

Avery Fisher Career Grants – Recipient Biographies

Balourdet Quartet

Angela Bae and Justin DeFilippis, *Violins*
Benjamin Zannoni, *Viola* • Russell Houston, *Cello*

Formed: Houston, TX
Based: Bloomington, IN

The Balourdet Quartet is an award-winning, dynamic ensemble that takes creative risks on stage, producing both emotionally intense and intimate moments. Its unique closeness and unwavering sense of team trust earned it Chamber Music America's 2024 Cleveland Quartet Award.

During the 2023-24 season, the Balourdet will return to the La Jolla Music Society, Montgomery Chamber Music, Nevada Chamber Music Festival, and Schneider Concert Series and have debuts in Atlanta, Memphis, Houston, and San Antonio. As recent winners of the 2023 Barlow Endowment for Music Composition as well as the 2021 Chamber Music America Commissioning Grants, the Balourdet has commissioned works by Paul Novak and Karim Al-Zand, premiering the latter in London's Wigmore Hall. Collaborations include pianists Marc-André Hamelin, Simone Dinnerstein, Stewart Goodyear, and violist Jordan Bak. They are currently the Graduate-String-Quartet-in-Residence at Indiana University's Jacobs School of Music and Quartet-in-Residence with the Chamber Orchestra of the Triangle in North Carolina.

After having been together for only a year at Rice University and one summer at the Aspen Music Festival, they took second prize at the 2019 Nielsen International Chamber Music Competition, and were selected as the only quartet admitted to Boston's historic New England Conservatory Professional String Quartet Program in 2020 under the tutelage of Cleveland Quartet cellist Paul Katz.

In 2021, the Balourdet won the Grand Prize at New York's Concert Artists Guild Competition, which included joint management by Concert Artists Guild in the U.S., and Young Classical Artists Trust (YCAT) in the U.K. and Europe. In addition, the quartet has been a top prizewinner in the Banff, Borciani, Fischhoff, and Yellow Springs Competitions.

The quartet takes its name from Antoine Balourdet, *chef extraordinaire* at the Hotel St. Bernard and beloved member of the Taos School of Music community.

Website: www.balourdetquartet.com

Management: *Katie Backus, Concert Artists Guild*

Njioma Chinyere Grevious

Violin

Born: Newton, MA
Resides: New York, NY

Described as "superb" by the *Chicago Classical Review*, violinist Njioma Chinyere Grevious is an emerging, passionate and versatile solo, chamber and orchestral musician and performer. She is a graduate of The Juilliard School and a winner of its John Erskine Prize for scholastic and artistic achievement. In 2023, Njioma won the Robert F. Smith First Prize and the Audience Choice awards in the Senior Division of the Sphinx Competition and joint selection in the CAG/YCAT artist auditions. As a soloist, she has appeared with the Chicago Philharmonic, Western Michigan Symphony, Minnesota Orchestra, Newark Symphony Orchestra, and the Sphinx Virtuosi.

As a chamber player, Njioma has been invited to perform in series including the Seattle Chamber Music Festival, Rockport Chamber Music Festival, and the Jupiter Chamber Players.

A founding member of the award-winning Abeo Quartet, Njioma most recently completed studies with Ryan Meehan and the Calidore String Quartet at the University of Delaware as a fellow in the Graduate String Quartet in Residence Program. In 2023, Abeo won Third Prize in the Bad Tölz International String Quartet Competition. In 2022, Abeo won First Prize and Audience Favorite Prize at the Yellow Springs Chamber Music Competition and was invited to participate in the 14th Banff International String Quartet Competition. As undergraduates the quartet studied with the Juilliard String Quartet and has also been coached by members of the Alban Berg, Quatuor Ébène, Takács, Artemis, Brentano, Meta4, Miró, Dover and Emerson quartets, appearing at festivals and series including Music@Menlo, Norfolk Chamber Music, and Emerald City Music.

Njioma began her studies at 4 years old and was a scholarship recipient through Boston's Project STEP string training program for black and Latino youth. She enjoys teaching composition and collaboration to NYC children from underrepresented communities through the Opportunity Music Project.

Website: www.njiomagrevious.com

Management: *Katie Backus, Concert Artists Guild*

Julian Rhee

Violin

Born: Milwaukee, WI
Resides: Boston, MA

The Silver Medalist of the 11th Quadrennial International Violin Competition of Indianapolis, Korean-American violinist Julian Rhee is quickly gaining recognition as an emerging artist and performer, praised for his "sophisticated, assured tone, superb intonation, and the kind of poise and showmanship that thrills audiences" (*The Strad*).

An avid soloist, Julian made his Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra debut at age 8, and has gone on to perform with orchestras such as the Indianapolis Symphony, Santa Rosa Symphony, Pittsburgh Symphony, Aspen Philharmonic, East Coast Chamber, Eugene Symphony, Fresno Philharmonic, New England Conservatory Symphony, and San Diego Symphony, among others. He has

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performed in venues including Heinz Hall, the Overture Center for the Arts, Teatro El Círculo in Rosario, Argentina, The Musikverein in Vienna, Bartók Hall in Hungary, New World Center, and the John F. Kennedy Center as a U.S. Presidential Scholar, receiving his medal at the White House. Highlights of his 2023-2024 season include appearances with the Madison Symphony, Waterbury Symphony, Württemberg Chamber Orchestra of Heilbronn, and Indianapolis Chamber Orchestra, as well as a production of Lera Auerbach's 24 Preludes with the Hamburg Ballet.

A member of Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center CMS's Bowers Program beginning in 2024, Julian has performed at and attended festivals including the Ravinia Steans Institute, Marlboro Festival, Rockport Music, and North Shore Chamber Music Festival. Julian studied with Hye-Sun Lee and Almita Vamos at the Music Institute of Chicago Academy. He received his bachelor's degree and is currently pursuing a master's degree as teaching assistant of Miriam Fried at the New England Conservatory.

Rhee is the recipient of the outstanding 1699 "Lady Tennant" Antonio Stradivari violin and Jean Pierre Marie Persoit bow on extended loan through the generosity of the Mary B. Galvin Foundation and the efforts of the Stradivari Society, a division of Bein & Fushi, Inc. **Website:** www.julianrhee.com

Sandbox Percussion

Jonny Allen • Victor Caccese • Ian Rosenbaum • Terry Sweeney

Formed: 2011

Based: Brooklyn, NY

Described as “exhilarating” (*The New York Times*) and “utterly mesmerizing” (*The Guardian*), GRAMMY®-nominated ensemble Sandbox Percussion is dedicated to artistry in contemporary chamber music. The ensemble was brought together in 2011 by a love of chamber music and the simple joy of playing together; today, Sandbox Percussion captivates worldwide audiences with visually and aurally stunning performances.

Sandbox Percussion's 2021 album *Seven Pillars* was nominated for two GRAMMY® awards — Best Chamber Music/Small Ensemble Performance and Best Contemporary Classical Composition. The ensemble performed the piece more than 15 times throughout the United States and Europe last season, including at the Théâtre du Châtelet in Paris.

In the 2023-24 season, Sandbox Percussion performs *Seven Pillars* at the VIVO Music Festival (Columbus, OH); the New School (New York); Aperio, Music of the Americas (Houston); the Frost School of Music (Miami); Brown University (Providence, RI); and the Peace Center (Greenville, SC), among other venues.

This season, Sandbox Percussion also releases their fourth album, *Wilderness*, featuring the piece of the same name by experimental composer Jerome Begin. Other season highlights include two performances at the Park Avenue Armory (New York), featuring premieres by Chris Cerrone and Viet Cuong; a performance at the 92nd Street Y with pianist and new-music champion Conor Hanick featuring the New York premiere of two works composed for them by Christopher Cerrone and by Tyshawn Sorey; and an appearance at the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center. Sandbox Percussion will also continue to champion Viet Cuong's acclaimed concerto for percussion quartet, *Re(new)al*, including performances with the Des Moines Symphony and with the Albany Symphony, which commissioned the piece.

Besides maintaining an international performance schedule, Sandbox Percussion holds the position of ensemble-in-residence and percussion faculty at the University of Missouri-Kansas City and The New School's College of Performing Arts. In 2016, Sandbox Percussion founded the Sandbox Percussion Seminar, introducing percussion students to the leading percussion chamber music of the day.

Sandbox Percussion endorses Pearl/Adams musical instruments, Zildjian cymbals, Vic Firth sticks and mallets, Remo drumheads, and Black Swamp accessories. **Website:** www.sandboxpercussion.com

Management: *Blu Ocean Arts*

Clayton Stephenson

Piano

Born: New York, NY

Resides: Boston, MA

Pianist Clayton Stephenson's love for music is immediately apparent in his joyous charisma onstage, expressive power, and natural ease at the instrument. Hailed for “extraordinary narrative and poetic gifts” and interpretations that are “fresh, incisive and characterfully alive” (*Gramophone*), the New York native credited the generous support of community programs with providing him pivotal musical inspiration and resources along the way.

A recent Harvard-NEC dual degree program graduate, with a bachelor's degree in economics from Harvard and a master's degree in piano performance from NEC under Wha Kyung Byun, Clayton's accolades have been bountiful: in addition to being the first Black finalist at the Van Cliburn International Piano Competition in 2022, he was named 2022 Gilmore Young Artist; 2017 U.S. Presidential Scholar in the Arts; and Young Scholar of the Lang Lang International Music Foundation.

Clayton attended The Juilliard School's Music Advancement Program for under-represented students, and advanced to Juilliard's elite Pre-College at age 10, where he studied with Matti Raekallio, Hung-Kuang Chen, and Ernest Barretta. Clayton practiced on a synthesizer at home until he found an old upright piano on the street that an elementary school had thrown away; that would become his practice piano for the next six years, until the Lang Lang Foundation donated a new piano to him when he was 16.

Clayton's bountiful accomplishments have led to a blossoming career. Recent and upcoming highlights include concertos with the Houston and North Carolina Symphonies, Vegas Philharmonic, and New York Philharmonic; festival appearances at Grand Teton and Tippet Rise; recitals at venues including Foundation Louis Vuitton and Weill Recital Hall at Carnegie Hall; and collaborations with violinists Nikki and Timothy Chooi in Europe, Canada, and the United States. Clayton also has been featured on NPR, WUOL, Your Classical Performance Today, WQXR, and BBC 3.

Website: www.claytonstephenson.com

General Management: *Sandra Doan, The Cliburn*