

**Kiana Del**

On 90.5 WUOL, I'm Kiana Del here with Sara Callaway, Executive Director of Louisville Academy of Music and composer Tahj Vaughn, discussing an upcoming concert on Friday, March 20, at 6:30pm in the perfect place to be on the first day of spring – Waterfront Botanical Gardens. Tahj, Sara, it's such an honor to share space with you!

**Sara Callaway**

Thank you for having us.

**Tahj Vaughn**

Thank you so much. Wonderful experience.

**KD**

Tahj, congratulations on the premiere of your piece *Deep Blue Water*. Can you tell us a little bit more about the music and your inspiration for writing it?

**TV**

Yeah, so *Deep Blue Water*, it's originally based off a song by [Maurice] Ravel, *Miroirs*. It's a piano song, and the first time I heard it, I was pretty...pretty inspired, actually. And I took a deeper dive into it, and I listened to it, and I kind of turned it into my own version of *Deep Blue Water*. It's a quartet piece with a flute, and originally it was just supposed to be just like the *Miroirs* song, but then I took it into my own hands, and I kind of explored what the meaning of water could really mean, just from the culture in the United States, how water is impacted, even from slavery and stuff like that, and just deep water. So when I was originally composing, I would usually watch an interview or something like that, just to get the emotions. And then I would compose off of that, and it really impacted just my daily life.

**KD**

Yeah, that's beautiful. It's my understanding your first experience composing came through the Louisville Academy of Music's two week camp dedicated to writing and performing the Summer Symposium. Can you talk about how that experience informed how you compose?

**TV**

Yes, ma'am. So the two week experience, I mean, it was probably one of the best experiences I've had in my life, really. Just the community, being around the LAM facility and the faculty and the students, I feel like it really gave me a chance to emerge with the people, and it really gave me a chance to really blossom. My...my first composition was called *Falling Blossoms*, and it really just allowed me to just set free, and ever since then, it's inspired me to compose more and more.

**KD**

Yeah, an inspirational environment always helps.

**TV**

Mmm, yes!

**KD**

Tell us about your composition style. Are you writing alone at the piano? Is it mostly in your head? Is it in collaboration with your fellow students and instructors? What does that look like for you?

**TV**

This is actually kind of funny. My instructor, he advised me to really be around other people. But sometimes it is a little harder. So usually I am by myself, either next to a piano, or in a room, or maybe right after school. I really like to get...really get in the mood, or get in the swing of it, let my emotions really take over. I really like to let my emotionality take over and just and just let it carry the way, really, for most of the part.

**KD**

That's great, do you have any "pre-game rituals" so to speak?

**TV**

Pre-game? I mean, like I said, usually it comes when I'm... My best composition I'd say, when I'm going through like a harder time. I really get a chance to express my emotions and release my emotions when I'm composing. So sometimes it'll be like, maybe I just did bad on a test, or I didn't like a comment that someone said to me. So then I'll be like, "okay, what can I do with this energy?" And sometimes I'll just sit down and I really let those emotions carry the composition.

**KD**

Yeah, put it in the music.

**TV**

Mmhmm!

**KD**

Sara, it's really exciting to see an ensemble made up completely of students. How did the student ensemble, Magnolia Chamber Players come to be?

**SC**

Well, they actually all auditioned to be part of the group. So there are six of them. We have a traditional String Quartet, two violins, a viola and a cello, and then another violist and a flute player. And they... we we serve all ages and all levels of students at the academy, but these are really our most dedicated students who you will hear at this concert.

**KD**

Awesome! Can you talk a little bit about the curation of the program itself? How do you see each of the composers our very own Daniel Gilliam, Reena Esmail, the usual suspects Ludwig van Beethoven and Felix Mendelsohn. How do you see them interacting with each other?

**SC**

Yeah, well, I mean, it's really a mash up. It's... there's a lot of tradition, there's a lot of innovation, which is something that we care a lot about at the academy. I did not pick all the pieces. Actually, a lot of the pieces were picked by the students themselves –

**KD**

I love that!

**SC**

And that kind of just created its own diversity of programming, which is really cool. And then also Tahj's piece, he had this string quartet with flute, which was the perfect combination for the Magnolia Players. So we're really excited to bring that to life. Of course, we love new music. Our composer of the year is Reena Esmail, so one of her pieces will be on the program, and then, of course, a shout out to local composer and WUOL host Daniel Gilliam will be on there as well.

So it's going to be a great mix of new and old, something for everybody.

**KD**

That's exciting. Is there anything you'd like folks to know about the academy or about the concert?

**SC**

Let's see... I mean, I think the students and the faculty are what make us really special. The amount of faculty who have worked with the students to get to this point. Both their private teachers, their chamber coaches, their composition teachers, summer camp teachers. It's really magical seeing all of those faculty work together to support a young person and to create opportunities for young people, and it's just so inspiring for me to see their work and their ideas come to life. I think especially with Tahj as a young composer, thinking of the academy as a place where we can kind of have a role reversal and have young people compose, not just play the music, but create their own music is very powerful.

**KD**

Yeah. This is a question for both of you. What is one thing you'd like listeners to take away from this concert? Tahj, we'll start with you.

**TV**

I'd really like the listeners to take away, just like I said, expressiveness and just deeper than just the music. One thing I like to mention is, like, when I compose, I really like to do it for more of like a service, rather than just doing it for just for the audience. I like to provide a service. I think

one thing I'm trying to provide for this song right here is history and being able to maybe feel the history in a sort of a sense. That's for me.

**KD**

Yeah! Sara?

**SC**

Hope and inspiration.

**KD**

Mmhmm! That's a great way to usher us into looking forward to –

**SC**

Exactly, great way to start the spring!

**KD**

Absolutely. Thank you so much for being here!

**SC**

Thank you for having us.

**TV**

Thank you, thank you so much.

**SC**

Thank you, Kiana.

**KD**

You have the chance to support Louisville Academy of Music and their mission to uplift the next generation of musicians and composers on Friday, March 20, at 6:30pm in Louisville's picturesque Waterfront Botanical Gardens. Information about how to reserve your tickets at [Louisville Academy of Music dot org](http://LouisvilleAcademyofMusic.org)