



**Atlanta**  
Symphony  
Orchestra **Talent**  
**Development**  
Program

# News

year end **2018**

**DEAR FRIENDS,**

Musical knowledge and skills are best transmitted in an apprenticeship-like setting, from master to pupil, one-on-one. However, the path to professional musicianship involves so much more. Over the last 25 years, the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra (ASO) Talent Development Program (TDP) has evolved to meet the needs of our Fellows as they pursue careers in classical music.

In the beginning, only a handful of TDP students successfully auditioned into Atlanta Symphony Youth Orchestra (ASYO). Now, it's a rite of passage. Every junior and senior Fellow is currently a member of ASYO, and many serve in principal positions.

In the early days of the program, summer camp was not a standard part of the TDP, but now it is expected that all Fellows attend. In addition, All State was not accomplished by all, but now it is a milestone achieved by many Fellows before they even enter the program.

Today, TDP Fellows successfully audition into enrichment ensembles during their first semester in the program. This year, all Fellows, even those in their first year, participated in a solo public performance as part of the TDP 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Recital Series. Since 2012, one hundred percent of our students have graduated from the program to pursue a music degree. We have created a climate of excellence by meeting Fellows

where they are and guiding them towards achieving the program's mission.

Our mantra is "trust the process." By following the protocols of efficient practice, consistent feedback, accountability, problem solving and reflection; we can help those with a true passion for their art prepare for the next level of training.

Join us in Symphony Hall on Feb. 9, 2019, 8pm to enjoy a very special concert, celebrating 25 years of learning and growing through the Talent Development Program. The

evening will begin at 6:45pm with a special pre-concert recital featuring our current TDP fellows, followed by an evening of music featuring the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra, led by Maestro Robert Spano with special guests Talent Development Program alums. Khari Joyner, 2009 TDP graduate and 2017 Leonore Annenberg Arts Fellow, will perform the Saint-Saëns Cello Concerto. Xavier Foley, 2011 TDP graduate and Avery Fisher Career Grant winner, will join ASO Concertmaster David Coucheron to perform the Bottesini Grand Duo; and our 2019 Aspire Award winners, The Imani Winds, will perform a piece by Valerie Coleman for wind quintet, strings and percussion. In addition, our featured TDP alumni will join the Orchestra to perform Beethoven's Seventh Symphony. Veteran TV journalist, Monica Pearson, will serve as emcee for this special celebration. Visit [aso.org/TDP](http://aso.org/TDP) for tickets.

Thanks to generous support from the Mellon Foundation, we have tremendous opportunity to not only envision the future of the ASO TDP, but to collaborate with other institutions to further our mission. On February 8 and 9, 2019, the ASO will host the first Building Bridges Symposium, which will bring together representatives from the top music training programs, summer camps and conservatories in the country to share best practices and collectively forge a path to support aspiring musicians of color across the United States.

Thank you for supporting the TDP along this journey. We look forward to celebrating 25 years of progress with you during this very special February 9 performance.

Sincerely,  
Adrienne Thompson, TDP Manager

**THANK YOU** for joining us for The TDP 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Recital Series. Click **HERE** to view performance photos and be sure to share!

# Visiting The Juilliard School

By Angela Leeper

This fall, several Talent Development Program Fellows had the exciting opportunity to visit one of the top conservatories in the world, The Juilliard School in New York City. Thanks to TDP Manager, Adrienne Thompson, the Fellows were given a warm welcome and an experience that went far beyond a tour. The Fellows received an in-depth look at what being a student at Juilliard is really like. The trip included open orchestra rehearsals, the opportunity to sit in on music classes, lunch with Juilliard students, a thorough tour of the school, and of course, trial lessons with the renowned faculty. Each Fellow who made the trip left New York with new inspiration, each enjoying their own unique Juilliard experience.

**VINCENT TAPIA IV**, a senior, had a lesson with Weston Sprott, a trombonist in the Metropolitan Opera Orchestra; and he was able to watch a trombone choir rehearsal. "I learned so much just from watching the embouchure of each individual player in the studio," says Vincent. "It showed me what I need to do to fix simple mechanics in my playing. It surprised me that I was able to learn so much sitting in one rehearsal." Not only did Vincent learn a valuable detail that improved his playing, he also learned about misconceptions surrounding the Juilliard School. For example, Juilliard is often thought of as pretentious and viciously competitive, but Vincent's interactions with the students at Juilliard proved otherwise.

Although **FRANCISCO VIDALES**, a senior, was at Juilliard for only four hours, he said, "It was still a memorable experience. I had a lesson with one of the clarinet professors, who travels the world as a famous soloist. Not only did he help improve my fundamentals, he showed me scores of solo pieces and explained how certain sections can help me phrase the music."



**ANGELA LEEPER**, a senior, had a trial lesson with Timothy Cobb, who is principal bassist of the New York Philharmonic and a Juilliard faculty member. Her lesson was very beneficial because she got many tips on how to improve her college audition repertoire. For her lesson, she was fortunate enough to borrow a bass from a student at Juilliard, whom she had only met the day of her visit. She also spoke to other Juilliard bassists, who were kind and encouraging of her upcoming audition.

The Juilliard trip was an equally memorable experience for the TDP parents. Andrew Leeper, who accompanied his daughter Angela said, "Our visit to Juilliard was very productive. The friendly staff gave us a complete tour of the school; we spoke with admissions and financial aid representatives and we observed an orchestra rehearsal. It was nice to meet some of the current students, who were very helpful during our visit. Overall I was very impressed with Juilliard."

**OJO OKOKA**, a junior, says "My experience at Juilliard was wonderful. The first day, I had a lesson with Nathan Hughes and he gave me a lot of major focal points to focus on with my oboe playing to improve in specific areas. Coming in, I didn't know what to expect, but during the tour I got a very personal feel for the school and New York. I sat in on an ear training class and a performance class, and I definitely got a better sense of what going to school there would be like." Ojo says this trip has influenced his college decision process.

Thanks to this trip, the junior and senior TDP Fellows are better prepared for the college admissions and audition process. All of those who attended are including Juilliard on their list; and they are one step closer to attending the school of their dreams.

*Angela Leeper, a senior at Ola High School, studies with TDP master-teacher Gloria Jones and is principal bassist for the Atlanta Symphony Youth Orchestra.*





# Khari Joyner:

## Classical Music's Rising Star

As we celebrate our 25th anniversary, it's fitting to look at TDP alumnus Khari Joyner's musical journey. It's a stunning example of the power of this program to open doors for young African American and Latino musicians.

Since completing the TDP, Khari's accomplishments have been plentiful. He performed in the Oval Office for President Barack Obama; and because of his amazing solo and chamber music performances throughout the world, he was hailed by *New York Classical Review* as "one of the most exciting young musicians on the classical scene." Khari has also received many prestigious scholarships and

rewards, including the Leonore Annenberg Fellowship, which helps promising artists activate their careers. Last summer, he performed Tchaikovsky's *Rococo Variations* with the ASO for an audience of approximately 10,000

How did this vision come about? "It was a combination of seeing others in the program who looked like me," he explains, "Once I started progressing on the cello technically, while becoming more proficient in general, I realized that music was so fulfilling and a serious passion of mine, and from there one thing led to the next."

Khari's parents were "hands-on," and instilled a love of music in their children. "We always had music in the house," Khari remembers. Both parents played instruments, but not professionally. They actively sought enriching music experiences for their children, and started their oldest sons in the Peabody Conservatory Young People's String Program in Baltimore, Md. When the family moved to Atlanta, they found the TDP. Khari followed his brothers Jarin and Amyr (violinists) into the program, and at the age of 12, decided to become a

Atlantans at the annual Performance in the Park, Presented by Bank of America.

Khari is currently completing his final year of doctoral studies at The Juilliard School, where he received his bachelor's and master's degrees, as well as a minor in mathematics through a joint program with Columbia University.

The TDP, as well as Khari's Suzuki studies, helped lay the foundation for his exciting music career. In what Khari describes as the program's "very tight-knit community," he was nurtured and began to envision a career in classical music.



“Once I started progressing on the cello technically, while becoming more proficient in general, I realized that music was so fulfilling and a serious passion of mine, and from there one thing led to the next.”

professional musician.

In the TDP, Khari was exposed to quality teachers and summer camps, and built a network of contacts he would leverage later in his career. Khari's master-teacher, Martha Gerschefski, helped him find the right summer programs – Indiana University String Academy, Heifitz Music Festival in New Hampshire—that linked him to teachers whom he would later follow to Juilliard.

“With music... there are so many different career paths and opportunities one can take.”

Khari was also a member of the Atlanta Symphony Youth Orchestra, which helped him develop as a chamber musician.

Khari appreciates the community and fellowship fostered by TDP families and the

dedication of cofounder Azira G. Hill. “Seeing what she believed in and what she has wished for all the TDP students is something that has always been inspiring to me and my family,” he says. “It’s great to see so many wonderful things come out of the program. It’s a much different program from what it was. Just seeing that evolution in how it’s grown, I’m so proud to be a part of her vision.”

Khari, like most TDP alumni, gives back to his community. “One of my passions is teaching. I’ve done a lot of teaching and hiring of musicians of color, and mentoring not just musicians, but other

artists. Helping young musicians follow their goals and vision is very important to me.”

Looking ahead to life after Juilliard, Khari is confident. “With music, especially today, there are so many different career paths and opportunities one can take,” he says.

In recent years, Khari obtained professional gigs that have helped him build his brand: “I found a niche in playing new music and performing multidisciplinary music.”

The Leonore Annenberg Fellowship provided funds that enabled Khari to produce his first solo album featuring music he composed, *CelLocomotion*, which was released in October and is available on [Amazon](#) and iTunes.

Today’s TDP Fellows face many challenges, as competition to get into conservatories stiffens. What encouraging words can they get from a TDP alumnus who has blazed an exemplary path? “I would tell them to practice very diligently and to really study music,” says Khari, “and to also know that if they find it in themselves to really want to do music, it can be fulfilling even though there will be challenges along the way. If they work hard at it and are focused and disciplined, they will be able to make a real career out of music.”

Even if they don’t choose that path, he adds, “music will make them more well-rounded and virtuous as a person. That’s something that music has the power to do.”





## *Instructor Spotlight:* *Ronda Respass*

### and her enduring support of the TDP

TDP master teacher and ASO violinist Ronda Respass is helping to change the face of classical music, one student at a time. Ronda, who is also founder and artistic director of Franklin Pond Chamber Music, a year-round chamber music program in Atlanta for talented young musicians, has been involved with the TDP since the very beginning, 25 years ago.

“I honestly don’t remember how I got involved,” recalls Ronda. “But I was already involved in the education program, coaching the second violins of the ASYO and then I was invited to join the taskforce that started the program.”

Ronda joined the Orchestra in 1969, two years after Robert Shaw began his tenure as Music Director, and she was influenced by the culture he created.

“Shaw was very much for equality and acutely aware of the need for diversity,” Ronda recalls. “He hired more women for our Orchestra when I came in than any orchestra in the world. I didn’t realize it at the time, I was just like, ‘Oh goody I got a job.’ But I now realize that he was a catalyst for inclusion of all people in the arts in Atlanta.”

Shaw spearheaded many initiatives that were designed to include African Americans into the ASO. In this context of inclusion and outreach, Ronda became heavily involved in the ASO’s education and community engagement programs, coaching young musicians in the ASYO since its inception.

Later, after Shaw retired and the TDP was founded in the early 1990s, it seemed natural for Ronda to be part of its development. At the time, the Symphony didn’t have much funding for education. “There was education as far as having kids come to the hall for concerts and the ASYO,” Ronda explains. “Everything we have now was really started by volunteers.”

As a member of the TDP steering committee, Ronda worked with Azira G. Hill, Mary Frances Early and other volunteers to ensure the success of the program. When no venue could be found for the TDP’s first concert, she even opened her home. Ronda has served as a teacher for most of the program’s history, helping to create better growth opportunities than most professional musicians have had.

Growing up in New Jersey in the fifties and sixties, Ronda had a fraction of the resources the TDP provides to its fellows. “I had a youth symphony, there was an all-state and youth symphony--that was it,” she recalls. “I didn’t have any chamber music. My parents had to pay for the lessons. I was lucky because my mother was a pianist and



a musician, and she played with me. So, I was one of the lucky ones. We didn't have anything like the TDP available to anyone, so this is extraordinary."

Today, Ronda teaches two TDP Fellows: ninth-grader Roland Mason and senior Taylor Tookes. Additionally, she formed two string quartets made up of TDP Fellows, who will receive training and coaching through the Franklin Pond Chamber Music.

"I think the trajectory we're on in the program is really good right now," Ronda says. "The Fellows have plenty of performance experiences, plenty of learning experiences.

They have to work at it, and if they don't, they know right away they're not doing what they're supposed to."

Ronda has been connected to the program long enough to see the fruits of her labor. "I met two of our alumni in Paris when I went this year," she says. "And one of them is in international studies and has a good job in Paris, but he plays with an amateur orchestra there. He is spreading the word, he kept music in his life. I love to see where they end up and what they do. Sometimes I can be of support from afar."

## Nov 30 | First Presbyterian Church of Atlanta





# Achievements

## Enrichment

**Congratulations to our 2018 Fellows and their many accomplishments in the following enrichment ensembles:**

**Gordon Meeks:**

Metropolitan Youth Symphony Orchestra (MYSO) and Cobb Co. District Honors Symphony

**Zoe Willingham:** Atlanta Symphony Youth Orchestra (ASYO)

**Taylor Tookes:** ASYO

**Roland Mason:** MYSO

**Waverly Alexander:** Georgia Youth Symphony Orchestra (GYSO)

**Lucia Reber- Vinas:** Atlanta Junior Chamber Orchestra (AJCO)

**Jaia Alli:** MYSO

**Brandon Leonard:** MYSO

**Bria Rives:** MYSO

**Joshua Sheperd:** MYSO

**Angela Leeper:** ASYO

**Micah Blair:** Urban Youth Harp Ensemble (UYHE)

**Sage Harrison:** UYHE

**Ojo Okoka:** ASYO

**Juliyán Martínez:** ASYO

**Triniti Rives:** ASYO

**Francisco Vidales:** ASYO and Atlanta Youth Wind Symphony (AYWS)

**Alexandria Carrillo:** Emory Youth Symphony Orchestra (EYSO)

**Justin Griffin:** MYSO

**Vincent Tapia IV:** ASYO, EYSO and AYWS

**Kobe Lester:** ASYO

**Rodney Clark Jr:** MYSO

**Spencer Mitchell:** Gwinnett Youth Orchestra (GYO)

## Kudos

**Stanford Thompson:**

[Named Dean of the Sphinx LEAD program](#)

**Drew Ford:** Performed at Spivey Hall

**Robyn Smith:** Featured as the face of New England Conservatory's music catalogue

**Khari Joyner:** Featured as the face of Juilliard's music catalogue.

[Listen](#) to **Adrienne Thompson, Ryan Walks** and **Vincent Tapia** talk about TDP with WABE's Lois Reitzes



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