

Phillips Exeter Academy Music Department  
Gilbert Series Guest Artist



**Curtis Stewart**  
*violinist/composer*



**Tuesday, April 28, 2026**

7:00 PM

**“the Bowld”**

Forrestal Bowld Music Center

29 Tan Lane, Exeter, NH

*This performance was made possible through the generous support of the Jane  
and Clint Gilbert Music Fund*

# Program Notes

Works to be announced from stage

## **Selections from 24 American Caprices**

The *24 American Caprices* are inspired by a kaleidoscope of recorded American music, with some honorary American additions...musical aspects of each inspiration are abstracted and imbued with challenging violin techniques emulating the sounds and styles of their origin. In the full meaning of *caprice*, these violin fragments dance and sing lightly from inspiration to ornamentation, both with flights of fantasy and fastidious settings of referenced material, creating playful musical dialogue around American lineage and individual perspective in Classical music. Inspired by:

- David Bowie, Modern Love
- Janet Jackson, Doesn't Really Matter
- Taps
- JJ Rosamund Johnson, Lift Every Voice and Sing
- Bob Dylan, Blowin in the Wind
- Nina Simone Young Gifted and Black
- Stevie Wonder, Isn't She Lovely
- Aretha Franklin, Rock Steady

## **Selections from "of Love."**

A digital and personal requiem of sorts...“of Love.” is a through-composed collection of works to cherish life, time and lifetimes...Recorded in the childhood apartment inherited after his mother’s passing, Curtis’ original compositions for strings, electronics and voice weave between a single poem of prayer and songs Curtis’ visionary mother taught him - meditative recompositions of Alice Coltrane, Johannes Brahms, Duke Ellington, Greek Folk Song, Jazz standards, Karol Szymanowski, and Purcell. These works flow directly from the impulses of holding and loss - a caregiver’s sonic grappling with grief, that entangles music and identity - in hopes to hold onto this love just a bit longer.

## **Seasons of Change - a recomposition of Vivaldi's Four Seasons i. A.Recent.Summer**

“Seasons of Change,” a recomposition of Vivaldi’s Four Seasons is the frame for an Afro-futurist meditation / dreamscape on climate change, class and the nature of digital memory. Including public conversation and recorded interviews with the unhoused population around the existential impact of climate + infrastructure on our daily lives.

## **Samuel Coleridge Taylor - selections from 24 Negro Melodies I. Deep River (America) arr. Powell/Stewart/Berry**

I was drawn to an approach of dealing with the history of slavery within one's family, the ownership of a name and its "rebranding" - reflecting on the American Slave and how Black Americans deal with creating a sense of pride, familial storytelling and lineage in contemporary America. This notion of "rebranding" extends to the "Negro Melody." Coleridge-Taylor originally wrote 24 solo piano works based on spirituals and songs from many parts of the world including Africa and the Americas. My intent with these arrangements is to acknowledge the impact of those melodies on current popular culture, and reflect that influence onto the orchestral stage - to create moments where listeners may participate vocally, with movement, or rhythmically clapping along- to maintain a sense of belonging and recognition - to create community around this music in the classical concert hall - to embrace where all contemporary American Concert music extends from, in my belief - America's mother-music: the Blues."

**Stewart's "I wouldn't stop there: in the words of a KING" for chorus and chamber orchestra** is a paraphrase and fantasy on Martin Luther King's "Mountaintop" Speech - a meditation on the last public words he spoke in 1968 before his assassination. The opening of his speech notes the honor of witnessing humanity's struggle for freedom - in present tense. Given the option from God, he would stop at no other point in history but the time in which he lived, to participate in that pursuit of freedom.

This work depicts a struggle to feel ownership of our moment in history. It explores a will to resist the impulse to fast forward, to pause, or to be stuck looking to the past for relief; the music provides moments to breathe, alongside incantations summoning the spirit of Dr King; dreamlike atmospheres - akin to nightmares, the energy of running in what feels like a quicksand of forward motion. The text induces an idea from the original words of MLK - there is no time but now, both chaos and stillness exist at once, a splatter and glitch of genre quickly and unpredictably twitches between gospel, stravinsky, disco, hip hop, funk, sacred, and atonal classical music - the throughline of determined and graceful rotating rhythmic progress remaining clear behind the jarring static shifts which culminates in a praise dance of conjuring - returning to the breath to keep on keeping on.

History repeats, sometimes when we least expect it - through the noise, we are here. Far from trapped, with access to almost all of human history at our digital fingertips, we remain; here - struggling for freedom, honoring our history by grappling with the now. *Commissioned by the Virginia Symphony; Eric Jacobsen, music director.*

*"Something is happening in our world. I see God working in this period of the twentieth century in a way that men, in some strange way, are responding.*

*Something is happening in our world. The masses of people are rising up. We have been forced to a point where we are going to have to grapple with the problems that men have been trying to grapple with through history, but the demands didn't force them to do it. Survival demands that we grapple with them. Men, for years now, have been talking about war and peace. But now, no longer can they just talk about it. It is no longer a choice between violence and nonviolence in this world; it's nonviolence or nonexistence. Let us develop a kind of dangerous unselfishness. Let us rise up tonight with a greater readiness. Let us stand with a greater determination. And let us move on in these powerful days, these days of challenge - to make America what it ought to be.*

*Well, I don't know what will happen now. We've got some difficult days ahead. But it really doesn't matter with me now, because I've been to the mountaintop. And I don't mind. Like anybody, I would like to live a long life. Longevity has its place. But I'm not concerned about that now. I just want to do God's will. He's allowed me to go up to the mountain. I've looked over and I've seen the Promised Land. I may not get there with you. But I want you to know tonight, that we, as a people, will get to the promised land!*

*And so I'm happy, tonight.*

*I'm not worried about anything.*

*I'm not fearing any man!*

*Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord!*