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Two Cleveland-Area Music Professionals Among Musical America's 2019 Professionals of the Year

CIM's Johnnia Stigall, alumna Crystal Carlson of CIPC honored by iconic magazine 4

CLEVELAND, OH – December 17, 2019 Crystal Carlson, director of operations at the Cleveland International Piano Competition (CIPC), and Johnnia Stigall, manager of Pre-College and Pathway Programs at the Cleveland Institute of Music (CIM) are among 30 individuals nationwide named as *Musical America* magazine's 2019 Professionals of the Year. The honor recognizes "the often behind-the-scenes individuals who keep the performing arts alive and well and relevant." *Musical America* is the oldest US-based magazine on classical music and is regarded as the definitive voice for the performing arts industry. More than 14,000 performing arts organizations and 24,000 musicians and professionals in more than 95 countries actively engage with *Musical America* annually. Cleveland is one of only a handful of cities to boast more than one honoree.

Carlson grew up in Caldwell, ID, and majored in voice at Capital University in Columbus. At the suggestion of her undergraduate voice teacher, she came to CIM in 2007 to study with Mary Schiller, head of CIM's voice department, earning a professional studies diploma in 2009. She notes the *Musical America* award indicates that CIM "turns out well-rounded musicians. At one point, I thought that if I took a 'real' job it would mean that I couldn't perform. If you stay within the music industry, you can still have opportunities to perform. For instance, I'm an outreach performer with CIPC and a church musician. My training from CIM means that I get to utilize all the things that I love about music instead of being defined as one thing."

Carlson, who became director of operations at CIPC in 2018, oversees all of the organization's programming, including concerts and events, education and outreach, as well as the box office and artist management for medalists.



Before arriving at CIM, Stigall, a native of Chattanooga, TN, served as project manager of the National Alliance for Audition Support (NAAS), a \$1.8 million, four-year initiative led by the [Sphinx Organization](#), [New World Symphony](#) and the [League of American Orchestras](#) to increase diversity in American orchestras by

enabling the success of musicians and conductors of color in professional orchestral auditions through mentorship, audition training and financial support.

Stigall, who holds a bachelor's and master's degree in viola performance from the University of Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music, said it was such an honor to have been included in *Musical America's* 30 Professionals of the Year alongside so many diverse, talented, hardworking professionals in the performing arts industry. "Especially as a black classical musician, it was a big decision to transition into performing arts administration since as a field we focus so heavily on diversity in the most visible areas, but over the years I've learned that there is also a significant need for diverse voices and perspectives in the behind-the-scenes work," Stigall said.

As manager of pre-college and pathway programs, Stigall guides CIM's pre-college students and their families through the demands of an advanced classical music education by developing creative new programs and measures to ensure prep students will receive a well-rounded, career-defining musical education.

In addition to their connection to CIM, both women see this honor in the larger context of Cleveland's reputation as a classical music mecca.

"One thing I've found the most surprising and interesting about Cleveland since moving here in July is the ripple effect of having so many world-class arts and cultural institutions in a city that makes people want to settle down and stay here," said Stigall, who relocated from Baltimore to Cleveland to take the CIM position. "Whenever I tell a new person I meet here that I work at CIM or that I'm a classical musician, they always have a great story to tell about what classical music has meant to them as a Clevelander – the generations of their family that took piano lessons at CIM, a relative who was in The Cleveland Orchestra, the organization in their community that they love that was started by a CIM alum. Cleveland is definitely a special place to work and live."



When Carlson moved to the city, she had been told it had a strong arts community and found this to be true. “There really was a sort of renaissance when I got here in 2007. It ended up feeling like home, which I didn’t expect. There are so many concerts everywhere, from the halls to churches to bars, there’s so much to take in. It’s incredible. I used to live in the Coventry neighborhood, and it was shocking that I could walk to three different performances from my home,” she said. “Where I grew up, you’d have to drive 45 or 60 minutes just to get to one performance. I got all of my cultural experiences from PBS.”

Both Carlson and Stigall say the best part of their jobs is the positive messages they’re able to convey through classical music – especially with two organizations committed to artistic excellence

that reflect the importance classical music to Cleveland and around the world.

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The Cleveland International Piano Competition

The Cleveland International Piano Competition promotes Cleveland as a premier piano destination by presenting community engagement and education programming and world-class programs. The organization’s four major programs and events include the quadrennial Cleveland International Piano Competition (coming in July 2020), the CIPC for Young Artists Competition, the CIPC Concert Series, and a music-based community outreach and education program. For more information, visit: clevelandpiano.org.



The Cleveland Institute of Music

The Cleveland Institute of Music empowers the world's most talented classical music students to fulfill their dreams and potential. Its graduates command the most celebrated and revered stages in the world as soloists, chamber musicians and ensemble members; compose meaningful, award-winning new repertoire; and are highly sought-after teaching artists, administrators and thought leaders. A testament to the excellence of a CIM education, more than half of the members of The Cleveland Orchestra are connected to CIM as members of the faculty, alumni or both. All students benefit from access to world-renowned visiting artists and conductors, intensive study with CIM's stellar faculty and the rich curriculum offered by CIM's partner Case Western Reserve University. In fall 2019, the diversity of CIM's student body increased by a remarkable 235 percent to an historic high: 15 percent of the 375 students. CIM is an integral part of Cleveland's arts community, presenting nearly 600 free performances and master classes on campus each year, and hundreds more at locations throughout the region, including Severance Hall. Explore cim.edu to learn more.

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