

The Pittman Family Student Composition Competition



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

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.

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.

Pittman Family Student Composition Competition 2024

CONCERT OF FINALISTS

**Tuesday, May 7, 2024
7:00 pm in "The Bowld"**

Compositions & live performances by:

Arianna Bocchino '25

Vi Matheos '24

Ishaan Vohra '24

Sophie Wagner '25

Oron Wang '27

Anthony Yu '25

Eric Lee-Fook Drouart '25

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

Program

Fantasy in C minor

Molly Lozeau, piano

Dido

Vi Matheos, guitar and vocals
Michael Mele, guitar
Keala Kaumeheiwa, bass
Les Harris Jr., drums

梅雪争春 (Frosty Blooms)

Anthony Yu, production

Walk the Coals

Sophie Wagner, guitar and vocals

Basement Kimchi

Eric Lee-Fook Drouart, vocals & production

The Stranger

Arianna Bocchino, vocals
Ayaan Akhtar, guitar

My Heart

Ishaan Vohra, production

Oron Wang ‘27

Vi Matheos ‘24

Anthony Yu ‘25

Sophie Wagner ‘25

Eric Lee-Fook Drouart ‘25

Arianna Bocchino ‘25

Ishaan Vohra ‘24

Composer’s Notes

Fantasy in C minor

When I sit at a piano, rather than practice my pieces, most of the time I improvise my own tunes. I like to record these, and sometimes I create one that I like to listen to. The middle section in my piece is based on one of these tunes, hence the title of the piece.

I also enjoy listening to music, and the music I listen to influences my writing. The first section of my piece is inspired by the famous first movement of Beethoven's 14th sonata.

Dido

This is a rock song based around baroque / set theory. I decided to submit this under the notated category because I think it is composed intricately more in the way associated with notated music than with songwriting, but the categories are tricky to define.

Lyrically, the song is a continuation of a larger story which unfolds across an album. This segment of the story is from the perspective of a parent (father) who has lost his daughter to suicide. It is an exploration of guilt and regret inspired largely by the story of Dido and Aeneas of book four of the Aeneid (hence the use of the word 'perfidious' instead of the more common 'faithless' which references what Dido calls Aeneas, 'perfidus'). The guilt manifests as a ghost of the daughter, and light is meant to symbolize throughout the daughter's emotional condition.

Each section of the song musically is built around the subject introduced in the lead guitar line. In the first verse, the bassline is an augmented inversion of the lower line of the subject. The subject itself is repeated in the lead guitar line, so the harmony sandwiched in between is quite dependent on the subject. In the first chorus and the second half of the second chorus, the subject acts as the main melody, while the harmony repeats the same pattern, alternating keys (Cmaj - Amin - Emin; Fmaj - Dmin - Amin; Dmaj - Bmin - F#min; Gmaj - Emin - Bmin). This cycle is meant to represent the ceaselessness of the parent's haunting and remorse. The second verse's bassline is derived from the subject's intervals, where each interval is assigned a number (1 for minor second, 2 for major, etc) and mapped to the bass by notes in the scale above the tonic in C (so when there would be a minor second in the subject, the bass plays a D since it is one note above C the tonic). This technique of basing entire songs very specifically off subjects helps create an intricate, self-contained and self-fulfilling piece.

梅雪争春 (Frosty Blooms)

Growing up in China, I was always around the unique and beautiful sounds of traditional Chinese music. A few years ago, I got into EDM (electronic dance music), which felt like a completely different world from the music I grew up with. This composition is born out of my desire to bridge these worlds. It's my attempt to mix the beauty of traditional Chinese tunes with the energy of dubstep and bass music — I added melodic elements to the atonal dubstep sounds, but also brought in electronic techniques to the traditional sounds of Chinese instruments like the guzheng (zither), dizi (flute), and xiao (vertical flute).

The title of this piece, the chinese idiom 梅雪争春, evokes the image of plum blossoms bravely blooming amidst the cold snow, symbolizing resilience, and the arrival of spring. I believe this phrase captures the emotions of my composition.

Walk the Coals

This song is about an internal conflict and whether or not it's worth it to leave a place you grew up, love, and feel like you belong, for someone you love. I think everything is felt especially deeply when you're young, and relationships throughout all of life require sacrifices. This song is sort of the part of that that you can't say out loud- that you would be willing to sacrifice everything for another person, no matter how wrong that seems and even if you don't know if you would be wanted. I tried to write this song about dependency, as both a dangerous and beautiful thing, and used the contrast of North and South- hot and cold- to signify the difference in places people feel at home and feel like they belong. I've always been awful with heat, so for me, being willing to metaphorically 'walk the coals,' or deal with the heat and a completely new place for another person, signifies a significant sacrifice. My guitar teacher, Mr. Sinclair, was a tremendous help throughout writing this song and others, and helped me refine the guitar part and gave me tips on recording and small changes in lyrics.

Basement Kimchi

This is just a song I made for fun in one hour, but I thought I should submit it anyways just to see.

The Stranger

My composition is a dark love-song of sorts. On the surface, it is a declaration of love for one's partner. But in actuality, the piece reveals the singer's questionable, slightly jarring mindset. After watching the dark comedy television series Barry, as well as reading Albert Camus' novel The Stranger, I was inspired to create something from the perspective of this anti-hero type of character. I wrote the piece on the guitar this past summer, and since then I have considered it a special expression of both guilt and intense passion. The intention behind this song is to take the listener along for a journey, and to encourage them to question the intentions and message of the song's singer.

My Heart

"My Heart" marked my first return to progressive house music after taking a bit of a break and exploring some other genres of EDM. I had been dabbling in future bass and slap house, learning new kinds of sound design and experimenting with new automations and effects on my sounds – this song served as a way for me to apply the new ideas I had explored in a familiar environment.

I'm especially happy about the shifting synths I created during the buildup and the overall bouncy feel of the drop, which make the track more energetic and danceable. I eventually got "My Heart" released on a small label called Thunder Records a few months ago, and I'm really happy with how it turned out! Thanks for listening.