

For Immediate Release
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WINNERS OF THE NEXTNOTES® HIGH SCHOOL COMPOSITION AWARDS NOMINATE EDUCATORS FOR RECOGNITION

ST. PAUL (May 25, 2018) – The [American Composers Forum](#) (ACF), in partnership with [MakeMusic®](#), is proud to acknowledge the influential teachers of the 2018 *NextNotes® High School Composition Awards* winners. *NextNotes* is a national program designed to nurture the next generation of creative voices in music composition regardless of musical style. The following winners were selected for their compositional skills and strong creative voices: **Isaac Applebaum and Nimah Nayel** (Potomac and Silver Spring, MD), **Elise Arancio** (Tucker, GA), **Benjamin Ballmer** (Evanston, IL), **Michael Gaspari** (Robbinsville, NJ), **Esther Ollivier** (Los Angeles, CA), **Isaac Santos** (Hollywood, FL). Each of these composers have teachers in their lives—educators who help them craft their voices and grow as young artists and citizens. The following teachers were thoughtfully selected for their dedication to the *NextNotes* winners:

- **Carrie Eyler**, (Choir Director, [Richard Montgomery High School](#)), teacher of Nimah Nayel
- **Gary Geiger** (Artistic Director, [Evanston Children’s Choir](#)), teacher of Benjamin Ballmer
- **Dr. Richard Prior**, (Conductor, Emory Youth Symphony Orchestra), teacher of Elise Arancio
- **Jonathan (Daniel) Puckett**, (Jazz Band Director, [Eastern Middle School](#)), teacher of Isaac Applebaum
- **Randall Reid**, (Band Director, [South Broward High School](#)), teacher of Isaac Santos
- **Gary Shields**, teacher of Esther Ollivier
- **Brian Williams**, (Choral Director, Robbinsville High School), teacher of Michael Gaspari

Two of the 2018 *NextNotes* winners speak on the impact of their teachers:



“Gary Shields is the most meaningful and dedicated teacher a student could ever hope to have. He has been so incredibly helpful from the start, many years ago, when he offered to give me composition lessons after I showed interest. And since then, he’s been passionately working with me through the processes of each piece I write. Gary has taught me to always work hard to take each piece to a whole new level and to give strong intent and meaning to my works. He’s shown me how to “steal” effectively from some of my favorite composers and apply what I’ve learned to my own pieces. Gary’s love for music has definitely rubbed off onto me and I cannot thank him enough for everything he has done for me.” -Esther Ollivier

“When I joined Eastern Middle School’s Jazz Band as a 7th-grader, I had no idea what jazz was and had no way of knowing that this decision would change my life. Meeting every Monday before school, Jazz Band brought me into contact with Mr. Jonathan Puckett, the school Band Director and one of the most outstanding teachers I’ve ever met. Mr.

Puckett sparked my love of jazz and its aural tradition by playing and talking about his favorite records. He taught me to play jazz piano by meeting me before rehearsals and writing out voicings for each chord, then explaining how jazz standards' harmonic and melodic ideas worked together with the help of his tenor saxophone. He also encouraged me to write my first jazz compositions, helped me refine my work, and even had the band perform and record several of my pieces. Most importantly, Mr. Puckett always took the time to show his students he cared about them and believed they could succeed, helping us to eventually achieve the potential he saw in us before we recognized it ourselves. Without his inspiration, commitment, talent for education, and genuine humanity, I would never have become the musician, composer, or person I am today." -Isaac Applebaum



Learn more about the other champion educators and their impact on the *NextNotes* winners [here](#).

ACF and MakeMusic will honor all of these significant educators by awarding them a subscription to [SmartMusic®](#), an interactive music software program for use in their classrooms. SmartMusic provides guided practice, assessment and documentation, and an extensive repertoire library to bolster student learning. The 2018 *NextNotes* winners will also receive Finale® notation software as a part of their larger award package.

In June, the *NextNotes* winners will travel to Minneapolis, Minnesota for continued mentorship with leading composers [Carol Barnett](#), [Joshua Clausen](#), and [Joseph Horton](#), as well as rehearsals and performance of their winning works by professional musicians. The ***NextNotes* Showcase Concert** will take place at 7:30pm on **June 23rd** at the Lab Theater (700 N 1st St, Minneapolis, Minnesota.) The Showcase is free and open to the public.

ACF and MakeMusic are thankful to these exceptional educators, and look forward to helping more of their students thrive due to their dedication and inspiration.

2019 *NextNotes* High School Composition Awards applications are now being accepted.

Students in grades 9-12 are invited to apply with a single composition in any genre or style by the deadline of January 7, 2019 for the fifth anniversary year of the *NextNotes High School Composition Awards*. Interested high school composers are encouraged to visit the website www.NextNotes.org and connect via [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#), and [Instagram](#).

NextNotes applications are submitted electronically through an online process. Six composers will be chosen to receive a scholarship along with travel to Minneapolis-St. Paul for a two-day workshop with professional composer mentors and professional musicians in June 2019. The workshop will conclude with an awards ceremony and culminating concert of the winning works.

The *NextNotes High School Composition Awards* are generously supported by The Augustine Foundation, the Rosemary and David Good Family Foundation, The Thelma Hunter Fund, the Dr. Fred Noah Gordon Charitable Fund of The Minneapolis Foundation, and other generous individuals. In-kind support is provided by program Partners MakeMusic, Inc and Noteflight.

For more information, please visit www.composersforum.org or www.NextNotes.org or email Laura Krider, Director of Education and Community Partnerships, at lkrider@composersforum.org. For more information on MakeMusic, please visit www.makemusic.com.

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