

Pittman Family Student Composition Competition 2025

Prizes
Awarded!

Concert of Finalists

Sunday, May 4th 2025
4:00 pm in “The Bowl”

compositions & live performances by

Aveen Burney

Wilson Rhee

Sylvia Guarracino

Sophie Wagner

Max Liu

Benny Wang

Albert Lu

Anthony Yu

This competition is made possible through the generous support of the
Pittman Family Student Composition Competition Fund.

The Pittman Family Student Composition Competition



The Pittman Family Student Composition Contest is made possible with support from the Pittman Family Student Composition Fund that Joan and Fred Pittman '51, P'82 established in 2021 to encourage and inspire student composers and music creators.

Fred '51, P'82 Pittman (with granddaughter Elena)

Financial aid made it possible for Fred to spend a post-graduate year at Exeter after graduating as valedictorian of his high school in Cleveland, Mississippi. He credited much to that year, often describing it as the most meaningful in his life. In the spirit of non sibi, Fred and Joan dedicated their time and resources to many educational and arts organizations, including Exeter. In 2003, Exeter bestowed the 2003 Founders' Day Award on Fred for having "served Exeter mightily with a rare combination of fiscal generosity and the kind of energetic legwork that truly makes us a richer place, one student at a time."

The Music Department at Phillips Exeter Academy is committed to supporting the individual creative expression of our students across a multiplicity of musical styles and media. The generous gift of the Pittman family has provided an invaluable new avenue of opportunity for our students, encouraging the composition and completion of new works. This event reinforces that the creative voices of our students have innate, immense value, and that new music--in all its yet-unknown and yet-unwritten forms--has an important and welcomed place here in the music department.

We are enormously grateful for the generosity of the Pittman Family, and we look forward to presenting brilliant new works of student art for years to come.

Program

Tetris Variations

Benny Wang '26

Benny Wang, *piano*

It's the spring of 2023; prep spring. A violent, ruthless fever spreads across my friend group, sweeping us off our feet, leaving no survivors. It's a Tetris fever! That spring term, hardly a day could go by without our lunchtime Grainger tetr.io duel sessions, with SDPC's, T-spins and perfect clears flying across our screens as we furiously mashed the spacebar. I wrote Tetris Variations to try and capture the thrill of these lunch duels in a piece of classical music. While the piece is primarily based on the first theme of the Gameboy adaptation of the Russian folk song Korobeiniki, do listen for the second theme—it appears at the very beginning and the very end of the piece. I modelled my piece off Rachmaninoff and Lutoslawski's respective variations on Paganini's 24th caprice, two pieces with a momentum and flow that I strived to achieve in my own piece.

Don't Follow Us!

Wilson Rhee '26

This song is inspired by ambient minimalist musicians such as Aphex Twin and Thom Yorke. The synth sounds are also inspired by singer songwriter Lord. When I listen to this song I like to imagine a group of rebellious teens in the future who dance in secret speakeasy clubs.

Trickling Glacier

Albert Lu '26

Jacob Hiser, *piano*

Martin Yau, *violin*

Ethan Ding, *violin*

"Trickling Glacier" depicts the travel of a tiny drop from a glacier, as it makes its way through mountains, grassland, and woods before arriving in the sea and evaporating. The piece is written in 3 sections.

The first part depicts the droplet as it slowly trickles out of the glacier, attempting to find its way to fellow companion droplets. A melancholy tune of loneliness, the violin's slow-paced melody represents its search.

The second part has the droplet, along with many others, forming a wild river which rushes down, flooding and sweeping away everything in its path. The feverish melody, with seemingly no end in sight depicts the flash flood.

The third part is where the droplet, now residing in the sea, faces its return to the never-ending cycle, with simultaneous dread and excitement of its experience in the wild.

Not Even a Villain

Sophie Wagner '25

Sophie Wagner, guitar & vocals

This song is about being the 'good kid' growing up, and the life experiences and opportunities missed out on by living for adult approval. The validation of elementary school teachers and parents can only go so far-- in my song, I tried to express how being 'good' and always following the rules can leave one boxed in when it feels like everyone else is living more fully than you are. People can only be significant if they challenge something (no one makes history by getting A's and only doing what they're told) and this song expresses the fear of challenging anything and the regret that comes in turn. This song suggests that the teacher's pet in 6th grade might not be the most successful-- that those who are less afraid of authority and risk will live fuller lives. Mr. Sinclair was an incredible help throughout this process and helped me fine-tune the picking pattern.

Memory Pill: Patient #11/04/2007

Max Liu '26

Imagine...a pill.

A pill soaked with the cacophony of your life.

Do you remember the books?

Do you remember who you were?

Do you remember the voices?

If you experienced something in person, did that make it real?

Now...open your mind and swallow.

Between

Sylvia Guarracino '26

Sylvia Guarracino, guitar & vocals

Between is my take on the nervous energy of a new relationship. It's flirty and fun, yet slightly uncertain. I wrote and performed this song on guitar. The lyrics are my open and honest thoughts and questions about where things were heading in my past relationship. Between's upbeat melody contrasts with the otherwise negative lyrics as it's meant to express the whirlwind of emotions, I felt in my relationship. It's the type of song that makes you want to dance around your room but also over analyze every text message!

Out of Time

Anthony Yu '25

The idea of this track came when I wanted to see what would happen if I combined funk and future house. Both of which have complex rhythms and syncopations, which became the driving force of the song.

In the drop, for example, I created syncopated rhythms with guitar basses and offbeat Afro-Latin percussion from funk music, while adding in electronic elements like reverse reverb effects and LFO supersaw chords. I decided to go with a 3/4 time signature for a unique triplet feel and added swing to both the synths and drums for humanization.

I sound-designed most electronic sounds using Serum, while organic instruments come from Kontakt and FL Studio's FLEX. The vocals are from a royalty-free sample pack. This track is released on Spotify under Diversity Recordings.

Older

Aveen Burney '25

Aveen Burney, guitar & vocals

As a senior, I have been thinking about leaving my childhood behind, and in a way this song is a love song to my childhood and about how the sun is setting on my childhood. I wrote this song and recorded this on GarageBand in my dorm room very last minute and very low-key, I went with how I was feeling at the moment.



Congratulations to our seniors!

Aveen Burney, Anthony Yu & Sophie Wagner

Lyrics

Not Even a Villain, by Sophie Wagner

I'll pay my bills on time
I'll go to college
Quietly wait in line
Know when to be honest

I'll jump when I'm told to and land with both feet on the ground
Find hobbies to live for and settle in some quiet town

And I'll make it I know but not really
I'll only take risks that don't count
I'm playing it safe and I'm biting my tongue while I wait for someone else to shout
At ten teachers called me a leader
I'd tell on the kids sayin' swears
Now they've got stories not even a villain in theirs

Oh to break the rules
Try to make a change
My mother will die and with her my name
If I could break the rules
If I wasn't born scared
I know I could do it, could matter, but I wouldn't dare

Face flushing red as roses said the wrong word
If I could only scream I know I'd be heard
And I try to stand out but my knees only buckle and break
If I was the fastest I'd stop at the line of the tape

And I'll make it I know but not really
I'll only take risks that don't count
I'm playing it safe and I'm biting my tongue while I wait for someone else to shout
At ten teachers called me a leader
I'd get all the others in line
Now they've got purpose and I never cross through their minds

If I could break the rules
If I could break the rules
If I could break the rules

Between, by Sylvia Guarracino

You should stay here
Stay in my lane of sight
Signs point left
Left doesn't feel right

Right is wrong
Wrong to stay
Stay in sight but
I can't see anyway

Way to go, me
And way to go you
I'm new to this
But we made it through

New to love and
New to step outside
I can't see now,
Hold your hand real-

-Tightness in my chest
I think it's
Something I don't know about
Motions far too out of bounds

I'm bound to bite my tongue
And stutter,
I-I-I move slow
So show me what you know

Chorus

I know you read my mind
Between the lines
Between the line where
I say it's haunting

Between us two
Between and through,
You're

On my mind

On my mind

And in between
Is meant for me
Cause God knows I live
Indecisively
My tunnel vision
Leaves me blind
Cause you're

On my mind
All the time

I feel stupid
For twelve whole hours a day.
As if I'm sleeping

And you're wide awake

Day is night
And my emotions
I put on display
Match you but in different ways

Monday night you're on the phone
With your mother
Tuesday night you are calling home
To see your father
Wednesday, Thursday, Friday,
You'll go out with all your friends
Time for me is in between
And saved for the week-

-End up in my head
Because it's
Something I don't know about
And I get hot when you're around

I'm bound to bite my tongue
And stutter,
I-I-I'm too deep

I keep you on repeat
I keep you on repeat
I keep you on repeat

Chorus

In between, it's
In between, we're
In between, it's
In between, it's

Meant for me, it's
Meant for me, it's
In between of
Meant to be, it's

In between of
Meant to be

Older, by Aveen Burney

I'm getting older
The seasons feel colder
And your Bones grow weary
While my eyes get teary
When I realize

That you won't be here with me

One day you'll see my face for the last time
One day you'll hold my hand, then it's goodbye.

And I'll look back at all the times we had
And just wish that the world stood still

I waited my whole life and I'll be damned
Cause all I got was a kiss and your will

One day you'll see my face for the last time
One day you'll hold my hand, then it's goodbye

And my memories will be all I have left to feel you once again

Meet the Judges



Jerome Walker

A composer, pianist, singer and educator from Washington, DC. Writing primarily for musical theater, his work centers queer stories and seeks to bring new vernaculars to the stage. Jerome has taught and directed choirs at Phillips Exeter Academy, sung and arranged with Doox of Yale, Yale's first all-gender TTBB a cappella group, and directed POC-, queer- and drag-centered cabaret shows. Jerome graduated from Yale in 2019 with a BA in Music and received the Aretha Franklin Prize for Performing Arts, and he is currently pursuing his MFA in Musical Theatre Writing at NYU.



Javad Butah

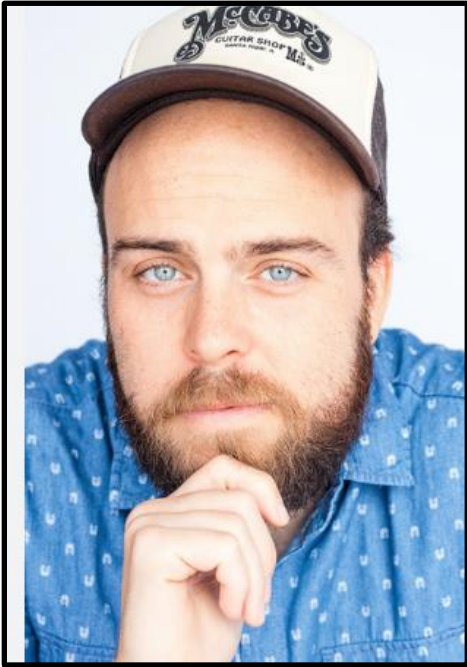
A disciple of world-renowned Tabla master Pandit Anindo Chatterjee, Javad's comprehensive approach to the instrument reflects his training at the hands of one of the finest Tabla artists alive today. In addition to his impressive technique, Javad's overall musicality, expressed equally in solo performance and accompaniment, leaves a lasting impression on listeners and has made him an in-demand young artist.

Javad is amongst a few who have had the rare honor of becoming an official "gandabandh" disciple of Pandit Anindo Chatterjee. He has had the honor of accompanying world-renowned artists such as Ustad Aashish Khan and Ustad Sultan Khan. He has played in such venues worldwide as the Peter Norton Symphony Space in New York, the Palace of Fine Arts in San Francisco, the San Francisco Conservatory of Music, and the Saptak Music Festival in Ahmedabad, India.

Recently, Javad completed a Masters in Fine Arts degree under the tutelage and guidance of Pandit Swapan Chaudhuri, eminent exponent of

the Lucknow Gharana, at the California Institute of the Arts in Los Angeles, CA.

With a deep love for the inexhaustible art of tabla, Javad is always continuing to learn and develop. His playing, noteworthy for its clarity and fine sound quality, represents a virtuosic tradition alive in a new generation.



Ian Merrigan

A Los Angeles & Kansas City-based actor, writer, and musician known most recently for his work in Dan Fogelman's Paradise for Hulu.

Ian's other major television roles include Showtime's The Chi, The CW's Crazy Ex Girlfriend, and HBO's Room 104. A graduate of the University of North Carolina School of the Arts, and a former house team member of The Upright Citizen's Brigade, Ian has performed across the world from Hollywood, to Hong Kong

As a musician, Ian has shared stages with the likes of KRS-ONE and The Roots . His work as a soundtrack and scoring artist can be heard on multiple television shows and in such films as Naomi and Ely's No Kiss List, Zoey 102, and The Only One. He is also one half of indie folk band Socks and Chimes with Zibby Allen.

As a writer, Ian's plays, including critically acclaimed musical The Unfortunates, have been produced by The Oregon Shakespeare Festival, ACT San Francisco, and Circle X.

- IMDb Mini Biography By: Uproar Theatrics

Concert Series Information

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