



**Pittman Family  
Student Composition  
Competition  
2026**



**Prizes  
Awarded!**

**Concert of Finalists**

**Sunday, April 26th**

**4:00 pm in "The Bowl"**

compositions & live performances by

**Toni Asenuga**

**Athena Creigh**

**Sylvia Guarracino**

**Roger Guo**

**Ricky Lan**

**Daniel Lee**

**Max Liu**

**Wilson Rhee**

**Oron Wang**

special guest: **Annie Zhu**

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



# **Congratulations to our seniors!**

Athena Creigh, Wilson Rhee, Max Liu &  
Sylvia Guarracino

# 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

## **Snowstorm**

**Oran Wang, '27**

Oran Wang, *piano*

Imagine you are outside one evening, snow drifting from the sky, everything is quiet. But then the winds pick up, snow piles on the ground, and you are caught in the middle of a snowstorm. It subsides for a moment, returning to calm, but then it returns stronger than before, winds howling in your face. You begin to freeze. You try to find a door and finally see one, but when you put your lion card up to the reader, it's locked. You're trapped outside, alone, in the snowstorm.

And then you wake up from that nightmare and realize that today is a snow day and you can sleep in.

I wrote this piece this winter in memory of the only snow day of my time at Exeter so far. The piece has five sections that loosely correspond to parts of the story above. See if you can follow along!

## **Craig and Raina's Theme**

**Wilson Rhee '26**

Annie Zhu, *clarinet*  
Roger Guo, *piano*

This piece is inspired by Craig Thompson's graphic novel *Blankets*. Please read the front matter to learn a little bit more about the book and its relation to the piece. I created the piece over the summer as a part of an online composition course at UNCSCA. At the end of the course, it was performed by student players at the university. This is my first notated piece. There were some things like clarinet slurs and pedaling that I was not able to effectively translate to score, but I was able to meet with the players and verbally make those changes. Overall, though, I am very happy with the piece and what it taught me about notated music creation.

## **Schoenhut**

**Athena Creigh '26 & Wilson Rhee '26**

This song was a collaboration between Wilson Rhee and Athena Creigh. We made it for fun in three hours after a band practice. The song started with playing around on a wavetable, and we built the rest of the sound around the spacey vibe. This song was made entirely digitally except for a sample we recorded on a Schoenhut toy piano.

Athena Creigh & Wilson Rhee, *improvised electronics*

## **"I"(t), said**

**Max Liu '26**

What makes a sound human? This piece takes the form of an auditory vivisection: a human(oid) presence is opened, and we traverse through it from interior matter to the surface, spanning its flesh, feeling, and fractured language. The work resists the human(oid) as an exterior image and dissects its inner mechanics. Synthetic and organic materials collapse into one another; linguistic fragments disintegrate into pure sound. This inward turn reflects my fascination with neurocognition and the hidden architectures of perception."

## **The Messenger**

**Toni Asenuga '27**

*Toni Asenuga, voice*

My song "The Messenger" is about feeling awkward and helpless when giving advice to someone who is not hearing it. I also produced the '80s style beat myself. I personally hope this is just the start.

## **Racing Droplets**

**Daniel Lee '29**

*Electronically Sampled Symphonic Demo by Daniel Lee*

Racing Droplets is a piece that explores the experience of rain through shifting emotional and sensory perspectives. Rather than depicting rain from a single mood, the piece follows a journey: from intensity and motion, to brightness, to reflection and calm. Composed for a full orchestra, Racing Droplet attempts to break the structural confinements of a traditional sonata through gradual transitions which aren't necessarily separated by movements. The piece will be played through a digital realisation of the piece made with MIDI instruments on DAW software Ableton. Through contrast in key, texture, and orchestration, Racing Droplets traces a complete emotional arc: from motion and force, to light and growth, to quiet reflection.

## **NO CONTACT**

**Sylvia Guarracino '26**

*Sylvia Guarracino, guitar & vocals*

Silence often speaks louder than words. Yet, nothing says “we're not talking” more than stuffing your ex’s hoodie into the furthest corner of your closet because you forgot to give it back. NO CONTACT is a song about the silence that can follow a messy break up, and the messier emotions that re-emerge every time you clean your room.

I made "No Contact" in GarageBand using my own recording equipment. The piece was composed with acoustic guitar, lead vocals, and layered harmonies, all recorded and arranged independently.

## **Starlights**

**Ricky Lan '29**

The goal is that people would want to play this song at a party, maybe dance to it. I made the piece in FL Studio in a few of the electronic music club sessions. As someone who's been making electronic music for most if not all my music making "career", I've stuck to this style a lot and I take inspiration from a lot of the music I listen to. The heavily chorded drop is inspired by the offset piano chords from a song that I heard but do not know the name.

## **Just Friends**

**Roger Guo '27**

*Roger Guo, piano & vocals*

“Just Friends” is a pop song, currently arranged as an acoustic work for piano and voice. A recording of this acoustic version of “Just Friends” will be available this May on Spotify and other streaming platforms. A fully produced version is currently in progress.

# Lyrics

## **“The Messenger” by Toni Asenuga ‘27**

The way you can't help giving in to your vices  
The way I'm not qualified to give you advice and  
I guess, here I am at my inner insistence  
Why everyone around you is keeping their distance  
You shot yourself in the foot and you meant to

You know that makes it a little bit hard to defend you

We gave you all the praise that you needed  
And then I watched you as you struggled to believe it  
I'm not sure I'm liking my newfound perspective  
Why I stick around you, well, here's my incentive  
Sometimes I don't know if you'll be here tomorrow

Do you know that I hate it when I don't know?

In the end I'll try to relay this with as much feeling as I can  
A messenger would leave you reeling on the floor, but I can't  
Stand to see you this way, but I know I can't stop you  
There's no changing in sight, with the wall I'm talking to  
Right now, I can't fix you but, for now I've got you

## “NO CONTACT” by Sylvia Guarracino ‘26

Your sweater's still in my room  
You thought you lost it  
I didn't have the heart  
To tell you it's in my closet

It's for the better,  
What was I supposed to do?  
You understand that  
I don't wanna talk to you

I'm turning every way  
So I don't see you  
But it won't go away  
The hate that we fell into

Staring at my ceiling  
Pushing down my feelings  
And wishing  
We were speaking

I don't want to  
Pick up for you  
I'll let the phone ring  
Pretend the call's the only thing im missing

Block your cell  
And clear your name  
Call you back  
And feel ashamed

I can't ignore you  
Even if tried to

I answer spam calls  
Maybe your on the other end  
Twist the wire on the wall  
Pull it off to distance

My faults  
From decisions  
I'm not thinking

I need you torn out  
From anything around  
I see you more now  
In everything  
I found you in my lungs  
And in my head  
And in my dreams  
Your in bed  
But that's not true,

You're left on read  
Ill go and check again

I don't want to  
Pick up for you  
I'll let the phone ring  
Pretend the calls the only thing im missing  
Block your cell  
And clear your name

Call you back  
And feel ashamed  
I can't ignore you  
Even if tried to

I want to give in  
I can handle  
Pissing off my friends  
Dialing drunk and-

Pull it back,  
Can't stay in touch  
I said too much,

I went  
And messed it up  
I guess  
Im meant to hold a grudge

But I can't keep it up  
I hate that I hate missing you

It's easy  
Letting you down easy  
Staring up at ceilings  
Pushing down my feelings

It's easy  
Letting you down easy  
Staring up at ceilings  
And wishing we were speaking

It's easy  
Letting you down easy  
Staring up at ceilings  
Pushing down my feelings

It's easy  
Letting you down easy  
Staring up at ceilings  
And wishing

## **“Just Friends” by Roger Guo ‘27**

I know I shouldn't tell you but it's burning in me  
With every passing breath I'm in more agony  
I know that you might not have any sympathy  
But I can feel the heat from the stare you give me

I can feel every single bone break in my body  
From the way that you move and slip into the beat

I know we're just friends but what if this is the end  
Do you wanna play this scary game with me

I know you shouldn't know  
I know it's best for both of us  
But do you wanna know  
How sweet does the forbidden fruit come

I know we're just friends but what if this is the end  
Do you wanna play this scary game with me  
I know we're just friends but what if this is the end  
Do you wanna play this scary game with me

## 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.

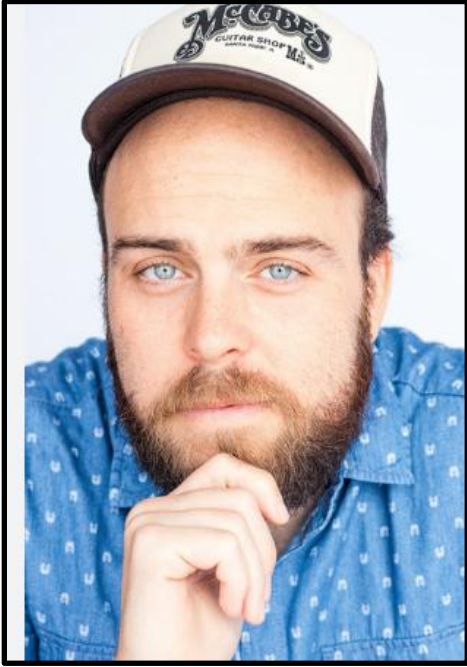


### **Javad Butah**

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.

Beyond his tabla playing, Javad served for several years as the West Coast Brand Manager for *Ableton*, the world's most prominently used music production software. He is an Ableton Certified Instructor (Jedi-level teacher) and has given hundreds of lectures and masterclasses on music production and performance throughout the US and the World.

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.



## **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.

# Concert Series Information

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