

The Future of Chamber Music

CMS's Bowers Program

By Katelyn Simone



The individual members of CMS's Bowers Program for 2024–27. Top row, from left: bassist Nina Bernat, cellist Sterling Elliott, and pianist Anna Geniushene. Middle row: pianist Sahun Sam Hong, violinist Lun Li, and pianist Evren Ozel. Bottom row: violinist Julian Rhee, cellist Jonathan Swensen, and oboist Juri Vallentin.

Next season, the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center will welcome its latest cohort of extraordinary young artists into the Bowers Program, a three-season residency that identifies and nurtures the next generation of leading

chamber musicians. Since 1996 the rigorous program has created a major pathway to the CMS roster—of which more than half of current artists are program alumni—and promoted the long-term vibrancy of the art form.

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THE FUTURE OF CHAMBER MUSIC: THE BOWERS PROGRAM

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The Viano Quartet is the sole ensemble selected for the Bowers Program's class of 2024–27. From left: cellist Tate Zawadiuk, violist Aiden Kane, and violinists Lucy Wang and Hao Zhou.

The dynamic 2024–27 Bowers Program class consists of nine individuals and one string quartet. Chosen from a pool of 168 applicants worldwide, these artists hail from seven countries and share a commitment to exemplary musicianship and a passion for chamber music.

"I can't say enough about the level of these Bowers artists," says Ani Kavafian, the eminent violinist, educator, and five-decade member of CMS's roster who served as one of the jurors at the last Bowers audition. "They play at the highest level on their instruments and bring a different level of excitement to the performances we play with them."

The program is built on a hands-on, intensive experience with CMS's illustrious roster. Bowers musicians fully integrate into every facet of CMS activity, including mainstage

performances at Alice Tully Hall, touring, radio broadcasts, recordings, education and community engagement programs, and individualized mentorship. Moreover, the program provides access to a global network of premiere chamber musicians, presenters, and performance opportunities.

These musicians may be emerging, but they are already active professionals; their CMS engagements will fold into calendars full of touring, recitals, solo appearances with major orchestras, and degree and diploma programs at leading conservatories.

Incoming Bowers artist Evren Ozel is a pianist currently enrolled in the Artist Diploma program at New England Conservatory. He says, "[The program] is very flexible and allows me to be in school and still pursue my own career as a pianist and soloist. That's

a really nice thing.” Before beginning his official Bowers residency in the 2024–25 season, Ozel will join CMS musicians in a performance at Drew University in April 2024.

While versatile, these artists cite chamber music—and the Bowers Program itself—as lifelong aspirations. “[Chamber music is] one of the great joys of music making, and some of the greatest repertoire, too,” says Ozel. For incoming violinist Julian Rhee, “There are so many videos from CMS of artists that I was watching when I was in elementary school.”

“Chamber music is the entire reason I play cello,” says incoming artist Sterling Elliott, who spent his formative early years in a prolific family string quartet. “[The Bowers Program] has been a dream of mine for quite some time. It was on that long-term vision board—perhaps something I would accomplish by the time I’m 30.” (Elliott is 23.) “For it to come at this point in my life and career . . . I’m elated.”

The opportunity to apply comes only once every three years. For an audition—particularly one for a globally leading chamber music organization—to be *fun* may seem surprising, but that’s how incoming Bowers artists describe it. “It reminded me of sight-reading with friends,” Elliott says. “My stress levels were lower than I thought.” The process begins with video submissions from which select applicants are invited to audition live at CMS’s Rose Studio in chamber ensembles alongside CMS musicians, with just a few weeks to prepare challenging repertoire.

On audition day, applicants had just 20 minutes of rehearsal—a simulation of the fast pace at CMS. “It was nerve-racking, but exhilarating,” says Julian Rhee. “Somehow, when I was doing it I was having a pretty good time. It brought out that sense of spontaneous collaboration on stage as opposed to everyone playing their own individual solos. It was a very unique audition, which makes sense for a unique organization.”

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Violinist Ani Kavafian (left) performing with alumni of CMS’s Bowers Program. Continuing from left: violinist Paul Huang, cellist Mihai Marica, and violists Matthew Lipman and Yura Lee.



CMS Artistic Directors David Finckel and Wu Han performing with violinist Arnaud Sussmann, an alum of CMS's Bowers Program.

Collaboration brings both joys and challenges. According to Kavafian, “I believe this program is an absolute gold mine for young performers who love chamber music and who will benefit so greatly. . . . They will learn how to give constructive comments and learn how to navigate different personalities. Their greatest challenge is when to voice their point of view and when to listen.”

The incoming artists anticipate learning to navigate these dynamics. As Rhee says, “You want to present yourself in the best way possible, while also trying to be as flexible as possible, too.” He sees exciting challenges: “How can I learn more from them by also giving more, and find a way to integrate myself into new collaborations constantly with a new network of people?”

At the Chamber Music Society, this network is an exceptional asset. “I’m really excited to work with not just [CMS Artistic Directors] David Finckel

and Wu Han, but all the CMS artists as well as the other Bowers artists,” says Elliott.

Rhee adds, “I think I’m most looking forward to meeting the amazing people you get to work with. I actually get to play with them and learn how they approach chamber music.”

The admiration goes both ways. “I absolutely love the new performers coming into the program. I look forward to working with each of them,” says Kavafian. “Continuing the Bowers Program is an essential part of the future of chamber music. The give-and-take between all of us only adds to each performance—excitement and energy, along with knowledge, is the best way to make music!” The future is in good hands.

Katelyn Simone is a New York City-based writer and oboist working at the intersection of art and social impact.