

# ALUMNI NEWSLETTER

## COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF THE ARTS

March 2017

Dear School of the Arts Alumni,

This month we feature alumnus **Dennis Miller** '81, DMA in Music Composition. As Associate Professor of Music at Northeastern University, he founded their Music Technology and Music Industry programs. Dennis has been combining his original music with computer-generated animation to create "Visual Music." Click here to watch [variations \(in black and white\) \(2015\)](#), an engaging and compelling piece.

Lincoln Center's [New Directors/New Films](#) festival begins Wednesday, March 15 featuring films by Film Studies alumnus **Ricky D'Ambrose** '12, Adjunct Professor **Eliza Hittman**, Film alumnus **Ming Kai Leung** '06, and current Film student **Dea Kulumbegashvili**.

**Stephen Massimilla** '96 will be at Bowery Poetry Club on Monday, March 27 for an event around his new book, [Cooking with the Muse](#).

In Theatre news, Playwriting alumnus and Manager of Academic Administration for Writing, **Clarence Coo** '10 will have reading of his play, *The Birds of Empathy* in [The Playwrights Realm's INK'D Festival](#). Theatre Directing alumnus **Saheem Ali** '07 also directs in the festival. Acting alumnus, **Markus Potter** '03 was named Associate Artistic Director of Theatre Aspen. His new show, [Church & State](#) is currently running at New World Stages.

[Donald Cried](#), a new film starring and co-produced by Visual Arts alumnus **Jesse Wakeman** '14 is currently screening at the Angelika in New York City and at the Nuart in Los Angeles with several other locations around the country to follow. At [The Bemis Center for Contemporary Art](#) in Omaha, Nebraska, see **Paula Wilson**'s '05 *The Backward Glance* on view through April 29.

Next month we will host an **Alumni Networking Breakfast** on **Tuesday, April 18 at 8:30am**. [Please RSVP here](#). Please [email us](#) if you are interested in volunteering as an alumni ambassador.

To keep receiving news and updates from the School of the Arts, please make sure we have your most recent [contact information](#). If you know a fellow alum who is not receiving emails from us but would like to, please have them email us at [artsalum@columbia.edu](mailto:artsalum@columbia.edu).

As always, please continue sharing your news and achievements with us via [artsalum@columbia.edu](mailto:artsalum@columbia.edu) and be sure to like and follow our [Facebook page](#).

Best,  
Laila Maher  
Associate Dean, Student and Alumni Affairs

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**CORRECTION:** In our February Newsletter, we incorrectly listed Playwriting alumna **Jocelyn Bioh '08** as an Acting alumna.

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## ColumbiaYOU

Our Columbia community is large, diverse, and global. [ColumbiaYou](#) is a new storytelling program where all members can share their stories of how Columbia has changed lives, sparked ideas, and launched careers. It reveals Columbia's impact today and it's the story of Columbia's future.

Through ColumbiaYou, you can share your Columbia stories in the way that you choose: your words, images, and voice. It's the story of Columbia -- told by you. [Read more here](#).

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## Columbia Alumni Community

Join the CAA's Columbia Alumni Community, an online directory and social media tool for all Columbia University alumni: <http://alumni.columbia.edu/alumni-directory>. Log in with your UNI and password. If you don't know your UNI, you can request it [here](#).

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## ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT

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This edition of the **Alumni Spotlight** features Music Composition alumnus **Dennis Miller '81**. If you would like to submit your own stories to be included on our website, you can do so at this [link](#).



**Dennis Miller** received his DMA in Music Composition from Columbia University in 1981 and since that time has been on the faculty of Northeastern University in Boston, where he is currently a Full Professor. Miller's mixed-media compositions, which combine his own original music and animation, illustrate principles drawn from music composition applied to the visual realm. His works have been screened at numerous venues throughout the world, and his still images appear in numerous texts including *Sonic Graphics: Seeing Sound* by Matt Woolman (Random House), *Art of the Digital Age* by Bruce Wands (W.W. Norton) and *Visual Music Masters* by Adriano Abbado (Skira Press).

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

I had a rather unique experience during my four years at the School of the Arts because my principal teacher, Chou Wen-Chung, was very involved with the Chinese-American arts exchange program at the time, especially during my first year (1977), and traveled extensively. So I was given the liberty to study with anyone I wanted to in the New York area. I reached out to Harvey Solberger, who was already on the Arts faculty, and another composer named Mordechai Schenkman, then at Princeton, and had the opportunity to study with both. Later in the program, I worked with Mario Davidovsky, who has remained a friend and mentor for many decades.

I was also at CU when both George Perle and Allen Forte were invited as guest instructors, and I had the great privilege of studying with both of them, as well as with George Edwards, also on the CU faculty. All of my teachers were inspirational in their own ways, and I feel very fortunate to have had so many different opportunities to learn from such a renowned faculty.

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

The School of the Arts was the most important step in my becoming a composer. The Columbia Composers Club was able to hire the top freelance new music performers in New York, among the best in the world, and we had all of our music played by professionals on a regular basis. Feedback was also provided by the performers, and I was also able to hone my conducting skills while at CU. There is no question that having Columbia on my resume was a main reason that I was hired by Northeastern University, which, coincidentally, happened three days before graduation in 1981. (I've been there ever since.)

**What was your favorite or most memorable class while at the School of the Arts?**

All of my classes were gratifying and elucidating. Learning about Schenker theory from Jim Baker, studying the music of Berg with George Perle, learning contemporary performance practices with Harvey Sollberger, 20th Century analysis with Jacques Monod - I got something from all of them, and much of that information has been relevant for me for much of my career as a composer.

**What were the first steps you took after graduating?**

The first step was finding an apartment in Boston! My wife was a year behind in her PhD program at the medical school, so I commuted to Boston every week for my first year (after which, she got her first Post Doc at Harvard Med). Thanks goodness for People's Express (\$29 - Newark to Boston).

**What advice would you give to recent graduates?**

I imagine a career as a concert composer is more difficult today even than it has been historically. Many schools are looking for faculty with diverse skill sets - my own job was advertised for a theorist and director of the school's jazz band - so be versatile and have a second area of expertise if possible. That could be theory, or writing, or performance - develop whatever you are good at.

**IN MEMORIAM**

**Val Sherman** (Film '11)

**ALUMNI BENEFITS**

- + [Artists' Resource Center \(ARC\)](#)
- + [Update Your Information](#)
- + [Email Forwarding & CU Address](#)
- + [Online Alumni Community](#)
- + [CAA Arts Access](#)
- + [Complete List of Benefits](#)

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