

Virtuosi of Houston has produced  
many talented musicians during our 20 years.  
We are so proud of their accomplishments and  
would like to share a few of our

# *Success Stories.*



*Johann* **ACUÑA**  
VIOLIN & PIANO

Since his first performance in 1998, violinist and pianist Johann Acuña has shared his music with audiences ranging from small church settings to grand symphony halls. Performing concerts all across the United States, as well as in Austria, Italy, Mexico and Ukraine, he devotes his talents to glorifying God and sharing the message of Jesus Christ through music.

Johann received a Bachelor of Music Degree from Baylor University (2009), and has since performed with the Arkansas, Ft. Smith (AR), San Angelo (TX), Northwest Arkansas, Temple (TX) and Waco (TX) Symphony orchestras. Currently, Johann is serving as the associate worship pastor/arranger for Cross Church in Northwest, Arkansas. He dedicates his time to developing church musicians & arranging/orchestrating music.

Johann and his wife Aubrey have been married since July 2014.



## *Ira* **GOLD**

*DOUBLE BASS*

Prior to joining the National Symphony in 2005, Ira Gold performed with several American orchestras, as Section Bass with the Minnesota Orchestra and as guest Principal Bassist with the San Francisco Symphony and Detroit Symphony. He has attended festivals such as Grand Teton Music Festival, Domaine Forget Music Academy, Aspen, and Tanglewood. Mr. Gold spent several summers at the International Festival Institute at Round Top both as a student

and faculty. He has presented masterclasses and recitals throughout the United States, including The Juilliard School, University of Michigan, Cleveland Institute of Music, and Oberlin College, among many others. Mr. Gold maintains a studio of private students, has taught in the National Symphony Orchestra Youth Fellowship program, and has been a Double Bass Faculty member at Peabody Conservatory since 2009. He is a co-founding member of Peabody Bass Works and DCBass, and will launch the Orchestral Bowing Workshop in summer 2016. Mr. Gold was previously faculty at Catholic University of America, and performed the Vanhal Bass Concerto at Carnegie Hall with the CUA Symphony Orchestra.

An active chamber musician, Mr. Gold has performed with East Coast Chamber Orchestra, the NSO Millenium Stage Prelude Series, Peabody Conservatory Faculty and the New Orchestra of Washington.

He earned his Bachelor of Music degree at Boston University's College of Fine Arts, and his Master of Music degree at Rice University's Shepherd School of Music, where he won the strings division of the 2005 Concerto Competition. His primary teachers include Edwin Barker and Paul Ellison.



# *Lauren Alexandra* **HALEY**

*VIOLIN & VIOLA*

Lauren Alexandra Haley earned a degree in Violin Performance from the Eastman School of Music, where she studied with Oleh Krysa. Accepted into both the violin and viola performance programs at Eastman, Lauren also studied violin with the late Zvi Zeitlin and viola with Phillip Ying (Ying Quartet). Lauren's teachers have additionally included Andrzej Grabiec, Fredell Lack, Levine Andrade, Irina Walters, Rodica Gonzalez, Lawrence Wheeler, William Pu, Marie Winget, and Nina Westbrook.

While living in the UK, Lauren performed and recorded professionally in the London Telefilmnic Orchestra and venues including Queen Elizabeth Hall, Royal Albert Hall, Liverpool Philharmonic Hall, Chichester Cathedral, St. John's Smith Square, and Menuhin Hall. Lauren played both violin and viola in the Wally Fields Jazz Orchestra and the Thames Philharmonia. She was awarded Farnham Young Musician of the Year 2008. In 2007, Lauren founded Fiddlers' Club, a non-profit course for young violinists, in Surrey, England. In Rochester, NY she taught after-school lessons at School 17. Lauren attended Juilliard's 2015 Starling-Delay Symposium on Violin Studies.

Lauren Haley Studios currently enrolls over 60 young musicians on violin and viola and became affiliated with the Eastman School of Music in 2015.

**[www.laurenhaleystudios.com](http://www.laurenhaleystudios.com)**

# *Christopher T.F.* **HANSON**

VIOLIN



Conductor, violinist, composer, pedagogue and musicologist, Hanson enjoys performing with a large and eclectic group of ensembles in the state of Texas and abroad. Hanson holds three Masters Degrees from Texas State University in Music History, Music Theory and Music Composition. He is currently working on his PhD in School Improvement at Texas State University, with a focus on teacher agency and axiology public schools. His research on African-American composer Edmond Dédé and equity and accountability in fine arts classrooms has afforded him an array of speaking engagements and publishing opportunities and several of his new compositions received their debut performances this year. As a violinist, Hanson has enjoyed performing and recording with a wide range of ensembles including the the Victoria, Mid-Texas, and Corpus Christi Symphony Orchestras. He is currently performing with Dr. Shana Mashego and the Sacred Ensemble and writing as the chief arranger of the Hymn Project established in 2015. Hanson currently resides in San Marcos, Texas and works as the Orchestra Director for San Marcos Consolidated Independent School District (SMCISD). Hanson is the founder and artistic director of the SMART Orchestra, a community-based orchestra created to encourage string education, established in the city of San Marcos in 2009. In the near future, Hanson hopes to continue his success at the podium by seeking more opportunities to study, perform, and teach through string education initiatives.



## *Beatriz* **MACIAS**

FLUTE

Celebrated for the beauty of her playing and for her ability to communicate directly with audiences, flutist Beatriz Macias has established a successful career as both a soloist and orchestral player. As Solo Flutist of the Luxembourg Chamber Orchestra, Beatriz's sensitivity to a broad range of styles has given her international praise for her performances, appearing in America, Europe and Asia. "Her playing is of extreme beauty, emotion and color. Beatriz is a pure and holistic musician who will bring new excitement into the world of classical music!" says Conductor Antony Hermus.

Beatriz received her first musical training at the age of four, learning piano with the Yamaha Program for Children in Mexico. A few years later, Beatriz moved to Texas where she developed further as a musician through the State's celebrated music education program. At the age of eleven, she made her first decisive step towards a career in music, hearing a television broadcast from the Metropolitan Opera in New York. She was so impressed by the dynamic voice of the soprano that she immediately decided she wanted to be a singer. However, Beatriz soon changed direction when she was introduced to the flute, which initially engaged her curiosity because she found it so difficult to make the instrument sound.

A passion for singing continues to guide Beatriz's music making. It is clearly reflected in her flute playing, which has an intensely lyrical quality, and in her pure, voice-like tone. Inspired by opera, Beatriz enjoys exploring the flute's ability to perform dramatic music. She is particularly drawn to works with a virtuosic, frantic and emotional character, which she conveys through a range of dark tone colors, like an operatic soprano in a sinister role.

At the age of 18, Beatriz made her solo debut at the prestigious D.A.R. Constitution Hall in Washington, D.C., performing Reinecke's Flute Concerto to an audience of over 3,000. Beatriz's expressive and technically fluent playing has impressed many influential musicians, and in 2008 she was awarded the position of Young Performing Artist with the Yamaha Corporation of America. A year later, she became the youngest finalist in the Pappoutsakis Flute Competition, and in 2010 completed her Bachelor of Music Degree at the Boston Conservatory of Music, graduating a year in advance on grounds of Artistic Merit. Through her studies in Boston, Beatriz developed a performance technique based on flawless and meticulous execution. She is recognized for her pure yet colorful sound, a quality promoted by her mentor, GERALYN COTICONE, former piccolo of the Boston Symphony Orchestra. Beatriz was able to further develop and perfect her distinctive approach through graduate studies in Europe with esteemed flutist Carlos Bruneel. In 2011 Beatriz had the honor of performing for the opening of the Ars Musica International Contemporary Music Festival, and in 2012, she completed her Masters of Music Degree at the Royal Conservatory of Brussels, graduating with the Highest Distinction.

Beatriz' career as a professional orchestral musician began even before she had completed her studies. In 2011 she won the Academy Position with the Royal Flemish Philharmonic, and since 2012 she's had the pleasure of working with several European orchestras, chamber orchestras and opera/ballet houses including the Royal Opera House La Monnaie, Flemish Opera, Luxembourg Philharmonic, Qatar Philharmonic, l'Orchestre symphonique et lyrique de Nancy, Birmingham Royal Ballet, HR Frankfurt Radio Symphony Orchestra and many more. Beatriz has also acted as Principal Flutist of the Nederlandse Orkest in Holland and in the renowned Encuentro de Musica y Academia de Santander in Spain. She will be acting as Solo Flute in the Tampere Philharmonic in Finland until the end of year.

**[www.beatrizmaciasflutist.com](http://www.beatrizmaciasflutist.com)**





## *Joey* **NAEGER**

DOUBLE BASS

A native of Houston, Joey Naeger currently lives in Katy, Texas. Mr. Naeger has a Bachelor of Music Degree from the University of Houston, under the instruction of Dennis Whittaker. In high school he was a member of the Virtuosi of Houston from fall 2004 to spring 2007. As a bassist, he freelances regularly in the Houston area. Mr. Naeger was featured on KUHF's "The Front Row" twice and has been reviewed in the Houston Chronicle for his performance in the production of "Anorexia Sacra." Additionally, he is a full time luthier working for the Lisle Violin Shop, specializing in double bass setup and repair. Mr. Naeger feels his musical development through Virtuosi has facilitated his growth as a luthier. As a bass luthier, he relies heavily on his musical skills to effectively evaluate, repair, and adjust double basses for discriminating clients. He recently completed his first bass, which was entered in the 2015 International Society of Bassists-Bass Makers Competition.



## *Arne-Christian* **PELZ**

CELLO

Born in Rostock, Germany in 1986, Arne-Christian Pelz first came to Houston as a Rotary International Exchange Student in 2003. He was the winner of the concerto competition while attending HSPVA. Mr. Pelz was also a proud member of Virtuosi of Houston and the winner of the string division of Virtuosi's 2004 Concerto Competition. That spring he performed Haydn's Cello Concerto in D-Major as the featured string soloist under the baton of Maestro Grabiec at the Virtuosi of Houston Concerto Concert in the Hobby Center. His experiences with the Virtuosi of Houston Young Artists Chamber Orchestra proved to be crucial to his later artistic

development. He is thankful for its generosity and for the opportunities it has granted him.

After studying with Josef Schwab at the music conservatory Hanns Eisler in Berlin, he went on to complete his artist diploma under the tutelage of Peter Bruns at the Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy School in Leipzig. Immediately after finishing at the top of his class, Mr. Pelz was granted the prestigious position of First Principal Cellist of the Hamburg Symphony under the baton of Maestro Jeffrey Tate.

His early successes in international competitions led to solo appearances and recitals in renowned concert halls throughout Europe and to the United States. This promising young soloist has been accompanied by renowned orchestras such as the Hamburg Symphony, the Plauen-Zwickau Philharmonic, the Mendelssohn Chamber Orchestra, and the Leipzig Symphony Orchestra. Mr. Pelz often collaborates with young conductors and premier contemporary composers.

He has a special passion for music of the 20th and 21st century. Recently, he was the featured soloist with the Hamburg Symphony in *Seven Last Words* by the renowned Sofia Gubaidulina. In 2009, he was awarded the Ethel Shein Prize for Best Interpretation of a Work from the 20th Century at the Premio Viturio Gui Competition, Florence. He has also received awards as a refined interpreter of ancient music. After being granted an award at the International J.S. Bach Competition in 2009, he was invited to play a recital at the Bach Festival Leipzig 2011. During the 2013–2014 concert season, he is performing all six of Bach's Cello Suites in a series of recitals in Hamburg and the UK.

His passion for chamber music led him to found the award winning Piano Trio Leipzig in 2011 which recently made its U.S. debut thanks to an invitation of the Bach Society Houston. The trio performed Beethoven's Triple Concerto at the Festival Emiglia Romana in Imola, Italy.

In his engaging playing, German cellist Arne-Christian Pelz combines both deeply felt emotions and a buoyant joy of music. Due to the support of a generous sponsor, Arne-Christian Pelz currently plays on a 1693 Giovanni Grancino cello made in Milan.





*Caleb* **QUILLEN**  
DOUBLE BASS

Caleb Quillen's career as a double bassist has led him to embrace diverse musical styles in a variety of concert venues. He has performed at venues such as Symphony Hall, Jordan Hall and Jones Hall, where he has performed in the Houston Symphony bass section.

Caleb has had the privilege to work with conductors Andris Nelsons, Christoph von Dohnanyi and Ludovic Morlot. He was a participant in the Texas Music Festival in Houston, Texas and the Wabass Institute for the 21st Century Bass player, where he worked with Principal Bassist of the Philadelphia Orchestra, Harold Robinson. Caleb was a Fellow at the Tanglewood Music Center in the summer of 2015 where he worked side by side with members of the Boston Symphony Orchestra.

A native of Houston, Texas, Caleb began his studies with Dennis Whittaker, Principal Bass of the Houston Grand Opera. Caleb received his Bachelors in Music from the New England Conservatory of Music studying with Lawrence Wolfe of the Boston Symphony Orchestra and Donald Palma of the Orpheus Chamber Orchestra. He is currently pursuing his Masters in Music at the Shepherd School of Music under the esteemed pedagogue Paul Ellison, where he will graduate in 2016. Caleb is the newest member of the Kansas City Symphony and is to begin his career with them in September of 2016.

# Elizabeth Priestly **SIFFERT**

OBOE



Elizabeth Priestly Siffert is originally from Sugar Land, Texas and was a member of Virtuosi of Houston from its start in 1996 until 1998. She is a graduate of Houston's High School for the Performing and Visual Arts and the Eastman School of Music where she graduated with a Bachelors of Music and the distinction of being one of the only students to ever receive two Performer's Certificates as an undergraduate. Ms. Priestly Siffert has made frequent solo performances throughout her career with orchestras including the Orchestra of Saint Luke's, Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra and Houston Ballet Orchestra.

At the age of 22 Ms. Priestly Siffert made her international solo debut with the Orquesta de Camera de Minería. She was invited two years later to perform as a soloist for the first time in Europe with Orquestra Classica da Madeira. Through the years Ms. Priestly Siffert has had success in solo competitions including winning the Eastman Concerto Competition and second prize winner in the Fernand Gillet Hugo Fox

Competition sponsored by the International Double Reed Society. She is also an active orchestral musician. Her former positions include second oboe with the Binghamton Philharmonic Orchestra (2001–2003), co-principal oboe with Orquestra Sinfonica de Minería (2003), and principal oboe with Orquestra Classica da Madeira (2003–2007).

Ms. Priestly Siffert has also performed with orchestras such as the Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra, the Houston Symphony Orchestra, Orquestra Dos Sonhos and the Phoenix Symphony Orchestra. She is currently principal oboist of the Houston Grand Opera and Houston Ballet Orchestras, a position she has held since 2008. For more information on this artist please visit [www.ElizabethPS.com](http://www.ElizabethPS.com).

## *Steven* **THOMAS**

VIOLA

Steven Thomas was a part of Virtuosi of Houston for three years. Inspired by the great mentorship of Andrzej Grabiec and Franz Anton Krager, he decided to pursue his college career at the University of Houston and graduated in 2012. During his stay at UH, he worked under the mentorship of Houston Symphony principle violist, Wayne Brooks. He also played with the University of Houston Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Franz Anton Krager. Steven

also learned great conducting methods developed by Elizabeth A. Green, taught by her pupil, Franz Anton Krager. Meanwhile, Steven had been teaching private lessons since he started his college career and eventually was offered a job working part time as a classroom teacher for a new school that had just been built in 2010. It was the Harmony School of Fine Arts and Technology where Steven effectively established a small orchestra program and was awarded Teacher of the Year. He left after his short stay at the school to complete the last portion of his college degree, student teaching. Thomas spent 5 weeks at Armond Bayeau Elementary School teaching Kindergarten through fifth grade and another 5 weeks at Space Center Intermediate with his first string mentor, Lisa Batson. After college graduation, he worked as a substitute briefly while looking for a full-time position as an Orchestra Director. He fortunately found his place in Pasadena at V. W. Miller Intermediate where he has worked for the last three years. Since his arrival at the school, he has helped the program bring home two sweepstakes and two superior ratings trophies from the UIL Concert and Sightreading Contest as well as many other awards. He intends to remain at Miller Intermediate for as long as he can and enjoys his job thoroughly.





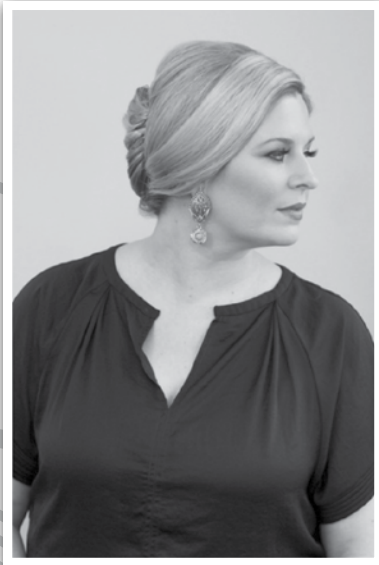
## *Ashley* **VANDIVER**

VIOLIN

Praised by the Denver Post as “*wonderfully expressive...polished and carefree*”, violinist Ashley Vandiver has earned recognition as an artist of the highest level. Ms. Vandiver is a member of the National Arts Centre Orchestra (Ottawa, Canada) and the Santa Fe Opera, and was a founding member of the Grammy-nominated chamber orchestra, A Far Cry. She performs regularly with the Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra, Toronto Symphony Orchestra, The Canadian Opera Company and the National Ballet of Canada. Ms. Vandiver graduated with Distinction in violin performance from The New England Conservatory of Music and holds a Master of Music Degree from the Royal Conservatory in the Netherlands.

# *Courtenay Vandiver* **PEREIRA**

CELLO



Grammy-nominated, acclaimed by the Boston Globe as “an expert player” and the New Jersey Star Ledger for her “wonderful technique and creamy sound,” native Houstonian Courtenay Vandiver Pereira, is a founding member of the self-conducted chamber orchestra A Far Cry.

Internationally recognized with over 400 performances across the globe, the ensemble, according to the New York Times “brims with personality or, better, personalities, many and varied.” Their latest album, Grammy-nominated, *Dreams and Prayers* features the music of Golijov and Grammy-winning, Klezmatics clarinetist, David Krakauer. A passionate chamber musician, Ms. Vandiver Pereira has performed with the St. Petersburg, Borromeo, and Jupiter String Quartets, as well as Donald Weilerstein, Roger Tapping, Ronald Leonard, and Natasha Brofsky. Festival appearances include Ravinia, Yellow Barn, Sarasota, Schleswig-Holstein, Leipzig BachFest, and the New York String Orchestra Seminar.

Featured on Houston Public Media and Classical 91.7, she is cellist-in-residence at the Texas New Music Ensemble. She plays with Mercury: the Orchestra Redefined, River Oaks Chamber Orchestra, and the Houston Grand Opera. Prior to that, she won a two year fellowship as a Young Artist with Da Camera. She played for Billy Graham's My Hope Campaign that was televised before millions across the United States and Canada. Her music can be heard regularly on iTunes and iHeart Radio.

Dedicated to education, in 2010 Ms. Vandiver Pereira was Assistant Orchestra Director at both Austin High and Sartartia Middle Schools in Sugar Land, Texas where the latter was awarded Texas State Honor Orchestra. Versatile as an artist, she has rocked for Josh Groban, Transiberian Orchestra, Kristin Chenoweth, Jethro Tull, Eurythmics' frontman Dave Stewart, and Peter Gabriel. She also plays in a grunge cello band, Samurai String Squad. Ms. Vandiver Pereira earned both her bachelors and masters degrees at New England Conservatory with Academic and Artistic Distinction under the guidance of Laurence Lesser and Paul Katz. She is a recipient of The Yellow Rose of Texas. Presented by former Governor Ann Richards, the award is given only through the Office of the Governor and recognizes women for their significant and outstanding contributions to the State of Texas.

# Emileigh **VANDIVER**

CELLO



Fascinated by unique cultures, Emileigh Brooke Vandiver has dedicated her life as a musician to exploring the world, cello in tow. Described by the New York Times as “an excellent performer” and by the Boston Musical Intelligencer as a musician bringing “a world of emotional meaning to the cello.” She also stars in the new PBS documentary, “Talent Has Hunger” directed by Academy Award nominated, Josh Aronson.

Ms. Vandiver’s ensemble experiences include performing with the Houston Symphony, the Baltimore Symphony, the Boston Lyric Opera, the Rhode Island Philharmonic, and A Far Cry.

She is currently the cello professor at the University of New Hampshire and is on the cello faculty at the New England Conservatory’s Preparatory School and at Project STEP at Boston’s Symphony Hall.

A noted interpreter of contemporary music, Ms. Vandiver has performed with Bang on a Can, Ensemble Modern, and Ensemble Signal. As a Carnegie Hall fellow, she was selected to be the principal cellist of the 21st Century Contemporary Ensemble led by David Robertson and John Adams.

Ms. Vandiver was awarded the New England Conservatory’s Gunther Schuller President’s Medal at graduation and was the recipient of the Lotta Crabtree Scholarship. She has completed a Graduate Diploma, Master’s Degree, and Bachelor’s Degree at the New England Conservatory of Music. Her cello teachers include Paul Katz, Natasha Brofsky, John Heiss, Richard Aaron, Hans Jørgen-Jensen, Chris French, and Ann Victor. For more information please visit, [www.EmileighVandiver.com](http://www.EmileighVandiver.com).