

The Social Work of Music

Jazz composer and pianist Darrell Grant '84E measures his success not only by how his music sounds, but also by what it does.

By Karen McCally '02 (PhD)

Darrell Grant '84E has been a celebrated jazz composer and pianist since early in his career, when his first solo project, *Black Art* (Criss Cross), was named by the *New York Times* as one of the top 10 jazz recordings of 1994.

In 1997, he took an unusual step for a rising jazz artist. He moved out of New York City to Portland, Oregon, a place much less known for its jazz scene.

Grant and his wife, **Anne McFall** '85E, who studied viola at Eastman, were eager to start a new life there. Yet it was also a place Grant felt would allow him, to a far greater extent than in New York City, to form meaningful connections with audiences and with his community.


"One of the things I was interested in was the idea of doing well by doing good," says Grant, who teaches at Portland State University. "If you're going to create something, you get to determine the measures for success. And something I always wanted to figure out was ways to connect my musical projects to something broader in the community."

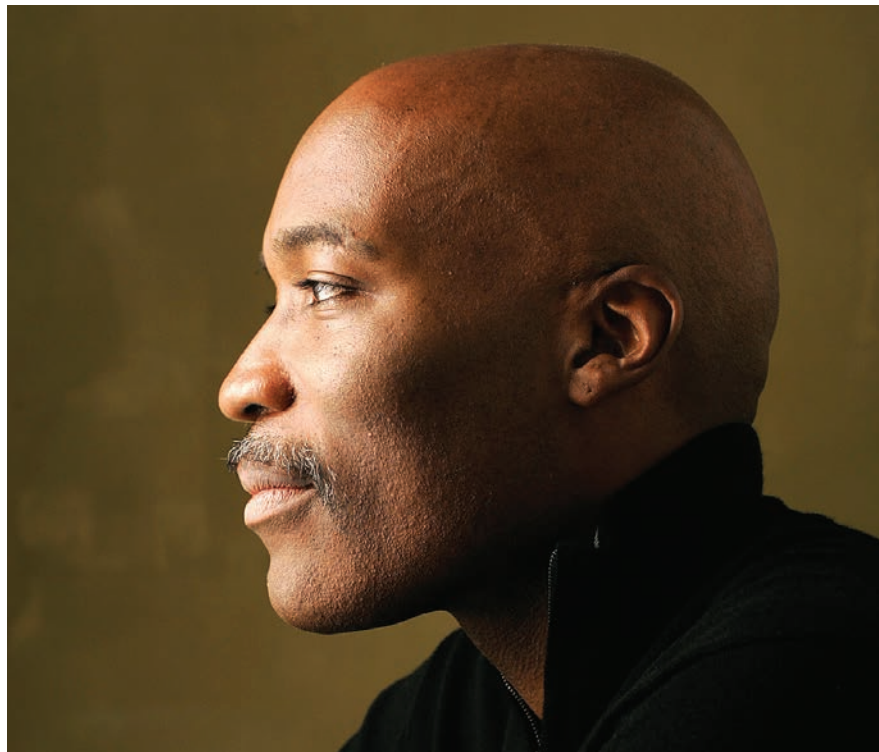
This past fall, Grant contributed an essay for a special edition of *Chamber Music* magazine (see "A Musician's Path to Change"). In it, he reflects on his own experience crafting a mission-driven musical practice. Artists have a unique means to "communicate, inspire, provoke, inform, and to move others to transform society and themselves," he writes, in articulating his own mission statement.

His projects have benefitted numerous Portland-area organizations. They've also explored deeply divisive areas of American life such as racial and regional conflict. In all cases, he says, music has the power to appeal to our common humanity.

But can drawing on our common humanity always achieve social transformation?

"That's the dilemma that everybody is grappling with," he says. "I don't have an answer." At the same time, he knows what his own approach will continue to be.

"There are individuals who will be able to make confrontational, powerful, combative art. I'm not one of those people. I'm probably always going to be one of those people with my hand open, rather than clenched." 



VALUE(S)-ADDED: In a variety of projects, Grant seeks to integrate his music with his values.

ESSAY

A Musician's Path to Change

By Darrell Grant '84E

A few years ago, the jazz pianist Herbie Hancock spoke with students in the music program at Portland State University, where I teach. In between questions about his musical history and his wide-ranging experiences, he shared some nuggets of his personal philosophy. I'll never forget his response to one student's question about the role of music in his life: "Music is important," he answered simply. "But I am a human being first and a musician second."

With its beauty, immediacy, and wonderful diversity, as well as its foundation in collaboration and deep listening, small ensemble music is a powerful vehicle for celebrating our shared humanity. A life in chamber music affords countless opportunities to build deep and meaningful interpersonal connections, and for nearly all of us engaged in the field—whether as performers, composers, or presenters—those connections sustain us in our professional endeavors.

That very capacity for community building, however, also compels us to look outward. How might we address the suffering of the people around us and offer a source of hope?

As a young African American growing up in the late 1960s, I was inspired by trailblazing performers like André Watts, Natalie Hinderas, and Leontyne Price, who were breaking new ground in the classical field; by jazz artists like Dizzy Gillespie and Louis Armstrong, who served as cultural ambassadors around the globe; by the social engagement of artists like Max Roach, Abbey Lincoln, Harry Belafonte, and Nina Simone in the movement toward civil rights; and that of African artists like trumpeter Hugh Masekela and vocalist Miriam Makeba, who used art as a vehicle for empowerment and a voice against injustice.

It made me wonder: Is there something unique about those who use their art as a platform for engaging with the wider world? Or does the possibility of artistically centered leadership lie in reach of all

of us? If so, what does it take for us to lead?

One day in the summer of 2004, I sat in the audience for a lecture by the South African minister Peter Story, who spoke about his experience in the historic struggle for justice and healing in South Africa. At the time, I was searching for inspiration and an organizing concept for my next recording. His stories of compassion, honesty, and courage in the face of unspeakable pain would become the inspiration for my 2007 album, *Truth and Reconciliation* (Origin Records). His talk also galvanized my own vision to use music as a tool for positive change. Shortly after that lecture I wrote the following personal mission statement:

I choose to believe in the power of humans to change the world. Art is the substance of our dreams and the medium through which resonates our most fervent hopes, highest aspirations, deepest truths, and most profound experiences. Those who create art possess a consequent extraordinary power to communicate, inspire, provoke, inform, and to move others to transform society and themselves, and we bear the responsibility to use this power to affect positive change in our communities and the world.

Linking my artistic practice to a mission challenges me to integrate my artistic choices and my personal values. In a culture in which economic bottom lines are often seen as the most significant measure of success, it provides a different barometer.

A few years ago, I created a course at Portland State entitled Artistry in Action. It provides an opportunity for students of all artistic disciplines to explore the ideas of mission and purpose in their artistic practices. In a section of the class focusing on community engagement, we do a game in which I hand out sections of the local newspaper and challenge the students to come up with an artistic project that addresses something they read there. The “game” is really an exercise in asking the most basic question: How can I help?

Today, the doors to engagement—by which I mean the opportunities to connect art with the issues affecting people’s lives, and confronting the thorniest challenges facing our society—have never been as wide open.

And every action, however small, counts. 

This essay is adapted from “The Path to Change” in “Art in Action: Social Change through Music,” the fall 2016 special edition of Chamber Music magazine. Reprinted with permission.

In the News



Hoffman (Moka) Lantum



Lynne Davidson

‘Leading Global Thinkers’ Advance Maternal Health Care

Hoffman (Moka) Lantum ’03M (PhD) and **Lynne Davidson** ’01 (PhD) were named to *Foreign Policy* magazine’s list of the 100 Leading Global Thinkers for 2016.

Lantum, an executive and consultant in health care delivery and management, and Davidson, a political scientist with expertise on poverty and microfinance, are the founder and executive director, respectively, of 2020 MicroClinic Initiative. The initiative, which Lantum founded in Rochester in 2011, works to improve maternal and newborn health care in underserved areas of the globe. Its program, Operation Karibu, has provided clothes, emergency transportation, birth preparation, training in infant care, and safe deliveries to thousands of mothers in rural Kenya.

Prior to their work on the initiative, Lantum and Davidson played multiple roles in the University and Greater Rochester communities. In addition to serving as director of medical services at Excellus

BlueCross BlueShield, Lantum, a native of Cameroon, founded the Baobab Cultural Center in Rochester’s Neighborhood of the Arts. Davidson is a former assistant professor of health services research at Rochester, as well as former deputy to the University president and vice provost for faculty development and diversity.

Two other members of the University community have made *Foreign Policy*’s list in the past few years. **Brian Grimberg** ’96, an assistant professor of international health at Case Western Reserve University, was named to the list in 2014 in recognition of his work on rapid malaria detection devices; and **Narayana Kocherlakota**, who joined Rochester’s faculty as the Lionel W. McKenzie Professor of Economics in January 2016, was named to the list in 2012. Kocherlakota, former president of the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis, is a leading scholar and public intellectual on monetary and financial economics.

Grammy Nomination Roundup

The 59th Grammy Awards will take place on February 12 at the Staples Center in Los Angeles. Nominees, who were announced in early December, include several Eastman School of Music alumni:

Steve Gadd ’68E, Steve Gadd Band, *Way Back Home: Live from Rochester, NY* (BFM Jazz): Best Contemporary Instrumental Album.

Geoff Saunders ’09E, bassist, as part of the O’Connor Band with Mark O’Connor, *Coming Home* (Rounder Records): Best Bluegrass Album.

Bob Ludwig ’66E, ’01E (MM), mastering engineer for Andrew Bird, *Are You Serious*

(Loma Vista Recordings): Best Engineered Album, Non-Classical.

Sean Connors ’04E, percussionist with Third Coast Percussion, *Steve Reich* (Cedille Records): Best Chamber Music Performance.

Kristian Bezuidenhout ’01E, ’04E (MM), *Mozart Keyboard Music, Vols. 8 & 9* (Harmonia Mundi): Best Classical Instrumental Solo.

Gene Scheer ’81E, ’82E (MM), librettist for the opera *Cold Mountain* (Pentatone Music) and **Christopher Theofanidis** ’92E (MM), *Theofanidis: Bassoon Concerto* (Estonian Record Production): Best Contemporary Classical Composition.