

# QUARTER NOTES

## WELCOME CURTIS STEWART!

### 2025-26 JOYCE C. WILLIS ARTIST IN RESIDENCE

**A**s we begin the HSO's 2025/26 season, we are thrilled to welcome our newest Joyce C. Willis Artist in Residence, six-time Grammy Award-nominated violinist and composer Curtis Stewart.

A New York City native, Curtis was surrounded by music from the moment of his birth. His mother is Elektra Kurtis, a soulful and gifted Greek jazz violinist, and his father, Bob Stewart, is a jazz tuba pioneer. For Curtis, music was the very definition of joy. He adored the community of musicians that surrounded his parents, and he stepped into the world of music at a young age. When he was three years old, his parents took him to a music shop and urged him to choose 'something he liked.' While he loved the shiny and complex mechanisms of the clarinet, having a mom who was violinist made for an easy choice. He soon began Suzuki violin lessons and was immersed in the warm community at the Harlem School of the Arts. Curtis had no idea where his path would lead, and while music was always exciting and energizing, a teen-aged Curtis had many other interests including



Curtis Stewart, 2025-2026  
Joyce C. Willis Artist in Residence.  
Photo by Titilayo Ayangade

math, science and engineering. Curtis attended LaGuardia School of Performing Arts, where his father was a teacher. An English teacher recognized his writing skills and encouraged him on a writing path but ultimately, Curtis chose the University of Rochester, where he pursued a dual path in math and music.

Upon graduation, Curtis moved back to New York City. Despite his plan to pursue a career in music performance, he wasn't accepted at any of the graduate programs where he auditioned. While his parents never pressured him to choose that path, he knew that the music community he met in his parents' home was important to him, and he wanted to remain connected to a world where people valued and supported one another. Without clear plans for continued study, his father encouraged him to enroll in the music education program at Lehman College, part of the City University of New York. Curtis took his father's advice, and at the same time, remained involved in the New York City music scene. He went to jam sessions, formed a string quartet, was doing reading sessions with

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Curtis Stewart: A budding violinist with his parents



Curtis as a young Suzuki violin student

Jessie Montgomery, and created his community, which included a cutting-edge spoken word/music trio called the Mighty Third Rail. When offered the chance, Curtis took a full-time teaching job at LaGuardia Arts, his high school alma mater.<sup>1</sup>

Curtis loved his work as a teacher and was one of the few at the famed high school who taught music outside of the classical canon. He taught orchestra, music theory and strings. In his own words, Curtis was a tough teacher who demanded a lot from his students. He was strict about lateness and expected students to meet the demanding curriculum he created. He pushed his students to do their best. At the same time, he was pushing himself to be the best teacher he could possibly be. As his own performing career expanded, he made the difficult decision to leave

<sup>1</sup> LaGuardia Arts is part of the New York City school system (originally known as the High School of Music and Art on Convent Avenue in upper Manhattan, which merged with the LaGuardia School for the Performing Arts when it moved to its current location near Lincoln Center). Famous graduates include Jennifer Aniston, Nicki Minaj, and Wesley Snipes, to name just a few.

teaching and had no idea of the impact he'd made on the students until he announced his planned departure. His students were deeply disappointed, and begged him to stay, revealing how much he was revered and respected.

Today, Curtis is on the faculty at The Juilliard School and remains committed to helping his students explore every facet of musical expression. His own words are the best expression of his thoughts about music and teaching:

**“Classical musical is a tiny niche of an already tiny corner of the world. For those of us who are ‘insiders’ in music, there is a rich history that we understand and treasure, but compared with the rest of the world, all of music – with all the different styles combined – is just one tiny marble. I often think of the scene in *Men in Black* where an entire universe is located inside just one locker unit. To be relevant to those outside of music, we have to find what is**

**musically meaningful to us and to our audiences, so that we can reach as many people as possible and introduce them to the widest possible variety of music.**

**That’s what I search to find in my music and my work as a teacher.”**

In his opinion, classical music is the “arts and crafts” table of music. The term encompasses a wide variety of sounds and explorations, which gives us permission to explore and experiment with the creation of music that involves entirely new sounds or evokes different or complex emotions. Curtis observes that classical music is vastly different from pop music, which, to him, feels more like “camp”: everyone can sing along, the chords are familiar, and the musical direction is more easily anticipated. But unlike pop music, classical music can feel like the opposite of camp: invariably, it evokes images of “formal, upscale and restrained.” Curtis explained that in writing music, he wants to bring the “feeling of camp” into the concert hall. He endeavors to create a powerful shared sense of community in a space that was associated with “exclusivity.” And, says Curtis, “When it works, the results are magical.” His goal is for EVERYONE in the concert hall to feel a simultaneous sense of belonging, community and connection.

The first composition by Curtis that the HSO will perform is *Seasons of Change*. In Curtis’ words, it is a re-composition of Vivaldi’s *Four Seasons*, featuring the voices of unhoused people from Phoenix, Arizona. Curtis wrote the piece as an exploration of the impact of climate change on people, namely, those

struggling without shelter or basic resources. The twelve movements of the composition echo small pieces of Vivaldi's original work but add new and different rhythms that reflect Curtis' heritage.

Curtis is looking forward to his residency with the HSO and observed that it is vastly different from any other residence he has undertaken. Curtis has been involved in residency programs with other orchestras for short periods of time, generally not more than a week. The HSO residency program is much more intense. Unlike most other residencies, the HSO program involves repeated week-long visits over the course of a year, requiring the resident artist to engage with many different communities, including schools that do not have adequate arts or music programs. Curtis knows that each workshop will depend on the unique qualities of the population, and he is already thinking about ways to ensure that every workshop will feel fresh and vibrant. No doubt, Curtis will be able to draw on his own 9-year teaching experience with New York City high school students.

In his many roles as performer, teacher and composer, Curtis sees all musical expression as a healthy coping mechanism and a way to help us process our emotions:

**"All of us have complex emotions and feelings, which may be celebratory, sad or confusing, but music gives us a personal place in which to process those feelings. It offers a safe space surrounded by a community that may also be experiencing those same emotions. There can be a lot of ego involved in our relationship with music, which might dictate**

**how we fit in, the group we belong to, or how we see ourselves.**

**When music is recognized as an outlet for emotions that we cannot explain or fully understand, music is then understood as a positive way to express human qualities that might otherwise be expressed in more negative ways such as unhealthy competitions or even battles."**

Curtis is a one-of-a-kind artist who strives to welcome all with his music and his energy. We are all in for a treat in the 2025/2026, and if you want to sample some of the passion, emotion and talent that Curtis brings to his music, just watch his performance in the series *Elevator Music*, created by the Chicago Symphony



Photo by Titilayo Ayangade

Orchestra, which reflects his own unique musical and cultural heritage: [Curtis Stewart - Elevator Music at The Chicago Symphony - YouTube](#)

**Curtis, welcome to the HSO!** 

## **ABOUT THE HSO ARTIST IN RESIDENCE PROGRAM AND AN APPEAL FOR FUNDING:**

The Artist in Residence program at the Hartford Symphony Orchestra was begun in the 2022/23 season, thanks to a generous grant from The Roberts Foundation in memory of Joyce C. Willis, a champion of diversity and excellence in the arts, and a former Board member of both the Hartford Symphony Orchestra and The Roberts Foundation. While the Roberts Foundation grant supported the program for three consecutive seasons, the HSO, recognizing the importance of the program, made a commitment to continue it. Partial funding for the 2025/26 position is made possible by the J. Walton Bissell Foundation, and the HSO is actively seeking other funders to underwrite the program this season. 

**You can make a difference in the lives of students in our community with a special gift to the HSO. For more information, contact Eric Hutchinson, Director of Development, at [ehutchinson@hartfordsymphony.org](mailto:ehutchinson@hartfordsymphony.org).**

# Want to Make New Friends? HOST A MUSICIAN!

**T**he life of a musician involves far more than the challenging routine of daily practice and performance. It also involves traveling. Lots of traveling. And that's where you can make a difference.

Today, many orchestral musicians throughout the country have multiple jobs, performing with multiple ensembles in multiple cities. Part of their life necessarily includes hours of work-related travel by car, train or plane. And that kind of demanding travel can be exhausting and even dangerous, as musicians race to get to the rehearsal hall on time, often traveling considerable distances. They need a home base, a home-away-from-home, and the ability to practice when needed.

Nine years ago, the HSO found the answer: the Musician Host Program, a unique program that helps musicians feel welcomed and protected when they perform with the Hartford Symphony Orchestra. Safe housing means not traveling long distances late at night. It means being rested, focused and performing at the highest level. But best of all, for hosts and musicians alike, it means new and lasting friendships have been formed.

The Musician Host Program creates bonds that will last a lifetime. Not

only are the musicians smiling, but there are smiles on the faces of our host families, taking pride in their new friends on the stage. This is YOUR chance to make the best friend you have not yet met: a musician of the Hartford Symphony.

## Just listen to what people say about hosting!

This past season, the community of HSO hosts were responsible for 170 individual hosting stays for our musicians. As the HSO welcomes the 10 new musicians who will join our ranks in the 25/26 season plus two new graduate string musicians joining our special Fellowship program, the demand for hosts increases.

Our hosts routinely encourage others to join. **Marshall and Sandy Rulnick**, who have hosted HSO principal trombone Brian Diehl from the moment that the program began, have routinely raved about their experiences and just recently, Sandy told us:



“No one can whistle a symphony. It takes a whole orchestra to play it.” -H.E. Luccock



**“No hassle, no fuss!**

**Just joyous fun! What a very special honor to participate in the HSO musician hosting program. As hosts, we have had the opportunity to be drawn into and learn more of what “composes” our wonderful HSO.”**



Trombonist Brian Diehl with Sandy and Marshall Rulnick

**Karen and Phil Will**, hosts for trombonist Mike Shayte, were delighted when their grandchildren, Owen (9) and Luca (6), first learned about the trombone from Mike while he was staying at the Will household. Owen, now a 6th grader, began trombone lessons as a 4th grader at the Noah Webster School, because "he is now tall enough and his arms are long enough, and he can hear the notes as the slide moves!"

**Keith and Catherine Stevenson**, new hosts in the 24/25 season, told us,



**"Having (HSO principal clarinet) Sangwon Lee as our guest has enriched our lives in a variety of ways.**

**Our breakfast conversations are always fascinating and span a wide range of topics. We have gotten privileged insight into the world of talented young musicians. And hearing him rehearse is a rare treat!! It goes without saying that we would highly recommend this program to any music lover who has space."**



Karen and Phil Will's grandchildren with trombonist Mike Shayte

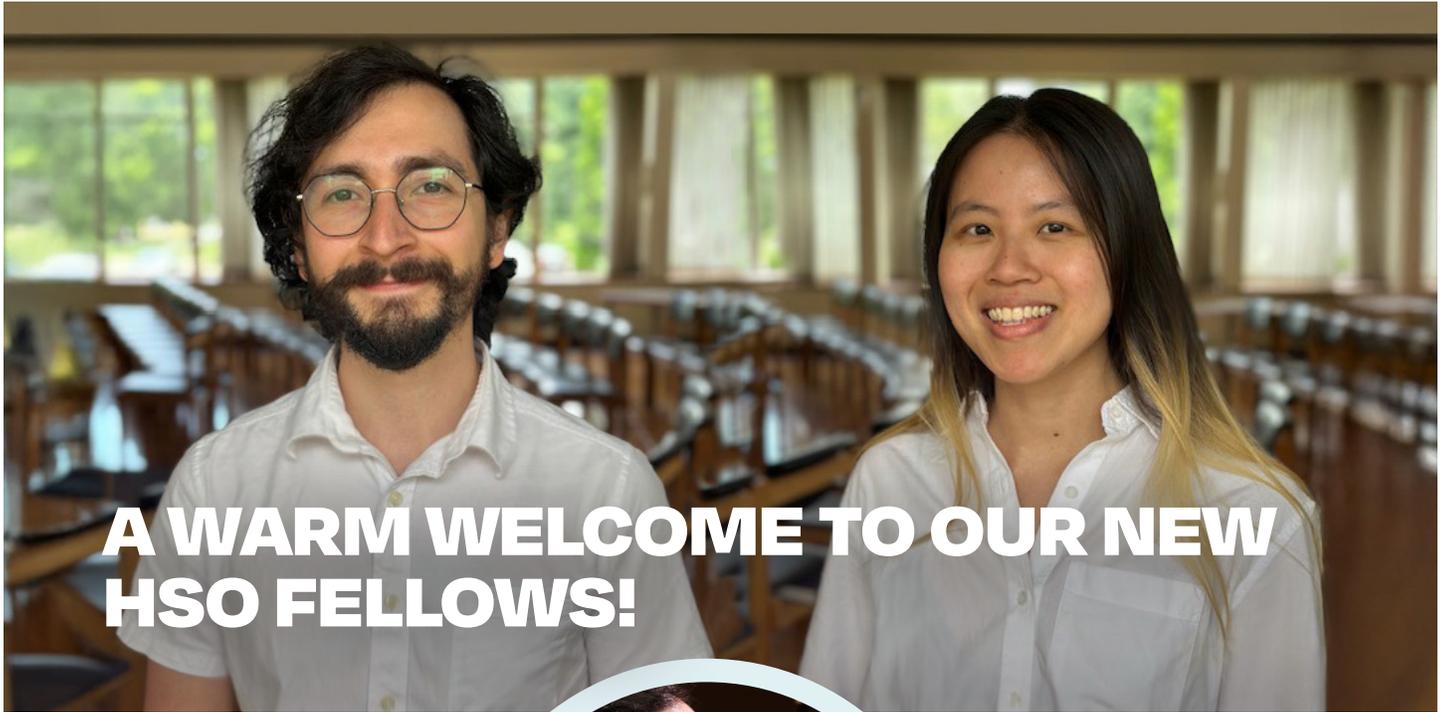
## We make hosting EASY!

What does it take to be a host? All have one thing in common: the desire to become friends with musicians. Space is also a factor, and hosts must have an extra private bedroom in their home with a separate private bathroom. If you meet the first two elements and you have an inquisitive nature that delights in meeting new people and expanding your horizons, you fit the definition of a perfect HSO host.

Hosting does NOT require that you commit to a schedule, because we respect the fluctuating schedules and personal needs of our hosts. Are you a winter snowbird? Not a problem – we'll put hosting on hold and circle back when you are ready. Concerned that hosting might interfere with family or vacation plans? Conflicts are never an issue: you host ONLY when it is convenient for YOU.

**Please - feel free to reach out to Ruth Sovronsky, former Director of Development and current Development Consultant, and she'll be happy to explain how it works. Her cell phone is 516-448-6549 or she can be reached at [rsovronsky@hartfordsymphony.org](mailto:rsovronsky@hartfordsymphony.org).**





# A WARM WELCOME TO OUR NEW HSO FELLOWS!

In the summer of 2024, we introduced our Quarter Notes audience to a new program at the HSO that had been in planning for well over a year: the addition of a fellowship program specifically created for string musicians from historically underrepresented racial and ethnic groups.

Having musicians in the HSO whose racial and ethnic identities reflect the community we serve make our performances, our educational, and social impact programs more meaningful and resonant for the audiences 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 worldwide. The fellowship supports pathways for more musicians of color to enter the world of symphony music. Although our model is unique to the HSO, it mirrors similar



Fellow Josué Alfaro Mora

initiatives now in place at some larger symphonies. The program offers a two-year fellowship to each selected string musician, and is structured so that two new musicians join each year as the two longest-standing fellows complete their terms, resulting in a class of four fellows at any given time.

For the HSO, the process of selecting fellows involves a competitive audition process that gave the HSO two gifted musicians for the 2024/25 season: cellist Esther

Benjamin and bassist Samantha Donato. You have already seen them on stage and met them through past Quarter Notes issues.

Esther and Samantha, who started last year, are now in the final year of their fellowship but are joined by our newest members, Josué Alfaro Mora (double bass) and Sarah Ng (violin). In this issue of Quarter Notes, we are delighted to introduce you to Josué, who was on stage as we opened the new season with Masterworks on September 26, 27, and 28, 2025.

Josué was born in Costa Rica, and, after completing his undergraduate studies at the Instituto Nacional de la Música, a government-run music conservatory of Costa Rica, he came to the United States to pursue his graduate studies. He was granted a full scholarship to attend the University of Central Florida in Orlando as an OPUS scholar, a program that includes a partnership with the Orlando Philharmonic Orchestra, providing students

with performance opportunities alongside a professional ensemble. After earning his master's degree in Florida, Josué was accepted into the prestigious graduate studies program at Yale University, and he is now pursuing his second masters in double bass performance.

Josué's journey and achievement are exceptional: he did not begin formal music studies on his instrument until he was 18 years old. Josué recognizes that most music students begin focused training at a young age and admits that he "had a lot of catching up" to do to make up for lost time. He points out a positive side benefit to starting a music career at an older age: "Putting everything I have into music has helped me grow in so many ways I did not anticipate." He believes that music has opened the door for him to explore and develop skills in languages, psychology, biomechanics, history, and more.

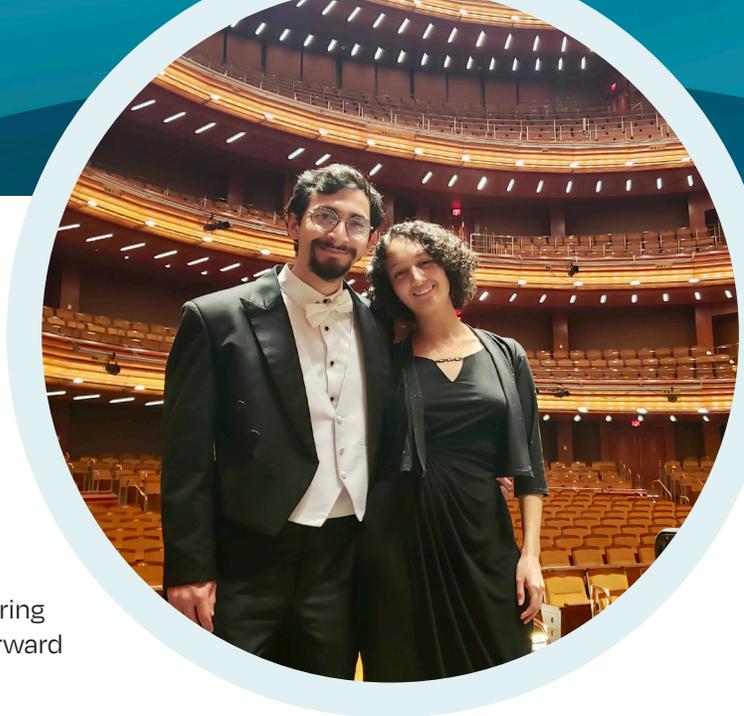
Josué grew up in a house filled with music. Although no one in his household played an instrument, his mother regularly sang in the church choir, and his extended family of aunts, uncles, and grandparents routinely sang at gatherings, whether at home or in church. With music as a constant presence in his life, Josué began experimenting with instruments at the age of 16, starting with the electric guitar, which he learned to play for a rock band. Later, he enrolled at SiNEM (or Sistema Nacional de Educación Musical), a program in Costa Rica that promotes the development of children and adolescents through musical education. Based on the El Sistem model founded in Venezuela, it provides orchestral

training as a tool for social development. At SiNEM, he had opportunities to learn from a gifted teacher, Rumano Solano, the Assistant Principal Bass at the Richmond Symphony and a master builder of high-quality double basses. After hearing him play, Josué's path forward became clear.

Josué met his wife, a violinist named Irene, when they were both students at the Instituto Nacional de la Música. She was also accepted into the same program to study at the University of Central Florida—one of many musical experiences they have shared since they met.

Josué is also an experienced and dedicated teacher. Since programs like SiNEM are not fully funded, advanced students enrolled in the program are asked to help by teaching others. Josué began teaching double bass early in his musical journey. He later became a conductor for the program and was eventually appointed music director of the youth orchestra operated by SIFAIS La Carpio, another powerful social project in Costa Rica that uses music and art to transform the lives of children and adolescents.<sup>1</sup> For more about SIFAIS, watch this brief video: [Fundación SIFAIS | Sistema Integral de Formación Artística para la Inclusión Social | Amigos of Costa Rica](#)

At Yale, Josué is part of the Music in Schools Initiative and in



Josué and his wife Irene on stage at the Dr. Phillips Center for the Performing Arts, Orlando, Florida

addition to his work with Yale undergraduates, he is already involved in an after-school program with the New Haven public schools, using his experience and passion to teach younger students. He reflects on the importance of the arts in education:

**"The arts are so impactful on young people in their formative years, and opportunities to learn and experience the arts must be encouraged whenever possible."**

Given his roots in a rural environment, it is no surprise that Josué feels most comfortable outdoors. He credits his grandfather, a farmer, for instilling his love of nature. Josué's favorite activity outside of music is hiking. "No matter what I feel, it is always improved when I am outdoors. It clears my head and makes me more aware of my surroundings." And his other hobby? Chess.

**Welcome to the HSO, Josué! We are honored to have you with us.**



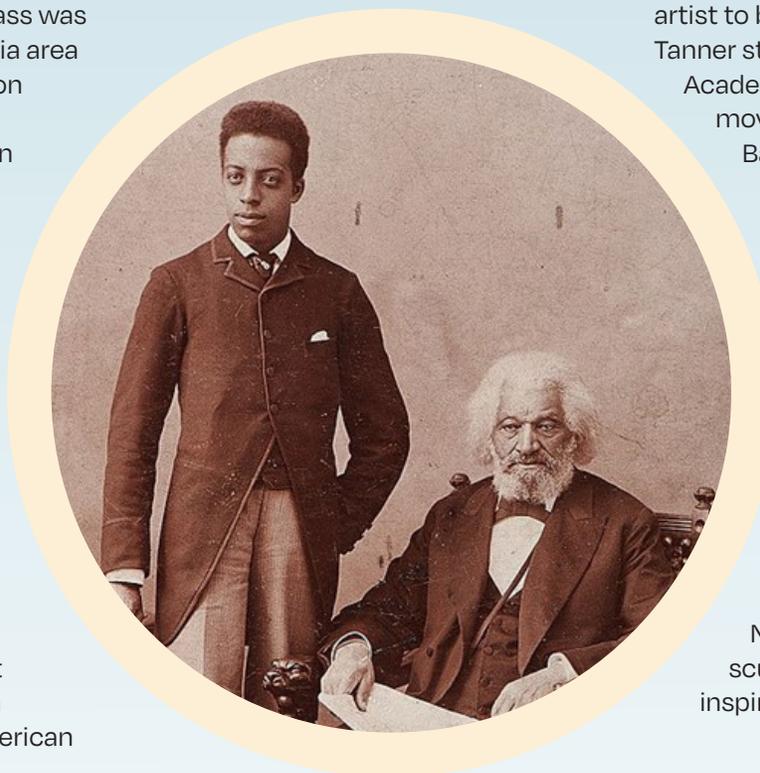
<sup>1</sup> In Costa Rica, SIFAIS (Sistema Integral de Formación Artística para la Inclusión Social or Integrated System of Artistic Formation for Social Inclusion) is an important nonprofit that uses music to build goodwill based on trust and perseverance to teach skills that have helped generations of young people overcome pervasive criminality and violence.

## DE COM POSED

### Decomposed – Joseph Henry Douglass, activist and artist

If you think that the spelling of Douglass seems familiar, you would be correct. Joseph Henry Douglass, the first nationally known Black concert violinist, was the grandson of the famed activist and abolitionist, Frederick Douglass. While his famous grandfather's name and encouragement helped give his career an initial boost, Joseph Douglass' long professional life as a national and international violinist was based entirely on his undeniable talents and remarkable virtuosic skills.

Joseph Henry Douglass was born in the Anacostia area of Washington, DC on July 3, 1869, in the brief Reconstruction era following the Civil War. This narrow window of history that ended with the marked increase in Jim Crow laws, saw the rise of HBCUs (historically Black colleges and universities) and was a time when many Black artists and musicians were recognized for their contributions. The list of artists whose talents were developed during that time include Henry Ossawa Tanner, the first African American



artist to be recognized internationally. Tanner studied at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts and later moved to Paris. His work "The Banjo Lesson" is one of his most well-known works. You can learn more about Tanner in this brief video: [Discover Henry Ossawa Turner: A Pioneer of Light and Emotion](#). The list also includes Augusta Savage, a woman sculptor, painter and educator, who was the only African American artist invited to contribute to the 1939 New York World's Fair. Her sculpture "The Harp" drew inspiration from James Weldon



The Banjo Lesson by Henry Ossawa Turner



Augusta Savage working on her sculpture The Harp.

Johnson's poem "Lift Every Voice and Sing." A fascinating video about Augusta Savage may be viewed here: [Searching for Augusta Savage | Full Documentary | American Masters Shorts | PBS](#)

Black poets and writers began to emerge, such as writer/poet James Weldon Johnson, born in 1871, and Paul Laurence Dunbar, born in 1872, whose famed poem, "We Wear The Mask" describes the experience of being Black in America: [We Wear the Mask | The Poetry Foundation](#). The groundbreaking novel "Iola Leroy" by author Frances E. W. Harper, published in 1892, is the story of a mixed-race woman who was sold into slavery, and was one of the first novels published by an African American woman. The list of musicians of the time is similarly impressive and includes the Fisk Jubilee Singers and composer W.C. Handy, who was previously featured in *Quarter Notes*. The Reconstruction era, although short-lived, was the foundation for the Harlem Renaissance and the many Black authors, artists, poets and musicians (Jacob Lawrence, Paul Robeson, Langston Hughes, Duke Ellington and so many others) who came to prominence as a result.

This was the era in which Joseph was born. He was the second of six children born to his parents, Charles

Remond Douglass and Mary Elizabeth Douglass, but he was the only child who lived to adulthood. Joseph's father, Charles, and his grandfather, Frederick Douglass, were both gifted amateur violinists, and they encouraged young Joseph's interest in music.

Joseph's mother died in 1879, and his father, Charles, remarried in



Joseph Henry Douglass (standing) with his famous grandfather, Frederick Douglass

**Joseph Douglass enjoyed a successful career as a concert violinist and composer. He performed in nearly every Black educational institution in America, as well as multiple churches.**

1880. Charles struggled to support the family and moved frequently to find work. As a result, Joseph spent a great deal of his childhood with his grandparents. Joseph's first violin teacher was likely his grandfather, who nurtured his interest in music. Recognizing his grandson's musical gifts, Frederick Douglass helped pay for his grandson's education. Joseph attended the New England Conservatory for five years and then pursued further studies at Boston Conservatory. While a student in Boston, Joseph often performed before and after his grandfather's lectures.

It was Frederick Douglass who gave his grandson his first 'big break.' In 1893, Frederick Douglass helped plan and organize "Colored American Day," a showcase of Black artists, writers and entrepreneurs that was part of the Chicago World's Fair. Joseph, then 22 years old, performed at the event, alongside other extraordinary artists that included poet Paul Dunbar, as well as Sidney Woodward, a gifted tenor. On February 14, 1896, Joseph gave a concert to

benefit a "home for friendless girls" at Metropolitan A.M.E. Church in Washington, DC. By 1910, he was performing at Carnegie Hall. He was one of the first African American performers to be nationally and internationally renowned.

For the next forty years,

Joseph Douglass enjoyed a successful career as a concert violinist and composer. He performed in nearly every Black educational institution in America, as well as multiple churches. In 1914, he was the first violinist to record music for the Victor Talking Machine Company, but sadly, none of the recordings were released to the public. Like his famous grandfather, Douglass was a frequent guest and performer



Joseph Henry Douglass, his wife, Fanny Mae Howard, and their two children, Blanche (standing) and Frederick Douglass III (infant)

## Beyond his vibrant career as a performer, Douglass was a family man, educator and conductor.

at the White House, invited by presidents William McKinley, Teddy Roosevelt and Howard Taft. He performed at the Grand Military Concert sponsored by the U.S. Marine Band to commemorate the inauguration of President Grover Cleveland.

Beyond his vibrant career as a performer, Douglass was a family man, educator and conductor. He met his wife, Fannie May Howard Douglass, at Oberlin College. Fannie was a gifted concert pianist and the daughter of Atlanta business mogul David T. Howard. She often played piano at her

husband's performances. Together, they made a home in the U Street Corridor of Washington, DC, a neighborhood that ultimately became known as "Black Broadway" because of its flourishing arts scene. The neighborhood was also home to composer Duke Ellington and opera singer Madame Lillian Evanti. Douglass and Fanny had two children, Blanche and Frederick III. Frederick III became a doctor and married Nettie Washington, the granddaughter of Booker T. Washington. Their wedding in 1941 made national headlines but sadly, while Nettie was pregnant with their first child, Frederick III took his own life.

Joseph Douglass rose to success at a time of increased oppression for Black Americans. States passed laws that prevented Black Americans from exercising their right to vote and the 1896 Supreme Court decision in Plessy v. Ferguson effectively legalized oppressive racial segregation, notwithstanding the language of the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment. The result was a devastating surge of violence against Black people and communities that forced Douglass to exist in two different worlds: he performed at the White House and in countless concert halls but had to travel in segregated train

# JOSEPH H. DOUGLASS

"A master of the violin."  
—Boston Daily Globe

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"Joseph H. Douglass, dean of race violinists, gave a wonderful exhibition of the true art in violin playing at the Brooklyn Y. W. C. A. Auditorium last eve."  
"His tone, pure and eloquent, carried his message to the hearts his audience. He was recalled again and again."  
—New York Age

"The fact that this master of the violin is the grandson of the late Frederick Douglass is unimportant besides the genius of the musician himself."  
—California Eagle

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"Joseph H. Douglass returned to Hampton Institute greater than ever."  
"The faculty and student body completely filled Ogdon Hall and were treated to an exhibition of violin music long to be remembered."  
—Hampton Institute Correspondent

### "Dean of Race Violinists"

"Joseph H. Douglas gave a marvelous rendition, his own composition, on scenes at a Georgia Camp Meeting. He made the violin sing and pray.—Columbus Daily Dispatch.

Date \_\_\_\_\_

At \_\_\_\_\_

Admission \_\_\_\_\_



Joseph Henry Douglass and his wife,  
Fanny Mae Howard Douglass

cars and was unwelcome in most of the hotels and restaurants in the cities where he performed.

Determined to nurture young Black musicians, Douglass founded and led music schools for Black and immigrant children in New York City and Washington, D.C. He held tenured positions at Howard University and the Colored Music Settlement School in New York City and one of his students, Clarence Cameron White, went on to become a gifted musician and composer. (The Decomposed column in the summer edition of *Quarter Notes* was focused on Clarence Cameron White.) After contracting pneumonia, Douglass passed away on December 8, 1935. His wife, Fanny, gifted Douglass' violin (a German copy of a Stradivarius) to the U.S. Department of the Interior. Fanny died in 1985 at the age of 101. 

## If you are interested in learning more about Joseph Henry Douglass, we recommend the following:

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[Strings of Legacy: The Trailblazing Journey of Joseph Douglass](#)

[Joseph Henry Douglass: Changing America With Music || Our Composite Nation - YouTube](#)

[Joseph Douglass, Director of the Department of Music at Howard University & Grandfather Douglass. - YouTube](#)

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To learn more about the family history of Joseph, Nettie and their children, we recommend this story in the Atlanta Magazine, published in January of 2024: [The ancestors of Nettie Washington Douglass still have stories to teach us. She just hopes we are ready to listen. - Atlanta Magazine](#)

### Source Material:

[Reconstruction and the Legacy of African American Artists](#)

[Henry Ossawa Tanner Paintings, Bio, Ideas | TheArtStory](#)

[Augusta Savage | Smithsonian American Art Museum](#)

[Paul Laurence Dunbar | The Poetry Foundation](#)

[Joseph Douglass, Violinist born - African American Registry](#)

[Joseph Douglass Violinist Little Known Black History Fact](#)

[Joseph Douglass, Director of the Department of Music at Howard University & Grandfather Douglass. Joseph Douglass: The Black concert violinist - Kentake Page](#)

[Joseph Henry Douglas, 1871-1935](#)

[Black History Makers: Joseph Douglass - Watershed Voice](#)

[Our Composite Nation: Frederick Douglass America | Curriculum 5 - Hope | The New York Historical](#)

[Joseph Douglass \(1871 — 1935\), African-American concert violinist, students | World Biographical Encyclopedia](#)

[The ancestors of Nettie Washington Douglass still have stories to teach us. She just hopes we are ready to listen. - Atlanta Magazine](#)

## STAFF SPOTLIGHT

# FAITH QUINN

## HSO Brand Marketing and Communications Coordinator

Faith began with the HSO in September of 2024 and has just celebrated her one-year anniversary in her new position. After just one year, Faith's skills, passion, and positive attitude have made her a valuable member of the HSO team. Our recent interview with Faith will help you get to know her a little better.

### QN: What made you apply for the position with the HSO?

I knew this job would be the perfect match for my ambitions and my training, and after one year, my instincts were absolutely right. Before applying to the HSO, I was doing freelance social media work for an acting company based in upstate New York. I had moved to Connecticut because New York City became too expensive, and I had always wanted to work in a performing art space. When the job opened at the HSO, it felt like the perfect match for my passion, skills and training.

### QN: What does it mean to be a "brand marketing and communications coordinator"?

For me, it's a perfect way to personally connect with the public. The role covers social media – but so much more. It involves everything including email marketing, website updates, press releases, graphic design and even more. I create content, video, graphics, posts and many forms of communication, to make everything that the HSO does more accessible and more

interesting for our audiences. If I can create great content and posts that display the HSO in the best possible way, showing the public all that we do and how we have a positive impact on our community, I can help grow our audience and build even stronger relationships between the public and the HSO.

### QN: Are there challenges in your work?

Of course, just as in every job. It is hard to create content that reflects the brand of the organization, while at the same time, creating enough variety to keep the public interested. Another challenge is that the HSO is very fast paced, always changing, and I must keep one step ahead of everything, so that I have the time I need to highlight the best of what we are doing.

### QN: Can you tell us a bit about where you grew up and your training?

I am originally from Wakefield, Massachusetts, a town located about 20 minutes from Boston. As a child, I was obsessed with musical theater, which is funny because neither of my parents were ever interested in

the arts. My dad is more into sports, and I wasn't brought to the theater as a child. But, even as a small child, I loved Disney, and I was fascinated with movie musicals. My parents separated and in middle school, I moved to CT to spend time with my dad. A few years later I got to see my first Broadway show (it was Annie) and from that moment, I was hooked. I was involved in the theater program in my high school, which is where I met my boyfriend. Andrew went to college at Emerson in Boston and as I was interested in the visual arts, I went to Suffolk University which is also in Boston. My training gave me the opportunity to create art through painting and digital media, which gave me the skills I needed for a career in managing social media.

### QN: Are you involved in theater in addition to your work with the HSO?

Yes. I have been taking acting classes at Hartford Stage, including a monologue class. This past summer, I was in a production of Pride and Prejudice and was cast in the role of Elizabeth Bennett. I love everything about the theater, and being able to work at the HSO, within



Faith Quinn

a performance space and a place that celebrates theater and the arts, is a dream come true. Besides the stage, I love everything "behind the scenes" from stagecraft to production. It's fascinating how much the audience never gets to see, but all "secret stuff" behind the curtain is what makes theater possible.

**QN: What can you tell us about your hobbies?**

I have so many hobbies! I love painting, sewing (I sew my own clothes), baking (especially sourdough bread), yoga, crocheting, sculpture, drawing and taking long walks. I've made a few short films and generally do the work on my iPhone. It is amazing how much you can do on a device that fits in your

pocket, and I love that you can learn almost anything you want on the videos easily available on YouTube and TikTok. Also, I'm a vegan, and given my interest in baking, I'm always trying to create the vegan version of delicious baked goods. I'm happy to share my recipe for vegan chocolate chip cookies!

**QN: Tell us some things about yourself we would not guess.**

Well, I love horror movies! Every year I go to Halloween Horror

Nights – which is a series of haunted houses held in Orlando at Universal Studios. My favorite horror movies are *Scream* and *Halloween*. Of course! And I've written and illustrated two children's books that are being sold on Amazon. They are called "My Love for You Is Summer" and "Stella Mouse." The links to them are here:

My Love For You Is Summer: <https://www.amazon.com/Love-You-Summer-Faith-Quinn/dp/BOBLYN5C1C>

Stella Mouse: [https://www.amazon.com/Stella-Mouse-Faith-Quinn/dp/BOCNYQGFBP/ref=tmm\\_pap\\_swatch\\_0](https://www.amazon.com/Stella-Mouse-Faith-Quinn/dp/BOCNYQGFBP/ref=tmm_pap_swatch_0)



## Faith's Vegan Chocolate Chip Cookie Recipe

- 1/2 c softened vegan butter
- 1 c brown sugar
- 1/4 c almond milk
- 1 tsp vanilla extract
- 1 3/4 c flour
- 1 tsp baking soda
- 1/2 tsp salt
- 1 c vegan chocolate chips (I love the Ghirardelli 70% dark chocolate chips)

Preheat oven to 350 degrees

Combine butter, brown sugar, almond milk, and vanilla extract in a large bowl

Add flour, baking soda, and salt.

Fold until well combined, and then fold in the chocolate chips

Line a baking sheet with parchment paper, and transfer 1 tbsp-sized dough balls

Bake for 10-12 minutes

Let rest for 5 minutes, sprinkle with sea salt, and enjoy!





## HELPFUL TAX TIPS for 2025 and 2026! Maximize your funds and help the HSO!

### **1 - Super-sized 401(k) and simple IRA catch-up contributions for people aged 50+, and special rules for those aged 60 to 63!**

For 401k and 403b Plans: In 2025, you can contribute the sum of \$23,500 to your retirement plans. If you have already or will turn 60, 61, 62 or 63 at any time between January 1 and December 31, 2025, you can reap the benefit of the "super catch-up" of \$11,250, in addition to the standard employee deferral limit (\$23,500 in 2025). Thus, in 2025, you can deposit \$34,750 of your income into your retirement plans, a huge investment in your future

that simultaneously reduces your taxable income by \$34,750. (Note: for those 50 and over, the "catch-up" is an added \$3,500.)

For SIMPLE IRAs: The 2025 base simple IRA contribution is \$16,500, which is an increase from 2024. Those aged 60 to 63 receive an added "super catch-up" of \$5,250, which brings the total maximum contribution to \$21,750. (Note: for those 50 and over, the "catch-up" is an added \$3,500.)

(Please note that for Roth IRAs and traditional IRAs, the maximum contribution of \$7,000, plus a catch up limit of \$1000, are

the same as existed in 2024.)

### **2 - You can maximize charitable giving from your IRA:**

If you are 70 ½ or older, and you have a traditional IRA, you can donate up to \$108,000 per year directly to charities, and it will NOT be counted towards your adjusted gross income. As the distributions are excluded from your AGI, you avoid the limitations tied to itemized deductions and income-based thresholds. The vehicle, called a **Qualified Charitable Distribution (QCD)** is a **GREAT strategy** for charitable giving. A QCD is a direct transfer of funds from your IRA custodian,

payable to a qualified charity

**Remember:** Starting with the year you reach 73, 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. This is the best time to use a QCD to avoid taxes while giving to organizations you love. QCDs can satisfy your required minimum distributions (RMDs) for the year, thus eliminating any income tax on the QCD.

In addition to the benefit of supporting a worthwhile cause, 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. You are not required to itemize deductions to use a QCD. So, you can get a double benefit on your taxes! You can take advantage of the higher standard deduction (\$30,000 for a married couple filing jointly in 2025 and \$15,750 for a single person), and you can still use a QCD for charitable giving.

There is a maximum QCD of \$108,000 per person per year, so for those filing "married joint" who have separate IRAs, the maximum donation increases to \$216,000 per married couple.

### **How to maximize an RMD**

**from your IRA:** Starting today, and at ANY TIME before the end of 2025, instruct your IRA advisor or manager to make the required distributions *directly* to a registered 501(c)3 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**. You can then repeat the process in 2026!

### **3 - Other helpful tips for 2025 planning:**

- IRA Contribution limits and deadlines. You can make 2025 contributions to Roth or traditional IRA until April 15, 2026.

- Excess contributions. If you exceed the 2025 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.
- For your 2025 tax return, the standard deduction for a married couple is \$31,500 (\$15,750 per individual), an increase from the 2024 amount of \$29,200. Note that on January 1, 2026, the standard deduction for a married couple is expected to decline to \$16,600 (\$8300 per individual.) However, in 2026, even those married couples filing jointly can claim the standard deduction and deduct up to \$2,000 in cash gifts. (That amount is \$1,000 for an individual.)



# Create a symphony of giving



- 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. RMDs must also be taken from your 403b or 401k plans, so it may be a wise strategy to convert those plans to a simple IRA, thereby allowing you to use QCDs to reduce the tax impact you will be required to pay on the RMD.

#### 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)



*The HSO does not provide tax, legal or accounting advice. These tips are for informational purposes only and should not be relied on for tax, legal or accounting advice. You should always consult your own tax, legal and accounting advisors before engaging in any transaction.*