

## MASTER PLAYERS FESTIVAL: BIOGRAPHIES

### Violin faculty



**Justin Chou** is a performer, teacher and concert producer. He has assisted and performed in productions such as the Master Players Concert Series, IVSO 60th anniversary, Asian Invasion recital series combining classical music and comedy, the 2012 TEDxUD event that streamed live across the Internet and personal projects like Violins4ward, which recently produced a concert titled “No Violence, Just Violins” to promote violence awareness and harmonious productivity. Chou’s current project, Verdant, is a spring classical series based in Wilmington, Delaware, that presents innovative concerts by growing music into daily life, combining classical performance with unlikely life passions.

As an orchestral musician, he spent three years as concertmaster of the Illinois Valley Symphony, with duties that included solo performances with the orchestra. Chou also has performed in various orchestras in principal positions, including an international tour to Colombia with the University of Delaware Symphony Orchestra, and in the state of Wisconsin, with the University of Wisconsin Symphony Orchestra, the Lake Geneva Symphony Orchestra and the Beloit-Janesville Symphony. Chou received his master of music degree from UD under Prof. Xiang Gao, with a full assistantship, and his undergraduate degree from the University of Wisconsin, with Profs. Felicia Moye and Vartan Manoogian, where he received the esteemed Ivan Galamian Award. Chou also has received honorable mention in competitions like the Milwaukee Young Artist and Youth Symphony Orchestras competitions.

### **Xiang Gao, MPF founding artistic director**

Recognized as one of the world's most successful performing artists of his generation from the People's Republic of China, Xiang Gao has solo performed for many world leaders and with more than 100 orchestras worldwide. In 2014, he was granted the Delaware Governor’s Award for his contribution in the arts.



As a multifaceted musician and singer-songwriter, Gao composes, arranges and performs in many styles of music. As a member of the China Magpie ensemble established by Yo-Yo Ma's Silk Road Project, and the 6ixwire Project, a crossover duet that he and Erhu soloist Cathy Yang formed in 2009, Gao is frequently featured on CCTV, China's leading TV station, performing live concerts for more than one billion TV viewers worldwide each time. Both crossover ensembles combine multiple styles, from Chinese folk to western classical and rock music.

With his strong interest in theatre and unconventional music productions, Gao is the creator and producer of very creative and engaging iMusic productions, which successfully humanize classical music in multimedia violin concerts that brings the audience of all ages and performers together with delightful artistic elements and special effects. As a song writer/composer, in 2015, Gao composed and produced *Campus Chatter: A New Musical* that opened in March 2015.

Gao lives in Newark, Delaware, where he is the Trustees Distinguished Professor of Music and the founding artistic director of the Master Players Concert Series at the University of Delaware. In 2007, the Stradivari Society in Chicago selected Gao to be a recipient of world famous Stradivarius violins for his international solo concerts.

Violinist **David Kim** was named concertmaster of the Philadelphia Orchestra in 1999. Born in Carbondale, Illinois in 1963, he started playing the violin at the age of three, began studies with the famed pedagogue Dorothy DeLay at the age of eight, and later received his bachelor's and master's degrees from the Juilliard School. His instruments are a J.B. Guadagnini from Milan, Italy, ca. 1757, on loan from the Philadelphia Orchestra and a Michael Angelo Bergonzi from Cremona, ca. 1754. He is an official endorser for Airtur hands free page turning systems. Kim resides in a Philadelphia suburb with his wife Jane and daughters Natalie and Maggie. He is an avid runner, golfer, and outdoorsman.



**Duo Shen**, MPF dean of students, earned his bachelor's and master's degrees in violin performance at the University of Delaware with concert violinist Xiang Gao. Shen is currently working toward his doctor of musical art degree at the University of Maryland, College Park, with James Stern, concentrating in violin performance. Shen also shares a great interest in conducting. His private teachers include maestros James Allen Anderson (2014), Jorge Mester (2015) and Michael Jinbo (2015, Pierre Montuex School). He also studies conducting during workshops with Samuel Jones, Donald Portnoy, Victoria Bond, Peter Jaffe, Paul Vermel and Diane Wittry. As a violinist, he was the second prizewinner of the 2011 Delaware National String Competition and the concerto competition winners during his freshman year, and he performed Paganini's Violin Concerto No. 1 with the University of Delaware Symphony Orchestra. Shen also is the co-founder of a student concert series, Violins4ward.

Hailed by the *Washington Post* for "virtuosity and penetrating intelligence," violinist **James Stern** has given recitals, chamber music performances and master classes throughout North America, Europe and China, including appearances at the Marlboro and Ravinia festivals. He is a member of two critically acclaimed ensembles, the Stern/Andrist Duo with his wife, pianist



Audrey Andrist, and Strata, a trio in which they are joined by clarinetist Nathan Williams. He has performed with the Smithsonian Chamber Players, the 21st Century Consort and the Verge Ensemble at such venues as the Corcoran Gallery, the Smithsonian Institution's Hirshhorn Museum, National Museum of American History, Renwick Gallery and American Art Museum, the Library of Congress, the National Gallery, the Phillips Collection and the White House. A former faculty member at the Cleveland Institute, he is now professor of violin and chair of the String Division at the University of Maryland School of Music.

### **Viola faculty**

Winner of numerous prizes and scholarships, most notably the Flora Matheson Goulden String Prize for the highest marked conservatory string player in Canada, violist **Esme Allen-Creighton** is a passionate performer and pedagogue. She was a featured soloist of both the 2006 International and 2009 Canadian Viola Congresses. Since moving to the United States, she has performed as principal violist of the Orchestra of Northern New York, Arcos Chamber Orchestra on their 2010 European tour and highlights CD for the NEOS label, and the Juilliard Symphony on their 2008 China tour. An enthusiastic chamber musician, Allen-Creighton has collaborated with, among others, Steven Doane, Jesse Levine, Sabine Meyer, Alan Stepansky, Xiang Gao and Joel Hastings, as well as members of the New York Philharmonic in a special "Genius of the Brandenburgs" concert. She has appeared throughout New York City in venues like Carnegie Hall, Merkin Concert Hall, Alice Tully Hall, Le Poisson Rouge and Scandinavia House as a chamber and orchestral musician and has also showed her versatility by playing with the band Vampire Weekend on Pitchfork TV and appearing on the debut CD of Lakewind Music from her native Toronto.



Since joining the faculty of the University of Delaware, she has had many exciting performances including Britten's *Lachrymae* as soloist with the UD Symphony Orchestra; frequent appearances as a guest artist in the Master Players Concert Series, including the world premiere concert featuring entirely new works with the Sixwire Project; and performed as guest faculty and artist at the Mozart on the Green festival in Ohio. Allen-Creighton was thrilled to pursue her great passion for chamber music upon joining the Serafin String Quartet, UD's quartet-in-residence, last fall. In her short time with Serafin, she has performed in numerous concert series in the Delaware/Pennsylvania area including residencies at the University of Delaware and Dickinson College, made appearances on WHYY-TV and radio and celebrated through many concert appearances their recent critically acclaimed Naxos release of the early chamber music works of Jennifer Higdon. Upcoming projects include a short tour to Florida with the quartet, continued residency concerts at Trinity Episcopal in Wilmington and the University of Delaware, appearances at the Arts Ahimsa and Pikes Falls chamber music festivals and her solo recital *1919: Viola's Golden Year* this spring, exploring the important viola repertoire of 1919, written for the Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge composition competition.

A dedicated pedagogue, Allen-Creighton earned her bachelor's and master's degrees from the Juilliard School and a doctorate with honors from the University of Montreal. She served on the faculties of the Brooklyn College Preparatory Center and SUNY-Potsdam among other institutions before joining the

faculty of the University of Delaware, where she is now an assistant professor. She has given master classes at the University of Ohio, University of Toronto and Universidad Javeriana and Centrale in Bogota, Colombia, and looks forward to teaching at the North Carolina School of the Arts this spring. Though she began playing on the viola, her passion for string pedagogy led her to pursue violin studies at the legendary School for Strings in New York, where she received her Suzuki pedagogy certification in violin, studying with Allen Lieb and the late, great Louise Behrend. Her doctoral thesis explored interactive concert programming for educational outreach, a passion she pursues as a Philadelphia Orchestra teaching artist, through interactive concerts with the Serafins and recently as she was invited to speak at UD's inaugural TEDx conference. Her speech, "Consonance and Disonance: Musical Story-Telling at its Most Instinctual" is available online through the TEDx website. Courtesy of William Stegeman, she plays an instrument made in 1754 by the Milanese master Carlo Antonio Testore.

**Hong-Mei Xiao** was the first prize winner of the Geneva International Music Competition. Her extraordinary artistry and brilliant virtuoso technique have gained accolades from reviewers across the globe. A recipient of the coveted Patek Philippe Grand Prize, Xiao has made an international career as a soloist with performances in major concert halls and with orchestras of the greatest distinction throughout the world. Xiao was honored as a United States Artistic Ambassador. Her performances and interviews have been broadcast on television and radio in Europe, Asia and North America. She has collaborated with artists such as Yo-Yo Ma, Joseph Silverstein and Cho-Liang Lin. She was also invited as an adjudicator for the 2013 Lionel Tertis International Viola Competition in the United Kingdom.



Xiao was the winner of the Critic's Choice Award from American Record Guide. Her CDs of Bartok Viola Concerto and Bloch Works for Viola and Orchestra have won international critical acclaim since their releases.

A graduate of the Shanghai Conservatory, Xiao was the recipient of the Asian Cultural Council Award. She completed her master's degree at State University of New York at Stony Brook. Xiao is currently on the faculty at the University of Arizona School of Music. She is also an honorary guest professor of the China Conservatory in Beijing. Previously she taught at University of Michigan and at the Eastman School of Music as a visiting professor.

### **Cello faculty**

Praised by *Baltimore Sun* for his "eloquent, poetic playing," **Bo Li** is the acting assistant principal cellist with the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra.

Since his solo debut with the Shanghai Symphony at age 17, Bo Li has frequently soloed with many other ensembles including Pennsylvania Centre Orchestra, Southern Illinois Symphony, Acadiana Symphony in Louisiana, South Arkansas Symphony, Riverside Symphonica in New Jersey and Montgomery Symphony in Alabama. His concerto performance with New England Conservatory



Symphony was broadcast nationwide by NPR. Most recently he soloed with the Baltimore Symphony playing Tchaikovsky's *Rococo Variations*.

Among many awards he has received, Bo Li was a prizewinner at the Tchaikovsky International Competition. He also won a top prize at the National Cello Competition in China, the Laurence Lesser Presidential Award and the Concerto Competition at New England Conservatory, the Presser Scholar Award by the Presser Foundation, and fellowships with the Aspen Festival and the Montgomery Symphony.

Bo Li played in New York String Orchestra as the principal and was a guest principal with the Singapore Symphony. An active chamber musician, Bo Li has performed in U.S., South America, Europe and Asia and has collaborated with such artists as Pamela Frank and Jon Kimura Parker. Passionate with teaching, he has taught at music festivals and has given master classes at universities and conservatories throughout the U.S. and abroad. He was also featured on Voice of America, Free Talk Asia and China Central TV. His first solo CD was released by Tian-Tian in Beijing.

Bo Li came from a musical family in China. After attending the Shanghai Conservatory of Music, he finished his education at Illinois State University with Ko Iwasaki and at New England Conservatory with Colin Carr and Laurence Lesser.

**Alan Stepansky** is recognized as one of today's most gifted and versatile cellists. After a distinguished orchestral career culminating in a 10-year tenure as associate principal cellist of the New York Philharmonic, he is currently professor of cello at the Peabody Institute of the Johns Hopkins University, the Manhattan School of Music, and is the newly appointed director of chamber music at Rutgers University's Mason Gross School of the Arts. He has performed as a guest artist of the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, the Mostly Mozart Festival and Jazz at Lincoln Center, and has appeared in concert with the Takacs and American String Quartets. A guest at many summer festivals, Stepansky returns every year as faculty artist of the Music Academy of the West in Santa Barbara. His solo and chamber music recordings for EMI and Cala have been honored by *Gramophone Magazine*, *BBC Magazine* and *The New York Times*, and he has been engaged as the solo cellist for many major motion picture soundtracks. He has also appeared on numerous albums of noted recording artists across many genres, including Bruce Springsteen, Natalie Merchant and Sting, with whom he has also performed in concert. He is a featured artist on Sting's latest album, "The Last Ship." After studies at the Curtis Institute of Music, Stepansky graduated from Harvard University with the Horblit Prize. Stepansky's students have won positions in numerous orchestras, including the Philadelphia Orchestra, Seattle Symphony, St. Louis Symphony, Montreal Symphony, and the Los Angeles Philharmonic, and have successful careers as soloists, chamber musicians, and teachers.



Hailed in *Strings Magazine* for "style and elegance," "lyrical expressiveness," and "drama and rhetoric," **Lawrence Stomberg** enjoys a wide-ranging career as soloist, chamber musician and pedagogue. He currently serves as cellist of the acclaimed Serafin String Quartet, performing with them throughout the United



States. Recent seasons have brought him, as soloist and collaborator, to venues throughout the United States and abroad, including concerto performances with orchestras in Delaware, Georgia, Alabama, and Bogota, Colombia, as well as recital debuts in China, the United Kingdom and Vienna. A committed interpreter of new music, he has championed new works by many American composers, both with commissions and first recordings. The coming year will bring the world premiere, in London, of a sonata by British composer David Osbon and a performance of a co-commissioned concerto by British-American composer Richard Prior. He was a featured performer in two critically acclaimed CDs released in 2013, with music by American composers Jennifer Higdon (on Naxos Records) and Kirk O’Riordan (on Ravello Records). He has also recorded for the VAI and Centaur labels.

An active and dedicated pedagogue, Stomberg served on the faculties at Truman State University in Missouri and Oklahoma State University before joining the music faculty at UD in 2004, where he is currently associate professor of cello. He lives in Delaware with his wife, cellist Jennifer Crowell Stomberg, and their three children.

Stomberg plays a School of Testore cello, circa 1727, obtained with the generous assistance of William Stegeman.

### **Piano faculty**

Pianist **Charles Abramovic** has won critical acclaim for his international performances as soloist, chamber musician and collaborator with leading instrumentalists and singers. As a solo recitalist, he has performed throughout the United States, Canada and Europe, and has played at major festivals in Salzburg, Berlin, Bermuda, Dubrovnik, Vancouver, Aspen and Newport. Abramovic made his solo orchestral debut at the age of 14 with the Pittsburgh Symphony. Since then he has appeared with numerous orchestras, including the Baltimore Symphony, the Nebraska Chamber Orchestra, the Florida Philharmonic, the Colorado Philharmonic and the Pennsylvania Sinfonia.



Highly regarded as a collaborator, he has performed often with such stellar artists as violinists Midori, Sarah Chang, Robert McDuffie and Viktoria Mullova, violist Kim Kashkashian and flutists Mimi Stillman and Jeffrey Khaner. With these and other artists he has performed in the world’s most prestigious concert halls, as well as for radio and television broadcasts in Asia, Europe and Canada.

Abramovic has recorded for EMI Classics with Sarah Chang, and for Avie Recordings with Jeffrey Khaner. His recording of the solo piano works of Delius on the DTR label has won high praise in both the United States and Europe. He is highly dedicated to performing and recording contemporary music, and has recorded works by Milton Babbitt, Gunther Schuller, Joseph Schwanter and many others for CRI, Bridge, Naxos, Albany and Koch International Classics.

Abramovic is actively involved in the musical life of Philadelphia, performing regularly with groups such as the Dolce Suono Ensemble, Network for New Music and Orchestra 2001. In 1997 he won the Career Development Award from the Philadelphia Musical Fund Society, and has received Temple University's Faculty Award for Creative Achievement. His teachers have included Natalie Phillips, Leon Fleisher, Eleanor Sokoloff and Harvey Wedeen.

**Matthew Brower** is a Philadelphia-based collaborative pianist, coach and educator whose versatility allows him to bring a vision and sensitivity to a variety of genres, from opera and art song to chamber music, musical theatre and jazz. He has performed on three continents and has collaborated with musicians at such esteemed institutions as Opera Philadelphia, Toledo Opera, the University of Michigan, the University of Delaware, Westminster Choir College and the Centre for Opera Studies in Italy.



He earned his doctor of musical arts and master of music degrees from the University of Michigan as a student of renowned pianist Martin Katz. He also received his bachelor of music degree in piano performance from the Oberlin Conservatory of Music, where he was awarded the Oberlin Piano Faculty Prize in Accompanying.

Brower has been the chorus pianist and musical assistant at Opera Philadelphia since 2013. Recent engagements include a concert in Beijing, China, with violinist Xiang Gao, premieres of opera scenes with Opera Philadelphia's composer-in-residence program, and performances at Georgetown University and the University of Delaware.

**Marie-Christine Delbeau** has performed to critical acclaim in recitals throughout the United States and Europe. *Il Messagero* fervently noted "... it was particularly compelling to follow the development of the music as guided by this great American pianist so in tune with the music, which she so intimately interprets."



She was a concerto soloist with numerous orchestras including the Delaware Symphony, Midland-Odesa Symphony, Austin Symphony and the Mid-Atlantic Chamber Ensemble. She has also performed in concert at the Weill Recital Hall/Carnegie Hall in New York City, and other distinguished performances include a solo recital for *State Days at the Kennedy Center*, a celebration of the 25th anniversary of the Washington, D.C., concert hall, where she represented the state of Delaware. Delbeau was also in the featured performance of the national conference of the Lincoln Center Institute for Arts in Education at Lincoln Center in New York City.

In addition to her appearances as soloist, Delbeau is an active chamber musician. She performed in the first critically acclaimed gala concert "Fiddlefest" at Carnegie Hall with violinist Diane Monroe. On this concert, Delbeau shared the stage with Itzhak Perlman, Isaac Stern, Midori, Arnold Steinhardt, Michael Tree, Samuel Sanders, Mark O'Conner and Billy Taylor. She was invited to appear again with Monroe in

a "Fiddlefest" gala performance at the Tönhalle in Zürich, Switzerland, where she performed with legendary violinist Isaac Stern.

As a member of the Johannes Piano Quartet, she performed in recital at the Philadelphia Arts Alliance and at the Festival at Mt. Gretna with Robert Chen, current concertmaster for the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, Philadelphia Orchestra principal violist Choong-Jin Chang and Los Angeles Philharmonic principal cellist Peter Stumpf. Delbeau has also performed as a member of the Lenape Chamber Ensemble with these artists and violist Roberto Diaz, in Philadelphia Orchestra Connection Series concerts and in numerous other recitals regionally and nationally with some of these artists.

Delbeau was also a member of Contrasts: Chamber Artists of Philadelphia, a group dedicated to featuring works by contemporary African-American composers. She has performed in recital with the eminent violinist Robert Mann and has also performed in concerts with the Mendelssohn String Quartet. Delbeau studied with pianists John Perry, Tong-Il Han and Jerome Lowenthal, amongst others, and holds degrees from the University of Texas at Austin and the University of North Texas.

**Rita Sloan** is acknowledged internationally as a leading teacher of piano, collaborative piano and chamber music. In 1999, she was appointed a piano faculty member and director of the collaborative piano program at the University of Maryland. As an artist faculty member at the Aspen Music Festival, Sloan founded their Collaborative Piano Program. She has performed as soloist with both the Aspen Festival Orchestra and Chamber Symphony as well as in chamber music with many of Aspen's distinguished guest artists including pianists Wu Han and Orli Shaham, violinists Sarah Chang and Nadja Salerno-Sonnenberg, cellist Gary Hoffman, bassist Edgar Meyer and flutist Emmanuel Pahud. Teaching residencies and master class presentations have included Tainan National University of the Arts and National Normal University in Taiwan, China Conservatory in Beijing, China, leading universities in Seoul, Korea, London's Royal College of Music, American universities and conservatories including numerous visits to the Juilliard School in New York. Sloan has performed with orchestras, in recital and in chamber music throughout the U.S., Europe, South America and Japan. She has been a guest in many chamber music venues and has performed with members of the Emerson and Guarneri String Quartets. Born in Russia to Polish parents, Sloan graduated from the Juilliard School, where she studied with Martin Canin and Rosina Lhévinne. Further studies were with Leon Fleisher, Aube Tzerko, Herbert Stessin and Vladimir Ashkenazy.



Associate professor of piano in the Music College of Capital Normal University in Beijing, China, **Xiao Xue Sun** was the first doctoral pianist who was introduced to Capital Normal University from the United States. Under her guidance, many students won competitions and received awards, including the Kawai Asia Piano Competition, Hong Kong International Open Music Competition, Asia Open Piano Competition, Academic Piano Competition of CNU, Beijing Piano Festival, Hope Cup Teenagers and Young Children Piano Competition and the 23rd United States Open Music Competition.



As an active performer, Sun appears as a soloist and collaborative pianist throughout mainland China, Taiwan and major places in the United States, such as Carnegie Weill Recital Hall in New York, Syracuse, Buffalo and more. She frequently serves as a competition juror in the Beijing Piano Competition, Academic Piano Competition of CNU, Hope Cup Teenagers and Young Children Piano Competition and the 23rd United States Open Music Competition and has been invited to give masterclasses in ZheJiang Art Professional College, TaiWan Fu-Ren University, and Buffalo State College in the U.S. She is the member of the China Musician Association and the Beijing Musician Association.

Sun earned her doctor of musical arts degree in piano performance from Michigan State University in 2006 under the tutelage of Prof. Panayis Lyras. She earned her master of music degree from Syracuse University, where she studied with Wei-Yi Yang, and her bachelor of arts from the China Conservatory of Music.



**James Allen Anderson, music director of the MPF Chamber Orchestra**

James Allen Anderson is the director of orchestral activities and music director of the University of Delaware Symphony Orchestra and Chamber Orchestra. He received his formal training as conductor and pianist at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and the Eastman School of Music in Rochester, New York. His principal conducting mentors include David Effron, Mark Gibson, Tonu Kalam, Pierre Hetu and Otto Werner-Mueller, with studies in piano under Michael Zenge and Francis Whang.

His commitment to new music developed early in his career and led to collaborations with composers such as Joseph Schwantner, Augusta Read Thomas, Michael Daugherty, Libby Larsen, David Liptak and Robert Moore. In 1997, as part of Eastman's 75th anniversary, Anderson was selected to conduct the world premiere performance of the newly revised *Overture in Praise of Folly* by Pulitzer Prize-winning composer George Walker. This commitment to new music endures, with recent world premiere performances of works by Daniel Bukvich (*The Glittering Hill*) and David Maslanka (*11:11 A Dance at the Edge of the World, Symphony No. 6 "Living Earth"; A Child's Garden of Dreams: Book 2*; recordings offered under the Albany Records label).

Anderson and the Appalachian Symphony Orchestra were both finalist in the 2010 American Prize in Orchestral Conducting and Performance. Anderson received the 2005 Miriam Cannon Hayes School of Music Outstanding Teaching Award. In 2003, he was selected by the American Symphony Orchestra League to participate in the National Conductor Preview with the Jacksonville Symphony in Florida. This program showcased eight conductors that had been “carefully chosen for their talent, accomplishments, and qualifications, who are ready to assume important professional conducting responsibilities with American orchestras.” In 2001, he competed in the first Vakhtang Jordania/New Millennium International Conducting Competition in Kharkov, Ukraine, and “was a third-round diploma laureate and major prize winner.” Anderson serves on the board of directors of the Conductors Guild, holding the office of president-elect.

Before joining the faculty at UD, Anderson held positions with the Eastman Opera Theatre, Triangle Opera and Pauper Players in North Carolina, Theatre on the Ridge in New York, Appalachian State University’s Hayes School of Music, University of Montana’s Music Department and the Missoula Children's Theatre. He remains committed to a variety of outreach projects and is a frequent adjudicator and clinician on both the state and national levels. He is in demand as a guest conductor and has served as music director of the Butte Symphony Association and director of orchestral activities at Appalachian State University and the University of Montana.