



Contempo

A New Musical Theatre Review

April 17 6PM

April 18 5PM

Presented by the Pepperdine Fine Arts Department

Directed by Kelly Todd

Musical Direction by David Fraley

Vocal Coaching by Kate Bass

Edited by Sam Sun

(bios and headshots below)

“I Have a Vision” from *Peace Child*

Music and Lyrics by David Gordon



David Gordon is a poet, songwriter, self-taught religious philosopher, and one of the founders of Peace Child International. David was born of Greek and Swedish parents in London and lived through the Second World War in a densely bombed area of the city. He entered the music business in 1966 by launching the career of his brother, Cat Stevens, who went on to become one of the most internationally acclaimed singer/ songwriters of the 1970s.

In 1969 he started his own song-writing career working with Terry Sylvester of the Hollies and, in 1980, went solo as a composer and lyricist creating and producing the oratorio *Alpha Omega*.

In October 1981, David Gordon worked with Brigadier Michael and Eirwen Harbottle of the World Disarmament Campaign, and David Woollcombe and Rosey Simonds to produce *Peace Child*, a musical adaptation of Bernard Benson's *The Peace Book*.

In September 1985, David co- produced the United Nations Peace Day Festival to launch the United Nations International Year of Peace at the Royal Albert Hall in London. In 1988, David founded Peace Child Israel which brought together Arab and Israeli children in theatrical and musical workshops dealing with conflict resolution.

In 1990, David went to the USA and worked with Peace Child International and others to create various local programs in and around Princeton and Trenton, NJ. He continues to manage some of his brother's business affairs and play an active role in various philanthropic causes.

“If I Could Grow a Beard”

Music and Lyrics by Jacob Fjeldheim



Jacob Fjeldheim is Brooklyn-based composer/lyricist and orchestrator originally from Merritt Island, Florida. He’s written music for four full-length musicals, including *Ultimate Storytime* (book, Thomas Sanders), which recorded an original cast recording before embarking on a national tour in 2016. His writing and arrangements have been featured at Lincoln Center (NYC), A.R.T. (Cambridge, MA), Barrington Stage (Pittsfield, MA), Harvard University, the Idaho Shakespeare Festival, with Cirque du Soleil, and with Rodgers & Hammerstein for their “RnH Goes Pop!” Youtube series. Jacob served as music associate on John Cameron Mitchell’s podcast musical “Anthem: Homunculus,” and he is releasing a singer/songwriter record this April. MFA: Graduate Musical Theatre Writing, NYU Tisch.

Performed by Britain Hope



Britain Hope is a Senior at Pepperdine University from Rancho Santa Margarita, California studying Theatre with an Emphasis in Acting and Computer Science. Hope is a six-time Academic Dean's List recipient and Theatre Scholarship recipient. His Pepperdine credits include: *Medea* (Medea's Son), *Curtains* (Johnny), *Ragtime* (Grandfather), *Polar Bears*, *Black Boys*, and *Prairie Fringed Orchids* (Tom), and Select Member of the Edinburgh Fringe Festival Company 2020.

“I Want to Live” from *Peace Child*

Music and Lyrics by David Gordon – headshot and bio on page 1

Performed by Indiana Wilson and Cole Wagner



Indiana Wilson is a senior theatre arts acting student with a hispanic studies minor from Palm Desert, CA. Her Pepperdine credits include *As You Like It* (Touchstone), *Polar Bears*, *Black Boys & Prairie Fringed Orchids* (Molly), *The Cherry Orchard* (Charlotta), *Ragtime* (Ensemble), *The Taming of the Shrew* (Vincentio), *Curtains* (Carmen Bernstein), and *Medea* (Chorus). Wilson is a Regents Scholar, a Theatre Scholarship recipient, and the proud President of the Pepperdine Improv Troupe.

Cole Wagner is a freshman Theatre and Screen Arts major from Portland, Oregon. He was last seen in the Freshman Showcase and in the stage productions *Into the Woods*, *Clue*, and *The Game's Afoot*. He is a recipient of the Pepperdine Theatre Arts scholarship. Cole would like to thank everyone in Contempo for all their hard work and hopes to be on campus with them someday soon.

“Another Right Turn”

Music and Lyrics by Chris Jerabek



Christopher Jerabek is a senior theatre major, emphasizing in Production/Design and Directing, with a minor in Studio Art. His scenic designs have been seen on Pepperdine stages in Rhinoceros, Call Center, and Stay Because. Jerabek also served as the scenic designer, props master, and assistant director for The Abode at its Edinburgh Fringe Festival world premiere. He was recently the scenic and projections designer for the 2020 TEDx event, sponsored by PepperdineU. His designs will also be featured in Pepperdine's upcoming production of Ugly Lies the Bone. Christopher is a Regents' Scholar, and recipient of the Pickford-Stotsenberg Endowment, courtesy of the Theatre Department.

Performed by Marcela Ferrarone



Marcela Ferrarone is a senior Theatre and Media Production major with an emphasis in Acting and a minor in Multimedia Design from Barrington, Illinois. Her Pepperdine theatre credits include Miss Bennet: Christmas at Pemberley (Lydia Wickham), Ragtime (Assistant Stage Manager), Taming of the Shrew (Curtis), The Abode (Ensemble, Troll Hunter), and Big Fish (Josephine Bloom). Marcela is currently interning at the Foundation for New American Musicals and she will soon appear as Jess in this year's Pepperdine production of Ugly Lies the Bone. She is a Theatre Scholarship recipient.

“Night Without the Moon”

Music and Lyrics by Kate Bass



Kate Bass, originally from Anchorage Alaska, performs internationally in many varying musical genres ranging from classical, musical theater, and jazz, to her own pop and folk-inspired original music. She has appeared on stage as a soloist with the New York Philharmonic, at Carnegie Hall, as well as on and off-Broadway for Emmy and Tony Award-nominated productions. She has recorded for numerous film scores with music by Arturo Cardelús, David Stone Hamilton, and others; her voice was recently featured in award-winning films at both the Austin Film Festival and the Milan International Film Festival. Kate was also the soprano soloist for Iranian singer and setar player Hafez Nazeri’s Grammy-nominated SONY Worldwide release of “Untold” with the Rumi Symphony.

As a singer-songwriter, Kate has four albums released; her first single aired on international radio in 2013. She has performed her music to sold out crowds all over the world, and has been hailed by the press as “easy to love,” “infectious,” and “one of the best vocalists on the scene today.” Her latest, entirely self-made album, “Quarantine,” was written, recorded, and released in March 2020 from her apartment in Los Angeles.

Kate is on vocal faculty at Pepperdine University in Malibu, California, where she also works as a Musical Director for Pepperdine’s musical theater department. She leads vocal masterclasses and songwriting workshops around the globe for organizations such as the Girl Scouts, the Metropolitan Opera Guild, Classical Singer Magazine, and American Voices.

Performed by Abrianna Lawrence



Abrianna Lawrence is a junior theatre music major from Phoenix, AZ. Lawrence has previously been in Pepperdine’s productions of Futureproof (Millie), Men on Boats (Hall 2019, Hawkins 2020) and the Musical Theatre Cabaret. Lawrence is a theatre scholarship recipient, music scholarship recipient, and a member of the Pepperdine Chamber Choir. She would like to thank Kelly and David for all their hard work on this production. She would also like to thank Kate for writing a beautiful song and allowing her to sing it for the world to see.

“I Can’t Do That for You” from *Still Putting It Together*

Music and Lyrics by Gaby Mank and Brett Miller



Brett Miller is a Musical Theater student in his last semester at Marymount Manhattan College. He is also a songwriter and musician with *Antonio: TONIGHT!* and a frequent collaborator of Gaby Mank’s. His credits as an actor include *American Idiot* (Johnny), *Good News* (Ben/Quartet Bass). You can also find his work as an actor/choreographer/composer/music director in *Birds and Bats: A Parody Musical* on YouTube. He’d like to thank his extremely supportive family, Robert, Kate, and every teacher and mentor that has made him the artist and person he is today.

Gaby Mank is a Manhattan-based performer, composer-lyricist, music assistant, and musical director. Raised on Long Island, she moved to New York City to study Musical Theatre at Marymount Manhattan College from where she graduated this past Spring. Through her music minor, she was able to deepen her music education by taking music theory classes at Hunter College and piano lessons at the New York Conservatory of Music. As part of the conservatory program, she has performed in student recitals at Steinway Hall. Along with studying musical theatre, she has been an assistant musical director for Marymount Manhattan College's productions of *Good News*, *Parade*, and *Starlight Express*. She was the founder, musical director, and arranger for "On A Side Note," Marymount's only on-campus a cappella group. She Music Directed *American Idiot* as part of the Musical Theatre Association's Fall show (2019) featuring a full band of student-musicians and some incredibly talented actor-musicians. She has served as a Music Assistant/Copyist on shows and readings such as *The Giant Hoax* (Theatre Row), *It's Kind of A Funny Story*, the Broadway-bound new musical *The Karate Kid*, and *Akira & the Merpeople*. Her own concert of songs "Still Putting it Together" was performed and streamed virtually in October to raise funds for Maestra, and features the songs into the later created *Apocalypse* written with Maeve Kelley Baker. Her song "Asking For A Friend" was recently featured in the University of North Carolina at Greensboro’s “Hear Our Voices” concert. She continues to be fulfilled by writing music and music directing (albeit virtually, for now). She is incredibly grateful to all the folx at Pepperdine who brought “I Can’t Do That For You” to life and for Brett, for his steadfast support and inspiring talent.

Performed by Sydney DeMaria and Sydney Swearengin



Sydney DeMaria is a senior theatre and music major from Orange County, CA. Her Pepperdine credits include *As You Like It* (Amiens/Corin), *Ragtime* (Mother), *Miss Bennet: Christmas at Pemberley* (Elizabeth Darcy), *Curtains* (Bambi), among others. Outside credits include Creative Quarantine's *Les Misérables* (Cosette), which was filmed remotely during the peak pandemic months, as well as *Ragtime* (Dance Captain/Ensemble) and *Big Fish* (Alabama Lamb), both at the Chance Theater in Anaheim, CA. DeMaria is a current member of the Pepperdine Improv Troupe and Dance in Flight, and is a Pepperdine Theatre Arts Scholarship recipient.

Sydney Swearengin is a Senior Music Major from Fresno, CA. Some of her recent credits at Pepperdine include *Cendrillon* (Spirit/Prince Charmant cover), *Ragtime* (Immigrant Ensemble), *Men on Boats* (Sumner), and *Curtains* (Mona). Swearengin has been a member of the Pepperdine Concert and Chamber Choirs for four years. She is a recipient of the George Pepperdine Scholarship Award as well as a Music Scholarship. Sydney is so glad to be a part of Contempo and is thankful to all who attend, as well as Kelly, David, and Kate for all of their work on this project. Art lives on!

“Easy” from *Senior Class*

Melody and Lyrics by Melvin Tunstall, III

Music by Greg Borowsky



Greg Dean Borowsky is a songwriter and music producer from South Africa, signed to *Sony ATV*. Greg is the creative producer and writer behind some of South Africa’s biggest *SAMA (SA Music Awards)* winning artists. Greg’s debut album, signed to *Universal Music SA*, was nominated for a *MetroFM Best RnB Award*, and his single (*Chocolate Vanilla*) was nominated for a *Best RnB Channel O Africa Award*. In 2014 Greg was commissioned by the South African government to co-write and produce the country’s official *20 Years of Freedom* song, featuring 20 of South Africa’s music legends from across various genres. Shortly thereafter Greg moved to New York to develop *MANDELA - The Musical* which will be premiering at The Young Vic Theatre in London 2022 and releasing a Broadway/West End all-star album through Sony Masterworks in 2021. Greg’s last producer album (*The Greg Dean Project*) reached #1 on the *U.K Soul Chart* and remained on the *U.S.A Billboard RnB Chart* for 6 weeks in 2016. He made his debut as a musical theatre composer with *Polkadots: The Cool Kids Musical*, which has had over 50 separate licensed productions staged around the U.S.A, and was produced Off-Broadway by *The Atlantic Theatre Company*, winning an *Off-Broadway Alliance Award for Best New Musical* in 2017, as well as a *Naledi Award* in South Africa (*Best Production for Young Audiences, 2018*). TV/Film songwriting and producing credits include A+E Networks Lifetime’s *The Christmas Edition*; *Merry Little Christmas Wedding*; *Sugar & Spice*; History Channel’s *Black Patriots Documentary*; and *Married At First Sight 2021 Theme Song*.

Melvin Tunstall, III is an Off-Broadway Alliance Award-winning playwright for penning the book of the TYA phenomenon *Polkadots: the Cool Kids Musical*. Seen in over 50 productions worldwide, the show also took home the Naledi Award, South Africa’s equivalent to the Tony Award. Melvin began his writing career while still a student at the Cincinnati Conservatory of Music as a founding member of the AMP Theatre Company. A proud participant in the Yale Institute for Musical Theater, Melvin took a small break from writing to make his Broadway debut in *Beautiful: The Carole King Musical* after originating the role of “Ja’Keith” in the Toronto Company of the Broadway smash *Rock of Ages*. The acting bug now quenched, Melvin returned to writing with commissioned adaptations of the Broadway musicals *Wonderland* and *The Wiz*. His original musical *BLooM!* was a finalist in the renowned NAMT Festival in New York City and *Pete(HER)Pan*, his contemporary take on the JM Barrie classic was one of the first virtual productions to be produced during the pandemic. Melvin resides in New York City where he is currently working on the musical adaptation of the YA Novel *The Supadupa Kid* for Barrington Stage

Company and an original movie musical based on the story of the famed Greensboro Four entitled *One Week at Woolworth's*. Melvin is represented by William Morris Endeavor.

Performed by Leyla Dillig



Leyla Dillig

Leyla Dillig is a Senior Theatre Major with an emphasis in acting from Stuttgart, Germany. Her Pepperdine Credits include *The Pirates of Penzance* (Ensemble), *Well* (Ensemble Member B), *Rhinoceros* (Housewife), *Stay Because* (Erin), *Falling* (Lisa), *Ragtime* (Sarah) and *Men on Boats* (Dunn). In 2018 she was part of the world premiere of “The Abode” with Pepperdine's Edinburgh Summer Program. She is a recipient of the Theater Scholarship and a member of the Pepperdine Student Players.

“Waiting” from *Virgins*

Music and Lyrics by Shane W. Dittmar



Shane W. Dittmar is a musician; educator; and composer of popular, theatrical, and concert music. A native of Raleigh, NC, he now serves as the music teacher at the Washington State School for the Blind in Vancouver, WA, where he lives with his wife, Kaitlin, and guide dog, Chevelle. His music is shaped by his unique view of the world: Shane is legally blind, and he strives to use his music to tell stories and express emotions that help everyone see the world a little more clearly. Recently, his original musical theatre has been performed at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro as well as by Roundabout Theatre Company in NYC.

Performed by Dawson Foster and Penny Devlin



Dawson Foster is a sophomore Theatre Arts major with an emphasis in Musical Theatre, from Arlington, Texas. His Pepperdine Credits include: Duke Frederick/Hymen in *As You Like It*, Yasha in *The Cherry Orchard*, and a soloist in the “*Fine Arts Cabaret*”. Outside credits include: Don Lockwood in *Singin’ In the Rain*, and The Lion in *The Wizard of Oz*. Dawson is a member of the Pepperdine Improv Troupe. He is also a Pickford-Stonsenberg Endowed Theatre Scholarship Recipient.

Penny Devlin is a junior theater musical theater emphasis major from San Francisco, CA. She previously appeared in the Fall 2020 Fine Arts Cabaret at Pepperdine. In addition, she has previously studied with the American Conservatory Theater and Marin Shakespeare Company. She hopes you enjoy the show!

“Does Anyone See Anything in Me”

Music and Lyrics by David Fraley



David Fraley, a recent graduate of the Pepperdine Music Department, is a pianist and music director in the Greater Los Angeles area. He was piano-conductor of "Big Fish" at Pepperdine (2017), and co-music director and piano-conductor of "Sweeney Todd" at Conejo Players Theatre (2019), for which he won Outstanding Musical Direction from Four Star Theater Alliance. For five years, David has music directed Contempo, the Pepperdine musical theater ensemble. Currently, David is music director and piano-conductor for Daddy Long Legs at Conejo Players Theatre. Aside from the proud work he does as a pianist for local churches, David currently gives private lessons and works as a choral and instrumental coach and accompanist.

Performed by Chris Jerabek - headshot and bio on page 4

“I Could Learn to Live Like This” from *Elektric*

Music and Lyrics by Murphy Taylor Smith



Murphy Taylor Smith is a transgender woman composer-lyricist, performer, and musician. She is passionate about creating new, authentic roles for trans people in musical theatre, working with her twin sister, book-writer, and fellow trans woman Emerson Mae Smith. She was named the 2019 York Theatre N/E/O Writer of the Future and her songs have been featured in several concerts at Feinstein’s/54 Below. She will perform her first solo evening of original music at the venue in August 2021, as a part of the New Writers series. Her and Emerson's musical, ELEKTRIC, a trans woman-centered adaptation of the Oresteia, is planned to be produced at the University of Michigan in 2022. They were commissioned by UNCGreensboro to write RADIO, a lesbian horror movie musical with an electropop score. A recent graduate of Penn State’s BFA program, she recently played 'Doll' in the Bedlam Theatre web-series *Bedlam*. @msmurphysmith // MurphyTaylorSmith.com

Performed by Dawson Foster - headshot and bio on page 10

“Little Things” from *Back to One: A Coming of Self Musical*

Music and Lyrics by Socks Whitmore



Socks Whitmore (they/them/theirs) is a multidisciplinary performer, composer, and storyteller. Whether they're writing a new musical, recording voice over, or testing their four-octave range in song, every aspect of their work is rooted in voice and text. Their current greatest bodies of work include the book, lyrics and music of the full length musical *We Are Here* (New Voices Project Winner 2019) and the one-act queer show, *Back to One: A Coming of Self Musical*. Their compositional and vocal talents can also be heard in Penguin Random House's *Narwhal and Jelly* series as Narwhal, and the episodic audio drama *Georgie Romero Is Done For* as Georgie. On their days off, Socks can be found working on choral music, indie games, short fiction, or amassing large amounts of socks. And for those who are curious, they hold a BFA Performer-Composer degree from the California Institute of the Arts (CalArts) with minors in Digital Arts and Creative Writing. To learn more about their adventures in professional overachievement, follow them on socials @sockswhitmore or visit <https://sockswhitmore.com/>.

Performed by Lauren Burton



Lauren Burton is a junior theatre and music major from Portland, OR. She was most recently seen at Pepperdine in the 2020 Cabaret event, *Futureproof* (Serena) and *Men on Boats* (Hall), and she is a member of the Pepperdine Improv Troupe. Some of her professional credits include *Junie B. Jones* (Bobbi Jean Piper) and *A Year with Frog and Toad* (Squirrel 1/Mole 3) with Oregon Children's Theater, as well as *Peter Pan* (Tootles) and *The Jungle Book* (Monkey) with Northwest Children's Theater. Burton is a Pepperdine Theatre Arts Scholarship, Pepperdine Music Scholarship recipient and Oregon Thespian Melba Day Sparks Memorial Scholarship recipient.

“Everything I Do”

Music and Lyrics by Lauren Drake



Lauren Drake is an aspiring singer-songwriter and Pepperdine acting student from Sammamish, WA. She has performed in numerous Pepperdine productions, notably *As You Like It* (Jaques), *Miss Bennet: Christmas at Pemberley* (Mary Bennet), *Ragtime* (Emma Goldman) and *The Taming of the Shrew* (Baptista). She is the Vice-President of the Pepperdine Improv Troupe and a Regents Scholar. Her debut single “okay” was released in March and can be found on Spotify, Apple Music and other streaming platforms. She is so grateful to be able to share her writing with such a wonderful production, and has plans to release more music of her own in the near future.

Performed by Indy Wilson - headshot and bio on page 3

“Anything is Possible” from *Double Helix*

Music and Lyrics by Madeline Myers



Madeline Myers is a composer and lyricist for musical theater in New York City. Her musicals include *Double Helix*, *Flatbush Avenue* (UNC-Greensboro commission), *The Devil’s Apprentice*, (world premiere Copenhagen, Denmark, 2018), *Masterpiece* (O’Neill Musical Theater Conference 2018 semi-finalist), *The Starry Messenger*, and *The Rumoured Lyfe & Certain Death of Delia Bacon*. Madeline is a 2020 Billie Burke Ziegfeld Award Finalist, a 2020, 2019, 2018, and 2017 Jonathan Larson Grant finalist, a 2019 York Theatre Company NEO Writer, a 2020, 2019, 2018, and 2017 ASCAP Plus Award recipient, and a 2016-2017 Dramatists Guild Fellow. ^[1]_{SEP}

Madeline’s musicals have been developed at the York Theatre, Goodspeed Musicals (Johnny Mercer Writers Grove), the New Dramatists Composer-Librettist Studio, the Fingerlakes Musical Theater Festival, Musical Theater Factory, the NMI Disney Imagineering New Voices Project, the New York Theatre Barn, and the Johnny Mercer Songwriting Project.

When not writing musicals, Madeline enjoys reading, walking in Central Park, and volunteering. She is an active volunteer with Central Synagogue’s homeless breakfast program and the founder of a 2020 voter registration/Census count initiative for the New York homeless community. In 2018, Madeline created the Blair School of Music Student Citizen Award given to a female student demonstrating excellence in personal character and contributions to the community. Madeline sits on the Alumni Board of the Vanderbilt University Ingram Scholarship Program, of which she is a proud alumna. She is an original member of the music department of the Broadway production of *Hamilton*. Madeline is a proud member of ASCAP and the Dramatists Guild. She is represented by Katie Gamelli at Abrams Artists Agency. @madelinesmyers www.madelinemyers.com

Performed by Joe Hebel and Sydney DeMaria - headshot and bio on page 7



Joe Hebel is a senior theatre music major from Moorpark, CA. His Pepperdine credits include *As You Like It* (Oliver), *Dido and Aeneas* (Aeneas), *Ragtime* (Younger Brother), the original musical *Electric Circus* (Giovanni Aldini), *Die Fledermaus* (Eisenstein), *Curtains* (Aaron Fox), and *The Pirates of Penzance* (Samuel). Hebel is a 2016 California Arts Scholar and both a Pepperdine Theatre Arts Scholarship and Pepperdine Music Scholarship recipient. He also attended the Heidelberg summer music program of 2019 and was planning to attend the Edinburgh summer program of 2020 before it was cancelled due to COVID-19.

“Once Upon a Time” from *The Chosen One*

Music and Lyrics by Eli Cohen



Eli Cohen is a recent graduate of Northwestern University’s theatre program, where he concentrated in writing and musical theatre. Much of his work focused on writing and directing, including his contributions to the Waa-Mu Show, Northwestern’s student written musical. On the Waa-Mu Show, he served as a writer, lyricist, and composer for three shows: *Beyond Belief*, *Manhattan Miracle*, and *For the Record*. He also served as assistant director for *Manhattan Miracle* and as dramaturg for *For the Record*. Eli also served as director for a workshop reading of a new musical, *Dragonsong*, and as an orchestrator on *Into the Woods*.

Eli has also worked on several workshop readings of new musicals with the American Music Theatre Project, including as assistant director on *Something in the Game* as well as *Legacy: A Book of Names*, which premiered at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival, and as writer’s assistant on *Marie in Tomorrowland*. He has also worked as a member of the Goodman Theatre’s Literary Department, where he wrote script coverage, did dramaturgical research for plays, and served as stage manager for an adaptation of George Orwell’s *Homage to Catalonia*.

Original works include *The Chosen One*, *Far From Christopher Street*, and *(de)Generate*. Songs from *The Chosen One* have been featured in UNC Greensboro’s *Hear Our Voices* concert, as well as in concert with Tin Pan Alley 2. Eli also studied computer science, and wrote an undergraduate thesis on “Queer Representation in Contemporary Musical Theatre”, which started his work on *The Chosen One*. Originally from Chicago, Eli is planning to move to New York and hopes to adopt a dog soon.

Performed by Sydney Swearengin, Leyla Dillig, Lauren Burton and Abrianna Lawrence

(headshots and bios above)

“Cry Freedom” from *Voices for Peace*

Music by Dr. Rickey Payton, Sr. and Lyrics by Sujata Sidhu Gibson



Dr. Rickey Payton, Sr., a Grammy’s member, attended Howard University where he majored in Music, Business Administration and studied Entertainment Law. In 1992, Dr. Payton taught choral music at Sidwell Friends School in Washington, DC. In 2005, Dr. Payton received an Honorary Doctorate of Humane Letters from the Breakthrough Bible College. He is also featured in The HistoryMakers Digital Archive.

In 1997, Dr. Payton along with Dr. Sheila Johnson Newman, formerly of Black Entertainment Television (B.E.T.), Co-Founded Urban Nation, Inc., a 501 c (3) organization that services at-risk youth throughout the Washington, DC metropolitan area, where he currently serves as President & CEO.

Dr. Payton & Urban Nation Choir has performed on The National Mall at the Earth Day Network and Moral Action for the Climate during Pope Francis visit to address the joint session of Congress and other world leaders, as well as performed many times at The National African American History Museum. Currently, Dr. Payton is the Artistic Director of the nationally renowned Urban Nation H.I.P. – H.O.P. Choir, an acronym which stands for (Hope, Integrity, Power – Helping Our People).

He served as The Music Director for composer Henry Jackman “Birth Of A Nation” movie premiere featured at The Middleburg Film Festival, Salamander Farm in Middleburg, Virginia. In keeping with his strong commitment to peace and social justice, Rickey was the Co-Founder, former Board Member, Composer and Musical Director of the acclaimed “City at Peace”, an organization that uses the performing arts to teach tolerance and cross cultural understanding. City at Peace highlights included performances at the John F. Kennedy Center, The Warner Theater and a featured story on “Nightline” with Ted Koppel. City at Peace was released as a 90-minute featured documentary on HBO, Director by Susan Koch with Executive Directors, Barbra Streisand and Cis Corman of Barwood Films. Rickey shared his gift with the world when his song “Let’s Build A Bridge All Across America” was featured as one of the highlights of President Bill Clinton’s Second Inaugural Ceremony in January 1996, and in 2008 he composed an original song "Yes We Can" for President Barack Obama's 1st Inauguration. Under the Administration of the late former Mayor Marion Barry, Rickey was appointed as a D.C. Commissioner of the Arts and Humanities for over four years.

His music scores include the Emmy Award-Winning Documentary “The New Cotton Club Revue” Hosted by the late Jim Vance, NBC-TV’s and “The Sunshine Store”. Rickey has composed original music scores for "Bring In The Morning", "Something To Shout About", "Hallelujah Boulevard", "The Great Messiah", “And It Came To Pass”, "Roll On" featuring Melba Moore with Michael & Regina Winans, and the Annual Christmas Productions for the DC Department of Recreation on TV Channel 32.

For over 25 years Dr. Payton served as the Minister of Music at New Bethel Church of God in Christ, under the leadership of the late Bishop Sherman S. Howard who also appointed him as The State Minister of Music for the Washington, D.C. Jurisdiction Church of God in Christ. Because of Payton's skills, talents and ability, Professor Iris Stevenson, the former President of the International Music Department of the Church of God in Christ appointed him as The Executive Director of The Office of the President. Dr. Payton, was then promoted to serve as Vice President under the current leadership of Dr. Judith Christie McAllister, Minister of Music and President Of The Church Of God In Christ Music Department Worldwide.

Additional credits include, In 2016, he produced the Greater Washington Urban League Gala, featuring Patti Labelle, he also serves as Music Producer for DC-CAPital Stars Scholarship Awards Gala presented by DC College Access Program, held annually at The John F. Kennedy Center for The Performing Arts. He has worked with such superstars as Michael Jackson, Whitney Houston, Stevie Wonder, Celine Dion, John Legend, Patti LaBelle, Opera Divas Harolyn Blackwell, Denyce Graves, and many others.

Rickey has traveled extensively throughout the world. He has appeared at the International Jazz Festival in Montreux, Switzerland, and gave command performances at The White House and The Vatican. He has also performed for the former President Mitterrand of France, Queen Elizabeth of England and Mikhail Gorbachev of the former Soviet Union. He is happily married to Vernita Ann Payton and they have three children, Rickey, Jr., Darnell and Dasia along with five beautiful grandchildren.



Outside of being an adjunct professor at Cornell, Sujata Gibson is the principal attorney at The Gibson Law Firm, PLLC, a general practice boutique firm with a focus on civil rights litigation and mass defense. Sujata wrote the lyrics for this song as a teenager on a musical program to bring racial equality to South Africa.

Ms. Gibson has been practicing in state and federal courts for over a decade. She began her career as an Associate at the D.C. office of the international law firm Crowell & Moring, LLP, where she specialized in fraud investigation, government contracts and civil and criminal litigation. After she moved back to Ithaca, New York to raise her family in 2011, she started a small solo practice. In 2015, she expanded her practice into The Gibson Law Firm and won "Best Law Firm in Ithaca" in her firm's first year in business.

Ms. Gibson served as the lead attorney for the "We Are Seneca Lake" environmental protest movement. From 2014 to 2017, she successfully defended over 650 protesters accused of trespass and disorderly conduct, winning acquittals and dismissals through motion practice, trials and appeals. She has supported

many mass defense efforts since and continues to serve as a resource nationally for protesters and activists. Ms. Gibson is also active in federal civil rights litigation, and is a member of the bar of the United States Supreme Court. In 2017, Ms. Gibson created and began teaching the Cornell Protest and Civil Disobedience Defense Practicum. In 2019, she began teaching a seminar class at the law school and regularly lectures and participates in panel discussions outside of Cornell on civil rights litigation and the role of civil disobedience in U.S. law and history.

Ms. Gibson is active in the community. She is a member of the Board of Directors of the Women's Bar of the State of New York, where she co-chairs the Judiciary/Courts committee and also serves as a member of the Board of Directors of Black Hands Universal. She is a past President of the Finger Lakes Women's Bar Association, past Secretary of the Board of the Alternatives Federal Credit Union and remains active as advisory counsel to multiple local organizations.

Before going to law school, Ms. Gibson was a lead organizer for the Union of Needletrades, Industrial and Textile Employees and led successful union campaigns across North America.

Edited by Sam Sun



Samuel (Sam) Sun is a Junior violinist and violist double majoring in Music Performance and Education at Pepperdine University. A native of the Bay Area, Sam is an active chamber musician and teacher, serving as a chamber music fellow and coach for the Palo Alto Chamber Orchestra since 2016. He has served as Concertmaster of the Homestead High School Orchestra, the Palo Alto Chamber Orchestra, and the Pepperdine University Symphony Orchestra, and received the distinguished National School Orchestra Musician Award in 2018. Sam has performed as a soloist and chamber musician throughout the Bay Area, as well as Spain, Portugal, Germany, and Taiwan. He has taken masterclasses with notable artists such as Midori Gotō and Haik Kazazyan, and his principal teachers and mentors include Alexander Treger, Elbert Tsai, Ben Simon, and Kwok-Ping Koo.