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**Contact:**

Claire Forrest  
Forrest.Claire@macphail.org  
612-767-5382

**MACPHAIL CENTER FOR MUSIC HONORS FOUR OF MINNESOTA’S TOP MUSICIANS WITH  
\$25,000 MCKNIGHT MUSICIAN FELLOWSHIP**

**MINNEAPOLIS—May 7, 2020—**MacPhail Center for Music announces the four recipients of the 2020-21 McKnight Fellowships for Musicians: Jose Antonio Zayas Caban, PaviElle French, Diane Miller aka D. Mills and Kirsten Whitson.

In January, the process began when 83 solo and ensemble musicians applied for the McKnight Fellowship with recordings, artist statements and resumes. Nine finalists were selected by a national panel of judges, and the finals were held virtually on May 1. Four recipients were selected to be awarded the \$25,000 McKnight Fellowship for Musicians.

MacPhail Center for Music administered the McKnight Fellowship for Musicians, a component of the McKnight Artists Fellowships Program, for the 24<sup>th</sup> year. 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 2020-2021 McKnight Musician Fellows:**



**José A. Zayas Cabán**, saxophone—new/classical, Minneapolis has presented performances and taught master classes throughout Europe, the Caribbean and North America. A native Puerto Rican and musician activist, José is building an artistic career focused on developing projects, albums and collaborations that address, respond and raise awareness about current events and social issues. José is currently collaborating with multiple Grammy Nominee and Guggenheim and MacArthur Fellow Miguel Zenón on a work titled *El País Invisible* (The Invisible Nation, 2019), that reflects on the relationship between Puerto Rico and the United States Empire. In addition, he is developing a project with Angélica Negrón that will result in a new composition, by Angélica, titled *Pedacito de Tierra* (Little Piece of Land). Influenced by the work of Rafael Tufiño, and photographer Erika Rodriguez, *Pedacito de Tierra* will celebrate Puerto Rico's stories and struggles. The collaboration with Angélica Negrón and Miguel Zenón is part of a larger, long term, project called Puerto Rico se Re-Inventa. José is developing this project to schedule annual residencies in Puerto Rico and bring free music concerts to the communities of Puerto Rico and, by documenting these visits to the island, raise consciousness and awareness about Puerto Rico in the mainland United States. His upcoming debut album, *Centennial*, commemorates the women's suffrage movement and the ratification of the 19th amendment in August 1920.

José is the co-founder of the Chamber Music Trio {Trés}, which was started as a collaborative project by José and Colin Young with the purpose of creating transcriptions and commissioning new works for a two saxophone and piano ensemble to perform. The trio has since performed chamber music by a wide range of composers in Central America, the Caribbean and throughout the United States. In the wake of Hurricanes Irma and María, {Trés} finished a national tour (2018) titled *A Tribute to Puerto Rico* to help raise funds and awareness about Puerto Rico and the island's efforts to recover from the hurricanes. In November 2019, the trio completed its first residency in Puerto Rico.



**Pavielle French, voice—soul, Columbia Heights** is an interdisciplinary artist, Emmy Award and Sage Award winner. Ms. French is Minneapolis City Pages "Best R&B Vocalist of 2015." As a Voice-Over artist, she has done national commercials for Pepsi and Boston Market. She has two documentaries, TPT's "Lowertown Line,"(2015) and "MN Original" (2019). She has written and performed two one-woman shows: *Runnin'* (2014); *Ovarian Fortitude* (2016). She is a recipient of the ACF Create Grant and received a commission by The Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra, writing a symphony about her Mom's service to the Rondo Community entitled, "A Requiem For Zula,"(2019). Pavielle began her career as a child with *City Songs*, Penumbra Theatre Company and, SteppingStone. As a teacher, she has worked at Maxfield Magnet and Saint Paul Conservatory for the Performing Arts. She has facilitated creative writing workshops and residencies in both Saint Paul and Minneapolis Public Schools. Currently, she is a faculty member at MacPhail Center for Music.



**Diane Miller, a.k.a. D Mills, voice—Hip-Hop, folk, alternative, rock, Minneapolis**, is a singer, rapper, looper, beatboxer, songwriter and guitarist who infuses a variety of influences into her music. For nearly a decade Miller has fronted the band D Mills & The Thrills, a 6 piece hip-hop/rap group originated in Fargo, ND. A devout fan and follower of classic hip-hop, Diane pays stylistic homage to the genre accompanied by lyrics authentic to her worldview. Miller raps and sings about love, personal growth and struggle related to growing up as a shy outcast in the rural Midwest. Miller and the band also powerfully showcase songs of legendary hip-hop/rap groups such as Outkast, A Tribe Called Quest, Rage Against The Machine, Beastie Boys, Wu Tang Clan, TLC and more.

Diane has gone on to become a fixture in the state of North Dakota, performing music and/or emceeing big events such as TEDxFargo, Celebration of Women and Their Music, Woodstock 50th Anniversary Celebration, DylanFest, Back is Black (Tribute to Johnny Cash), Martin Luther King Day Celebration at Fargo Theatre, Alley Fair and much more. Diane’s work has also been covered by nearly every major news source in the Red River Valley, including Forum News Service, High Plains Reader, MPR, Prairie Public, Fargo Monthly, WDAY, KFGO and others.

Since moving to Minneapolis in September 2018, Diane has been focusing on solo performances and collaborating with a variety of different musicians, including Kiss The Tiger, Haley (f.k.a. Haley Bonar), Greg Schutte (Mickey Hart Band, Ryan Bingham), Jeremy Ylvisaker (Alpha Consumer, The Suburbs, Andrew Bird) and JG Everest (Roma Di Luna). On January 1, 2020, she released her first solo hip-hop single “What Gets Ignored”, which has been receiving airplay and praise from MPR’s The Current.



**Kirsten Whitson, cello—classical, St. Paul**, performs extensively as a soloist, chamber and orchestral musician.

She has played throughout the US, Cuba, Europe and Japan with Minnesota Orchestra, Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra, Minnesota Opera, Milwaukee Symphony, Florida Orchestra and Norway's Bergen Philharmonic. She has also performed at the Festival of the Lakes in Alexandria, the Grand Teton Music Festival and with Zeitgeist New Music.

Kirsten has presented solo cello concerts throughout the Twin Cities and has been featured on programs broadcast by KFAI and Minnesota Public Radio. She is passionate about the extensive repertoire available for solo cello and has premiered several commissioned pieces. Composers Timothy C. Takach, David Evan Thomas, Carl Witt and Jocelyn Hagen have written music for her. One of Jocelyn Hagen's pieces for her involved live digital looping.

Kirsten received a B.M. and an Artist Diploma from Indiana University, where she studied with Fritz Magg and Janos Starker. Kirsten received Artist Initiative Grants from the Minnesota State Arts Board in 2002 and 2018.

Additionally, one ensemble and four solo artists were named finalists and will receive \$1,000: Krissy Bergmark of Minneapolis (tabla—world, jazz, Hindustani, contemporary, modern, newgrass), El Karnwie-Tuah/EL.i.BE of St. Paul (vocals—Hip-Hop & Rap), Nathan Hanson of St. Paul (soprano saxophone—jazz), Chadwick Phillips/Niles of Minneapolis (voice—Hip-Hop) and Timothy Broscious and Eugene Koshinski of Quey Percussion Duo of Duluth (contemporary).

The McKnight Foundation, a Minnesota-based family foundation, advances a more just, creative, and abundant future where people and planet thrive. Established in 1953, the McKnight Foundation is deeply committed to advancing climate solutions in the Midwest; building an equitable and inclusive Minnesota; and supporting the arts in Minnesota, neuroscience, and international crop research. The Foundation has approximately \$2.3 billion in assets and grants about \$90 million a year.

MacPhail Center for Music is committed to transforming lives and strengthening communities through music learning experiences that inspire. Each year, MacPhail offers programming to 16,000 students of all ages, backgrounds and abilities, at locations in Minneapolis, White Bear Lake, Chanhassen, Apple Valley and Austin, as well as 104 community partnerships across the Twin Cities and online at MacPhail Online. MacPhail has a 113-year history of excellence, promoting life-long learning and building long-term relationships between students and teachers. For more information, visit [macphail.org](http://macphail.org)

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