

Celebrating  
50 Years

**Columbia  
University  
School  
of the Arts**

# ALUMNI NEWSLETTER SPECIAL EDITION

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Dear School of the Arts Alumni:

Fifty years ago on this past Sunday, December 6, 1965, the Trustees of Columbia University voted into resolution the establishment of the School of the Arts:

***"The Faculty of The Arts shall consist of The President, the Vice President of the University, the Dean of Faculties and Provost, the Dean of the School of the Arts, and such officers of administration and of instruction as may be assigned thereto by the Trustees."***

We are proud to have reached this significant milestone and look forward to seeing what the next fifty years will bring for the School and our community.

In addition to staying up to date on alumni news, we wanted to share some updates about current students who are doing extraordinary things. Writing student (Nonfiction concentration) and Pulitzer Prize-winning poet **Gregory Pardlo** was recently featured in an extended segment on NY-1. You can watch the video [here](#).

As we continue to celebrate our 50th Anniversary and our wonderful alumni all year long, please keep sending your memories about your time at the School of the Arts and people who influenced you through the [Alumni Stories Survey](#).

In this final special 50th Anniversary edition of the



Alumni Newsletter, we share more on-campus history and profile alumni who graduated from the Doctor of Musical Arts (DMA) and Master of Fine Arts (MFA) in Arts Administration programs when they existed as part of the School of the Arts. Although these degree programs are no longer offered through the School, we are proud to have these individuals as members of our alumni community.

As always, please email us at [artsalum@columbia.edu](mailto:artsalum@columbia.edu) with any news you'd like to share. The newsletter will be going on hiatus in January and we will return in February with our regularly scheduled monthly newsletters.

Best,

Laila Maher  
Associate Dean, Student and Alumni Affairs

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*Minutes of the Board of Trustees 1965-1966, Columbia University Archives*

## History of the Arts at Columbia

### **2003**

Founding of the Interdisciplinary Arts Council (originally the Graduate Arts Council), the School of the Arts governing student group, whose mission is to promote dialogue and collaboration among the School of the Arts Programs (Film, Theatre, Visual Arts, Writing, and Sound Arts) and to foster a nurturing community for students through a variety of activities.

Theatre Arts Division admits its first students to the MFA Stage Management concentration.

### **2007**

First students enroll in the Film Program's new MA in Film Studies.

### **2009**

The School of the Arts launches an expanded Summer Program in Writing, Visual Arts, Theatre, and Film with master classes, workshops, residencies, and undergraduate and graduate-level classes for aspiring artists and practicing

professionals.

The School of the Arts launches its first formal global initiative, mounting a printmaking exhibition in Beijing, China, to celebrate the 60th anniversary of Columbia's Weatherhead East Asian Institute.

### **2010**

The School of the Arts Film Program introduces an MFA in Creative Producing.

Columbia artists make Oscar history: Film alumna Kathryn Bigelow ('81) becomes first woman to receive the Academy Award for Best Director for *The Hurt Locker*. Adjunct faculty member Geoffrey Fletcher is the first African-American to win the award for Best Adapted Screenplay for *Precious*.

### **2011**

The Writing Program launches the international Word for Word Translation Exchange Program, with pilot programs in Leipzig, Germany, and Amman, Jordan—a six-month collaboration between students in the Literary Translation at Columbia (LTAC) program and students attending foreign universities.

University Trustee Gerry Lenfest pledges the largest gift made for the arts at Columbia for the construction of the Lenfest Center for the Arts, a multidisciplinary academic and performance space on the Manhattanville campus.

### **2013**

The Visual Arts Program collaborates with Columbia's Music Department and the Computer Music Center to launch a multidisciplinary MFA program in Sound Arts.

Construction begins on the 60,000-square-foot Lenfest Center for the Arts, designed by renowned architect Renzo Piano, on Columbia's new 17-acre Manhattanville campus.

## **Pop Quiz**

1. Name two Columbia film directors who received Gotham Award nominations.
2. Which Visual Arts alumna is garnering attention for her salad crafting?
3. Which current Theatre adjunct will be heading to Broadway this Spring to perform in *The Humans*?

4. What is LTAC Director Susan Bernofsky's most recent translation project?

*Scroll down to the bottom of this email to check your answers!*

## Alumni Spotlight

This edition of the Alumni Spotlight features **Faye Ellen Silverman** ('74) and **Janet Rodriguez** ('88). If you would like to submit your own stories to be included on our [website](#) you can do so at [this link](#).



### **Faye-Ellen Silverman** **'74 Doctor of Musical Arts (DMA)**

Faye-Ellen Silverman, born in New York City, holds a BA from Barnard College (cum laude and honors in music), an AM from Harvard University, and a DMA from Columbia University. About 90 of her compositions are published by Seesaw Music, a division of Subito Music Corp., and recorded on Albany, New World Records,

Capstone, Crystal, private label and Finnadar Records. She has received awards from UNESCO, the National League of American Pen Women and ASCAP, and been awarded residencies at the Villa Serbelloni, VCCA, the Macdowell Colony, and Yaddo. She has received commissions from Nicole Abissi, the IWBC for SymbiosisDuo, the Phoenix Concert series, Edinboro University Chamber Players, Seraphim, Philip A. De Simone, Larry Madison, Thomas Matta, the IWBC for Junction, the Monarch Brass Quintet, the Sylvia and Danny Kaye Playhouse, the Fromm Foundation, NEA, Great Lakes Performing Artist Associates, Con Spirito, the Greater Lansing Symphony, and the Chamber Music Society of Baltimore. Silverman is a Founding Member of Music Under Construction (a composers' collective) and a Founding Board Member of the International Women's Brass Conference. [more](#)

*Was there a specific faculty member or peer who especially inspired you while at the School of the Arts? If so, who and how?*

The person who inspired me most while I was at the School of the Arts was Professor Vladimir Ussachevsky. He taught me both electronic music and composition. Electronic music was an important course in terms of my musical development, as it taught me to hear music in a different way. I have always been interested in timbre- important to my work as a composer. But studying electronic music in the days when sound was analog-when students needed to splice tape by hand-forced students to listen closely to sounds in order to find precise beginnings and endings. It forced me to imagine what sounds would result when mixed together, as too many mixes degraded the quality of the sound. And who would have guessed that a gong sound without a beginning or an end would be so different? I learned to focus on the inherent properties of the sound.

I also grew as a person through observing Professor Ussachevsky relate to students and colleagues. Although he was a pioneer of electronic music, he never put on airs. He was modest and approachable and kind, and generous with his time. And he taught me diplomacy (although I was a slow learner in this field). I hope that I reflect these traits in my own teaching.

After I finished my doctorate, we began to work together-giving concerts and exchanging ideas. The association helped him return to writing instrumental music. I introduced him to a few instrumentalists and he also wrote some works for me to perform on the piano. He, in turn, arranged concerts, and helped arrange my first recording and then helped me edit the recorded work. This symbiotic relationship showed me that in a highly competitive world it is possible to be friends with someone in one's own field and to grow musically (and personally) from the experience.

*How did attending the School of the Arts impact your work and career as an artist?*

In addition to the benefit of working with Professor Ussachevsky, Professor Chou Wen-chung also impacted my career. Two years ago, his letter of recommendation made it possible for me to go to China with the East-West Center-an experience that taught me much both about music and about current conditions in another part of the world. And studying and teaching his music has helped me to see how one can combine different cultural materials.

My time in the School of the Arts also led to a few long-lasting friendships with fellow students.

[more](#)



**Janet Rodriguez**  
**'88 MFA in Arts Administration**

Janet Rodriguez is Founding President & CEO of SoHarlem, Inc., a community-based social enterprise founded to ensure that artisans and the local community benefit from economic development in the Manhattanville Factory District. It is dedicated to forging partnerships that contribute to transforming Manhattanville's creative spirit, cultural economy, and public spaces through mentoring, training and educational programs.

Prior to establishing SoHarlem, she served as Vice President of the JPMorgan Chase Global Philanthropy Group and was responsible for providing leadership and support to the National Community Relations team charged with developing and implementing philanthropic strategies in their local communities. She was central to the integration of the three focus areas of JPMC's philanthropy-Community Development, Education, and Arts and Culture-in a coordinated, holistic manner to benefit low-to moderate-income communities, and to identifying

opportunities for leveraging grant dollars by collaborating with other public/private partners. As the subject matter expert in arts and culture, she was responsible for directing the national arts & culture initiatives across the country.

[more](#)

I think the concept of the now defunct MFA in Arts Administration Program being housed at Columbia School of the Arts was brilliant and I credit the founder, Stephen Benedict. Its core value was that artists should manage their own destinies. The program was designed for artists who needed to understand the business of being artists or managing art institutions. Its interdisciplinary curriculum has served me well during my professional career. In addition to being part of the School of the Arts, we were required to take courses in the Business School, School of Journalism and School of Law. I was very privileged to be accepted into the inaugural class in 1980, which only accepted 18 students from hundreds of applicants. And, I was the only woman of color. All 18 of us

shared a common thread, whether we were artists, art historians, art advocates or filled some other, art-related role.

*Was there a specific faculty member or peer who especially inspired you while at the School of the Arts? If so, who and how?*

My favorite professor was the late Phyl Garland, the first tenured African-American woman at the Journalism School. She opened a world to me about how the media views art, the challenges of getting media coverage and how important it is to communicate effectively.

*What were the most pressing social/political issues on the minds of the students when you were here?*

The exact same issues we still face today: inequality, vicious cycles of poverty, racism, classicism, like "the arts were for the elite," a key point in the speech the former Dean of the School of the Arts used to welcome our class. For me, the arts have been a vehicle for social change throughout my professional career. My experience in the Arts Administration Program, coupled with my personal understanding of the critical role the arts play in child and community development, have all contributed to my ability to serve on boards, manage institutions, initiate change, and become a social entrepreneur.

[more](#)

All alumni are invited to tell us about your time at the School and its influence on your life as an artist. All spotlights will appear on our website, [arts.columbia.edu/soa50](http://arts.columbia.edu/soa50). Please note that there will be an editing process prior to publication. To submit your story for an Alumni Spotlight, [CLICK HERE](#).

**POP QUIZ ANSWERS:**

1) [John Magary \('07 Film\) received a Bingham Ray Breakthrough Director nomination for The Mend, which he wrote and directed, and Faculty member Ramin Bharani's film 99 Homes received a Best Actor nomination for its star, Michael Shannon.](#) 2) [Julia Sherman \('11 Visual Arts\)](#) 3) [Reed Birney \(Theatre Faculty\)](#) 4) [Looking at Pictures by Robert Walser](#)

**CORRECTION:** The previous Alumni Newsletter incorrectly listed Ayad Akhtar as a Playwriting alumnus. He graduated with an MFA in Film in 2002.

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