

IU JACOBS SCHOOL OF MUSIC

At the *Next* **GENERATION**

THE WORLD OF MUSIC
IS CHANGING AND SO IS
THIS GREAT INSTITUTION

BY ELISABETH ANDREWS PHOTOGRAPHY BY SHANNON ZAHNLE

left to right: Jeff Nelsen,
Aaron Travers, Simin Ganatra,
Brenda Brenner, and
Dominick DiOrio.



Certain names are perennially associated with Indiana University's Jacobs School of Music, such as pianists MENAHEM PRESSLER and ANDRE WATTS, organist CHARLES WEBB, violinist JOSHUA BELL, conductor LEONARD SLATKIN, ballerina VIOLETTE VERDY, opera diva SYLVIA MCNAIR, and cellist JANOS STARKER.

The school is known for counting such eminent, accomplished performers and teachers among its faculty, a reputation that has helped Jacobs maintain its long-held prominence as one of the finest schools of music in the world.

It would be wrong to conclude, however, that little has changed within this century-old institution. In the past ten years, Jacobs has added 50 new faculty members, many of whom are implementing transformative programs within the school.

This year, for example, the acclaimed Pacifica Quartet became the school's quartet-in-residence, introducing a new tradition of organizing Jacobs string students into chamber ensembles. Choral conductor and composer Dominick DiOrio, just 28 years old, also joined the faculty this year, bringing a fresh perspective and repertoire to the school's Contemporary Vocal Ensemble. Aaron Travers, who joined the composition faculty in 2009, steers his students toward collaboration with other artists in and beyond the music field.

Jacobs professors are also beginning to look outward to find ways in which music can influence other pursuits, from academic achievement to athletic performance. Brenda Brenner, who recently accepted a new post in music education, uses the violin as a vehicle to engage schoolchildren with math and language arts. Horn professor Jeff Nelsen, who came to the school in 2006, has developed a music-inspired methodology for overcoming fears.

These appointments are part of a larger evolution into what Jacobs Dean Gwyn Richards describes as "the first 21st-century school of music." He explains that many of the traditional opportunities for young musicians are disappearing due to the dwindling of arts funding, opera houses closing, and symphonies shutting down. At the same time, he says, musicians now have means of promoting themselves that never existed for earlier generations. The same technological and cultural shifts that have contributed to a decline in music "jobs" have created a fertile environment for musical "ideas" to grow into careers.

"We have to look at the world in a different way," says Richards. "We need to help students assess what they will do if there is not an institutional home for them. How can they still follow their calling to make music? The good news is there is more opportunity than ever for entrepreneurial ways of thinking."

To help students establish themselves in this new environment, the school teamed up with the Johnson Center for Entrepreneurship & Innovation at the IU Kelley School of Business to build Project Jumpstart, a suite of services for Jacobs students and alumni. Designed to launch or advance careers, the project offers free one-on-one assistance for young musicians to help market themselves, identify potential projects and collaborations, and incubate business ideas. The school has also begun auditioning incoming students immediately for orchestral and chamber ensembles to ensure that they have as much exposure as possible to different modes of performance.

This focus on agility and embracing opportunity is also readily evident among the newly appointed faculty. Says Brenner, "Musicians have to be more versatile these days than in previous generations. We have to be flexible in terms of the ways we see ourselves and open ourselves up to a whole variety of different opportunities."

In the following pages, we introduce five Jacobs faculty members who may not yet be on your radar but who are making a major impact on the school and the future that awaits its graduates.



DOMINICK DIORIO

CHORAL CONDUCTOR
AND COMPOSER

AT 28 AND FRESH OUT OF HIS DOCTORAL PROGRAM AT THE YALE SCHOOL OF MUSIC, Dominick DiOrio is the epitome of youthful energy. The choral conductor and composer bursts with enthusiasm as he describes his new assistant professor position at the Jacobs School, which also involves directing IU's Contemporary Vocal Ensemble (CVE).

"This is the kind of job I could do for the rest of my life!" he says. "I am so excited to introduce the community to the music that I love."

DiOrio is fairly certain you haven't heard these works before. His passion is for choral music written within the past 50 years, much of it brand new, by young composers and incorporating unusual combinations of voice and instruments.

His opening CVE concert on October 9, for instance, featured a piece by Estonian composer Veljo Tormis, written in Finnish for men's voices and gong. He also conducted Chinese composer Chen Yi's "Capriccio," which incorporates bagpipe melodies and Indonesian monkey chants (DiOrio demonstrates: "zukka zukka woo woo!").

"I have a desire to champion music that is not often performed but that is great music," he says. Being young may be an asset in this regard, as he feels "close to the music that is being written today."

DiOrio is writing quite a bit of that music himself. Incredibly, he has already completed

more than 80 compositions, including an opera. These works, which range from solo piano pieces to concert-band marches, have earned prizes from the American Society of Composers, Authors, and Publishers; the American Choral Directors Association; and the Yale Glee Club. In the October CVE concert, the ensemble performed one of DiOrio's recent works, "A Dome of Many-Coloured Glass," which premiered this year in Houston. Based on the early-20th-century writings of poet Amy Lowell, it prominently features the marimba, one of his favorite instruments to pair with voice.

"Dome" is poignant but decidedly joyous, a quality that reflects DiOrio's state of mind. "I'm an optimistic and bubbly person by nature, and my music is part of the person I am. Right now I feel very joyful about life," he says, beaming.

He has a lot to be happy about. Earlier this year, he had his Carnegie Hall conducting debut, and in 2009 he was a semifinalist for the Eric Ericson Award, the highest international honor for young choral conductors. His sheet music, which he continues to produce at an astonishing rate, is printed by several music-publishing houses, a rare distinction in a field in which self-publishing is the norm.

Despite this unusual success, DiOrio comes across as immensely friendly and down-to-earth. He laughs and blushes and waxes poetic about his food preferences, referencing his grandfather's Italian deli and the "dairy maid" selling cheese at the Bloomington Farmers' Market. His exhilaration is infectious, and he's eager to spread it however he can.

"The goal of the CVE is to find new and engaging repertoire and bring it to life," he says. "The tangent that I am ever trying to approach with the ensemble and with my own music is to have the music be immediately understood and yet also deeply felt by the audience."

DiOrio conducts the Contemporary Vocal Ensemble on November 14 in Auer Hall.



“GET OVER YOURSELF!”

On paper, these words sound harsh, but coming from horn professor Jeff Nelsen, they are unmistakably supportive. He’s not suggesting that his listener has no worth—in fact, quite the opposite. What he means by the injunction is that in order for performers to access their full potential, they have to get out of their own way.

“Your performance needs to be more about the love of what you are doing than the desire to do it right,” he says. “We are expert doubters. If we focus on what can go wrong and what the audience is thinking about us, we create a massive opportunity to make things worse.”

Nelsen’s “Fearless Performance” method, which is quickly gaining recognition throughout the field of classical music and beyond, teaches performers to

replace their worries about making mistakes and looking foolish with an open-hearted willingness to share something with the audience. When the focus shifts from what he calls the “how” of performance—technique, skill, and process—to the sense of purpose or the “why,” fear gives way to a genuine connection with the people in the room.

That’s not to say that Nelsen doesn’t teach his students horn skills, or that he doesn’t possess such skills in outrageous abundance himself. For many years, he toured and recorded with the Grammy-winning quintet Canadian Brass, and

he continues to be in high demand for international orchestral, chamber, and solo performances. As with any music professor, Nelsen expects his students to devote many hours to learning their material and honing their technical capabilities. Once they walk onstage, however, their preparation comes to an end.

“I call it ‘Crossing the Magic Line’ when you step forward to play,” he says. “Onstage, there is no learning. There is only now. You bring everything with you to that moment, and you are finished preparing. This is the product that you are going to have today.”

After the closing bow, the cogitating can resume, but he insists that students begin their self-assessment with “strength collecting” before he’ll allow them to pick apart their flaws. They must identify one thing they did well during the performance and phrase the achievement in positive language. “If they try to say ‘I didn’t screw up that one part,’ that doesn’t work for me. I want to know what they did do,” he says.

Nelsen has built these and other principles into a full “Fearless Performance” curriculum for which he is currently developing a study guide and other classroom materials. He has also been offering workshops, seminars, and guest lectures on the method for musicians of all levels and types. Moreover, he is reaching out to a broader base of “performers” to share his approach with anyone who wants to overcome their self-doubt.

“Performance is what happens when what you are doing matters,” he explains, listing examples from boardroom presentations to interviews and auditions to hosting dinner parties. “A fearless performance is possible when what you are doing is the only thing that matters. Then you can become completely present and let go.”

For more information on Nelsen and his “Fearless Performance” method, visit jeffnelsen.com.

JEFF NELSEN

HORNIST

A magician and a musician, Jeff Nelsen uses magic in his “Fearless Performance” method.



SIMIN GANATRA

PACIFICA QUARTET VIOLINIST

TODAY, THE PACIFICA QUARTET IS ONE OF THE MOST CELEBRATED STRING QUARTETS IN THE WORLD, performing in top venues from Carnegie Hall in New York City to Wigmore Hall in London to Tokyo’s Suntory Hall. The quartet, which features Masumi Per Rostad on viola, cellist Brandon Vamos, and violinists Sibbi Bernhardsson and Simin Ganatra, won a Grammy Award and was named Ensemble of the Year by *Musical America* in 2009. This year, the group became the Jacobs School’s quartet-in-residence, following previous residencies at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Back in 1994, however, prospects weren’t looking so rosy. Living in the suburbs north of Chicago, surviving off credit cards and wedding gigs, Ganatra, then 21, had begun to wonder if starting an independent quartet of young string players was really a sensible plan.

“I remember thinking, ‘Oh my gosh, is this ever going to work?’” she says. “There was so much cold calling to universities and concert series, asking if we could send in our demo. We were taking out ads in the *Chicago Reader* and playing in bars and libraries and prisons,

wherever we could.”

Fortunately, the quartet had secured a post with the Music Institute of Chicago that “was just enough to pay the rent,” she says. So for more than two years, they practiced every day from 9 to 5, encouraging one another through the moments of doubt.

A big break came in 1997 when the quartet won the Concert Artists Guild Competition. The prize was professional management, and combined with the name they had by then made for themselves in the Chicago area, it helped launch the ensemble forward into national and international fame.

This history of independent, self-navigated success puts the Pacifica Quartet in an ideal position to mentor today’s music students, says Ganatra. “The way our careers developed is very much the new way of making a living through music. You have to do it for yourself and start from the ground up. If you can be a bit innovative, there is so much possibility out there for music performance.”

Chamber musicians in particular can look forward to a growing field of opportunities, she says. “This kind of programming is thriving because even places that can’t afford an orchestra can host a chamber ensemble, and the

repertoire speaks to audiences in a very personal way. There’s an intimacy to having so few voices on stage, and the ideas in the music come through very well.”

To introduce students to the chamber music experience, Ganatra and her fellow Pacifica Quartet members have grouped Jacobs string students into chamber ensembles and will coach them throughout the year. It’s the first time the Jacobs School has implemented this type of process, ensuring that string players have a background working consistently with the same small group of peers.

“For us, figuring out how to function as a quartet was so much trial and error,” says Ganatra. “These students will have a great advantage from having already gone through that process. I’m glad we can help provide it, because chamber music is a wonderful career path.”

The Pacifica Quartet performs at Auer Hall on October 20 and November 30; visit pacificaquartet.com for details.

BRENDA BRENNER

MUSIC EDUCATOR

REMEMBER THE ALPHABET SONG?

Chances are you took the first step toward reading by learning this simple tune, and you can still sing it today. It's no accident that the song is so persistent, says Brenda Brenner, associate professor of music education.

"Music is a way of learning that engages multiple parts of our brains," she says. "It involves listening, following instructions, integrating physical motion, and working together with a group. It commands your attention in different ways from basic types of instruction."

While the traditional approach to music education emphasizes its cultural and aesthetic value, Brenner sees enormous potential for music to serve as a vehicle for other types of learning. As the alphabet song illustrates, music can be particularly beneficial for introducing basic concepts at the elementary school level, she says.

She's testing this theory through a number of programs she recently initiated in Bloomington and Attica, Indiana, in which Brenner and her team of 36 IU music students lead onsite violin classes designed to encourage skills such as counting, pattern recognition, and building words and phrases.

At Fairview Elementary School in Bloomington, for example, Brenner uses musical games and activities to address state standards for math and language arts in the first and second grades. These goals include learning to identify letters and their sounds and becoming familiar with geometric concepts like object placement.

"We have a song we teach about the four strings on the violin. The strings are G, D, A, and E, and we sing, 'Each, each, each, each and every ant, ant, ant, digging in the dirt, dirt, dirt, all the way to Greece, Greece, Greece,'" she says, singing each phrase in its respective pitch. By learning where to place their bows and which strings to play, students also grasp ideas like finding the center point on a line and distinguishing between identical objects by their placement in space.

With her third- and fourth-grade students at Attica Elementary School and Highland Park Elementary School in Bloomington, Brenner leads an exercise that involves counting rhythmically by multiples—first by twos, fives, and tens, then working up to trickier numbers. "We were counting by sevens the other day," she says proudly.

The team is now in the process of analyzing data to assess whether the Fairview program's students are showing academic gains. Anecdotally, she says, teachers are reporting positive changes in children's behavior and performance, and she sees a preliminary correlation between achievement on the violin and achievement in reading. Though it's too soon to say whether the music classes are improving standardized test scores, Brenner is certain that the children are engaging with the material in a meaningful way.

"They think they are having fun. They don't know they are learning," she says. "They see these classes as something special that they get to do, and they are excited about it."

An even more profound shift, she says, is occurring in her IU students. She hires many performance majors in addition to music educators and says the experience of working with children is giving them the tools they need to succeed in today's economy.

"What you have to do in this world today is make a connection. You have to be able to sell your art by communicating with people on many levels. It's not enough to just stand up on the concert stage and move your fingers," she says. "I am seeing a huge change in my IU students as they begin to see themselves as educators—not just for children, but for any audience."

AARON TRAVERS

COMPOSER

"WHAT YOU'RE HEARING IS MY ESSENTIAL NERVOUSNESS," says Aaron Travers, jiggling his leg and fidgeting with the objects on the table. He's referring to the manic tempo of his compositions, which, though they differ widely in theme and format, all contain a degree of frenzy. "I've always been this way. I can't stop moving. Even when I'm composing, I have to pace around."

It takes ingenuity to turn agitation into an asset, but Travers, an assistant professor in the composition department, has clearly channeled something about the 21st-century experience. His works, many of which feature dissonant sounds, stop-start rhythms, and unnerving titles like "Shards," "His Royal Badness," and "A tiny scream..." have been widely performed throughout the U.S. and Canada, winning prestigious honors including the Chicago Symphony First Hearing Award. Travers also has been awarded both a scholarship and a fellowship from the American Academy of Arts and Letters. Commissions have come from the Chicago Civic Orchestra and the Howard Hanson Institute for American Music, among others, and Travers has taught at Syracuse University, Hamilton College, Northwestern University, and the University of Illinois at Chicago before coming to IU in 2009.

Despite the distinctive tension in his oeuvre, however, Travers' personality is far from dark. His official promotional photographs, for example, inexplicably feature a stuffed elephant, and he displays open amusement in describing one of his most ear-splitting compositions as "four different pitches of squeak."

Travers also defies expectations in his teaching philosophy. As avant-garde as his work may sound, he considers himself a traditionalist in that he espouses careful deliberation in the development of melodies, harmonies, and chord progressions. The word he uses to

describe himself, in fact, is "fussy," though he says he's careful not to impose his own aesthetic vision on his students.

"They should have their own ideas, but what I do is force them to explain themselves," he says. "No one writes music just from their heart. They have to use their brains, too. They need to think about what they are doing, and they have to be able to explain it to an audience."

The key to a composer's success looking forward, he says, is to combine this methodological rigor with openness to new musical settings. Scoring for video productions, for example, now goes beyond feature films and television to involve audiovisual projects for any number of audiences. Travers points out that this year, Jacobs composition students teamed up with IU film students to produce works for a new series, called Double Exposure, that aired at IU Cinema.

While Travers makes every effort to encourage and participate in these multimedia opportunities, he says the greatest advantage of studying composition at Jacobs is the chance to

collaborate with world-class performers pursuing degrees at the school. "At the end of each semester, orchestration students write a short piece and get to hear it played in concert by performance students."

Those relationships between young performers and composers often continue beyond graduation, he says, noting that some of his most innovative compositions—"tiny scream" included—came from this type of collaboration. ✨

For more information and audio clips, visit aarontravers.com.





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