



MNjcc Suzuki Program Teacher Bios – 2022-23 season

Gretchen Paxson-Abberger – violin, viola, improvisation, Artistic director of MNjcc Suzuki Program, MNjcc Suzuki Summer Music Camp



Gretchen Paxson Abberger holds a Bachelor of Liberal Arts from Bennington College, a bachelor's degree in Music Performance from the Manhattan School of Music, and a master's degree in Historical Performance from the Mannes College of Music in New York City, as well a two-year Long Term Certificate in Suzuki training from the School for Strings in New York City studying with Louise Behrend. Further teacher development has been short-term training courses with the following: Ronda Cole, Daphne Hughes, Allen Lieb, Carol

Smith, Ed Sprunger, Carey Beth Hockett, Brian Lewis, and Alice Kay Kanack. Gretchen has been teaching privately, free-lancing, as a guest teacher at Suzuki workshops in the Toronto area since moving here in 1994. She has also taught for the Southwestern Ontario Suzuki Institute, RCM, ESM and Hamilton Suzuki winter workshops, and Toronto Suzuki Studio's Camp Sparrow. She teaches all levels at the North York Suzuki Program, as well, is the artistic director for the Miles Nadal Jcc Suzuki Program since 1999, and directs the MNjcc Suzuki Summer Music Camp since 2010. Gretchen founded Thanks to Dr. Suzuki Concert Performances, a charitable organization whose mission is to create community among students and teachers of Toronto area Suzuki schools in a yearly collaborative gala concert. She approaches the Suzuki philosophy from 2 sides of the Suzuki triangle, as a teacher, and also as a parent of two children who learned violin by the Suzuki method studying at the MNjcc Suzuki Program.

Bethany Bergman – violin (not teaching this year 2022-23)



New to our Suzuki program last season, Bethany Bergman will again be teaching violin group classes and note reading ensembles, as well as teaching private violin lessons. She holds a master's degree focused in Music Performance from University of Toronto, and currently has positions both with Hamilton Philharmonic, and the Canadian Opera Company Orchestra.

Bethany is known not only as skilled as an orchestral musician, but as well for her knowledge in baroque styles, contemporary music, and alternative styles of music. She has an international reputation with experience recording for film and numerous artists. We were fortunate last season that Bethany was able to substitute occasionally for various teachers and are thrilled to have her on board this season as part of our regular staff, sharing her expertise with our community.

Jennifer Burford – violin, improvisation, bow fitness, Suzuki Early Childhood Education classes



Jennifer's students range in age from children as young as 3 years old to adults. She is a member of the violin faculty at the Miles Nadal JCC Suzuki Program and the Royal Conservatory School. Her teaching style readily adapts to the needs of the individual student. She has experienced all sides of the Suzuki Triangle, beginning as a Suzuki student at age 4, continuing to evolve as a Suzuki teacher, and adapting into a new role as a Suzuki parent and practice partner to her oldest of three children. She began her first decade of teaching at the North York Suzuki School where she held the positions of String Coordinator and Director. Jennifer is equally comfortable with older children and teens, having held teaching positions at Claude Watson School for the Arts and Havergal College.

Prior to beginning her teaching career in 2006, she completed a Bachelor's of Music Performance while studying with Mark Skazinetsky at the University of Toronto. She received her Artist Diploma from the Glenn Gould School and her Master's of Music Performance Degree from University of Toronto under the tutelage of Erika Raum. Jennifer has completed teacher training through the Suzuki Association of America in

books 1-8, studying with Elayne Ras, Ed Sprunger, Karen Kimmet, Kathleen Spring, and Allen Lieb. She also has taken the Suzuki Association of the Americas supplemental course “Teaching from the Balance Point” with Ed Kreitman. Jennifer recently was certified as a Teacher Trainer in the Creative Ability Development, a method of developing divergent thinking and musical artistry through improvisation.

Jennifer remains an active performer and freelancer in Toronto. She holds the position of Principal Second Violin with the chamber orchestra Canadian Sinfonietta and has performed with Kitchener-Waterloo Symphony Orchestra, Hamilton Philharmonic Orchestra, Esprit Orchestra, Toronto Concert Orchestra, Sinfonia Toronto, and Mirvish Productions. She continues to enjoy playing chamber music, after being a recipient of the Felix Galimir Chamber Music award at UofT. In addition to classical music, Jennifer has developed her versatility as a musician by recording and performing with jazz, funk, folk, Klezmer artists, and the Queer Songbook Orchestra.

She is a member of the Suzuki Association of America, the Suzuki Association of Ontario, and the American Federation of Musicians.

Philip Clark – piano accompaniment



Philip studied piano and harpsichord at Oberlin College, while majoring in philosophy. In his teens and twenties, he played jazz piano with various ensembles. Since 2002 he has taught philosophy at U of T. Both Phil’s children studied at the MNjcc Program, son Sam on violin, and daughter Gwendolyn on cello. He became an accompanist for the Suzuki Program in 2014.

Debra Cutler - violin



Debra Cutler has enjoyed teaching for the MNJCC Suzuki program over the past 12 years. Though she has devoted much of her time recently toward raising her three young children (two of whom study the violin through the program), Debra continues to love teaching and sharing a love of music with her students.

Debra received her Bachelor's degree in Violin Performance from Indiana University and a Master of Arts in Music Education from Teachers College, Columbia University. She studied Suzuki pedagogy at Indiana University, and received her Suzuki Books 1-8 Certification

through the School for Strings in New York City. She has also taught various early childhood music classes and received her New York State Teaching Certification in Music for grades K-12. Debra has appeared as a solo and orchestral performer in Cleveland, Ohio, Interlochen, Michigan, Bloomington, Indiana, Jerusalem, New York City and Toronto.

Diana Dawydchak – violin, fiddling



Diana is in the fourth year of her undergraduate degree at the University of Toronto studying Classical Violin Performance under the tutelage of Dr. Timothy Ying. Diana has been a member of the National Youth Orchestra of Canada for its 2020 and 2021 seasons. This past summer, Diana attended Bowdoin International Music Festival on scholarship where she studied with Ayano Ninomiya. In June 2021, Diana attended the Online Solo Strings Intensive (OSSI) where she studied with Ani Kavafian and Arnaud Sussmann. At OSSI, she was chosen to play in a masterclass for Benjamin Beilman. Diana has performed in masterclasses for Andrew Wan, Jonathan Crow, Stephen Rose, Conrad Chow, Erika Raum and Marie Bérard to name a few. Diana has also had the opportunity of assisting Jonathan Crow as his faculty assistant at the Interprovincial Music Camp.

Since the age of 4, Diana has demonstrated her passion for performing and love for all genres of music. At a young age she was exposed to Canadian Old Time Fiddle Music and became hooked. Since the age of seven, she has competed in many competitions in Ontario and the Maritimes and has been a Champion in each of her age categories multiple times, as well as in Duet and Gospel. She is a two time Canadian Open Fiddle Champion, Ontario Open Champion, Southwestern Ontario Open Champion and Northern Ontario Open Champion. Diana is also well versed in the American Bluegrass fiddling style. She has competed internationally winning the title of Junior Runner up at the Grand Master Fiddle Championship in Nashville, Tennessee and the Tennessee State Fiddle Championship. Diana is a multi-instrumentalist and performs with her brother, (DnA) Diana and Andrew. There you can find her fiddling, step dancing, playing the keyboard and French button accordion.

At the age of 16, Diana along with her brother Andrew recorded their first album in Nashville, Tennessee and were showcased on Toronto's CP24 Breakfast Television. Their most recent single, "Reborn" is available on all music streaming platforms. DnA performs

at many musical events in Ontario such as ceilidhs, festivals, showcases and private events. They have performed at the Toronto Christmas Market, Toronto's Harbourfront Centre Canada Day Festival, World Fiddle Day at the Aga Khan Museum to name a few. They are frequently invited guests of Natalie MacMaster and Donnell Leahy and have shared the stage with them at numerous shows and festivals including Casino Rama, Roy Thomson Hall, Centre in the Square, Greenbridge Celtic Folk Festival, ArtsFest Waterdown. With a passion for teaching, Diana has completed her Suzuki Book 1 teacher training course and is currently on faculty at the Miles Nadal JCC Suzuki School where she teaches both fiddle and pop music. She also teaches both classical and fiddle privately at her home studio in Toronto.

Katrina Grieve - violin



Katrina grew up as a Suzuki violin student and has taught Suzuki violin for almost 20 years. Since 2000, she has taught with the Suzuki program at the Miles Nadal Jewish Community Center. She also taught violin and piano for several years with the Oakville Suzuki Association. Katrina studied the violin at Oberlin College in Ohio and performs with the Etobicoke Philharmonic Orchestra. She has taken Suzuki teacher training for both Suzuki violin and piano. Katrina also enjoys the experience of being a Suzuki parent to her two sons, who learn violin at the MNjcc Suzuki Program

David Lokan – note-reading ensembles, theory (not teaching this year 2022-23)



David Lokan, son of longtime Suzuki Program teacher Nancy Lokan, began his violin studies at age six, as a student in the MNjcc Suzuki Program. He continued advancing in the program, playing both violin and viola until leaving for university, completing his Bachelor of Music at Western University, studying violin, with a major in composition.

He has performed in university orchestras, opera productions, and performed in solo recitals from a young age. He completed his teacher's college degree at York University (primary school division) and has completed a variety of teaching experiences in private and group settings. David is excited to continue working with the MNjcc Suzuki Program and give back to the community that he came from. The

program is thrilled to have him as one of our staff members, completing the continuous circle of learning by the Suzuki method.

Nancy Lokan – violin, viola, chamber music



Nancy Lokan started her violin studies in Ottawa, studying with Walter Prystawski, former concertmaster of the National Arts Centre Orchestra. She started playing professionally in solo and chamber music as a teenager. After her degree in music at the University of Toronto she joined the Canadian Forces String Ensemble based in Ottawa. After moving back to Toronto Nancy began exploring the Suzuki method of teaching while raising her three children. All three of her children have grown up in the Suzuki world and have embraced music. Now one of her grandsons is also part of the program. She teaches privately, and group and ensemble classes.

Kerri McGonigle – cello, chamber music, bow fitness



A recipient of the Margarita Heron Pine String Prize and the Beryl Barns Graduate Scholarship, cellist Kerri McGonigle graduated with a Master of Music degree in cello performance from the University of Alberta. While studying in Paris, she won Premier Prix with unanimous distinction in violoncello and chamber music from the Gennevilliers Conservatory. Having completed an Advanced Certificate in Baroque Performance with Tafelmusik through the University of Toronto, Kerri is based in Toronto and performs regularly as a recitalist, chamber musician and orchestral cellist on both Baroque and modern cello, recently playing with the Edmonton Symphony Orchestra, Alberta Baroque Ensemble, Windsor Symphony Orchestra, Talisker Ensemble, Aradia Orchestra, Nota Bene Orchestra and the Bach Consort. In addition to Suzuki training, Kerri studied cello pedagogy as part of her master's degree with Tanya Prochazka and with Irene Sharp in San Francisco. She has been teaching cello and chamber music at the Miles Nadal JCC Suzuki Program since 2007.

Alex McMaster – chamber music (not teaching this year 2022-23)



Since her graduation from the University of Toronto with an Honours B.A. in Music, cellist Alex McMaster has been very active as a performer in the Canadian music scene, playing many styles of music with a variety of ensembles. She is as comfortable improvising or learning by ear as she is reading music, and has performed at venues across North America including the ACC, Roy Thompson Hall and Massey Hall.

She has been teaching private cello lessons at University of Toronto Schools (UTS) since 2010, and has been hired as a cello clinician at Sir John A. Macdonald C.I., Rosedale School for the Arts and UTS. Alex has worked as a chamber music coach with the

Miles Nadal JCC Suzuki program since 2017.

Erika Nielsen – cello, chamber music (not teaching this year 2022-23)



A passionate, wholehearted performer known for her "vibrant cello playing" (The WholeNote), cellist Erika Nielsen has a multi-faceted career as a chamber musician, collaborative artist, orchestral player, and educator, with a musicianship that spans from Baroque and Classical traditions to contemporary and popular genres.

A passionate educator with a love for teaching cellists of all ages, levels, and abilities, Erika has been on faculty at National Music Camp of Canada since 2018 and the Miles Nadal JCC Suzuki Program since 2016, where she coaches chamber music and group classes. She maintains a busy private studio, and is an itinerant cello teacher for Branksome Hall. Erika is certified through The Royal Conservatory and the Suzuki Association of the Americas, where she completed her teacher training with Susan Gagnon.

As a chamber musician, Erika regularly performs as a solo and continuo player with Resonance Baroque Ensemble and fellow faculty at NMC. She was principal cello of the Sudbury Symphony Orchestra from 2011–13, and continues to lead cello sections with

numerous orchestras across Ontario. Erika also performs with Classic Albums Live, the 25-piece Toronto Motown band The Big Sound, and the ELO tribute band Strange Magic.

Lisa Olafson – ukulele, Suzuki Early Childhood Music classes



Lisa Olafson worked as an actor for many years, including touring internationally with the renowned mask and mime theatre company, Theatre Beyond Words. She wrote and toured her one woman clown show before starting the female rootsy bluegrass trio, Dirty Dishes. She loves teaching Suzuki music to babies and toddlers, leading Kindie and Primary Choirs for young singers and is thrilled, of course, to share her love of music by teaching the happiest instrument of all, the ukulele!

Amanda Penner - violin, viola, chamber music



Originally from Manitoba, Amanda Penner completed a Bachelor of Music in violin performance at the University of Manitoba before moving to Toronto where she obtained a master's degree in viola performance at the University of Toronto. As a performer, she has a wide range of interests and experiences. As a classical orchestral player and chamber musician, she has played most recently for Orchestra London, Sudbury Symphony Orchestra, Canadian Sinfonietta, and Feu Noire String Quartet. Her playing abilities also include improvising, arranging string parts and recording as a session player for various singer-songwriters, electronic musicians and bands, as well as Multibeat Music and Ivory Storm Productions. During this time she has also developed as a teacher, continuing her training in the Suzuki method, gaining experience while teaching at the Huntsville Suzuki School, private and group lessons, chamber music, outreach music programs in the schools and theory. Amanda joined the MNjcc Suzuki Program team last season after moving back to Toronto and freelances in the city as well.

Tova Rosenberg – cello



Incorporating her extensive Suzuki training with her love of working with young children, Tova Rosenberg has developed innovative teaching ideas for young cellists and exciting programs for early childhood music education in New York City, and now in Toronto. For almost a decade, Tova was the teacher of the Early Childhood Music Program at the School for Strings in Manhattan, where she also taught Suzuki cello lessons and theory classes. She was a member of the cello faculty at the Diller-Quaile School of Music as well as the Third Street Music School Settlement. She has been a cello teacher for the Music Institute of Long Island, the Suzuki program at Brooklyn College and for the summer string festival at the Elisabeth Morrow School in New Jersey. An active performer, Tova was a founding member of the TEA trio. She holds an M.M. from DePaul University and a B.M. from McGill University and is a graduate of the School for Strings 2-year intensive Suzuki Teacher Training Program in NYC. She is also certified in the Mark O'Connor Violin Method. Tova is on the cello faculty at the Miles Nadal JCC Suzuki Strings Program as well as the Royal Conservatory of Music. She has been the sole creator and teacher of custom Early Childhood Music Curriculums around Toronto, previously running classes out of the Wychwood Barns' *Music in the Barns* studio and the Miles Nadal JCC. Currently, Tova runs her one of a kind, music education program, Do Re...Me! out of the Trinity St. Paul's Centre in the Annex.

Kate Shaner – violin, viola, Suzuki Early Childhood Music classes and MNjcc Suzuki Program Administrative Assistant



Kate is a dedicated and passionate Suzuki teacher, music educator and arts administrator, who brings enthusiasm and energy to each of her interests. In addition to her admin duties, she teaches group classes, private lessons and the Suzuki Early Childhood Music class at the MNjcc.

Prior to moving to Toronto, Kate was the assistant director of Greenwich Suzuki Academy and head of development for the Friends of Greenwich Suzuki Academy fund. She was also a primary member of the violin, viola, and SECE faculty. Prior to joining GSA in 2017, she served as the director of the Milford Branch at The Music School of Delaware and a core violin and viola faculty member in the school's Suzuki Academy

from 2013-2017. In 2016, Kate was selected as one of Delaware's top young professionals and received the Delaware Business Times "Best 40 under 40" award. From 2008 to 2013, she taught viola and chamber music at Interlochen Arts Summer Camp. She also served on the board of directors for the Greater Philadelphia Suzuki Association from 2016-2017.

Kate is a registered Suzuki teacher with the Suzuki Association of the Americas in ECC, SPA, SECE Unit 1, violin units 1-6, violin practicum, and viola unit 5. She is a graduate of Interlochen Arts Academy and holds degrees from the University of Memphis (B.M.) and Ithaca College (M.M., Suzuki Pedagogy). While at Ithaca College, she completed the long term Suzuki training program under Sanford Reuning and Carrie Reuning-Hummel, with additional instruction from Edward Kreitman, Stephanie Sandven, Teri Einfeldt and April Losey. Kate has studied Suzuki Early Childhood Education with trainer Lynn McCall. Her principal viola teachers have included Debra Moree, Lenny Schranze, David Holland and Shelley Beard Santore. Kate's students have been accepted into prestigious training programs including Interlochen Arts Academy and Sphinx Performance Academy.

In her spare time, Kate enjoys reading, playing chamber music with friends and gardening. She lives in Toronto with her husband Rabbi Jordan Shaner and their son.

Arie Verheul van de Ven - Composition



Formerly a violin and viola student in the MNjcc Suzuki Program, Arie Verheul van de Ven is a composer and violist based in Toronto. He has taught Writing & playing for a variety of contexts, Arie's music is informed by deep interests both in contemporary classical music as well as Canadian folk music, klezmer, and free improvisation.

Arie is currently working in a variety of distanced music projects, finding ways to present music within new digital contexts, embracing the problems that online music making presents. He is currently a resident

composer with the Gather Round Singers and Jumblies Theatre, and has been collaborating with them in creating choral music specifically written to be performed online. Arie received a bachelor of arts in composition at Wilfrid Laurier University studying contemporary music with Linda Catlin Smith, Cameron McKittrick, and Christine Vlajk. He is currently working towards a masters in composition with Peter Adriaansz and Yannis Kyriakides at the Royal Conservatoire in The Hague.

For the past 6 years, the summer Music & Arts Camp has featured Arie teaching klezmer, and more recently, as our composition teacher. Due to the awarding of a grant from the JCCA called "Making Music Happen," in 2018-19 Arie was asked to create a curriculum

and teach an innovative youth klezmer music course entitled “Klez-mish.” The goal of this course was to captivate a younger generation, to teach and spread the knowledge and richness of klezmer music, and related genres. Arie started as a teacher in the Tuesday afternoon yearlong program in 2020-21.

Natasha Zado - Cello Group Classes and Cello Choir



Natasha is a young cello and theory teacher who is passionate about teaching and seeing her students reach their full potential. She is a graduate from Wilfrid Laurier University, and holds an Honours Bachelor of Music Degree in History, Theory, and Critical Analysis, with a concentration in Music Theory. During her time at Laurier, she studied cello with Dr. Katie Schlaikjer of the Penderecki String Quartet. On top of her studies in music theory, she regularly performed in solo and chamber music recitals, as well as orchestra concerts and opera performances, as principal cello. Natasha is a trained cello teacher in the Suzuki method, and has completed ECC! and Cello Unit 1 with both Catherine Walker and Dr. David Evenchick, Units 2-8 with Dr. David Evenchick, as well as Units 9-10 with Dr. Shu-Yi Scott. At Laurier, she enjoyed facilitating supplemental instruction sessions for the first year music theory course, as well as tutored private students. Natasha has taught at a number of music programs, most notably the MNJcc Suzuki Summer Camp as well as Sistema, a social program which brings free music lessons to students in underserved communities. Currently, she teaches at the Etobicoke and MNJcc Suzuki Music programs, as well as maintains an active career as a performer, freelancing at weddings and other events. She aims to help her students find their musical voice through a solid foundation of technique and a love of music.