouragement from the renowned composer William Grant Still. After graduating with a degree in music education in 1938, Kay received a full scholarship to the Eastman

School of Music in Rochester, N.Y., to pursue a graduate degree in composition. Kay earned a master's degree in composition, and some of his orchestral compositions were performed between 1938 and 1940 while he was still a student at Eastman. Those early works included *Sinfonietta for Orchestra*, *Concerto for Oboe and Orchestra* and his ballet, *Danse Calinda*. Upon graduating from Eastman, Kay won a scholarship to attend Tanglewood (then known as the Berkshire Music Center) in 1941, where he studied with Paul Hindemith, and with Hindemith's encouragement, Kay won a scholarship to study at Yale in 1941-1942, which allowed him to continue composition studies with Hindemith.

In 1942, with the outbreak of World War II, Kay joined the U.S. Navy and played in the band, acquiring further



Kay in the U.S. Navy, 1942



Kay and his wife, Barbara



Kay, Barbara and children, Virginia (top center), Melina, Hilary

proficiency on many other band instruments including flute and piccolo. In 1947, after the war, Kay was awarded the Alice M. Ditson Fellowship which enabled him to study composition at Columbia University. He spent numerous summers at the Yaddo Festival, a community in Saratoga Springs, N.Y., that invites artists from multiple disciplines to reside in a nurturing environment conducive to the creation and development of their art. Kay's ongoing music studies were financed by a series of prestigious scholarships and awards that included the Julius Rosenwald Fellowship (1947) and a Fullbright Scholarship (1949), as well as the Guggenheim Foundation and the National Institute of Arts and Letters. In addition, Kay was a two-time recipient of the Prix de Rome (1949, 1951) and was the first African American to receive that prestigious award.

Kay met pianist Barbara Harrison at a party in Chicago in 1946. Harrison was an accomplished musician who was born in Harlem on October 29, 1925. She was raised by her fraternal grandmother in Chicago and attended Chicago Teachers College as well as Chicago Musical College. On August 20, 1949, three years after they met, Harrison and Kay were married in New York.

As Kay had just been awarded his second Prix de Rome, the couple moved to Italy so Kay could continue his studies in residence at the American Academy in Rome.<sup>1</sup> During their three years in Rome, Harrison gave private piano lessons, taught music at the Anglo-American Overseas School in Rome, and

studied Italian, Russian, French and German. The couple's first daughter, Virginia, was born in 1951 while they were in Rome. Kay's composition, *Umbrian Scene*, commissioned by the New Orleans Philharmonic in 1963, memorialized the composer's love of Italy. A recording of the piece by the Louisville Orchestra may be heard here: [Umbrian Scene \(youtube.com\)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UmbrianScene)

When the Kay family returned to the U.S. in 1952, Harrison initially taught English and social studies in the public schools in Harlem. The couple had two more daughters, Melina (1957) and Hilary (1959), and today, Hilary Kay is a composer who performs her own music with Kate Freeman in an ensemble called *Wildsang*.

In 1958, during the Cold War, the U.S. State Department included Kay in the first state-sponsored cultural exchange with the Soviet Union. Kay joined Roy Harris, Peter Menin and Roger Sessions in visits to Moscow, Leningrad, Tiflis and Kiev over the course of roughly thirty days. A groundbreaking and sold-out concert of the works of the listed American composers was held in Moscow on October 15, 1958. The concert included Kay's *Of New Horizons*, a piece written for concert band that was completed in 1944 while he was still in the Navy. That work had been premiered by the New York Philharmonic Orchestra at Lewisohn



Stadium on July 29, 1944. When the ambassador-composers returned to the U.S., *Hi-Fi Review* published Kay's account of the trip entitled, "Thirty Days in Musical Russia." Many years later, Kay's oldest daughter Virginia recalled joining her father to welcome the reciprocal group when they arrived at New York's LaGuardia Airport, and remembered handing a bouquet of flowers to the famed Russian composer, Dmitri Shostakovich.

At some point during the late 1950s or early 1960s, Kay and Harrison resettled in Englewood, NJ. From 1953 to 1968, Kay worked as a music consultant for BMI (Broadcast Music, Inc.), the major U.S. performing rights organization, while simultaneously serving as a visiting professor at Boston University (summer of 1965) and at the University of California (1966-1967). In his diary entries in 1967 and 1968, Kay noted that he had received teaching offers from nine different colleges and universities including U.C.L.A. and Hunter College in New York. Ultimately, in 1968, Kay accepted the offer from Lehman College and was appointed

<sup>1</sup> The American Academy in Rome was created in 1894 by Charles Follen McKim, financed by U.S. philanthropists J.P. Morgan, John D. Rockefeller and William Vanderbilt, as a "place for select U.S. scholars and artists to gather ... to commune, exchange ideas, think, create and generally be exposed to the great cultural repository that is Rome and its history-steeped surrounding countryside."



Distinguished Professor of Music at the Herbert H Lehman College of the City University of New York, a position he held until his retirement in 1988.

During the 1960s, as Kay worked on numerous commissions while working fulltime at BMI and Lehman College, Harrison was also busy as a civil rights activist. She participated in the Mississippi Freedom Rides during the summer of 1961. Her efforts to advance civil rights led to her arrest in Jackson, and she was held in three different jails including the Parchman Penitentiary, for a total of roughly 60 days, on the charge of "breach of the peace." Upon returning home, Harrison participated in the Englewood Movement, in which Englewood residents took over city hall to protest racial segregation in the schools in 1962. She was again arrested and held for two weeks in the county jail in Hackensack, NJ. During the boycott of the Englewood schools, Harrison opened a Freedom School in the basement of the couple's home. In 1966, Harrison joined James Meredith's "March Against Fear" in Mississippi, and later continued as an active member of the New Jersey chapter of CORE, the Congress of Racial Equality. Many of the details



Barbara (right) with activist Tom Haydn, marching in Mississippi's "March Against Fear"



Barbara (center), Ulysses (right) with William Schuman (left), then president of Juilliard

of her activism were recorded in interviews conducted in 1979 by the Columbia University Oral History Office.

Throughout the course of his academic studies and postings, Kay composed extensively. In addition to the compositions mentioned previously, other notable works, composed during and immediately following his time at Columbia, included *Suite for Strings* (composed in 1947 and premiered by the Baltimore Chamber Orchestra), *Concerto* (1948) and the film score for *The Quiet One* (1949). In 1954, Kay composed his second major orchestral composition, *Serenade for Orchestra*, commissioned and premiered by the Louisville Symphony.

Kay's style of composition was considered neoclassical and timeless, and not necessarily reflective of his early roots in jazz and church spirituals. He was moved to compose works in dedication to notable

personalities who, in his view, advanced the cause of human and civil rights. In 1961, U.N. Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld lost his life in a plane crash while attempting to establish peace in the Congo and South Africa. Kay's 1964 musical tribute to the fallen civil rights leader, *Markings*, the same title as Hammarskjöld's book, was commissioned by the Meadow Brook Music Festival, thanks to the resources of the Detroit Symphony. Kay's notable *Essay on Death* (1964) was a tribute to President John F. Kennedy. His opera *Frederick Douglass*, completed in 1985 was, in Kay's words, "written out of interest for the human condition," and was mounted in April of 1991 at the New Jersey State Opera, with Kevin Maynor in the title role and Kiara Barlow as Helen Pitts Douglass. His complete ballet, *Six Dances*, was performed in its entirety by the Houston Ballet in the winter of 1983. The piece may be heard here: [Ulysses Kay \(Six Dances for String Orchestra\) \(youtube.com\)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UlyssesKaySixDances)



During an interview with the composer in 1985, Kay expressed enthusiasm about the number of highly qualified new composers, but he was also a realist, and understood that, in his words, "there's not a great deal of room in the market for all of these talented composers." Kay explained the dilemma as follows:


*"[Mounting a new composition] is hard work! It takes more rehearsal time. It costs much more to perform and almost any contemporary piece is going to cost more than anything from before the Baroque through Brahms."*

Kay recognized that smaller orchestras, with smaller budgets and limited means, faced economic challenges that invariably erected barriers to the performance of newer works. To make matters more complex, Kay acknowledged that audiences have their own opinions and tolerance for new works:

*"Then it becomes a matter of the audience. The conductor feels he's doing a cultural teaching thing [by programming the music of new composers] but in many communities, there's a large audience that's just beginning to experience concert music in a formal sense."*

In 2020, during the recent pandemic, Boston Symphony Orchestra violist Mary Ferrillo was searching for viola repertoire and stumbled upon Kay's *Sonata for Viola and Piano* which, in her words, "blew her away." As Ferrillo

set her sights on performing the piece composed 80 years earlier, she contacted the American Composers Alliance for performance rights and learned that her performance of the piece would be a world premiere. It was another violist, Juliet White-Smith, a student at Eastman, who discovered the piece in the 1980s while searching the school's library for viola music by Black composers. White-Smith explained that she was in search of "music by people who looked like me." A decade later, as a busy academic, White-Smith contacted the composer by phone and to her surprise, wound up in a conversation with Kay, who was delighted that his work was being performed and asked her to forward a copy of the music to him because he had never retained a copy of his own works. That conversation took place in 1993, and Kay died two years later. Thereafter, White-Smith was instrumental in getting the music published and was elated to learn it would be performed in a world premiere by Mary Ferrillo and pianist Brett Hodgdon at Tanglewood in August of 2020. A recording of the piece White-Smith unearthed and Ferrillo premiered that evening may be heard here: [Ulysses Kay - Sonata for Viola and Piano \(1942\) - YouTube](#)

Kay was still living in his Englewood, NJ home at the time of his death on May 20, 1995, from complications due to Parkinson's Disease. It is noteworthy that when he died, Kay was still actively composing, at work on a composition for the New Philharmonic Orchestra. 

**We hope that learning more about Ulysses Kay has inspired you to listen to more of his thoroughly approachable and compelling compositions, and we offer the links below for your enjoyment:**

Enjoy Kay's work *Concerto for Orchestra*, performed by the Minnesota Orchestra and conducted by Scott Yoo, was recorded on October 6, 2021: [Ulysses Kay - Concerto For Orchestra \(youtube.com\)](#)

The world premiere of *Chariots: An Orchestral Rhapsody*, written in 1978, was premiered by the Philadelphia Orchestra on August 8, 1979, with Ulysses Kay conducting: [Ulysses Kay: Chariots: An Orchestral Rhapsody \(1978\) \(youtube.com\)](#)

This recording of Kay's orchestral piece, *Symphony*, written in 1967, was performed by The Juilliard School orchestra conducted by Jean Morel: [Ulysses Kay: Symphony \(1967\) - YouTube](#)

Kay's *Sonata for Bassoon and Piano* may be heard here: [Ulysses Kay - Sonata for Bassoon and Piano | HEAR Classical - YouTube](#)

Source Materials:  
[Ulysses S. Kay \(1917-1995\) • \(blackpast.org\)](#)

[Ulysses Kay | Encyclopedia.com](#)

[Ulysses Kay | 20th Century, Jazz, Orchestral Music | Britannica](#)

[Ulysses Kay \(aseatatthepiano.com\)](#)

[Ulysses Simpson Kay \(1917-1995\) - Find a Grave Memorial](#)

[AfriClassical: Ulysses Simpson Kay, African American Composer Born Jan. 7, 1917](#)

[Columbia University Libraries Online Exhibitions | Ulysses Kay: Twentieth Century Composer](#)

[Why It Took 80 Years For A Piece By Acclaimed Black Composer Ulysses Kay To Have Its World Premiere | WBUR News](#)

## Meet the newest members of the Hartford Symphony Orchestra!

In 23/24, the HSO welcomed ELEVEN new musicians to the orchestra, all of whom were highlighted in our Autumn 2024 edition of *Quarter Notes*. Since then, we've added another eleven musicians to the HSO roster, as auditions held for piano, trumpet, cello, percussion, violin and viola produced a new pool of incredibly gifted musicians, who competed for the few coveted positions. The musicians who won their jobs in the Fall of our 24/25 season are the best of the best and we are proud to introduce them to you.

recalls the concerts and knows that the experience had a strong influence on his desire to become a professional musician. Kyle's special interests include art films and photography, and he enjoys creating short films which provide creative fulfillment and like music, carries the power to evoke thought and reflection. On occasion, Kyle also plays with the Norwalk Symphony Orchestra in Connecticut.

**Nickolas Kaynor, Section Viola**, is from Melrose, Massachusetts, where he grew up in a family of musicians including a harpist mom, a fiddler

**Andrew Knebel, Section Viola**, grew up in Norwalk, CT and now lives in Westchester County, NY. Neither of his parents have backgrounds in music, but they both encouraged him to study a string instrument when the opportunity was offered in 3rd grade. While others picked violin, Andrew knew he wanted to play viola and from the moment he picked it up! Andrew also teaches music privately and at a private school. Andrew and his wife love to travel and recent adventures have included the Adirondacks, Maine, Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia, Saint Lucia, Bermuda, Paris, and



Kyle Davis, Section Viola



Nickolas Kaynor, Section Viola



Andrew Knebel, Section Viola



Wanxinyi Huang, Section Viola

### Meet our **FOUR** new violists:

**Kyle Davis, Section Viola**, comes from a musical family. His mother is a pianist and each of his three siblings has played a musical instrument, including piano, viola, cello, and guitar. Kyle was born in Houston, Texas, but grew up in Shreveport, LA, and recalls that as a child, he was often brought to see his local symphony perform. He fondly

dad, a cellist brother, and two pianist siblings. Outside of performing, he enjoys making transcriptions and arrangements of works by inspiring artists such as Mister Rogers, J.S. Bach, and Cher, among others. Nickolas also has a passion for repairing inexpensive, broken instruments and transforming them into unique decorative scordatura pieces.

Australia! When not wearing concert black, you'll most likely see Andrew wearing purple every day in honor of his wife's mother, who passed away from pancreatic cancer. Fifteen years ago, his wife organized the Westchester Pancreatic Cancer Walk in her mother's memory, which, over that time, raised over \$4,500,000 for pancreatic cancer research. Andrew also performs with the Eastern



Connecticut Symphony and the Norwalk Symphony.

**Wanxinyi Huang, Section Viola,** was born in Chengdu, China, a city located in the southwest of the country, and most famous for hotpots and pandas! She is currently living in New Haven, Connecticut, studying at Yale. While none of her family members are musicians, she is grateful to her mom who encouraged her to choose an instrument to play so she would have a future “hobby.” She heard a violin performance that she thought was “cool” and luckily, her first violin teacher was gentle, interesting and set her on a wonderful career path. Wanxinyi loves hiking and her fondest memories of childhood

Carolina, and grew up watching his parents perform in the Charleston Symphony Orchestra. His mom plays the violin, his dad is a cellist, and both his sister and brother play the cello. As might be expected, having parents and siblings who are musicians was a big part of his childhood, which naturally led to fun opportunities to perform with his parents, siblings, and other family members over the years. Benjamin also loves to play card and board games with the family when together. When not making music, Ben enjoys watching movies, experimenting with home crafts, and exploring other areas of study.

**Meet our new pianist:**  
**Yujin Lee, piano,** is originally from

of Violin, Clarinet, Cello and Piano. Yujin’s hobbies include reading and taking long walks. She recently began reading books by South Korean author Han Kang, who won the Nobel Prize for literature this year. See: [Han Kang wins Nobel Prize in literature 2024 for ‘intense poetic prose’ | CNN](#)

**Meet our new percussionist:**  
**Evan Glickman, Section Percussion,** is originally from Old Bridge, New Jersey and began playing music in his high school marching band. He first started on keyboard percussion (marimba, xylophone, vibraphone) and quickly developed an interest in all percussion. In college, being exposed to all kinds of music for the first time made him fall in love



Benjamin Kremer, Section Second Violin



Yujin Lee (second from left), piano



Evan Glickman, Section Percussion



Reid Harman, Bass Trombone

were taking road trips to hike in the high altitudes of the surrounding Sichuan basin in China. She has enjoyed ice hiking, rock climbing and just walking in the mountains and her dream is to visit all the national parks in the United States.

**Meet our newest violinist:**  
**Benjamin Kremer, Section Second Violin,** is from Charleston, South

Korea and emigrated to the United States in 2013. Her mom was a piano teacher and was also a choir member. Yujin fondly recalls always singing with her mom, even joining together to sing pop music or folk songs. Yujin regularly attends numerous summer music festivals. She also is part of a performing quartet, Strata, that has been together since 2022, consisting

with percussion, which set him on a path in music. Although his dad was casually interested in the guitar, Evan is the first professional musician in his family. Evan enjoys cooking and all kinds of physical exercise and performs with numerous other groups including the Rhode Island Philharmonic, the Allentown Symphony, the New Bedford Symphony, Orchestra Iowa

and the Des Moines Symphony and Opera. If you are curious to see what Evan does, check out this video: [Casey Cangelosi - Sleight of and Evil Hand for snare drum and metronome - YouTube](#)

### **Meet our new bass trombone:**

**Reid Harman, Bass Trombone**, was born in State College, PA and raised just outside of Chicago, Illinois. Reid currently lives in New York City. He is the only musician in his family but was raised with a love of classical music by his parents, who are avid listeners and supporters. Outside of the practice room, Reid finds great joy in card games, board games, and rock climbing!

### **Meet the newest members of our trumpet section:**

**Dovas Lietuvninkas, Principal Trumpet**, was born in Chicago, and, while he is the first professional musician in his family, he was surrounded by music from an early age (particularly Lithuanian folk songs and dances, having grown up in Chicago's Lithuanian American community). His love of folk music continues to this day, and he sings and plays guitar, accordion, cornet, and Lithuanian *kanklės* at various folk jams and happenings in Providence, Rhode Island, where he now resides. Professionally, Dovas is also Principal Trumpet of the New Haven Symphony Orchestra and is part of a trumpet trio, **something something trumpet**, whose aim is to bring new music to new audiences throughout New England and beyond. In the rare moments when he is not making music, he also enjoys teaching, cooking, reading, hiking, and petting dogs. If you are curious about Dovas' trio, you can find more about them right here: [something something trumpet](#)



Dovas Lietuvninkas, Principal Trumpet



Alison Marseglia, Third Trumpet



Amy Butler, Principal Cello

**Alison Marseglia, Third Trumpet**, is from Stonington, CT and attended Baylor University in Texas for her undergraduate degree. While she is not from a musical family, she was introduced to orchestral music at a very early age. From the time she was very young, she always wanted to play the trumpet, and her parents confirm that she asked them for a trumpet when she was just four years old, so for Christmas that year, they bought her a plastic toy one! Alison enjoys arranging music for various ensembles, mainly brass quintet, and loves hiking and exploring nature. She is also a proud member of the very prestigious United States Coast Guard Band and is about to celebrate her one-year anniversary with them.

### **Meet our new principal cellist:**

**Amy Butler, Principal Cello**, is originally from Michigan, which she loved as a small child because the snow came up to her waist (at least) and she didn't know what people meant when they spoke of "shoveling." And now, every winter, Amy is disappointed if the snowfall is less than "significant." Becoming a professional musician felt natural for Amy. Her mom is a gifted pianist and growing up, there was classical music in her house all the time. Amy recalls that she foolishly tried the violin before happily settling on the cello. Amy has a dog and loads of cats which makes cooking, her other passion, challenging, as they are always underfoot.

We are delighted to have brought on so many new musicians this year and as others join the HSO, we will be sure to introduce them to all of you in future editions of *Quarter Notes!*







2024 YAC winner Michael Sigal, with Adam Boyles, HSO's Assistant Conductor

**T**ogether, 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. HSO's Young Artists Competition consistently provides young musicians with direction, focus, and an important goal.

HSO's **Young Artists Competition (YAC)** is an instrumental competition, open to Connecticut residents in grades 9 – 12. Candidates are invited to apply online, with a deadline of January 3, 2025. We begin the difficult process of selecting those

applicants who will proceed to a live semi-final audition. If you know of a talented young musician, please encourage them to apply through the HSO website here: [Young Artist Competition | Hartford Symphony Orchestra](#)

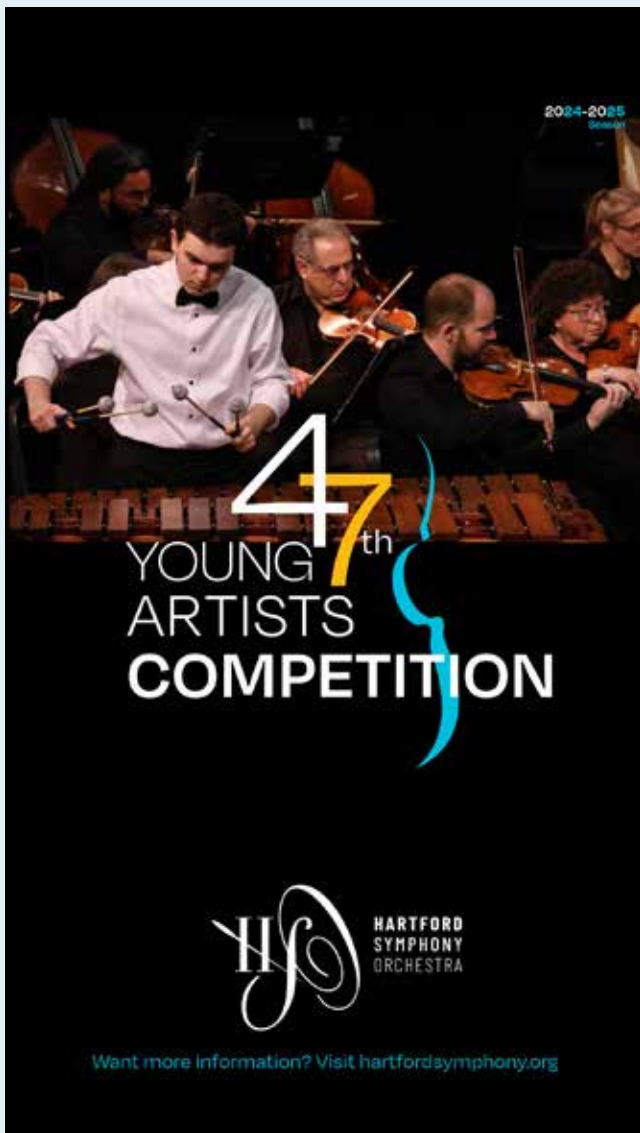
Each year, the HSO proudly welcomes an enthusiastic public to enjoy the in-person **final** round of the competition, featuring five enormously talented finalists. The brilliant virtuosity of each of the finalists is always thrilling. In May of 2024, the three winners selected by a panel of independent judges were:

**First Place winner: Michael Sigal**, a senior at Fairfield Ludlowe High School, performed the first move-

ment of the Saint-Saëns Violin Concerto No. 3 in B minor. This fall, Michael began his freshman year at the University of Indiana as a double major in foreign policy and violin performance.

**Second Place winner: Eli Gold**, a junior at Simsbury High School, performed the first movement of the Séjourné Concerto for Marimba.

**Third Place winner: Jackson Hill**, a home-schooled student from West Hartford, performed the first movement of the Walton Concerto for Viola. Jackson, already a student in The Juilliard Pre-College division, entered Juilliard College as a freshman in the Fall of 2024.



**Our two runners-up were:**

**Matthew Li**, a sophomore at the Loomis Chafee School in Windsor, CT, performed the first movement of the Mozart Concerto No. 3 in E-flat major for French Horn,

**Max Salzinger**, a junior at The Hotchkiss School in Lakeville, CT, performed the first movement of the Dvořák Concerto in B minor for Cello.

If you missed last season's performance, don't let it happen again! Please make sure to **mark your calendars** for the final round and closing performance of this season's 47<sup>th</sup> Competition, which will be held on **Saturday, May 17, 2025, at 3 pm** at the Theater for the Performing Arts, part of the Greater Hartford Academy of the Arts.

Aside from the monetary prize that is given to each of the top three winners, 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!

***We cannot do this alone, and to succeed, we need ALL of you.***

***If you missed the fun last year, please consider attending – and supporting – this important initiative.***

**Be part of the initiative – it's easy!**

Just contact Eric Hutchinson, Director of Development, at 860-760-7321 or [ehutchinson@hartfordsymphony.org](mailto:ehutchinson@hartfordsymphony.org) to say you want be part of this very special event. Or use the tear-off sheet below and return it to Eric at 166 Capitol Avenue, Hartford, CT 06106.

**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 2025 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: \_\_\_\_\_

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





## FOUR HELPFUL TAX TIPS for 2025!

### 1. Super-sized 401(k) and simple IRA catch-up contributions for people aged 60 to 63

For 401ks: Effective for the 2025 tax year, active participants aged 60 through 63 can contribute the greater of the following: \$10,000 or 150% of the 2024 catch-up contribution limit that is indexed for inflation. In 2025, the total limit for 401(k) contributions for those aged 60 to 63 is \$10,000.

For simple IRAs: The new catch-up contribution limit for folks aged 60 to 63 will increase to the greater of \$5,000 or 150% of the regular age 50 catch-up contribution limit for simple IRA plans in 2025. Cost of living adjustments will begin in 2026.

Account holders can take advantage of this additional catch-up contribution if they attain age 60

but are not older than age 63 by the end of the 2025 calendar year.

### 2. You can maximize the mandatory IRA Distribution:

Starting with the year you reach 72 (or 73 if you reach 72 after December 31, 2022), you are required to take a Required Minimum Distribution (RMD) from your IRA and retirement plan accounts. Since such retirement accounts were funded with pre-tax dollars, the income tax must then be paid on the minimum distribution in the year it is taken by the owner. Depending on your tax bracket, this could mean a significant increase in your income. ***If you are looking for the best tax advantage for your charitable gifts, using a Qualified Charitable Distribution (QCD) is a GREAT strategy.***

A QCD is a direct transfer of funds from your IRA custodian, payable to

a qualified charity. QCDs are used to satisfy your required minimum distributions (RMDs) for the year, thus eliminating any income tax on the QCD.

In addition to the wonderful benefits of supporting a worthwhile cause, using a QCD excludes the amount donated from your taxable income. Keeping your taxable income lower may reduce the impact on certain tax credits and deductions, including Social Security and Medicare.

QCDs don't require that you itemize, so that means that even if you decide to take advantage of the higher standard deduction (\$30,000 for a married couple filing jointly in 2025), you can still use a QCD for charitable giving.

***How to maximize an RMD from your IRA:*** Starting on January 1,



2025, and at ANY TIME before the end of 2025, instruct your IRA advisor or manager to make the required distributions directly to a registered 501c3 nonprofit of your choice, and the entire amount of that distribution will NOT be subject to ANY income tax. This is an opportunity to eliminate tax obligations on the RMD. The entirety of the RMD can be directed to a single gift or broken into multiple gifts, and **all tax consequences** on funds designated as charitable gifts (QCD's) **are eliminated**.

### 3. Other helpful tips for 2025 planning:


- IRA Contribution limits and deadlines. You can make 2024 contributions to Roth or traditional IRA until April 15, 2025.
- Excess contributions. If you exceed the 2024 IRA contribution limit, you can

withdraw excess contributions from your account by the due date of your tax return (including extensions). If you don't, you must pay a 6% tax each year on the excess amounts left in your account.

- Required minimum distributions (RMDs). Remember that you face an excise tax on any RMD that you fail to take on time. You must calculate the RMD separately for each IRA that you own other than any Roth IRAs, but you can withdraw the total amount from one or more of your non-Roth IRAs.

### 4. You can make gifts of appreciated stock!

If you've been holding stock for at least a year, you may be fortunate enough to have enjoyed significant increases in your stock or mutual fund holdings.

If you sell the stock, those great gains will be taxed (both federal and state) as ordinary income, a minimum of roughly 28% if you live in Connecticut. **BUT** – you can make the gains work to your advantage. If you've held the stock for more than a year, call your favorite charity, tell them you want to make a gift of stock and enjoy a DOUBLE WIN! You pay NO tax on the transaction, AND you may deduct full market value of the stock on your tax return. You get a tax break, and your favorite non-profit benefits. Once you've decided, instruct your asset manager to make the stock gift in accordance with the directions of your chosen charity. Instructions for making a stock gift to the Hartford Symphony Orchestra are on our website. [Make a stock donation | Hartford Symphony Orchestra](#) 

### EXTRA BONUS:

Do you (or did you) work for an employer that has a matching gift program? If you're unsure about matching gift opportunities, go to your employer's website to check it out. You just might double your gift!



**QUESTIONS?** Always consult your own tax specialist for proper guidance and advice, but if you have questions about HSO policies and suggestions, please contact Eric Hutchinson, Development Director, at 860-760-7321 or at [ehutchinson@hartfordsymphony.org](mailto:ehutchinson@hartfordsymphony.org)



## STAFF SPOTLIGHT

# EMILY RAFALA

## HSO Production Manager

**Emily began her position with the HSO in September of 2024 and after just a few months, it's clear Emily not only has the unique talents needed for her challenging job but is a special person who immediately bonded with the rest of the team. Our recent interview with Emily will help you get to know her a little better.**



**QN: Emily, we are thrilled that you joined the team, and we know you moved here from Los Angeles for this job. Were you always in California?**

I'm a Connecticut native and I am thrilled because this job brought me home! I was raised in Southington, and my earliest interests were music and dance. I am a proud graduate of the Greater Hartford Academy of the Arts!

**QN: Tell us more about your earliest interests in the arts.**

My first interests were drumming and karate, but for me, karate meant movement, which translated to dance, so by the age of eight I was part of a musical theater group in Plainville. I was drawn to the combination of movement and music, which of course led to a love of musical theater. In high school and college, I was very involved in dance, either as the dance captain, the "swing" (who had to learn ALL the parts), or the choreographer. I began in two high schools: The Academy

of Math & Science, as well as the Arts Academy, but when the Arts Academy moved into the Colt Building, I learned I could not attend both schools. I chose the Arts Academy. After graduation, I went to Shenandoah University and was accepted into an accelerated program that included a Bachelor of Fine Arts in musical theater plus a Master's degree in performing arts leadership and management. While I loved performing, I knew that I needed the training to take on a leadership role in the arts, so my graduate degree in arts leadership and management was the perfect solution for me.

**QN: Were your parents supportive of your goals?**

Oh yes, but they also wanted to make sure I was fully aware that the arts can be a tough road. It's something you must really want in order to stick with it. As a 6-year-old, I watched the 2001 movie "Josie & The Pussycats" and that made me want to become a drummer! I saw a mini drum kit in

the window of The Music Shop and begged my parents for it. They relented and my AOL screenname became DramaDrummerEm. My dream came true because for a time, I got to join the 'power trio' and originated a comic book character named Trula Twyst. I became one of the Pussycats! When my parents saw that I was determined and had a plan in addition to a dream, they knew they had done their job, namely, to make sure I had the determination to pursue the path I had chosen. I like to think that all those years with a loud drummer-child paid off.

**QN: What did you do after earning your master's degree?**

I went out to California! I wanted to see what the west coast could offer. I already had experience working as a summer events coordinator at a venue in Southington and worked as an intern with the front of house staff at the Goodspeed Opera House in East Haddam. My adventures

in L.A. led me to a position as the venue manager for The World Famous Laugh Factory, a comedy club on Sunset Blvd, where I learned the ropes of production: booking talents, managing a team of employees, and I was responsible for overseeing the many venue spaces including all the equipment. I was there for four years, and I then got a job as an executive assistant with a major talent agency in L.A., managing and recruiting clients, handling special events and more.

**QN: So, what brought you back to CT from California?**

It was the job description for the HSO! I had started to become interested in returning to the east coast and when a friend of mine showed me the job posting at the Symphony, it felt like it had been written with me in mind. My time in L.A. helped me to understand that I wanted to be closer to the stage and closer to the actual art. My first interview with the HSO was on Zoom, while I was still in L.A., but my plan to relocate back to CT was already in the works. After that first interview, I knew I wanted to work with the HSO, and in fact, I turned down another job offer while I was waiting to hear back from the Symphony.

I always felt that I was meant to be here.

**QN: Now that you're here, do we meet your expectations?**

Absolutely! I am so impressed with how communicative the team is and Nathan, the Director of Artistic Operations, is a joy. He is patient, thorough and takes the time to ensure that I can be the best at my job. Also, he's hilarious! I am back in the world of music and could not be happier.

**QN: We know you are a drummer, and do you play any other musical instruments?**

Of course, being in musical theater I sing – and there's piano and ukelele as well.

**QN: We hear you have a unique hobby – can you tell us about it?**

I guess you are referring to the fact that I'm an aerial hoop artist, also known as the lyra. I started learning aerial skills while I was in LA, because hanging from the lyra teaches you balance, focus and priorities! When you are in the world of production, your life is going a thousand miles a minute and you are juggling so many tasks simultaneously. Being on the lyra helps you learn how to focus on each task separately,

which helps you get the job done more efficiently. I go to Air Temple Arts in Woodbridge, near New Haven – and when I'm dangling from the lyra, I am focused on staying in the air. It's a form of meditation for me. I also love roller blading and in Connecticut, there are plenty of fun trails to explore.

**QN: Did you move back to CT as a single?**

My boyfriend from LA moved with me. Danny is an actor/producer so his decision to leave LA with me was a compelling commitment. He was born in Colombia, grew up in Miami, attended Syracuse University for theater, and we have been together for four years. He loves adventure, nature and has the best senses of humor!

**QN: And our last question. What kind of music do you enjoy?**

Everything! I adore musical theater (my favorite is Cabaret), and my tastes swing from punk rock to disco to jazz to the American Songbook like Irving Berlin and Cole Porter. And thanks to Spotify and my work at the Symphony, I'm exploring so many different genres of music. I love it all. 