

Connoisseur Concerts

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Bach 2015 Guest Artist Biographies

Kurt Nikkanen, violin

An internationally recognized violin soloist, **Kurt Nikkanen** is one of the finest American violinists of his generation. Born and raised in Hartford, Connecticut, Kurt began his violin studies at the age of three. At 12, he gave his Carnegie Hall debut with the New York Youth Symphony. Continuing his formal studies as a young adult, Nikkanen earned his Bachelor's Degree, studying with Dorothy DeLay, at the Julliard School in 1986.

He has appeared with orchestras such as the Detroit and St. Louis symphonies, and in Europe with the BBC Symphony and Dresden Staatskapelle. He has worked with many leading conductors including Vladimir Ashkenazy, Andrew Davis, Jeffrey Tate, Hans Vonk, Hugh Wolff, Neeme Jarvi, and Andrew Litton. An enthusiastic advocate of contemporary music, Nikkanen has given numerous performances of John Adams' *Violin Concerto* among many other works.

Since becoming a soloist of the New York City Ballet Orchestra in 2003, he has performed several concertos with the orchestra, including those by Stravinsky, Berg, Bach, and Vivaldi. In 2006, he premiered a new Peter Martins ballet set to Corigliano's *Red Violin Concerto*.

Soovin Kim, violin

Korean-American violinist **Soovin Kim** is an exciting young player who has built on the early successes of his prize-winning years to emerge as a mature and communicative artist. At the age of 20, he captured first prize in the Paganini International Competition and subsequently was the recipient of the prestigious Borletti-Buitoni Trust Award, an Avery Fisher Career Grant, and the Henryk Szeryng Foundation Career Award. Now Kim enjoys a broad musical career, regularly performing repertoire such as Bach sonatas and Paganini caprices for solo violin, Mozart and Vivaldi concerti without conductor as well as big Romantic concerti, sonatas for violin and piano by Beethoven, Brahms, and Ives with duo partner Jeremy Denk, and new world-premiere works almost every season.

In recent seasons, he has been acclaimed for his "superb...impassioned" (*Berkshire Review*) performance of Alban Berg's Chamber Concerto at the Bard Festival with the American Symphony Orchestra and a "sassy, throaty" (*Philadelphia Inquirer*) rendition of Kurt Weill's concerto with the Curtis Chamber Orchestra. His Dallas Symphony performance of the Mendelssohn Double Concerto was noted for its "gorgeous tone, effortless brilliance and eloquent musicality" (*Dallas Morning Star*). He has performed with the Philadelphia Orchestra, San Francisco Symphony, Stuttgart Radio Symphony, Salzburg Mozarteum Orchestra, and the Seoul Philharmonic and Accademia di Santa Cecilia Orchestra.

Kim's CD, *Gypsy*, was released in September 2010. It is his third collaboration between American label Azica Records and Korea-based Stomp/EMI. They previously released a French album of Fauré and Chausson with Jeremy Denk and the Jupiter Quartet in 2008, and Niccolò Paganini's demanding *24 Caprices* for solo violin in February 2006 was named *Classic FM* magazine's Instrumental Disc of the Month ("he emerges thrillingly triumphant...a thrilling debut disc."). He made his first solo recording with Jeremy Denk for Koch-Discover in duo works by Schubert, Bartók, and Strauss.

Kim is the founder and artistic director of the Lake Champlain Chamber Music Festival in 2009 in Burlington, Vermont. Kim is also a sought-after teacher; he previously taught at Yale University and is currently a professor at Stony Brook University in the U.S. and an International Visiting Scholar at Kyung Hee University in Seoul. He also teaches at the Peabody Institute.

Catalyst String Quartet

Hailed by the *New York Times* at their Carnegie Hall debut as "invariably energetic and finely burnished...playing with earthy vigor," the Catalyst Quartet, prize winners of the Gianni Bergamo Classical Music Award 2012 (Switzerland) is comprised of top Laureates and alumni of the internationally acclaimed Sphinx Competition. Catalyst Quartet members are Karla Donehew-Perez, violin; Jessie Montgomery, violin; Paul Laraia, viola; Karlos Rodriguez, cello.

"Electrifying... Wildly colorful and exploding with life" (*Washington Post*), the quartet has held residencies and given master classes both domestically and abroad at the University of Michigan, Rice University, Cincinnati Conservatory of Music, In Harmony Project; London, UK and the University of South Africa to name a few. They also serve as principal faculty at the Sphinx Performance Academy at Oberlin College and Northwestern University. The Catalyst Quartet members are visiting teaching artists at the Sphinx Preparatory Music Institute, hosted by the Detroit Symphony Orchestra.

The Catalyst Quartet has also participated in the Juilliard String Quartet Seminar, Grand Canyon Music Festival, Great Lakes Chamber Music Festival and been featured in *The Strad* and *Strings* magazines including multiple radio and television broadcasts on American Public Media's Performance Today as well as Chicago (WFMT) Houston (KUHF) Public Radio and Detroit Public Radio and Television.

The Quartet maintains a busy performing schedule and completed a national tour in the fall leading the Sphinx Virtuosi. Highlights of the tour included concerts at the Kennedy Center in Washington D.C., opening the 10th anniversary season of the Harris Theater in Chicago, sold out performances at Miami's Frank Gehry-designed New World Center, and New York's Carnegie Hall (Stern Auditorium) with members of the legendary Guarneri Quartet.

Awadagin Pratt, piano

Pianist Awadagin Pratt is acclaimed for musical insight and intensely involving performances in recital and with symphony orchestras.

Born in Pittsburgh, Pratt began studying piano at the age of six. Three years later, having moved to Normal, Illinois with his family, he also began studying violin. At the age of 16, he entered the University of Illinois where he studied piano, violin, and conducting. He subsequently enrolled at the Peabody Conservatory of Music where he became the first student in the school's history to receive diplomas in three performance areas - piano, violin and conducting. In recognition of this achievement and for his work in the field of classical music, Pratt received the Distinguished Alumni Award from Johns Hopkins.

In 1992, Mr. Pratt won the Naumburg International Piano Competition and two years later was awarded an Avery Fisher Career Grant. Since then, he has played numerous recitals throughout the US including performances at Lincoln Center, Kennedy Center, Dorothy Chandler Pavilion in Los Angeles and Chicago's Orchestra Hall. His many orchestral performances include appearances with the New York Philharmonic, Minnesota Orchestra and the Pittsburgh, Atlanta, Baltimore, St. Louis, National and Detroit symphonies.

Piotr Gajewski, guest conductor

Piotr Gajewski is widely credited with building the National Philharmonic to its present status as one of the most respected ensembles in the Washington, D.C. region. He has been hailed in *The Washington Post* as an "immensely talented and insightful conductor, whose standards, taste and sensitivity are impeccable." In addition to his appearances with the National Philharmonic, Maestro Gajewski is much in demand as a guest conductor. In recent years, he has appeared with most of the major orchestras in his native Poland, as well as the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic in England, the Karlovy Vary Symphony in the Czech Republic, the Okanagan Symphony in Canada and numerous orchestras in the U.S.

Born in Poland, Gajewski began studying piano at age four. After immigrating to the United States in 1969, he continued his studies at the New England Conservatory Preparatory Division, Carleton College and the University of Cincinnati, College-Conservatory of Music, where he earned B.M. and M.M. in Orchestral Conducting. Upon completing his formal education, Gajewski continued refining his conducting skills at the 1983 Tanglewood Music Festival in Massachusetts, where he was awarded a Leonard Bernstein Conducting Fellowship. His teachers there included Leonard Bernstein, Seiji Ozawa, Andre Previn, Gunther Schuller, Gustav Meier, and Maurice Abravanel.

Maestro Gajewski has conducted many important world premieres, including works by Steven Gerber, Joel Hoffman, Andreas Makris, Gerhard Samuel and Peter Ware. His recording on the Koch International label of Steven Gerber's Violin Concerto, Cello Concerto, and Serenade for String Orchestra with the National Chamber Orchestra, garnered enthusiastic reviews.