Cellists Take Home First Place Prizes at the 22nd Annual Sphinx Competition

Presented by DTE Energy Foundation
Top prize made possible by Robert Frederick Smith

In February, 18 of the nation's top emerging musicians convened in Detroit for the 22nd Annual Sphinx Competition for young Black and Latinx string players. This year's competition featured amazing performances from immensely talented semifinalists in both the Junior and Senior Divisions.

The Junior Division Finalists performed with the inaugural Sphinx Honors Orchestra, led by Maestro Carlos Andrés Botero. 17-year-old cellist Nygel Witherspoon, from Minneapolis, MN, was named first place Laureate of the Junior Division, winning a $10,000 prize and instrument support from SHAR Music. He will also have the opportunity to be featured with Sphinx Soloist Program Partners. Violinist Sophia Ayer won the $5,000 second place prize and cellist Maxwell Remmer won the $3,000 third place prize.

The Competition culminated with the Finals Concert at the Max M. and Marjorie S. Fisher Music Center. Due to the incredible level of talent, four Senior Division finalists were selected to compete instead of the traditional three. The four finalists performed with the Sphinx Symphony Orchestra, led by Maestro Michael Morgan. 19-year-old cellist Sterling Elliott, a student at The Juilliard School and first place Laureate of the Junior Division in 2014, was named first place Laureate of the Senior Division. He receives the $50,000 Robert Frederick Smith Prize and instrument support from SHAR Music, as well as the opportunity to be featured with Sphinx Soloist Program Partners. Sterling was also the recipient of the $5,000 Audience Choice Award sponsored by Mercedes-Benz Financial Services. Violinist Adé Williams, another previous Junior Division winner, received the $20,000 second place prize. Violist Caleb Georges won the $10,000 third place prize and cellist Laura Andrade won the $5,000 fourth place prize.

The Sphinx Symphony Orchestra also gave thrilling performances of Bernstein's Candide Overture and the beautiful and seldom-heard Ballade for Orchestra by Samuel Coleridge-Taylor. Featured guest artist EXIGENCE, a Sphinx vocal ensemble led by founding director Eugene Rogers, performed a deeply moving piece by ensemble member Joel Thompson entitled Caged Bird.

Sphinx Performance Academy 2019

We look forward to welcoming a new class of Sphinx Performance Academy students this summer! SPA is a full-scholarship summer intensive for string players, ages 11-17. SPA 2019 sessions will take place in collaboration with the Curtis Institute of Music, Cleveland Institute of Music (CIM), and The Juilliard School. SPA Curtis and SPA CIM will have a string quartet and solo repertoire focus, and SPA Juilliard will have a solo repertoire and chamber orchestra focus. Students will also study music history and music theory, explore the topic of identity and diversity in the arts, and experience masterclasses with renowned guest artists such as Roberto Diaz and Nokuthula Ngwenyama (viola); Kelly Hall-Tomkins and Olga Kaler (violin); Astrid Schween, Gabriel Cabezas, and Richard Weiss (cello); Tim Cobb and Joseph Conyers (bass).

SPA Alumni: Where Are They Now?

Sterling Elliott was named First Place Laureate of the 22nd annual Sphinx Competition! Sterling is a student at The Juilliard School and has toured with the Sphinx Virtuosi, performed as a soloist with orchestras around the country, and played as a substitute cellist with the New York Philharmonic.

Cameren Anai Williams won the Audience Choice award at the inaugural Sphinx Tank: Identifying the Next Great Cultural Entrepreneur at SphinxConnect 2019! Cameren started her foundation, CamAnai Strings, at age 14. She is now a student at The Juilliard School, and is launching an instructional children's book about instrument care.

Angelica Durrell is participating in the inaugural Sphinx LEAD: Sphinx's professional development program empowering arts leaders of color. Angelica is the Founder & Executive Director of INTEMPO, an organization aiming to make music education relevant, accessible and inclusive.
A NOTE FROM OUR PRESIDENT

Dear Friends,

I hope you are enjoying the beginning of spring! We are heading into this season of growth and renewal energized and motivated by our recent flagship events in our hometown of Detroit. We were honored and grateful to welcome more than 800 registrants to SphinxConnect 2019: Leaders Rising, our largest convening yet! This year’s gathering, truly the epicenter for artists and leaders in diversity, was alive with thought-provoking discussions, inspiring exchanges of ideas and stories, and a tremendous sense of community and camaraderie. Concurrently, the 22nd Annual Sphinx Competition saw 18 of the nation’s top young musicians come together for a transformative week of master classes, mentorship, and an incredibly high caliber of auditions and performances.

With the momentum from these transformative events, we are excited to move into our spring and summer programming! As you will read in this newsletter, we will soon celebrate the Detroit and Flint elementary school students in our Sphinx Overture violin program with their spring recitals, and we are eagerly looking forward to a new season of our Sphinx Performance Academy with sessions at the Curtis Institute of Music, Cleveland Institute of Music, and The Juilliard School.

Thank you so much, as always, for believing in our mission and standing with us at the intersection of the arts and social justice. Your support makes everything we do possible!

Warmly,

Afa
Afa Dworkin, Sphinx President & Artistic Director

2019/20 Sphinx Virtuosi Tour: For Justice and Peace
Presented by JPMorgan Chase & Co. and Robert F. Smith

The 12th National Sphinx Virtuosi Tour program, For Justice and Peace, focuses on themes of justice and peace as they appear in music throughout place and time, exploring the ways in which both artists and citizens can play a role in propelling peace and positivity. Audiences will hear a world premiere by Sphinx Competition Laureate Xavier Foley and works by Béla Bartok and Franz Schubert.

The 19/20 season will include two touring periods, providing more opportunities to see and book this dynamic ensemble! Limited dates are still available in October 2019, and February and March 2020. Don’t miss your chance to bring the Sphinx Virtuosi to your community: contact California Artist Management (calartists.com) for booking information now.

Find a performance near you! Visit sphinxmusic.org/sphinx-virtuosi-tour for the current schedule.

SAVE THE DATE

Celebrate diversity and artistic excellence on one of the world’s greatest stages: save the date for the 2019 Sphinx Virtuosi at Carnegie Hall performance & gala!

October 11, 2019 at 7pm

Performance tickets will be available through Carnegie Hall. Email Therese@SphinxMusic.org to reserve advance box seat or gala tickets. The gala supports Sphinx’s music education programs.
A Record-Breaking SphinxConnect!

SphinxConnect 2019: Leaders Rising brought a record number of musicians, industry leaders, educators, students, funders, diversity advocates, and more to Detroit. From January 31 to February 2, attendees participated in transformative sessions celebrating and empowering leadership and designed to inspire and ignite action.

This third annual convening was the largest in Sphinx’s history! By the numbers, SphinxConnect 2019:

- welcomed more than 800 registrants
- presented more than 70 speakers, comprising leaders, innovators, and trendsetters in the field
- provided attendees access to 30+ sessions and events
- encouraged connections and networking at 2 receptions

The epicenter for artists and leaders in diversity included:

- an opening plenary by Earl Lewis, founding director of the Center for Social Solutions and professor of history at the University of Michigan and former president of the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation
- a closing plenary by concert artist Jade Simmons, a powerhouse speaker and Sphinx Medal of Excellence recipient
- Sphinx Artist Showcase hosted by artist & activist Lara Downes
- the conference’s largest Expo Hall with 40+ participating organizations and projects
- the inaugural Sphinx Tank, hosted by Aaron P. Dworkin (Sphinx Founder) and judged by Carla Canalas (The Canales Project), Jane Chu (Arts Advisor, PBS), Brian Offutt (Former Chief Operating Officer, Combs Enterprises), and Stewart Thornhill (Executive Director, Samuel Zell & Robert H. Lurie Institute for Entrepreneurial Studies, University of Michigan Ross School of Business)

Save the dates for SphinxConnect 2020: Vision Detroit February 6 - 8, 2020

For more information or to watch videos of past sessions, visit www.SphinxConnect.org.

Sphinx LEAD (Leaders in Excellence, Arts & Diversity) launched at SphinxConnect, with ten outstanding leaders beginning their 2-year professional development program. These administrators, entrepreneurs, and musicians hail from 8 states and represent an exciting cross section of classical music. Sphinx LEAD exists to empower arts leaders of color and to evolve the landscape of administrative leadership in the country. Stanford Thompson oversees the program as Dean, and Aaron P. Dworkin serves as Senior Advisor. Sphinx is thrilled to collaborate with Cleveland Institute of Music, Curtis Institute, The Juilliard School, and New World Symphony to host Leadership Retreats, where LEADers will learn from experts in the field and maximize valuable networking opportunities.

“Being a part of the inaugural class of the Sphinx LEAD program has produced a tangible shift in my perspective of what’s possible. Almost immediately, cohort members felt connected to like-minded, motivated peers who will be experiencing the same challenges to grow themselves over the course of the next two years.”

- Camille Delaney-McNeil
Our most recent Sphinx trip to Davos for the World Economic Forum was truly a gift… This was my first time ever going to Europe, let alone performing there, and everything about the trip was so amazing!"  
Sterling Elliott  
2019 Sphinx Competition Senior Division 1st Place and Robert Frederick Smith Prize Winner

Something to Ponder:  
“Don’t sit around and wait for opportunities to come. Get up and make them.”  
Madam C. J. Walker

SPHINX NEWS

Spring Recitals for Detroit and Flint Students!

Sphinx Overture violin students are busy preparing for their upcoming end-of-year recitals. Students will showcase their skills in a series of recitals in May. Flint Overture Students will perform at the Flint Institute of Music on May 8th at 5pm. Detroit Overture students will perform at Maybury Elementary on May 16th at 4pm, at Detroit Community Schools May 22nd at 4pm, and at Gompers Elementary on May 21st at 4pm. All recitals are free and open to the public.

Kayden Kelly (SPA Curtis 2018) was invited by the Arts and Culture Foundation to perform in the National Theater of Costa Rica for the 50th anniversary celebration of Quince Duncan, regarded as Costa Rica’s first Spanish language Afro-Caribbean writer. Kayden performed the Sonata for Violin and Piano No. 2 Op. 1 by Chevalier de St George in front of an audience of over 700 people.

Sphinx Competition Alum Steven Laraia has recently won a section viola position with the Boston Symphony Orchestra.

Sphinx Symphony Orchestra alum Xavier Verna was appointed to the Michigan Council for Arts and Cultural Affairs. The 15-member council, housed in the Michigan Economic Development Corporation, helps create an environment of artistic, creative and cultural activity to support Michigan’s quality of life and economic vitality. Xavier was also elected President of Michigan Non Profit Presenters Network, a statewide coalition of presenters working toward supporting the work of presenters through block booking, professional development, and access to state and national resources.

Send us your news and performance updates:  
QuarterNote@SphinxMusic.org

#SphinxStories in Switzerland

Sphinx participated in the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, thanks to Robert F. Smith, a key supporter & advocate of Sphinx. Hannah White, Randall Goosby, Sterling Elliott, and Mira Williams wowed audiences with multiple appearances across the convening. Sphinx’s presence, including President and Artistic Director Afa Dworkin, placed diversity in the arts at the front and center of a uniquely influential global platform.

“Our most recent Sphinx trip to Davos for the World Economic Forum was truly a gift…This was my first time ever going to Europe, let alone performing there, and everything about the trip was so amazing!”  
- Sterling Elliott  
2019 Sphinx Competition Senior Division 1st Place and Robert Frederick Smith Prize Winner