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MACPHAIL CENTER FOR MUSIC AWARDS FOUR \$25,000 MCKNIGHT MUSICIAN FELLOWSHIPS TO MINNESOTA'S TOP MUSICIANS

MINNEAPOLIS—MAY 9, 2019—MacPhail Center for Music announces the four recipients of the 2019-20 McKnight Fellowships for Musicians: Sedra Bistodeau, Gao Hong, Maria Isa and Will Johnson.

The process began in January when 79 solo and ensemble musicians applied for the McKnight Fellowship with recordings, artist statements and resumes. From this group, nine finalists were selected by a panel of national judges to audition live on May 3. Following the audition, four recipients were awarded the \$25,000 McKnight Fellowship for Musicians.

For the 23rd year, MacPhail Center for Music administered the McKnight Fellowships for Musicians, which are a component of the McKnight Artist Fellowships Program. Founded on the belief that Minnesota thrives when its artists thrive, The McKnight Foundation's arts program is one of the oldest and largest of its kind in the country. Support for individual working Minnesota artists has been a cornerstone of the program since it began in 1981. The McKnight Artist Fellowships Program provides annual, unrestricted cash awards to outstanding mid-career Minnesota artists in 10 different creative disciplines. Program partner organizations administer the fellowships and structure them to respond to the unique challenges of different disciplines. Currently the foundation contributes about \$1.7 million per year to its statewide fellowships.

The 2019-2020 McKnight Musician Fellows:



Sedra Bistodeau, violin and fiddle, Princeton: Sedra Bistodeau, 24, is a violinist and fiddler from Princeton, Minnesota. She started playing at the age of 3 and studied with teachers Margaret Haviland, Mary West and Sally O'Reilly. She graduated from Shattuck St. Mary's and went off to California to pursue her Bachelor's Degree in Classical Violin Performance at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music. She graduated in May 2017, and studied with Bettina Mussumeli. Sedra has soloed with numerous orchestras around the state of Minnesota including the Duluth Symphony, the Bloomington Symphony, Itasca Symphony Orchestra, St. Cloud Symphony, Little Falls Symphony, Civic Orchestra and the Minnesota Orchestra. Along with her classical training, Sedra has had tremendous success in the art of fiddling. She is a Minnesota State Champion, a Wisconsin State Champion, and she won the "Gone to Texas" division in Hallettsville, Texas when she was 13. She was the youngest person ever to win this division and the first female to win as well. She has also won two national titles at the National Old Time Fiddling competition in Weiser, Idaho, and is a certified National Judge for the Old Time Fiddling Competition as well. She has made many guest appearances with Peter Ostroushko, and has been a guest performer on Garrison Keillor's "A Prairie Home Companion" for the last decade.



Gao Hong, traditional Chinese music, Northfield: Gao Hong, a master of the Chinese lute, the pipa, began her career as a professional musician at age 12. She graduated from China's premier music school, the Central Conservatory of Music, where she studied with pipa master Lin Shicheng. In both China and the U.S., Gao has received numerous top awards, including 1st Prize in the Hebei Professional Young Music Performers Competition and an International Art Cup (Beijing). In 2005, Gao became the first traditional musician to be awarded a Bush Artist Fellowship. She has also been awarded fellowships from the McKnight Foundation and grants from the Minnesota State Arts Board, Sorel Organization (NYC); Mid Atlantic Arts (Baltimore); Meet the Composer (NYC) and others. In 2018, she received the Sally Award from the Ordway for her commitment to the arts in Minnesota.

Gao has performed throughout Europe, Australia, Argentina, Asia and the U.S. in solo concerts and with symphony orchestras, jazz musicians and musicians from other cultures. She has performed at major venues and festivals worldwide: Lincoln Center Festival; Carnegie Hall; San Francisco Jazz Festival; Smithsonian Institution; the Next Wave Festival; Festival d'Automne a Paris in Paris and Caen, France; the International Festival of Perth; and the Festival de Teatro d'Europa in Milan. Her performances of pipa concerti include several world, U.S., and regional premieres and performances with the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra, Buenos Aires Philharmonic, China National Traditional Orchestra, Guangdong National Traditional Orchestra Louisville Orchestra, Pasadena Symphony, Heidelberg Philharmonic and others. In 2017, she became the first Chinese musician to play the National Anthem at a Minnesota Timberwolves NBA game at Target Center in Minneapolis.

As a composer, she has received commissions from the American Composers Forum, Walker Art Center, Jerome Foundation, Zeitgeist, Ragamala, Theater Mu, guitarist Lars Hannibal, Minneapolis Guitar Quartet and Twin Cities Public TV.

As an educator, in 2016, Gao Hong completed the first pipa method book ever written in English and had it published by Hal Leonard. She teaches Chinese musical instruments and directs the Carleton Chinese Music Ensemble and the Global Music Ensemble at Carleton College in Minnesota. She is also Guest Professor at the Central Conservatory of Music, China Conservatory of Music, Tianjin Conservatory of Music and Hebei Provincial School for the Arts in China.



Maria Isa, Afro-Latin hip-hop, St. Paul: Maria Isa is a singer, composer and hip-hop artist born in St. Paul. A self-identified “SotaRican” (Puerto Rican born in Minnesota), at an early age Maria Isa began her musical career at El Arco Iris Center for the Arts, an Afro-Puerto Rican performance and educational non-profit founded by women in her family.

Maria Isa’s musical voice is anchored in traditional Boricua folk music of bomba, plena and jibaro (Puerto Rican country music). These traditions blend together with contemporary versions of Latin jazz, salsa, funk, rap and R&B. For over twenty years as a recording artist and with over fifteen albums, Isa’s work uplifts the voices of Indigenous and Women of Color’s rights gracing airwaves, stages and Twin Cities’ entertainment publication covers, receiving awards from the Governor’s office of Minnesota and national recognition through the National Hispana Leadership Institute’s “Rising Latina Star Award.” MPR’s The Current has listed her as one of the state’s top 52 artists to be from Minnesota. Isa is currently writing Boricua musical curriculums and directing youth jazz programming throughout Minnesota. Maria Isa’s work contributes to

the empowerment of future Latina/o/x musicians and she is also the owner of her own label SotaRico, distributing her music since 2009 and managing artists and Midwest Latino Music events.



Will Johnson (W/ILLS), post genre, St. Paul: Will Johnson is a vocal artist/sound programmer/composer originally from New York City. He received childhood vocal training as a member of the Harlem Boys Choir and continued his pursuit of music education throughout college, graduating from NYU with an interdisciplinary degree in Music and Philosophy.

In early performances and recordings, Johnson used song as vehicle for critical discourse on topics of race, gender, class, identity and selfhood. The work received mention and praise in outlets including NPR, the New Yorker, the New York Times and Vice. During this period, the artist was selected as a resident at the Red Bull Music Academy and contributed vocals to Grammy-winning album “Skin” by producer Flume. The growing success culminated in a songwriting/publishing contract under the name W/LLS for Universal/Kobalt/Reservoir.

Johnson’s solo and ensemble performances have been commissioned by the Kitchen, BAM, Lincoln Center, MassMoca, the Apollo, Afropunk Festival and Moogfest. As a guest vocalist, he has appeared in the Black Rock Coalition’s tributes to Gil Scott Heron, Grace Jones and Prince.

His recorded work and original scores have been licensed/commissioned by HBO, Fox, Amazon and Hulu and appear in advertisements for the Gap, Beats Electronics and Acura.

In 2017, he was awarded the Jerome Foundation’s fellowship for Sound Art/Composition. During this fellowship, he wrote, recorded and produced “The New Old” LP, an album that explores the futurist aesthetic of gospel music. He is currently based in St. Paul Minnesota, working on an upcoming theater piece commissioned by New York City’s Public Theater.

Additionally, five solo artists were selected as finalists and will receive \$1000: Alyssa Anderson of Minneapolis (mezzo-soprano), Nathan Hanson of St. Paul (composer and saxophonist), Steven Hobert of Minneapolis (improvisational genre-blending), Kristoff Krane of Minneapolis (hip-hop, rap) and Steve Tibbetts of Mendota Heights (new music).

The McKnight Foundation, a family foundation based in Minnesota, advances a more just, creative, and abundant future where people and planet thrive. Program interests include regional economic and community development, Minnesota's arts and artists, education equity, youth engagement, Midwest climate and energy, Mississippi River water quality, neuroscience research, international crop research, and rural livelihoods. Founded in 1953 and independently endowed by William and Maude McKnight, the Foundation has assets of approximately \$2.2 billion and grants about \$90 million a year.

MacPhail Center for Music is a non-profit organization committed to transforming lives and strengthening communities through music learning experiences that inspire. Each year, MacPhail opens its doors to more than 16,000 students offering programming for all ages, backgrounds and abilities, at locations in Minneapolis, White Bear Lake, Chanhassen, Apple Valley and Austin, as well as 113 community partnerships across the Twin Cities and online at MacPhail Online. MacPhail has a 112-year history of excellence, promoting life-long learning and building long-term relationships between students and teachers. For more information, visit www.macphail.org.

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