ARTS

"We know the game and we're gonna play it"
NEVER GONNA GIVE YOU UP RICK ASTLEY

From Yale to the Grammys: 21 School of Music alumni earn nominations

BY SIMRAN RANDHAWA
STAFF REPORTER

Twenty-one Yale School of Music alumni earned Grammy nominations on Tuesday, spanning the classical, opera, choral, chamber music, orchestral, musical theater and arrangement categories.

Behind the names and pieces, the nominations embody years of training, practice and collaboration — and for Craig Hella Johnson MUS '90 '95, whose group earned a nomination for Best Choral Performance on Tuesday, an important part of that musical journey was the relationships and learning that began at Yale.

Johnson is the conductor for Conspirare, a professional choir and nonprofit organization based in Austin, Texas. Prior to this year, the group received 12 Grammy nominations and won the Grammy Award for Best Choral Performance in 2015.

"It's really a joy to be nominated," Johnson said. "It's so meaningful to be recognized by your peers in the field and to hear them saying, 'We support you. We acknowledge the work that you've done, the investment that you've made and the artistry that you've brought.'"

Johnson's nominated work, "Piedra de Sol," is a choir piece based on Mexican poet Octavio Paz's poem of the same name. The composition was written by Joby Talbot, transforming over 500 lines of visual imagery into a musical piece.

The project faced its fair share of struggles, Johnson said. In its initial stages, COVID-19 took out Johnson and half of Conspirare's singers. When the ensemble regrounded, an ice storm disrupted performances, and Conspirare lost its recording venue just weeks before the session.

Johnson recounted that many people asked him whether he took that as a sign that his project would be unsuccessful. But he rejected that notion.

"Every time something happened, I had a quiet, deep conviction that it was strengthening us — that it was part of the journey," he said.

He added that when half of Conspirare was bedridden and ill, supporters stepped in financially to bring the project back to life. Johnson said that this support "meant everything."

"Their affirmation saying almost immediately, like, 'We're going to see this project through to the end with you,'" he said. "It is such an affirmation."

Members of Sandbox Percussion, a percussion quartet formed at the School of Music, also said a significant part of their experience can be attributed to the relationships they formed at Yale. Jonathan Allen MUS '13 '14, Victor Caccese MUS '13, Ian Rosenbaum MUS '10 '11 and Terry Sweeney MUS '15, were nominated for both "Re(new)al" and "Renewal: Music of Viet Cuong."

Caccese said the group's formation was catalyzed by Yale's emphasis on chamber music in every type of music, including percussion — which is historically atypical for chamber music, according to Caccese. He said the percussion students spent time rehearsing together for the Yale Percussion Group concert when they "started thinking about whether we could continue doing it outside of school."

After looking for concert opportunities through composers, including Yale-educated composers, they started commissioning works.

Rosenbaum said Robert van Sice, a lecturer at the School of Music, encouraged the group to "pursue a career path that may be less secure than many others," which gave members the courage to follow through on starting their own percussion quartet.

The quartet's members did not all attend Yale at the same time, but the small percussion department — about six students at a time — helped create a close community across graduating classes, Rosenbaum said.

"Yale was such a special place for us," he said. "It was so key, so instrumental to our formation as a group."

The training also shaped how the quartet approaches music. Caccese described that the main thing they think about as an ensemble is, "How can four players sound like one person, like one mind?"

On "Re(new)al," each percussionist contributes part of the musical material and it comes together to represent an interesting environmental topic.

Among the list of Grammy nominees were other School of Music alumni: Andy Akiho MUS '11 was nominated for "Akiho: Beneath Lighted Coffers & Concerto for Steel Pans & Orchestra," conductor Marin Alsop for "Clyne: Color Field" and pianist Steven Blier '72 for "My Brother's Keeper." Composer Anthony Davis '73 was nominated twice for "The Central Park Five." Jasper String Quartet members J Freivogel MUS '10 and Rachel Henderson Freivogel MUS '10 are among the artists on "Lamenting Earth."



TIM TAI
Twenty-one graduates of the Yale School of Music earned Grammy nods on Tuesday, with their field spanning from choral performance to percussion quartet. Three nominees told the News that Yale was a critical part of their musical journey.

"I'm overjoyed and extremely honored to be nominated with David Danzmayr and the Oregon Symphony—it is the culmination of our seven-year journey together," Akiho wrote to the News. Akiho, who collaborated with Danzmayr and the orchestra as its composer-in-residence for three seasons, said that the musicians "have become family" to him.

Akiho celebrated sharing the Best Classical Instrumental Solo category with close colleagues and idols, including Curtis Stewart, Yo-Yo Ma and Han Chen, as well as — "most importantly" — his "favorite YSM collaborators," Sandbox Percussion.

"It's truly a dream," Akiho wrote.

The list also includes pianist Eri Nakamura MUS '05 '06 of Neave Trio for "In Her Hands," William Paul '86 for "Schmigadoon," tenor Matthew Polenzani MUS '94 for "Vanessa," Caroline Shaw MUS '07 for "The Governor's Waltz," composer Sarah Kirkland Snider MUS '05 '06 for "Forward Into Light" and composer Missy Mazzoli MUS '06 for "Breaking the Waves."

S Percussion members Eric Cha-Beach MUS '07, Josh Quillen MUS '06, Adam Sliwinski MUS '03 '04 '09 and Jason Treuting MUS '01 '02 were nominated for "25x25."

The 69th Grammy Awards will take place on Feb. 7, 2027.

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Exhibit explores Cairo's vanishing public spaces

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Satellite images and aerial photographs of public spaces in Cairo are currently sprawled across the walls of Rudolph Hall in the School of Architecture. The images, accompanied by physical models at the center of the exhibit, depict the changing landscapes of Egypt's capital city as both widespread and tangible.

"Formal Informalities," an exhibit by architect Abdallah Kamel ARC '27 that opened on Monday, examines how Cairo's green spaces are steadily disappearing and shifting. The exhibit explores how public spaces and public life are shaped by formal infrastructures that can "accomodate, constrain, or give rise to informal adaptations and everyday encounters," according to its description.

Kamel said the project was largely inspired by his experiences growing up in Cairo.

"This project came to me when I felt myself losing the public sense and the public space, the places that I belong to," he said.

After coming to those realizations, Kamel said, he began to question his community's public spaces, how many of them have been lost and its lasting impacts.

Kamel's work largely focuses on underserved communities, specifically in relation to its educational infrastructure, and "the relationship between architecture, urban fabric, and social agency in the Global South," his website reads.

The exhibition features a range of different models, drawings and imagery. Among those displays is "Cairo Through Moving Images," which synthesizes excerpts from Egyptian films and modern footage of Cairo's streets. Curated by Hagar Amr, who is also Kamel's wife, the sequence centers personal, human relationships and interactions with public spaces.

"We wanted to show people how Egypt was like and how it is now," Amr said, adding that the public spaces are nearly gone. "So we chose old movies so it can show how Egypt was so beautiful and some recent footage from how it has become now."

Another display, titled "Reading Cairo's Urban Fabric," depicts a large-scale map of Cairo that highlights both the scope of the city and the pockets of human life within it.

"The map asks how connections across the city relate to the continuity of walking routes, crossings and places to pause within it," the display's description reads.

The perspective that these displays bring to the exhibit embody Kamel's broader beliefs on the importance of sustainability, particularly in public spaces. He said accessibility is necessary in order for public spaces to be sustainable.

"The public spaces should be accessible," he said. "It's called public because it has to be accessible to everyone."

For some observers, the exhibit elicited similar sentiments and prompted various understandings of the exhibit's different aspects. Asami Igarashi ARC '27, who attended the exhibit's opening reception, said the exhibition felt "visible" and encouraged her to consider her own perception of sustainability in public spaces.

People will leave an unsustainable city because it is "unlovable," and that cannot happen in a place like Cairo, she said.

"Formal Informalities" will be on display until Dec. 18.

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"Formal Informalities" by architect Abdallah Kamel investigates how public infrastructure like transportation is changing green spaces in Cairo.

