

**The D'Angelo Department of Music  
Mercyhurst University**

**Presents**

**The Senior Composition Recitals of**

***VANESSA NOLAN***

**and**

***CARMEN STEWART***

**With**

**Special Guest Artists**

**and**

**Students and Faculty of the D'Angelo Department of  
Music**



**Tuesday, April 29, 2025**

**7:00 PM**

**Walker Recital Hall**

**\*PROGRAM\***

**Music of Vanessa Nolan**

9 PM Street Song (2024)

Tristan Yeagle, alto saxophone  
Aidan Moore, tenor saxophone  
Jonah Harshell, baritone saxophone

Bad Cat! (2025)\*

Nova Bolling, percussion  
Nicholas Page, percussion  
Michael Bell, percussion  
Nicole Nietsch, percussion

Songs for the Human Being (2023)  
(poems by Emily Dickinson)

- I. Hope is the Thing with Feathers
- II. I Felt a Funeral in my Brain
- III. Wild Nights

Mary Bowen, mezzo-soprano  
Nathan Hess, piano

Birdsong Quintet (2024)\*

Nova Bolling, flute  
Elizabeth Rathburn, oboe  
Rebecca Wunch, clarinet  
Elodie Devos, horn  
Carmen Stewart, bassoon

## Hot Pepper Quintet (2025)\*

Chris Wise, trumpet  
Matthew Lenehan, trumpet  
Elodie Devos, horn  
Mark Dressler, trombone  
Tyler Ruhe, tuba

## **\*INTERMISSION\***

## **Music of Carmen Stewart**

### Fantasy for Flute and Piano (2024)

- I. Foxglove
- II. Nightshade

Nova Bolling, flute  
Carmen Stewart, piano

### “The Beautiful People” (2024)\*

Ryah Lambert, mezzo-soprano  
Shane Dexter, tenor  
Christian Goulione, piano

### A Harrowing Venture (2025)\*

Aidan Moore, soprano saxophone  
Tristan Yeagle, alto saxophone I  
Julianna Cole, alto saxophone II  
Shannon Evans, tenor saxophone  
Johah Harshell, baritone saxophone

Festal Dances (2025)\*

Nova Bolling, flute  
Elizabeth Rathburn, oboe  
Rebecca Wunch, clarinet  
Elodie Devos, horn  
Carmen Stewart, bassoon

Glass Mannequin (2025)\*

Nova Bolling, percussion  
Nicholas Page, percussion  
Michael Bell, percussion  
Nicole Nietsch, percussion

Isabelle Garvey, choreographer/dancer

Vindication ((2024)\*)

Abby Secor, flute  
Aidan Moore, clarinet  
Carmen Stewart, piano  
Tyler Ruhe, bass  
Nicholas Page, drums

\*\*\*\*\*

\*Designates a world premiere performance

**(continued)**

## Vanessa Nolan

Vanessa Nolan (b. 2001) is a Senior Composition Major at Mercyhurst University. This is her final semester studying under Dr. Glinsky as a Composition Major, as she studied vocal performance in her freshman year. In addition to composing, she studied piano and voice as a lyric coloratura soprano. She also sings as a Soprano I in the Erie Philharmonic Chorus.

### Notes on the Works

**9 PM Street Song** is a saxophone trio for alto, tenor, and baritone saxophone. It was inspired by Vanessa's late-night drives home from her less-than-ideal job at a supermarket. It is loosely structured in rondo form, with three distinct themes representing the daydreams of someone who is in a place they do not want to be. The A theme represents the reality of the dreamer, which is rainy and foggy with an overall feel of hopelessness. For this part of the piece, she was greatly influenced by the music of old noir films. The B section depicts the desire of the dreamer, allowing the world to melt away and imagine a life as a performer. The music takes on a tango flare here, before melting back into reality. The brief C theme represents the shock of realization while also recalling the dreamer's past aspirations. The piece ends with a smoky and longing chord that trails away like the desires of the dreamer.

**Bad Cat!** is a percussion quartet written for vibraphone, xylophone, glockenspiel, crotales, snare drum, bass drum, crash cymbals, wood blocks, and triangle. It tells the story of a wily cat that breaks out of his cage and causes all sorts of trouble around his family's house, such as climbing up furniture and knocking over potted plants. It includes various polyrhythms and upbeat syncopations as well as a cool yet funky sound world that takes turns showcasing the pitched as well as the un-pitched instruments. It was inspired by Vanessa's own cat—found as a stray—who gets into all sorts of commotion in her home.

***Songs for the Human Being*** was Vanessa's first major compositional work, consisting of three famous Emily Dickinson poems set to original music. The first, "Hope is the Thing with Feathers," encapsulates a feeling of melancholy and that of being lost, with hope being the only thing left to hold on to. It has a somber feel, with slight moments of brightness, to represent how hope is not always something that occurs when one is happy. Her inspiration for this piece came from a time when she was experiencing a debilitating and long-term illness. The second song, "I Felt a Funeral in My Brain," represents death in its rawest form, leaving the poet with a feeling of excruciating grief and eventually eternal numbness. Vanessa wanted to capture the anguish of the poet in this piece, making it a stark contrast from the first song. The final song, "Wild Nights," represents a passionate love and longing for a person. It was inspired by a past relationship and the desire of always wanting to be with the person that you adore. The themes of these songs, (hope, death, and love), make up something that is integral to being human, thus the title "Songs for the Human Being."

***Birdsong Quintet*** is a five-part rondo written for the classic instrumentation of flute, oboe, clarinet, French horn, and bassoon. It is inspired by various North American bird calls that Vanessa hears around her house and in the woods, ranging from the songbirds heard in the morning to the deep calls of the owls at dusk. There are motives that draw from the calls of American robins, northern cardinals, black-capped chickadees, mourning doves, great horned owls, and the overall lively chatter of bird-filled trees in the spring and summer. This quintet begins with a sunny day that fades into a peaceful and somber night, before coming alive again and taking the listener into a serene woodland glade. It ends with a return to the joyful day, where the birds take flight at the very end.

***Hot Pepper Quintet*** is a traditional brass quintet in ABA form for two trumpets, a French horn, a trombone, and tuba. It is inspired by vivacious big band swing music and the sultry, jazzy sounds of scores that accompanied noir film. The quintet starts off fevered

and fast paced in a syncopated fashion, exemplifying the spiciness of its namesake. It slinks into a slower B theme that changes the feel of the piece, leaning into a hazier shadowy vibe. It returns with a bang to the A theme where the brass instruments show off their impressive range and volume.

\* \* \*

Vanessa would like to thank her family, friends, and teachers who have supported her throughout her journey as a musician and composer, and especially Dr. Glinsky, who never gave up on her and provided her with everything she needed to succeed. She would also like to extend her gratitude to the incredible musicians who practiced and perfected these pieces.

\* \* \*

## **Carmen Stewart**

Carmen Stewart (she/they; b. 2002) is a senior year BM composition major at Mercyhurst University. She primarily focuses on the bassoon and piano as her main instruments, but she also plays the alto clarinet. Her approach to music is one of story and emotion, using herself as a vector to bring out the most from her compositions and performances. She takes regular study with Dr. Albert Glinsky to study and work on her compositional style. She has been composing for 7 years, particularly writing chamber music and solo pieces with accompaniment. She is an open class winner of the 2021 PMEA Composition contest, a recipient of the Presidential Arts Award at Mercyhurst University, and a member of the Tri-Alpha Honors Society.

## **Notes on the Works**

***Foxglove*** and ***Nightshade*** are two movements from a series of short and sweet compositions each called ***Fantasy for Flute and Piano***. This is an ongoing series dedicated to Nova Bolling. The intention behind these pieces is to bring out a latent pastoral beauty in the flute parts and gentle repeated piano ostinatos

mixed with just a slight edge in each to bring out qualities of poisonous flowers. **Foxglove** is the shorter of the two and the first to have been composed. This piece meanders briskly through a windy nighttime scene focused upon a singular foxglove flower. It's both beautiful and mesmerizing, but there's just something almost tragic about it. The fleeting nature of the piece adds to such. **Nightshade**, being a more potent plant, is a bit longer and more deviant. The sweetness is exchanged for slow descents and intermingled with jazz harmonies and exciting changes into different sections. The flute mostly grounds the piece, attempting to bring back the melancholy that invades both movements of the fantasies, but the piano is often pulling us somewhere new and foreign.

***The Beautiful People*** is a duet for mezzo-soprano and tenor, for the in-progress opera *Theodosia*. The two characters are named Theo (later Theodosia), and Adonis. At this point in the opera, Theo is still relatively uncertain about how the world works and has also developed feelings for Adonis. Adonis, being the more experienced one, informs Theo of the dangers of not conforming to the world around them. This duet is a warning to watch out for queerphobic individuals that he ironically calls the "beautiful people", and how they're potentially dangerous and threatening to queer people. Theo meanwhile attempts to add optimism and hope into the conversation, saying that they don't know any better or that they're just concerned,

This piece itself has a jazzy element to it, which blends interestingly with the operatic style the vocalists perform. Words go by fast as if to mimic a hushed conversation, with occasional forays into imaginative moments to better express and emphasize the important words they say. When Theo sings, it's usually in a more major and open style, while Adonis' sections are snappy and witty. The "beautiful people" motive is a returning motive for the rest of the opera, meant to represent dangerous people and the threat of social backlash. It's in this duet that it's made note of, and its purpose explained.



***A Harrowing Venture*** is a piece composed for saxophone quintet (having an additional alto sax player). The intention of this piece is to emphasize and feature the baritone saxophone player while driving the audience through the story. Use of Messiaen Modes, imitation of Balinese Gamelan, extended techniques, registral choices, and sudden shifts cause a story that keep the audience on its toes!

The story follows a young traveler finding an old temple from a culture now unknown and ancient, searching and delving for riches and jewels. While inside, they start to realize they aren't the only one within the ancient walls. Whilst searching, the traveler is shocked to meet a fearsome beast that chases them through the dark temple until finally closing an ancient door. What they find however, is the riches of their greatest desire, gold and silver relics coating the inner sanctum. Grabbing what they can, the return path is stressful, now trying to retrace hurried steps back and evade the creature. If the timing couldn't get any worse, the creature makes a return and tries to stop the thieving adventurer from getting away with what rightfully belongs at the sight. One more chase, one last push to escape with their lives, abandoning loot just to run faster... the protagonist leaps to the outdoors and slams the ancient entrance shut with an exhausted sigh. Perhaps some places are best left undisturbed.

***Festal Dances*** is a piece written for wind quintet, emphasizing harmonies and melodies that suggest a traditional Japanese sound. Use of the insen and hirajoshi scales, rhythmic patterns from traditional Japanese festivals, repetitive use of simple melody, and quartal/quintal harmony all work to this end. This piece was composed for Warren County's Promising Young Composers Competition, intended to be played by higher level high school students to introduce them to soundscapes and musical language that would otherwise be unfamiliar.

The piece follows a simple ABA form. The A theme represents a serene environment and the beauty of traditional festivals, while the B theme is the lively night life, dances, and music that's played at that time. The A theme is a much slower tempo and uses the

insens scale's minor 2<sup>nd</sup> scale degree to have a better sense of stability to its melodies. The B theme however takes the hirajoshi scale and soars through the air with its brisk tempo, creating a much greater sense of contrast and adventure.

***Glass Mannequin*** is a piece composed for percussion ensemble consisting of all pitched percussion. The piece itself thrives upon repeated motives and ostinatos to create a minimalistic atmosphere, leaving much of the space free to enjoy the soundscape without particularly forcing attention. Each change that happens is meaningful and is meant to better serve a slowly growing narrative. This then coalesces into what could be considered a B section, which begins to take more and more attention to itself and eventually demand it with growing intensity on bowed instruments. The A section then returns in a way that it's mirrored in some ways, and troubled in others. The piece becomes grating at times, and returns initial motives in more complicated ways, until the music eventually dies out.

This piece has commentary on the experience of being a transgender woman in a world where many are only seen through political views and ideologies. There's a succinct discomfort and dehumanization in feeling stared through rather than recognized as one's own person. This is where the idea of a glass mannequin comes in, being placed to be dressed to whatever fits a narrative and put away when we aren't wanted. The growing section of the piece is the joy of becoming oneself and the realization of the self. The dissonant and reversed sections emphasize how when rights are reversed, it pushes what was once blooming back into a hidden bud.

***Vindication*** is a composition written in the style of a jazz chart, meant for a flexible jazz combo and a form that can be repeated ad libitum. This composition was originally written to add originals to the library of the Swing Syndicate of Erie, PA. Vindication has an A section, solo section, and B section all in a relaxed swing feel. The rhythm section have to exact parts, needing knowledge of comping and basslines with the chords to help make the melodic figures work, and the solo section only has chords to go off.

The idea behind the piece was craft a compelling enough narrative with the basic melodic ideas to then allow the performers to take the main role in shaping direction and story of the chart. The A section has a minor sound to it, while the B section is a little more major. The solo section is more unique with it's chord changes, due to the slow harmonic rhythm.

\* \* \*

## **Shout outs**

Dr. Glinsky- I wouldn't be the composer I am today without the dedication to my growth you've given to me over the last 4. You believed in me through my many bold choices and huge aspirations. You gave me the room to find and develop my voice as a composer, and I plan on continuing to grow more and more with the tools you've provided me as I move on to graduate school.

Dr. Meier- Your continued support has allowed me to dive into things I've never done before and really open my eyes to things I now could never imagine living without. Learning jazz piano for the jazz band, taking me into the world of synthesis, and of course building a theremin with me have all been such wonderful and eye-opening experiences. You've helped me solidify my ideas for post-graduate to follow a degree in music tech. Thank you.

Ms. Wunch- Ever since high school marching band, you've always strove for excellence and reaching potential out of me. You were a large part the reason I decided upon Mercyhurst for my education, and I have been able to thrive here. Your interest and willingness to let me explore musical territories has allowed me to really evolve my education. You've also given me so many useful and impactful experiences that will help grow me as a musician and professional.

Dr. Hess- Ever since you first played my wacky Themes and Variations composition, I'm sure you knew exactly what you were walking into with me. Jokes aside, I am extremely grateful for you

having faith in me with my pieces and my ideas for what I want to do. You always had faith in me that I didn't quite understand, but now that I'm graduating, I only recently realized how much courage you gave me to keep striving for the next step.

Mr. Anderson- You were the first person to notice my compositional voice back in high school and gave me the courage to follow it. I began to use professional notation software, won a composition contest, and arranged for the marching band. I am privileged to have received the opportunities you gave me.

Everyone else- Family members, friends, professors, and comrades; I sincerely want to thank every single one of you for being on this rollercoaster of a journey with me, and hope that you will all be excited for what comes next as I leave the nest! I fully intend on staying true to myself and growing into someone you all can be proud of.