
CASTLE OF OUR SKINS
FIRE!!
A CELEBRATION OF RADICAL BLACK EXPRESSION



FiRE!!

A Celebration of Radical Black Expression

Friday, November 6, 2026 | 7:00pm

The Edward M. Pickman Concert Hall

at the Longy School of Music of Bard College



i: WHAT COUNTS?

***The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain* (1926)**
Langston Hughes (1901–1967)
DeShaun Gordon-King, *reader*

***Quantify* (2017)**
Jessie Cox (b. 1988)
Gabriela Diaz · Emma Powell, *violins*
Sergio Muñoz Leiva, *viola* · Francesca McNeeley, *cello*

ii: WHO COUNTS?

***The Creative Process* (1962)**
James Baldwin (1924–1987)
Lenelle Moïse, *reader*

***Wonder* (2024)**
Brian Raphael Nabors (b. 1991)
Emma Powell, *violin* · Francesca McNeeley, *cello*

***Yet Do I Marvel* (1925)**
Countee Cullen (1903—1946)
Lenelle Möise, *reader*

iii: WHO ARE WE?

***The Negro Speaks of Rivers* (1921)**
Langston Hughes (1901–1967)
DeShaun Gordon-King, *reader*



***The Negro Speaks of Rivers* (2024)**
Errollyn Wallen (b. 1958)
Gabriela Diaz · Emma Powell, *violins*
Sergio Muñoz Leiva, *viola* · Francesca McNeeley, *cello*

***How It Feels to Be Colored Me* (1928)**
Zora Neale Hurston (1891–1960)
DeShaun Gordon-King, *reader*

***Be Natural* (1973)**
Alvin Singleton (b. 1940)
Gabriela Diaz · Emma Powell, *violins*
Sergio Muñoz Leiva, *viola*

iv: what becomes possible?

***Joy Boy* (1974)**
Julius Eastman (1940–1990)
Gabriela Diaz · Emma Powell, *violins*
Sergio Muñoz Leiva, *viola* · Francesca McNeeley, *cello*

***To Usward* (1926)**
Gwendolyn Bennett (1902–1981)
Lenelle Moïse, *reader*

***Work Songs* (2024)**
Curtis Stewart (b. 1970)
Gabriela Diaz, *violin* · Francesca McNeeley, *cello*

Today's program will run 75 minutes without intermission



ARTISTS

Composers

Jessie Cox
Julius Eastman
Brian Raphael Nabors
Errollyn Wallen
Alvin Singleton
Curtis Stewart

Writers

James Baldwin
Gwendolyn Bennett
Countee Cullen
Langston Hughes
Zora Neale Hurston

Performers

Gabriela Diaz, *violin*
DeShaun Gordon-King, *reader*
Lenelle Moïse, *reader*
Sergio Muñoz Leiva, *viola*
Francesca McNeeley, *cello*
Emma Powell, *violin*

Curators

Lyndsay Allyn Cox
Francesca McNeeley

Zine Artists

Bithiah Holton
jr mahung

CURATORS NOTE

Welcome to Season 14 of Castle of Our Skins

As we begin this season, we are thinking a lot about what it means to create, to remember, to inherit, and to imagine. We are interested in the ways artists carry the past with them while making something that could not have existed before. We are interested in what happens when we make room for contradiction, experimentation, joy, discomfort, and possibility.

There may be no better place to begin than *FIRE!!*

In 1926, a group of young Black artists, writers, and musicians came together to publish a single issue of *FIRE!!*. The magazine was intentionally provocative. It challenged expectations of what Black art should be, who it should speak to, and who should have the authority to define it. It was messy, experimental, and short-lived. But its insistence on artistic self determination continues to resonate.

Tonight, we aren't recreating *FIRE!!*. Instead, we are entering into conversation with the artists who made it and the questions they left behind. Across music, poetry, essays and prose, artists separated by generations and artistic traditions meet one another in unexpected ways. Some things will feel familiar. Some may challenge you. Some may not immediately make sense. All of it is an invitation to listen, wonder, question, and imagine.

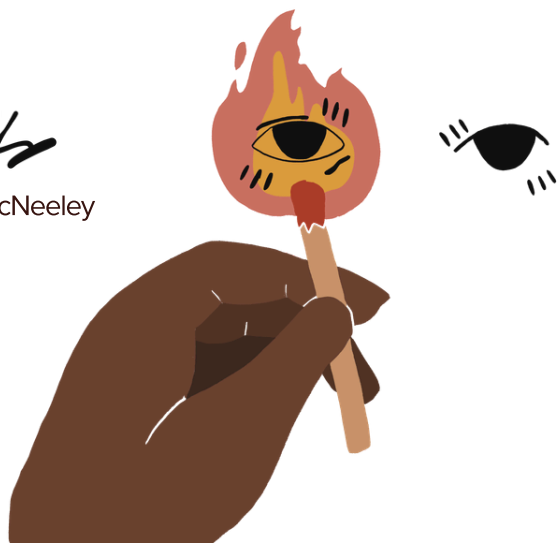
CURATORS NOTE

At Castle of Our Skins, we believe classical music can be a place for all of these things. It can hold history and possibility at once. It can connect us to what came before while giving us language for what comes next.

Thank you for being here at the beginning of this journey with us. We hope you'll stay awhile, listen deeply, and see what becomes possible when we create space for one another to imagine something new.

Warmly,

Lyndsay Allyn Cox & Francesca McNeeley
Curators



On Kinship

by jr mahung

My friend loves to say Langston Hughes was a drag queen. In his “Spectacles in Color” Hughes describes a Harlem ball where there are “males in flowing gowns and feathered headdresses and females in tuxedoes and box-back suits.” He describes a pageant where the winner is determined by who is “most gorgeously gowned”.

There’s a movie called “The Queen” about a Miss All-America Camp Beauty Pageant in 1967, New York. Watching, my eyes are trained on Miss Chicago, Marlow Monique Dickson. A girl from Bronzeville, just like me.

In a 2023 interview, Miss Marlow is draped in red. Red sequin scarf, red sheer blouse, red button earrings. She describes Bronzeville’s history of Black Art and says it was “not just a little neighborhood like Harlem or Watts”. I love this moment. When Chicago takes over and reason slips away. She uplifts and minimizes Harlem at once, placing her block, or mine at the center of Black ingenuity.

I take some ire with the term “chosen family.” Whether by us or by circumstance, all family is chosen. I grew up with a thousand cousins because my parent’s friends were their cousins. They were Black, often

immigrants to the States. Their shared condition made them family, this form of relation a kind of ingenuity.

My people, the Garifuna, were formed when a slave ship crashed off the coast of St. Vincent in the 1700's. Survivors of the wreckage formed community with the Caribs and Arawaks living on the island. It's said that maroons from nearby islands fled to St. Vincent to join a free Black society. I wonder sometimes how they moved from guest, to comrade, to kin.

I now live in a collective house, all of us trans folks of color, our communities are also largely trans people of color. We cook for each other, get each other to medical appointments, hold grief for each other, with each other, share car rides, share money, share homes.

My friend is at my place when they tell me Langston Hughes was a drag queen. He wrote several poems in the voice of one Madam Alberta K Johnson. Is that the name he might have used? I want to call him my sister. I have found nothing to confirm this as true. But still. I like to imagine Langston in the mirror, applying makeup just how he saw our sisters do once.

PROGRAM NOTES

***Quantify* (2017)**
Jessie Cox (b. 1988)

With *Quantify*, Jessie Cox asks us to reflect on what "counts" in musical discourse; by what metrics do we consider things to have value or to even exist, and where should we draw the line between categories of sound? Are we truly listening with openness if we have preconceptions of what "counts" at all? Jessie asks these questions not simply in the abstract, but as an extension of our socio-political landscape in a world that is quick to categorize and dismiss whole people and cultures. "On the one hand, *Quantify* is about the violence and restrictions produced by categorization. To quantify is to decide what counts, what can be registered, and what is left out. On the other hand, categories and measurements are also necessary. Without them, sounds cannot be held, repeated, shared, or transformed. A name can reduce, but it can also make something thinkable." This provocative piece invites us to reflect on the process of listening, drawing, and naming.



PROGRAM NOTES

***Wonder* (2024)**

Brian Raphael Nabors (b. 1991)

This duo was created through a commissioning project by The Well, a nonprofit organization that works at the intersection of art and wellness. The organization provides holistic care and counseling for children and youth. The piece emerged out of interviews and conversations with unhoused youth, as they reflected on topics such as science, wonder, and hope. The piece reflects back the curiosity and exuberance of these children, and is in three short movements:

1. I wonder...
2. What Lies Beyond
3. Leaps & Bounds.

***The Negro Speaks of Rivers* (2024)**

Errollyn Wallen (b. 1958)

When asked to write a piece for string quartet that explored themes of isolation, loss, and rage, Errollyn Wallen found inspiration in Langston Hughes' iconic poem, "The Negro Speaks of Rivers." The poem is a reflection on the resilience and perseverance of Black people across history. Wallen's musical response, while romantic and lush, leaves one feeling unsettled. The piece travels through various moods—from tranquility to rage to wonderment—before meeting an abrupt and aggressive end, as if unable to reconcile its own journey.

PROGRAM NOTES

***Be Natural* (1973)**
Alvin Singleton (b. 1940)

Alvin Singleton's *Be Natural* (1973) can be performed with any trio of bowed string instruments. The piece is somewhat of a game for the players: instead of typical music notation, the musicians have to interpret 9 events represented by the pictographic score. These hand drawn symbols represent different instructions for playing with loud, soft, long, or short notes, among other indications. The title of the piece reflects the underlying pun: the note B natural both begins and ends the piece in unison, but must also be passed between the players like a baton, for the duration of the 12 minute piece. With improvisation at its core, no two performances of *Be Natural* can ever be the same.

***Joy Boy* (1974)**
Julius Eastman (1940–1990)

Joy Boy develops like a musical kaleidoscope of haunting, shimmering sound, mimicking giggling voices. The harmonies develop ever-subtly as new notes are layered into the mix. The collective body of sound expands and morphs, building in ecstasy though never fully succumbing to the jubilance. The piece is said to capture Eastman's own journey towards self-actualization, as he tried to reclaim his space in a world that continued to project unspeakable violence onto the Black and queer psyche. As he wrote, "What I am trying to achieve is to be what I am to the fullest—Black to the fullest, a musician to the fullest, and a homosexual to the fullest. It is important that I learn how to be, by that I mean accept everything about me."

PROGRAM NOTES

***Work Songs* (2024)**
Curtis Stewart (b. 1970)

Invention #2: Work Songs (2024) is a rondo moving from blues inflected theme, to historic Prison Holler, Ring Shout and Stomp Claps - each variation is a distinct spiritual search in sound: downward (to the ground), and upward (to the sky) for freedom in time. Each variation asks the duo to gather the audience in multiple forms of call and response - celebrating time through rhythm and joyous exclamation. *Work Songs* is a response to history's call, a celebration of 20th century freedom - inviting the listener to contribute both to the moment of performance and the multifaceted tradition of virtuosic violin and cello composition. It is a call to celebrate our now, dancing through the question marks of our then.





ARTIST BIOS



Lyndsay Allyn Cox (curator + artistic producer) is a Boston-based actor, director, producer, and interdisciplinary curator whose work centers storytelling, artistic collaboration, and community engagement. Previously, she served as Producing Director at The Huntington and Senior Director of Programs and Experiences at Boston Center for the Arts, leading the development of productions, artist residencies, and public programs. Her directing credits include *Tiny Beautiful Things, Chicken and Biscuits, Splash Hatch on the E Going Down*, *Lizard Boy,* and *Moon Man Walk*. She is a 2022 Elliot Norton Award winner for Outstanding Director and was named to WBUR's ARTery 25 in 2019. Lyndsay is a member of Actors' Equity Association and Casting Society.

She holds a B.A. in Theatre Performance with a minor in Vocal Music. At Castle of our Skins, she draws on her experience across performance, theater-making, producing, and community engagement to develop interdisciplinary work that expands how audiences encounter and experience Black music.

Artist Bios



Gabriela Diaz (violin) is a Georgia native who began her musical training at the age of five, studying piano with her mother, and the next year, violin with her father. A childhood cancer survivor, Gabriela is committed to supporting cancer research and treatment as a musician, bringing music to cancer units at various hospitals in Boston. Gabriela is a member of the trailblazing and genre-defying Kronos Quartet. She is also a member of The International Contemporary Ensemble, A Far Cry, Castle of our Skins, is Co-Artistic Director of Winsor Music, and plays regularly with other chamber music ensembles throughout the United States. Her recording of Lou Harrison's Suite for Violin and American Gamelan was highlighted in the New York Times Article "5 Minutes That Will Make You Love Classical Music." You can hear Gabriela on Mode, Centaur, New World, BMOP Sound, Phenotypic, and Tzadik records. More info can be found at gabrieladiazviolin.com

Artist Bios



DeShaun Gordon-King (reader) has collaborated with Castle of Our Skins, the Celebrity Series of Boston, Shelter Music Boston, and performed as Reed 1 for the American Repertory Theatre's production of Evita. A graduate of the Longy School of Music and Harvard Ed Portal Pipeline Artist Fellow, Díjí Kay's work and studies center around synergizing the principles of therapeutic music, sound healing, and vibrational therapy to curate healing and transformative concert experiences



Francesca McNeeley (cello + curator) is a Haitian-American cellist who has received critical acclaim as a collaborator and soloist. She enjoys an eclectic career in the Boston area as a chamber musician, orchestral player, and modern music advocate. She is a core member of the A Far Cry "self-conducted" chamber orchestra, and Music Curator, Teaching Artist and Cellist with Castle of Our Skins. She has also performed, recorded, and toured with the Boston Symphony and Boston Pops Orchestras. She is a recipient of a 2025 Sphinx MPower Award to support her research into Haitian chamber music. She serves

on the faculties for the Boston Youth Symphony Orchestra's Intensive Community Program, Project STEP, as well as the Charles Ives Music Festival at the Western Connecticut Youth Orchestras.

Francesca graduated Princeton University Phi Beta Kappa, and went on to receive scholarships to attend the Shepherd School of Music at Rice University and the New England Conservatory for her graduate degrees in cello performance. She has earned fellowships and prizes from the Tanglewood Music Center, where she also served as a New Fromm Player for two years. She has been awarded multiple grants from the Sphinx Organization, and now serves on The Artist Council for the National Alliance for Audition Support. Her teachers and mentors have included Tom Kraines, Darrett Adkins, Norman Fischer, Yeesun Kim, and Astrid Schween.



Lenelle Moïse (reader) is a poet, playwright, and songwriter. She wrote the romantic comedy K-I-S-S-I-N-G, winner of the 2023 Elliot Norton Award for Outstanding New Script, a national finalist for the 2024 Steinberg/ American Theatre Critics Association New Play Award, and an international finalist for the 2024 Susan Smith Blackburn Prize. The full playscript of K-I-S-S-I-N-G is published in the

ARTIST BIOS

Spring 2025 issue of American Theatre magazine. Lenelle also wrote, composed, and co-starred in the critically-acclaimed Off-Broadway play Expatriate. As a poet, she has been a guest artist at dozens of colleges and venues including the United Nations, Poets House, Lincoln Center, the Norton Museum of Art, and the International Museum of Women. Her book of poems, Haiti Glass (City Lights Books), won the PEN Oakland Josephine Miles Literary Award. She is currently working on WRIT RITM, a song cycle commissioned by the Huntington Theatre. Visit lenellemoise.com for more info.



Sergio Muñoz Leiva (viola) is a Chilean violist and is an advocate for dialogue, collaboration, and community building, which he realizes in music through his love for chamber music and education.

A curious and versatile performer, Dr. Muñoz Leiva is active in chamber music and orchestral settings. His repertoire spans from early Baroque to music that is fresh off the press, performed on both modern and baroque viola. He has premiered works by Paola Prestini, Nico Muhly, and Samuel Adler, and has collaborated with artists such as Kinan Azmeh, Dinuk Wijeratne, Catherine Cho, Natasha Brofsky, Areta Zhulla, Stella Chen, Carol Rodland, Kim Kashkashian, Mikhail Kopelman, Renée Jolles, and Steven Doane. He has performed as a guest artist with A Far Cry,

ARTIST BIOS

Palaver Strings, Carnegie Hall's Link Up Orchestra, the United Nations Chamber Music Society, and the Chile Chamber Orchestra. As a baroque violist, he is a member of the Providence Baroque Orchestra, has performed with members of the Handel and Haydn Society and Boston Early Music Festival Orchestra, and has toured in the United States and Canada with Juilliard415, Juilliard's professional baroque ensemble, alongside artist such as Masaaki Suzuki, Rachel Podger, Monica Huggett, and Robert Mealy. He has performed in venues such as Jordan Hall and Symphony Hall in Boston; The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Alice Tully Hall, and Carnegie Hall in New York; Teatro Municipal in Santiago de Chile; and the Guangzhou and Shenzhen Opera Houses in China. His musical mentors include Penelope Knuth, David Holland, Dimitri Murrath, Kim Kashkashian, and Carol Rodland. He is a graduate of the Interlochen Arts Academy and holds degrees from the New England Conservatory, the Eastman School of Music, and The Juilliard School.

Dr. Muñoz Leiva is the Director of Chamber Music at College of the Holy Cross in Worcester, MA. He also currently serves as Music Theory Instructor at Project STEP in Boston. Previous teaching appointments include serving as Studio Teaching Assistant to Carol Rodland at The Juilliard School and as Instructor of Viola for Non-Majors at the Eastman School of Music and the University of Rochester.

ARTIST BIOS



Emma Powell (violin) is a violinist based in Boston, Massachusetts. She maintains an active performance schedule across New England as a collaborative member of the Rasa String Quartet, Oko harp trio, and Cape Cod Chamber Orchestra.

Driven by a curiosity for musical storytelling, Emma enjoys performing and curating programs that connect works across centuries, genres, and cultures. This passion has led her to a varied career including recent collaborations with American singer-songwriter Judy Collins, Celtic harpist Maeve Gilchrist, Irish fiddler & composer Liz Carroll, and Persian singers Mahsa and Marjan Vahdat. As an orchestral musician, Emma serves as concertmaster of the New Bedford Symphony and performs each summer as a member of the Boston Festival Orchestra. She appears frequently as a substitute musician with many ensembles throughout New England, including Emmanuel Music, Juventas New Music Ensemble, and Palaver Strings. Her summer festival appearances include the Tanglewood Music Center and Spoleto Festival.

In addition to her professional commitments, Emma has spent the last few years getting to know Boston's vibrant Celtic fiddle community, listening to and participating in sessions throughout the city, and drawing inspiration from its rich tradition of music-making and connection. Originally, she is from Ann Arbor, Michigan, and holds degrees from Princeton and Rice University where she studied with Dan Trueman, Sunghae Anna Lim, and Paul Kantor.

COMPOSER BIOS

Jessie Cox is Assistant Professor of Music at Harvard University and received his doctorate from Columbia University. Active as a composer, drummer, and scholar, his work thematizes questions at the intersection of black studies, music/sound studies, and critical theory. From Switzerland, with roots in Trinidad and Tobago, Cox thinks through questions of race, migration, national belonging, and our relation to the planet and the cosmos. His first monograph Sounds of Black Switzerland: Blackness, Music, and Unthought Voices (Duke UP, 2025) addresses how thinking with blackness and experimental musical practices might afford the opening of new discourses, such as thematizing Black Swiss Life. Jessie Cox makes music about the universe and our future in it. Through avant-garde classical, experimental jazz, and sound art, he has devised his own strand of musical science fiction, one that asks where we go next. Cox's music goes forward. He is influenced by a vast array of artists who have used their music to imagine futures, and takes Afrofuturism as a core inspiration, asking questions about existence, and the ways we make spaces habitable.

Julius Eastman was an American musician and artist who, as a gay black man, aspired to live those roles to the fullest. He was not only a prominent

member of New York's downtown scene as a composer, conductor, singer, pianist, and choreographer, but also performed at Lincoln Center with Pierre Boulez and the New York Philharmonic, and recorded experimental disco with producer Arthur Russell. "Eastman is something of a cult figure among composers and singers," reads a 1980 press release.

Despite his prominence in the artistic and musical community in New York, Eastman died homeless and alone in a Buffalo, New York, hospital, his death unreported until eight months later, in a *Village Voice* obituary by Kyle Gann. He left behind few scores and recordings, and his music lay dormant for decades until a three-CD set of his compositions was issued in 2005 by New World Records. In the years since, there has been a steady increase in attention paid to his music and life, punctuated by newly found recordings and manuscripts, the publication of *Gay Guerrilla*, a comprehensive volume of biographical essays and analysis, worldwide performances and new arrangements of his surviving works, and newfound interest from choreographers, scholars, educators, and journalists. "The brazen and brilliant music of Julius Eastman...commands attention: wild, grand, delirious, demonic, an uncontainable personality surging into sound," writes Alex Ross for *The New Yorker*.

COMPOSER BIOS

Brian Raphael Nabors, born in Birmingham, Alabama, is a composer whose music reflects a rich tapestry of hospitality and embodies the enduring spirit of humanity. With a vision to inspire change, Nabors creates works that encourage listeners to explore their own emotional landscapes. Drawing from his deep roots, he skillfully blends traditional soundscapes with contemporary elements, resulting in a vibrant and immersive sonic journey that resonates profoundly with audiences.

Nabors earned both a Doctor of Musical Arts and Master of Music degree in Composition at the University of Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music (CCM), where he studied with Douglas Knehans, Ellen Ruth Harrison and Miguel A. Roig-Francolí. Prior to graduate studies, he obtained a Bachelor of Music Theory & Composition degree from the School of the Arts at Samford University in Birmingham, AL, where he studied composition with Sarana Chou and piano with Kathryn Fouse.

Alvin Singleton was born in Brooklyn, New York and attended New York University and Yale. As a Fulbright Scholar, he studied with Goffredo Petrassi at Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia in Rome, Italy. After living and working in Europe for fourteen years, Singleton returned to the United States to become Composer-in-Residence with the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra (1985-88). He subsequently served as Resident Composer at Spelman College in Atlanta (1988-91), as UNISYS Composer-in-Residence with the Detroit Symphony Orchestra (1996-97), and was the

COMPOSER BIOS

2002–03 Composer-in-Residence with the Ritz Chamber Players of Jacksonville, Florida. In addition, he has served as Visiting Professor of Composition at the Yale University School of Music.

Singleton has amassed numerous awards throughout his compositional life. He is the recipient of a 2003 Guggenheim Fellowship and was commissioned by The Serge Koussevitsky Music Foundation and American Composers Orchestra for the orchestral work *When Given a Choice*, which premiered at Carnegie Hall in April 2004. His other awards include the Kranichsteiner Musikpreis by the City of Darmstadt, Germany, twice the Musikprotokoll Kompositionpreis by the Austrian Radio, the Mayor's Fellowship in the Arts Award by the City of Atlanta, and a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts. His music has been published exclusively worldwide by Schott Music since 1977, and is recorded on the Albany Records, Elektra/Nonesuch, First Edition, Tzadik, and Innova labels.

Curtis Stewart Praised for "combining omnivory and brilliance" (*The New York Times*), six-time GRAMMY® Award-nominated violinist and composer Curtis Stewart translates stories of American self-determination to the concert stage. Tearing down the facade of "classical violinist," Stewart is in constant pursuit of his musical authenticity, treating art as a battery for realizing citizenship.

COMPOSER BIOS

As a solo violinist, composer, Artistic Director of the American Composers Orchestra, professor at The Juilliard School, and member of award-winning ensembles PUBLIQuartet and The Mighty Third Rail, he realizes a vision to find personal and powerful connections between styles, cultures and musics. He has been awarded a 2025 Sphinx Medal of Excellence, in recognition of extraordinary leaders in the classical music field who are transforming lives while addressing systemic obstacles within Black and Latino communities.

Errollyn Wallen is a multi award-winning Belize-born British composer named as one of the world's top twenty most performed living classical composers. Her prolific output includes over twenty operas and a large catalogue of orchestral, chamber and vocal works, which are performed and broadcast throughout the world. She has composed for the opening ceremony of the Paralympic Games 2012, for the Queen's Golden and Diamond Jubilees, a specially commissioned song for COP 26, a re-imagining of Jerusalem for the Last Night of the Proms 2020. BBC Radio 3 featured her music for Composer of the Week, and she has made several radio documentaries. Errollyn collaborated with artist Sonia Boyce on her installation, Feeling Her Way, for the British Pavilion at the 2022 Venice Biennale, which won the Golden Lion prize. Her acclaimed opera, Dido's Ghost was premiered at the Barbican in 2021 and received its US

première in San Francisco in November 2023. She is currently working on a new opera which will premiere at Aldeburgh in 2026. Recent premieres include a Wigmore Hall debut performance of songs from The Errollyn Wallen Songbook, a violin concerto for Philippe Quint, Dances for Orchestra for Scottish Chamber Orchestra, Swedish Chamber Orchestra and Irish Chamber Orchestra, Night Thoughts, a song cycle for Dame Sarah Connolly and pianist Joseph Middleton and PARADE commissioned by Academy of St Martin in the Fields which toured Germany and Austria in January 2025.

CASTLE OF OUR SKINS BIOS



Dr. Ciyadh Wells (Executive Director) is a musician, arts administrator, educator, and advocate committed to building more inclusive and accessible arts organizations. She has served as Executive Director of Castle of our Skins since 2023, leading the organization through a period of growth and strategic expansion, including the development of new artistic leadership and plans for a future home in Boston's South End.

Prior to joining Castle of our Skins, Ciyadh served as Artistic & Executive Director of Margins Guitar Collective and held leadership roles with the Louisville Guitar Society and Ghana National Music Festival. She has also been part of the Sphinx LEAD program and other national arts leadership initiatives. In addition to her work with COOS, she serves as General Manager of Collage New Music.

A classical guitarist, educator, and scholar, Ciyadh holds degrees in Music Education and Guitar Performance from the University of Memphis and University of Louisville, and a Doctor of Musical Arts in Guitar Performance from the University of Georgia. Her work as an artist and administrator is grounded in a belief in the power of music to expand access, build community, and create meaningful change.

CASTLE OF OUR SKINS BIOS



Ruben McFarlane (Director of Community Engagement and partnerships) is an arts administrator, educator, and violist committed to expanding access to the performing arts. In addition to his work with Castle of our Skins, he has held administrative positions with the New England Philharmonic, PostClassical Ensemble, Berklee College of Music, Boston City Singers, and Boston New Music Initiative.

As an educator, Ruben teaches private violin and viola lessons and has worked as a string teaching artist with the DC Youth Orchestra Program and Northern Virginia public schools. An active freelance violist, he has performed throughout the Northeast, Mid-Atlantic, China, and South Korea, including with the Williamsport Symphony, Pennsylvania Chamber Orchestra, Fairfax Symphony Orchestra, and Rhode Island Philharmonic. Originally from upstate New York, Ruben holds bachelor's degrees in Viola Performance and Music Education from Penn State University and a master's degree in Viola Performance from The Catholic University of America. www.rubenmcfarlaneviola.com

CASTLE OF OUR SKINS BIOS



Rachel Styles (Operations Manager) is an operations manager with a decade of experience. She graduated from Mount Holyoke College with a BA in African American Studies. In her free time she has performed in and stage managed community theater productions, sung in various choirs, and served as part of the leadership team for Voices Rising. She is excited to support Castle of Our Skins and reconnect with music and arts.

See artists bios above to learn more about Lyndsay and Francesca

Zine Artists Bios



Bithiah Holton (she/they) is a queer Black and Mexican-American comic artist, illustrator, printmaker, ceramicist, and educator. Their work honors cultural and familial histories through storytelling, self-preservation, and connection. Rooted in a love of food, nature, and community care, Bithiah's practice celebrates life and identity.



jr mahung (She/They) is a Garifuna poet from the South Side of Chicago. She has served on the organizing team for the Louder than a Bomb MA youth poetry slam festival, co-organized The Plantain Collection, a poetry reading and conversation series for writers of diaspora, and co-coached the Northeastern University Poetry Slam Team. jr's chapbook "Since When He Have Wings" is available through Pizza Pi Press. [photo by Nohemi Rodriguez]

CASTLE OF OUR SKINS STAFF

Dr. Ciyadh Wells, *Executive Director*
Lyndsay Allyn Cox, *Artistic Producer & Interdisciplinary Curator*
Ruben McFarlane, *Director of Community Engagement and Partnerships*
Francesca McNeeley, *Music Curator*
Rachel Styles, *Operations Manager*

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www.castleskins.org

About Castle of our Skins

Castle of our Skins is a Black arts institution dedicated to fostering cultural curiosity and celebrating Black artistry through music. In classrooms, concert halls, and beyond, Castle of our Skins invites Black heritage and culture exploration, spotlighting both unsung and celebrated figures of past and present.

Through thought-provoking concerts, educational programs, and interdisciplinary collaborations, Castle of our Skins brings together music, history, spoken word, visual art, dance, and other creative practices to celebrate the breadth and depth of Black creativity.

The name Castle of our Skins comes from the celebrated poet Nikki Giovanni's "Poem (for Nina)." The poem beautifully captures the sense of adoration and celebration for the very fabric that makes us who we are: our skin.

Castle of Our Skins is a proud Artistic Partner at Longy School of Music.

About Longy School of Music of Bard College

Longy School of Music of Bard College prepares musicians to make a difference in the world. A leader in reimagining conservatory education, Longy centers music as social change and prepares musicians to engage new audiences, teach anyone, anywhere, and create meaningful impact through music.





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2026



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