



# Hamilton-Garrett



*Celebrating 20 Years!*

# THE HG GAZETTE

VOLUME 2 | MARCH 2021

Official Newsletter of the Hamilton-Garrett Music and Arts Academy

Edited by Eva Montgomery-Morrison

## Announcements and Updates

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Congratulations to Boston City Council President Kim Janey, who is expected to become the acting mayor of Boston pending Mayor Walsh's official appointment in the Biden administration. Upon appointment, Ms. Janey would become the first woman and the first person of color to serve as the city's mayor. This is a huge step for Ms. Janey, as well as for a city that has unfortunately been plagued by widespread systemic racism for far too long. Ms. Janey currently serves Boston's 7th District, which includes HGMA and the Historic Charles Street AME Church!



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## Announcing Our Spring Recital!

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Save the date for Hamilton-Garrett's annual Spring Recital on **Friday, June 18th, 2021!** The recital will be streamed on YouTube Live and will feature all of our amazing students as well as performances by faculty and other guests. Make sure to tune in if you want to see the results of our students' hard work this year!

## Teacher Profile: Julie McKenzie

By Eva Montgomery-Morrison

*In addition to teaching violin at Hamilton-Garrett, Julie McKenzie is an accomplished and versatile musician with a career spanning over 40 years. She specializes in performance on period (historically accurate) instruments but has played nearly every kind of music that has been written for the violin. Interview has been condensed and edited for clarity and brevity.*



### Can you give us a summary of your musical journey?

The first thing I started with was my mom sitting us all down at the piano--we learned a couple scales at a very early age, but no real lessons. I started violin, like most kids, at age 9 in the public schools, in a small town in California. I didn't take any private lessons until I got really serious; at age 15, I decided that was what I was going to do with my life. All I did was after-school ensembles before then.

### Can you remember anything that influenced your decision to go into music as a career?

I think about this often as I teach. Music became a constant companion for me; it was a real friend that was always there. Even though I didn't really play much until I was 15 or 16, I can't imagine ever having been without it. My brother and sister also started to play but they only played for a few minutes. I never put it down! When I became serious, I fell in love with all violin music, and then I decided it was what I was going to study. I went to a summer camp at University of the Pacific in central California, and then transferred to UC Irvine. There, I worked with a wonderful African-American violinist, William Fitzpatrick, who was one of very few African-American professional violinists in the country. He was fresh out of Juilliard and had studied there with Dorothy DeLay. He founded and led an incredible, dynamic string quartet out of Juilliard called the New York Quartet. We don't hear of them very much anymore, because they weren't very long-lived, but they were hired at UC Irvine. They were incredible, real stars in southern California in the early 1980s. Fitzpatrick is a fantastic player and he's even written a book about his life growing up in the South as one of the very few Black violinists. So his story is awesome. Anyway, I then had the choice of going to graduate school at either San Francisco Conservatory or New England Conservatory. I had auditioned at both places and I chose Boston to expand my horizons. I studied with one of Fitzpatrick's colleagues, Paul Kantor, who had been another student and assistant of Dorothy DeLay's at NEC. He's now an amazing violin teacher that people scramble to learn with. Another reason I chose to come to Boston is because I had heard Christopher Hogwood's recording of [Handel's] Messiah on period instruments. It just blew my mind and I knew I had to learn to play that way. So I chose Boston because it was a center for early music. I went to NEC and studied as a modern violinist with Paul, knowing that I would figure out how to acquire a baroque violin and learn that style too, and that's what I did. I'm very lucky to have played with Hogwood on many Messiahs when he was here in Boston with the Handel and Haydn Society, until he left in 2001. So that's a wonderful thing about being able to come to Boston. I've been here ever since; it's a perfect place for what I want to do with my music.



## Teacher Profile: Julie McKenzie

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### **What do you think is so valuable about preserving historical performance practices?**

As a history buff, I'm really interested in recreating what historical figures knew. For music, that means trying to recreate the sound world those performers knew the best that we can, and that starts with the instrument that they knew. There are a lot of string players who don't realize how different baroque violins are from modern ones, and it fascinates me how much you can learn from just picking up the equipment and letting it show you how it is. We can read the treatises and the accounts of the day, and that gives you some instruction, but to really feel how it is, lets you figure out for yourself how it works. So it's important to try to use the equipment that historical composers wrote for and knew, because Vivaldi and Bach would not know the modern violin, and Stradivari would hardly recognize his own instrument. I've loved developing the two different memory banks for the different techniques. A lot of people ask me how I do that, because I've really maintained a pretty even balance between period playing and modern playing. It's a matter of keeping both sets of knowledge and taking out what you know once you pick up the instrument. So that's why it's important to me to at least try to recreate--I wish we knew for sure, we don't know for sure, but at least the instruments are there, many of them intact or some really great reproductions, that do show us how the tone was produced and the gestures from the very different bows.

### **Who are your musical influences or people you look up to?**

There are so many, but when I was growing up, Itzhak Perlman was huge, Isaac Stern, all those old guys. I really love discovering women violinists too, listening to some of the old Maud Powell recordings. I love Regina Carter for jazz. I just learned of an African-American jazz violinist, a woman named Ginger Smock from the 1950s. She was an incredible violinist who was studying classical music in California and decided to go for jazz instead. I'm going to have my students play her stuff. I love rock, I love jazz and everything, so my influence is all over the place. Technique-wise, Stéphane Grappelli is huge for me, and really anything I can get my hands on. I'm always on YouTube watching what people are doing. I also love listening to amateurs, and I love working with amateurs and teaching music appreciation to people who are going to be amateurs. Not necessarily pros, but just people who fall in love with the instrument!

### **What are some highlights from your musical career?**

When I was in high school I got to play with Chuck Mangione; that was huge. I went to London with Handel and Haydn Society to play in Royal Albert Hall; that was a big one and really wonderful. I got to go to Puerto Rico with Boston Baroque to play in the Casals festival. I went to Regensburg, Germany, with the Musicians of the Old Post Road, in the early music days. I'm also really proud of what my ensemble Eudaimonia is trying to do. Vivian Montgomery and I share this idea to bring music to underserved audiences and to connect and bring awareness to all sorts of underserved groups. So that's something that's really important to me. There are many lucky things that I've been exposed to because of my violin playing; some of that is travel, some of it is meeting heroes and playing with amazing colleagues.

### **Why do you enjoy teaching at HGMAA and what do you hope to instill in your students at HGMAA?**

I love being part of HGMAA, working with students from Boston to help them learn about the rich musical history of Black composers, and to help integrate the musical experiences of our communities. With the amazing versatility of the violin, students can play so many different genres and styles of music, and it's a privilege to help them learn about the violin's history and music by composers of diverse backgrounds, while discovering music of their own cultural heritages, and developing the technique to play the music they love.



# Highlights from HGMAA

## Voice lessons



"This semester is all about helping students connect to their artistic expression via their vocal instrument. Students will learn how to take a piece of music and make it their own, while also continuing to learn the fundamentals of singing that will enable them to blossom into nuanced, well-rounded vocalists who can go on to use their instruments in whatever way best suits their purpose."

-Ms. Zakiyah, voice instructor

## Piano lessons



"This semester the students are each working on a repertoire applying fundamentals in theory, melody, harmony and rhythm. Lessons are catered to meet each student's level, musical interests and to help improve their musical skills. They are taught how to play by ear, read music, and how to practice. Such skills are important for musicianship and in expressing their musicality."

-Mr. Witness, piano instructor



## Celebrating March Birthdays of Black Innovators

Black History Month may be officially over, but we all know that the amazing achievements of Black Americans deserve to be celebrated all the time! Here are a few of the many important figures in Black and American history who were born this month!

- March 1st: Lupita Nyong'o, actress
- March 6th: Shaquille O'Neal, basketball player
- March 14th: Simone Biles, olympic gymnast
- March 14th: Quincy Jones, music producer
- March 17th: Nat King Cole, jazz singer and pianist
- March 20th: Spike Lee, filmmaker
- March 23rd: Chaka Khan, funk singer
- March 25th: Aretha Franklin, soul singer
- March 26th: Diana Ross, R&B singer
- March 27th: Mariah Carey, pop singer

