

She Scores: Celebrating Underrepresented Composers

by Mike Telin



Since 2021, Local 4 Music Fund’s She Scores project has been providing a platform for underrepresented composers who, despite their immense talents, face barriers to having their works performed. And what began with performances of works by 16 composers has now blossomed into a four-concert series featuring works by 31 living composers who identify as female or nonbinary. “We have over 70 people involved in the festival this year,” Local 4 Music Fund executive director Amber Rogers said during a telephone interview.

The fourth edition of She Scores runs May 30 - June 2 at the Cleveland Institute of Music’s Mixon Hall, with performances at 7:00 Thursday-Saturday and 4:00 on Sunday. Emily Laurance will present a pre-concert lecture one hour prior to each performance. All concerts are free. Click [here](#) to read bios of the composers and performers.

“In the past, the call for scores only went out to composers in Ohio. This year we added Pennsylvania, Indiana, Michigan, Kentucky, and West Virginia. And we have composers from every one of those states represented in the programming,” Rogers said, adding that the jury reviewed around 80 submissions, all evaluated anonymously — the jury didn’t know who wrote what, or what their backgrounds were.

“I’m never sure what to expect in terms of instrumentation,” Rogers said. “But this year there are fewer solo works than in the past, and there are a number of pieces for Pierrot ensemble. We’re super percussion-heavy this year, and many pieces have interesting instrumentations — there’s one for baritone saxophone, electric guitar, percussion, and piano.”

While last year was the first time that a piece included electronics, the number of pieces with fixed electronics has more than doubled this year. “Matt Holm, who is the director of

percussion at Kent State University, is not only playing, he's also the man in charge of electronic tracks, so he's doing double duty, and we're lucky to have him."



Rogers noted that scheduling rehearsals for 31 pieces with diverse instrumentations has been "pretty wild." Not to mention the fact that composers are coming from out of state to attend rehearsals and concerts. "So another big issue has been lodging. Home stays are very good for us, and we also have a relationship with No Surf House."

Because the call for scores is sent to composers guilds, organizations that have relationships with composers, and every university or conservatory with a music theory or composition program, Rogers said that it's always interesting to see who is on the final list once the panel has made their decisions on programming.

"I think we have more mid-career composers than we had in previous years, which is encouraging. But the composers who are still in some part of their university education have really solid backgrounds already. I think we have one or two composers where it's their first time working with professional musicians, but for the most part everybody has done some kind of professional-level composing, even if they're still in university."

Some statistics about the composers involved:

- 61% of composers represented identify as white
- 39% of composers represented identify as non-white (including asian, hispanic, non-white hispanic, african american, indigenous, or mixed race)
- 48% are composers from 20-30 years of age
- 29% are composers from 30-40 years of age
- 23% are composers of the age 50+
- 20% are composers involved in a university program as a student
- 40% of composers are mid-career composers with some professional commissions, competition experience, teaching experience, etc.
- 40% are professional composers who make a living through composition and/or teach composition or theory at the university level
- 87% of composers identify as female
- 13% of composers identify as nonbinary

Rogers hopes that everyone will come out and hear all the great music from the 2024 class of She Scores.

Photo by Derek Snyder

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