In the first year with a new online entry and video audition process, the 15th annual Sphinx Competition presented by the DTE Energy Foundation will welcome 19 talented young Black and Latino string players from around the country to Ann Arbor and Detroit in February.

The musicians that advanced as semi-finalists are divided into two divisions based on age. The junior division of the Competition, for musicians up to 18 years old, culminates in the Honors Concert, which will be held on February 10 at the University of Michigan’s Hill Auditorium. The senior division, for musicians up to age 26, ends with the Finals Concert, to be held at the Max M. Fisher Music Center on February 12.

For the first time in the history of the Competition, audience members will be able to vote for their favorite performance during the Finals Concert. While the jury panel deliberates, audience members will send their votes by text message. The finalist with most votes will win the Audience Choice award.

Audiences around the country are invited to watch the concert live on the Sphinx website and join in the text message voting. The concert will also be recorded for national broadcast on PBS stations and Detroit Public Television.

At stake in the Sphinx Competition are scholarships, cash prizes of more than $25,000, and opportunities to perform with major orchestras around the country. Outside of the competitive aspects of the Competition, participants will have the opportunity to work with members of the Sphinx Symphony Orchestra and the jury panel during masterclasses and an evening of chamber music.

The Sphinx Symphony Orchestra, an ensemble of professional musicians from around the country, will come together during the competition, and will be featured on both the Honors and Finals Concerts. The Finals Concert, to be held on February 12, will feature a guest performance by the Catalyst Quartet.

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Semi-Finalists Announced in 15th Annual Sphinx Competition

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This year, semi-finalists range in age from 12 to 25, and hail from 13 states. Six are violinists, six are violists, and seven are cellists.

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2012 Sphinx Competition Semi-Finalists

Caitlin Adamson
16, IL
Juan-Salvador Carrasco
17, CA
Brendon Elliott
17, VA
Sterling Elliott
12, VA
Tristan Flores
13, MA
Tiffany Laraia
17, NJ
Lev Mamuya
15, MA
Miryti Mitanga
16, GA
Ade Williams
14, IL
Mira Williams
13, IL
Gabriel Cabezas
19, PA
Scott Jackson
25, OH
Rainel Joubert
25, MS

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Honors Concert
Friday, February 10
12:00 pm
Hill Auditorium, Ann Arbor, MI

Finals Concert
Sunday, February 12
2:00 pm
Orchestra Hall, Detroit, MI

For ticket information visit us at www.SphinxMusic.org
Sphinx Programs Span the Globe

The past year has been another exciting period for Sphinx International. From Brazil to the Netherlands to South Africa, Sphinx has been changing the face of classical music around the world.

In addition to artist residencies, Sphinx staff have also been building awareness for our work abroad. Caitlin Ilich, Director of Corporate and International Partnerships, was invited to the Dutch Classical Music Meeting in Amsterdam October 15-17 to participate on a panel discussion on the topic of classical music in America. Also serving on the panel were past Association of Performing Arts president Sandra Gibson and Aldert Vermeulen of the Dallas Symphony Orchestra.

Later that month, Sphinx Laureates Gareth Johnson and Khari Joyner visited the Netherlands in partnership with the U.S. Embassy and the Leerorkest, a country-wide student orchestra program. During the week-long program, Gareth and Khari gave numerous masterclasses in Amsterdam and Rotterdam, reaching more than 1,000 students of nearly 40 different nationalities. In the spirit of cultural exchange, they also performed a collaborative concert with a Dutch pianist, Tilly de Groot, Cultural Affairs Specialist at the U.S. Embassy in The Hague, said of the experience “we cannot think of better ambassadors for classical music than Gareth and Khari.”

Sphinx looks forward to many more exciting international opportunities in 2012!

To learn more about Sphinx programs around the world or to support these efforts, please contact Caitlin Ilich, Director of Corporate and International Partnerships, at (313)877-9100, ext.710 or Caitlin@SphinxMusic.org.

Photo left: Catalyst Quartet members give a masterclass at the University of South Africa. Photo right: Gareth Johnson, violin, and Khari Joyner, cello, perform at the Duif church in Amsterdam.
Dear Friends,

As the year draws to a close, and we embark on the exciting, yearlong celebration of Sphinx’s 15th anniversary, I have taken some time to reflect on our history over the past 15 years. In the early years of Sphinx, I never quite imagined the number of lives that would be touched through the dedicated efforts of our faculty, staff, partners and other members of the Sphinx family. Their many achievements are an inspiration to me each day as we strive to make our world a better place.

Never before in the history of Sphinx has there been such excitement and momentum, and it is my hope that during this holiday season you will consider how you can be a part of the Sphinx family. The 15th annual Sphinx Competition in February represents a true landmark: the changing face of classical music.

Your continued support of our musicians ensures that the joy of music can be shared year round with our talented young students and all of our audiences. During this special year, it is more imperative than ever that we build support for our artistic excellence and sustainability for our educational programs—that’s where we are counting on you. Your support empowers young people to realize their potential, and your gift of $15, $50, $150, or more will ensure that students will have these special experiences in classical music for years to come. Making a gift is as easy as visiting www.SphinxMusic.org where you can also learn about where our alumni are today!

Even more than your financial support, I am asking you to recruit five friends who have yet to have their first Sphinx experience. Connect them with our incredible music and get them involved in our work. Let them know about the opportunities we are creating for our musicians and young people in classical music today. It is only through our joint efforts that we will be able to bring about the evolution we all seek for our communities and society as a whole.

I wish you a happy and healthy new year filled with prosperity, joy, and music.

-Aaron

“During this season of giving, honor a music lover or musician in your life by making a gift to Sphinx!

When you make a gift, Sphinx will send a personalized card letting them know a gift has been made in his or her honor.

This is a unique way to give the gift of music while supporting Sphinx as we continue to build diversity in classical music.

“I’m just in awe of what Sphinx has accomplished, but even more excited about its future.”
- Yo-Yo Ma

“I applaud and support the vision of the Sphinx Organization.”
- Vanessa Williams

“The Sphinx Organization serves as a voice empowering young people through music.”
- Gustavo Dudamel
Elena Urioste, 2007 Laureate, and Alexandra Switala, 2011 Laureate, made their solo debuts with the New York Philharmonic in October under the baton of Joshua Weilerstein. Elena was also featured in Latina magazine as one of their “Future Fifteen.”

Alexandra Switala, 2011 Laureate, performed with the Florida Orchestra in November.

In October, Gareth Johnson, Laureate 2010, made his debut with the Kwazulu Natal Philharmonic in South Africa playing Mozart’s Violin Concerto No. 3.

Sphinx will be well represented at the Chamber Music America Conference in January. Catalyst Quartet will perform in a showcase recital on January 14 and will participate in panel discussion led by Afa Sadykhly Dworkin, Sphinx Artistic Director and Vice-President of Programming. Aaron Dworkin will give the opening keynote speech of the conference.

Sphinx Founder and President Aaron Dworkin was sworn in as a member of the National Council on the Arts on October 28. He is President Obama’s first appointee to the Council, which advises the Chairman of the National Endowment for the Arts on agency policies and programs, applications for grants, funding guidelines, and leadership initiatives.

Aaron was also honored in November by the Torch of Wisdom Foundation, a Detroit organization that supports education, arts and culture, and economic development programs in the community. Chair of the Sphinx Preparatory Music Institute Parent Committee Chanel Harlan and outstanding oboist and Sphinx Prep student Myles Harlen accepted the award on Aaron’s behalf during a ceremony. In accepting the award, Myles spoke about the profound impact that Sphinx and Aaron’s vision for the organization has had on his life. Myles is 16 and also performs in the Detroit Civic Youth Orchestra.

The Quarter Note wants to know what you’re doing! Send news and updates to QuarterNote@SphinxMusic.org.

In memoriam Dr. Arthur L. Johnson

In 1950, a remarkable young man, Arthur L. Johnson, came to Detroit. He saw tremendous potential for the city, and for six decades worked tirelessly as a civil rights leader and visionary passionately devoted to the Detroit community. On November 1, 2011, Detroiter paid their respects as Johnson was laid to rest after a difficult battle with Parkinson’s disease. An icon revered by many, he set an unparalleled example for generations to come.

Johnson was and will always remain a legendary figure in the civil rights movement. He was also an educator and an ardent arts advocate. He retired from Wayne State University in 1995 after 23 years of service, not only as a faculty member, but also as the first director of this institution’s department of community relations, and later senior vice president for university relations.

Throughout his journey and fight for equal rights, Johnson continuously advocated for hiring of more women and people of color in the worlds of academia, medicine, education, and beyond. One of his many legendary achievements was his pioneering role in launching the Detroit Festival of the Arts, for which Wayne State University bestowed upon him the Arts Advocate Award. He also served as president of the Detroit Branch NAACP from 1987 to 1993, bringing the organization to the national forefront through his tremendous work. A strong supporter of the arts, Johnson believed in making music and the arts accessible across the board. As a trustee of the Detroit Symphony Orchestra, he was a key champion behind the orchestra’s Classical Roots Series, always making a powerful case for a higher exposure for African-American composers and artists.

His accomplishments were numerous, his story is inspirational, and his legacy will live on through the lives and continued efforts of many of today’s leaders, for whom he paved the way. In honor of Arthur Johnson’s courageous and profound contributions to the civil rights movement and our society as a whole, Sphinx will embark on an annual Arthur L. Johnson Memorial Lecture and Award. The lecture and award will recognize scholars working in the areas of arts and social change and will memorialize Johnson’s legacy in these fields.
In their first year known as the Sphinx Virtuosi, led by the acclaimed Catalyst Quartet, the ensemble embarked on its fourth national tour, performed at Carnegie Hall for the seventh time, and reached an audience of more than 20,000 in 14 cities across the country. Thanks to support from The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, the tour will continue through 2013.

On September 19, the tour started at the Grand Opera House in Macon, Georgia before making its way to the New World Center in Miami. These two concerts, in addition to the season ending concert in Charlotte, North Carolina, were made possible with additional support from the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation. The New World Center concert was the ensemble’s Florida debut, and in addition to a sell-out crowd in the hall, was seen by hundreds of spectators in the Miami Beach SoundScape Park outside the hall as a Wallcast, a high-definition audio/video simulcast on a 7,000 square-foot outdoor wall of New World Center.

Following the Miami performance, the ensemble performed at Booker High School, Beaches Fine Arts, Central Michigan University, Interlochen Center for the Performing Arts, Harris Theater, University of Cincinnati, University of North Carolina, Carnegie Hall, Stanford Lively Arts, Faye Spanos Concert Hall, and Halton Theater.

Sphinx Virtuosi has found a second home in Chicago, and has returned to the Harris Theater there three years in a row. The Chicago Classical Review described the ensemble’s style as “a stylish swagger that betrayed the exuberance of their music,” and stated that “The ensemble exhibited a fine awareness of balance throughout one of the most complex fugues Bach ever wrote.” As if the performance at Harris weren’t enough, Sphinx president Aaron Dworkin and Sphinx cellist Gabriel Cabezas collaborated with cellist Yo-Yo Ma, ballet star and producer Damian Woetzel, and hip-hop dancer Lil Buck in a new initiative called “Arts Strike,” an exciting multi-disciplinary music, dance, and spoken word performance held at an elementary school in Chicago.

This fall marked the seventh Sphinx performance at Carnegie Hall. Actress and recording artist Vanessa Williams was honorary chair of the concert, which featured performances by Sphinx Virtuosi, Catalyst Quartet, Randall Goosby, and Gabriel Cabezas, and guest artists from the legendary Guarneri Quartet. While serving as the launch of the Sphinx15 celebration, the concert was dedicated to the memory of Isaac Stern in honor of the 10 year anniversary of his death.

The Sphinx Virtuosi annual tour is made possible by The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. Community engagement and outreach programs during the tour are supported by Target. Sphinx Virtuosi is available for bookings in 2012 and 2013. For information about booking the Sphinx Virtuosi and Catalyst Quartet, contact California Artists Management, sue.endrizzi@gmail.com and camdon@aol.com.
Composer Jeffrey Mumford was recently selected by the members of the Sphinx Commissioning Consortium to compose a new work for orchestra.

Quarter Note: How do you feel about being selected as the Sphinx Commissioning Consortium composer this year?

Jeffrey Mumford: I am of course deeply honored as I have long respected the Sphinx Organization’s mission. Over the past several years, I have been focusing on images from my childhood—specifically, the energy and particular journey daylight (either direct or reflected) took through my bedroom window. The opportunity to share my work with the larger community is truly one that I cherish.

QN: What music are you listening to these days?

JM: MANY things! In addition to the things I use in my teaching, at present I am listening to lots of work for orchestra in preparation for the new Sphinx piece. Composers include Christopher Theofanidis, Brahms (of course!), Olly Wilson, Irving Fine and Rachmaninov). In addition, I am always delighted by the wondrously lush string arrangements that accompany many of the jazz singers I love (including Gloria Lynne) and remember hearing as a child. Maybe this fueled my love of writing for strings.

QN: In what ways has your background influenced your music?

JM: This is partly impossible to say. I grew up in a house full of Count Basie. We trimmed our Christmas tree to pianists Ramsey Lewis and Billy Taylor. I also have memories of Beethoven’s Emperor concerto and The Messiah as performed by the cast of thousands—the Mormon Tabernacle Choir and Philadelphia Orchestra—a far cry from the now much more historically accurate and subtle Christopher Hogwood realization we now have to put this in context. As one can imagine, it is nearly impossible to pinpoint specifically how all of this filters its way into one’s art but how could what one creates be anything other than a sum of life experience? As I have said, I do LOVE lush string sonorities. Certainly, Count Basie, Ray Charles, and the Philly Orchestra were possible inspirations.

QN: How do you believe we can inspire young people in communities of color to embrace classical music?

JM: I think that we need to give ourselves permission to simply love it. Too often, there are roadblocks such as class perceptions and “snob appeal,” but the essence is that this is music written by people who are increasingly diverse in ethnicity with a passionate need to express themselves and communicate what words cannot. As an African American composer, I take my position and responsibility seriously. When I teach, I encourage all of my students to speak with their own voice, and not succumb to the limitations others may try to give them. I believe that for too long, African Americans (and many others) have been pigeonholed (both by their own constituency and by others) by limited assumptions of the scope of their creative activity. I want to explode this. I believe that the artist must be a citizen aware of the context in which he or she lives both politically and culturally. Then he or she must define his or her own world with frames of reference unique to him or herself and invite people into that world at appropriate times. This music is “ours” as well!