

## MNjcc Suzuki Program Teacher Bios – 2024-25 season

**Gretchen Paxson Abberger** – Emeritus Artistic Director of MNjcc Suzuki Program, Co-Director of MNjcc Suzuki Summer Music Camp, violin, viola and ensembles.



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 2-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, Sera Smolen, and Alice Kay Kanack. Gretchen taught at the Manhattan School of Music prep department, and Louise Behrend's School for Strings in NYC before moving to Toronto in 1994. Since then she has been free-lancing, teaching privately, and as a guest teacher at Suzuki workshops throughout the GTA. She has also taught for the Southwestern Ontario Suzuki Institute, and Camp Sparrow. As a guest teacher at winter workshops, Gretchen has taught all levels for RCM, Hamilton Suzuki Program, Etobicoke Suzuki Music, and in Ottawa for Suzuki Programs of Laura Nerenberg, and Leslie Wade. She teaches all levels at the North York Suzuki School of Music, and was Artistic Director for the Miles Nadal Jcc Suzuki Program from 1999-2024. This coming season Gretchen is looking forward to handing the reins of Artistic Director of the program to Kate Shaner, and taking on a new role as Emeritus Artistic Director, while continuing to teach in the program, and oversee the adult music programming. In 2010 Gretchen founded and directed the MNjcc Suzuki Summer Music and Arts Camp, which she will continue to co-direct alongside Kate Shaner.

In 2002, she 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. Gretchen approaches Suzuki philosophy from two sides of the Suzuki triangle, as a

teacher, and also as a parent of two adult children who learned violin by the Suzuki method studying at the MNjcc Suzuki Program.

### **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 13 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.

## **Nancy Lokan – violin, viola, chamber music, string orchestra**



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 at the MNjcc and beyond, and have embraced music.

Currently one of her grandsons participates in the MNjcc Suzuki Program. Nancy teaches privately, and group and ensemble classes for the MNjcc Suzuki Program.

## **Kerri McGonigle – cello (not teaching group classes this season 2024-25)**



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.

## **Elizabeth Morris - Chamber Music**



Elizabeth Morris, viola, B.Mus (perf), originally from Edmonton, began studying the viola at age 12 in the Edmonton Public School System, then continuing at University of Alberta, University of Western Ontario, the String Quartet Institute in Kingston, and the Banff School of Fine Arts. Recent studies have been at the Maggini Quartet Chamber Music Courses in Yorkshire, UK. As well as playing in the Tost String Quartet, she is currently principal violist with Orchestra Toronto. As a freelance musician, she has played with many ensembles including the Kitchener-Waterloo Symphony, Hamilton Philharmonic, Canadian Opera Company, the Royal Winnipeg and National Ballets, Stratford and Shaw Festivals, and was principal violist for Livent's productions of musicals presented at the Toronto Centre for the Arts. Elizabeth has also been active in the visual arts, creating watercolour and pencil crayon miniatures. An avid bread baker, she writes about it as well as humanitarian and environmental concerns in "blog from OUR kitchen". She also maintains the website for Peacemakers Trust, the Canadian charitable organization for research and education in conflict transformation and peacebuilding.

## **Rebecca Morton - Cello**



Cellist Rebecca Morton began her studies at the age of six at the Hamilton Suzuki School and went on to study at the Royal Conservatory of Music in Toronto with David Hetherington where she was awarded the Gold Medal for achieving the highest string mark in Canada. Continuing at the Eastman School of Music, she was the recipient of a six year scholarship and graduated with highest distinction receiving Bachelor and Master of Arts degrees under Paul Katz and Steven Doane. Since graduating, she has won numerous scholarships and awards including semi-finalist in the 2003 Eckhardt-Gramatte String Competition.



Currently living and freelancing in Toronto, Rebecca has taught extensively in the Toronto area as well as at McMaster University. Rebecca looks forward to joining the MNjcc Suzuki program in September 2024.

### **Lenny Ranallo - Guitar**



Drawing inspiration from Bach to Coltrane and beyond, American Guitarist Leonard Ranallo seeks to blur the line between composer, performer, and improviser. Equally comfortable in the concert hall or a local club, Ranallo brings a unique vitality to every performance. His fluency in both classical and electric guitar has resulted in performances across the United States and Europe.

As a performer, he's been featured at festivals in Italy, Scotland, and the US, and has won prizes in the Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra's Young Musicians Competition, the Philadelphia Classical Guitar Society Competition, and the James Stroud Competition. In 2012, Ranallo made his professional orchestral debut as a concerto soloist performing with the Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra.

Ranallo is a committed educator, having taught privately for over ten years. He was previously on faculty at the Peabody Preparatory and Swarthmore College, and is a certified Suzuki guitar instructor. He has given workshops and classes at Peabody Conservatory, Oberlin Conservatory, and the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland in performance, composition, and improvisation.

Ranallo completed his Master's Degree at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland studying under Professor Allan Neave and Matthew McAllister, and his Bachelor of Music at Oberlin Conservatory under Stephen Aron.

**Kate Shaner** – Artistic Director of MNjcc Suzuki Program, Co-Director of MNjcc Suzuki Summer Music Camp, violin, viola, Suzuki Early Childhood Education classes.



Kate is a dedicated and passionate Suzuki teacher, music educator and arts administrator, who brings enthusiasm and energy to each of her interests. She is the Artistic Director of the Miles Nadal JCC Suzuki Program and also teaches at the North York Suzuki School of Music.

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.

### **Elena Spanu – violin, improvisation, ensembles**



Elena Spanu started playing the violin at the tender age of three. She began her studies at the Royal Conservatory of Music in Toronto Ontario after signaling to her mother she wanted 'that' while pointing to the television screen of children playing the violin. She continued to develop her skills at Western University where she

received a Bachelor of Musical Arts. It is there that she discovered her interest in Baroque violin performance and moved on to pursue an Artists Diploma in the subject while at the University of Toronto under the direction of Jeanne Lamon and other members of Tafelmusik.

Elena currently holds the chair of principal second violin with the North York Concert Orchestra and plays regularly with the Niagara Symphony. As a freelancer, she also plays with orchestras and chamber groups in and out of Toronto. Elena has a keen ability to play sensitively with other musicians. She enjoys using this aspect of her skillset in aid-ing and fulfilling the powerful collective music making of an ensemble.

Elena has always enjoyed listening to the sounds and grooves of folk music, finding it to be uplifting and energizing. The isolation period of the pandemic created a space for her to master her favourite tunes and explore the genres of Old Time and Irish music.

Thanks to the prominence of virtual environments, she has had the opportunity to study under the guidance of exceptional artists and composers such as Patrick Ourceau, Judy Hyman and Rayna Gellert in the pursuit of these new genres. One of Elena's favourite pastimes is attending jams as she enjoys connecting with other musicians, learning new tunes, meeting new people and learning their

stories through music. She is often inspired by people of all ages and stages of life who are fiercely dedicated to their craft and love what they do.

Elena is a trained Suzuki violin instructor and Creative Ability Development coach. She directs the Toronto Suzuki Studio and is a faculty member at the North York Suzuki School of Music. She enjoys teaching music to both children and adults and strongly believes that one is never too old or too late to learn an instrument. Her goal as a teacher is to nurture her students to be their own creative guides. Through their instruments they learn the power of discipline, commitment and to trust and share their voices through their expression, creativity and connection to their community.

### **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, Suzuki Early Childhood Education classes**



Natasha is a passionate cello and music theory teacher who aims to help her students find their musical voice through a solid foundation of technique and a love of music. She has taught at a number of music programs, most notably the Miles Nadal JCC Music and Arts Summer Camp, as well as El Sistema and The Hammer Band, two social programs which bring free music lessons to students in underserved communities. Currently, she teaches cello and Suzuki Early Childhood Education classes at the Etobicoke Suzuki Music School and Miles Nadal JCC Suzuki Music programs. In addition to her teaching responsibilities she has an active career as a performer, freelancing at weddings and other events in Toronto.

Natasha is a certified cello and early childhood music 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, Units 9-10 with Dr. Shu-Yi Scott, as well as SECE Stage 1 with Sharon Jones. At Wilfred Laurier University, she enjoyed facilitating Supplemental Instruction sessions for the first-year music theory course, as well as tutoring private students.

Natasha is a graduate of 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.