

A close-up portrait of a woman with dark hair, looking slightly upwards and to the right. She is wearing a white lace top and a small gold earring. The background is a plain, light grey.

# The York University Magazine

Winter 2024

Tech entrepreneur Eva Lau knows what's next

A red, stylized starburst or flower-like icon with eight points, positioned above the text.

# Venture On

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## THE PRESIDENT



**RHONDA L. LENTON**  
PRESIDENT AND VICE-CHANCELLOR

**THROUGHOUT HISTORY**, collaboration has been the driving force behind society's groundbreaking advancements. In a world where challenges such as climate and health crises, war and economic uncertainty transcend borders, pooling our diverse resources, expertise and talent is increasingly critical.

While universities, as autonomous intermediaries, have always collaborated to produce and mobilize knowledge and accelerate regional socio-economic development, the 21st century's knowledge-based economy requires that they expand the frontiers of both their scholarly and geographic impacts, and re-envision their institutions as platforms for social change.

When York was founded in 1959, it was designed to serve local postwar communities through programs, research and pedagogical innovation and advocacy. Today, our purpose includes bringing together local and global public, private and non-profit actors to catalyze the changes needed to prevent conflict, inequality and environmental degradation.

To fulfil this mission, we built new campuses spanning from Canada to Costa Rica and India, and strategically invested in critical interdisciplinary programs and collaborative research initiatives, including the \$318-million Connected Minds project, which aims to optimize the benefits and mitigate the risks of a techno-social collective; the \$7.25-million AI4PEP program to support AI-based health-care solutions in the global South; an \$8.7-million initiative to address global antimicrobial resistance; and a United Nations-backed Water Academy to address the global water sustainability crisis.

There is still a long way to go to achieve the UN Sustainable Development Goals at the heart of our 2020-2025 University Academic Plan. In response to the UN's call to action, we stepped up our commitment to sustainability with a target of achieving net zero by 2040 or sooner, and are building our network of more than 300 partners across 60 countries to support a new Internationalization & Global Engagement Strategy.

In the past year alone, we partnered with governments in Guyana and the Philippines, co-sponsored the first Canada-in-Asia Conference, hosted more than 40 delegations, visited 11 countries, joined four new coalitions and implemented temporary financial measures for students from conflict-affected countries. Other initiatives, such as the Global Research Excellence Fund, will further leverage the power of interdisciplinary knowledge and cross-sectoral collaboration to create targeted solutions for our most urgent challenges.

As a sustainability leader with a diverse community that includes more than 370,000 alumni across the world, it is our responsibility as a public institution and as an international university to mobilize lasting positive change. By continuing to work together, I am confident that we can realize a future that is more inclusive, peaceful and sustainable for us all.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY SOPHIE KIRK

## EDITOR'S NOTES



### Northern Lights

**SHORTER DAYS, LONGER NIGHTS**, blankets of cold enshrouding the darkness. Welcome to winter, the so-called dead season, where the mind becomes broody, awaiting the reawakening of spring. We are all waiting for the snow to melt and for the sun to shine brightly again.

It's a transitional period, thank goodness, so banish despair. The light will shine bright again, germinating a renewed sense of purpose. What that entails is up to the individual. But it is in the silence of winter when the inner voice sounds most loudly, articulating ideas that can irradiate the spirit, even on the darkest of days.

For inspiration, look at the alumni who illuminate the winter 2024 edition of *The York University Magazine*. Each is a bright light that can guide us through the winter months to keep pushing toward our own goals and self-betterment.

Some harness creativity to push themselves forward. They include Eric Choi, an aerospace engineer who writes award-winning speculative fiction on the side, and the acclaimed Canadian musician and composer Aaron Davis, a founder of Manteca and the Holly Cole Trio, whose latest project – debuting soon – is a score set to new poetry by Margaret Atwood.

Others are motivated by a sense of fairness. Christa Eniojukan, the celebrated head coach of York University's top-flight women's basketball team, is part of a growing movement toward gender equality in sport. Female empowerment is also

the theme of our cover story highlighting Eva Lau, one of only a handful of women in Canada to lead her own venture capital fund. Recipient of a 2023 *Report on Business* Changemakers award, Lau was recently back at Keele Campus for the launch of the Schulich School of Business's new MBA in Technology Leadership program. Lau knows something about that.

Not only is the engineer turned venture capitalist a proud Schulich grad, she is also a trail-blazing tech entrepreneur whose company, Two Small Fish Ventures, an early-stage transformative tech investor, makes big bets on everything from AI to blockchain to semiconductors and computing. Why does she invest in tech? "I believe in creating a better future," says Lau, echoing York's commitment to foster positive change for students, educators and alumni here in Canada, and around the world. It's a way out of the darkness, for sure. ●

— Deirdre Kelly

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**PUBLISHER** Jacqueline Janelle

**EDITOR** Deirdre Kelly

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**CONTRIBUTORS**

Neil Armstrong, Brennan Doherty, Mike Ford, Michael Grange, Horst Herget, David Jager, Nichole Jankowski, Katherine Laidlaw, Rebecca Payne, Chris Robinson, Joanna Thompson,

**CHIEF COMMUNICATIONS AND MARKETING OFFICER**

Susan Webb

**ADDRESS CHANGES:** [alumni@yorku.ca](mailto:alumni@yorku.ca) or 1-866-876-2228. Update your communication preferences at [yorku.ca/alumniandfriends](http://yorku.ca/alumniandfriends)

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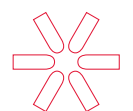
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### ON THE COVER



**Eva Lau**  
Photography by Mike Ford





PHOTOGRAPHY BY CHRIS ROBINSON

# Resisting Microbial Resistance

*How York scholars are preparing to win the war with superbugs*

**WHEN YOU ACCIDENTALLY** cut your finger, odds are that it won't turn into a life-threatening wound. A century ago, this might have been a concern. The reason minor cuts usually don't become a serious problem nowadays is that we have access to antibiotic drugs, such as penicillin and amoxicillin. But these miracle drugs are losing their effectiveness – fast.

Antimicrobial resistance is on the rise worldwide. The World Health Organization ranks it among the top 10 biggest threats to global wellness, and without interventions, experts predict that multi-drug resistant microbes will only continue to spread.

“The way we're using antibiotics right now is destroying them for everyone,” says Mary Wiktorowicz, York University professor of global health governance. But she and her team are working to help preserve effective antimicrobial drugs for future generations.

When most people think of antimicrobial resistance, the first thing that comes to mind is probably drug-resistant bacteria, such as the superbug MRSA. But the term actually encompasses an even wider range of resistances, including drug-proof viruses, fungal infections and parasites.

Micro-organisms usually become resistant to drugs through evolution. Any time a person uses an antimicrobial compound – be it spraying down a surface with Lysol or taking an oral antibiotic to fight an infection – there is a chance that a few genetically predisposed microbes will survive. Once those survivors start to repopulate, all of the microbes descended from them carry the same drug-resistant genes.

This is a huge problem. In addition to preventing superficial wounds from becoming infected, antimicrobials are

routinely used to keep livestock healthy, treat diseases such as tuberculosis and pneumonia and prevent infections in people with immune-suppressing conditions. They also allow for modern surgical techniques. If antimicrobials were to stop working completely, the world as we know it would undergo drastic change.

Broadly speaking, Wiktorowicz says, governments have taken two different routes to addressing this issue. The first is regulating antimicrobial use. Many European countries have adopted this approach – for example, by passing laws to limit the use of unnecessary antibiotics in livestock feed. This is in contrast to other nations that are trying to curb antimicrobial resistance by developing new drugs.

“In North America, we seem to have taken the approach that we're going to innovate our way out of this problem,” says Wiktorowicz, a founding member of the School of Health Policy and Management who, in addition to her work on antimicrobial resistance, has tackled everything from developing global frameworks to monitor zoonotic diseases with pandemic potential to assessing the evolution of mental health policy in Canada.

While such innovation can be useful, she cautions that it doesn't address the larger structural problems that lead to the rise of drug-resistant microbes in the first place. That's where Wiktorowicz's research comes in.

She and her team at York analyze the effectiveness of antimicrobial regulations in countries that have passed them. Then, they determine how similar interventions can be implemented in countries that don't have them, such as Canada, the U.S. and many parts of the global South. “We're looking very broadly at the system,” Wiktorowicz says, in hopes of mitigating a crisis. ●

— Joanna Thompson

*A York experiential learning initiative provides new entry points for Black students in health care*

PHOTOGRAPHY BY MIKE FORD

# OPENING DOORS

Nichol Edwards Snagg

**T**HE CONNECTIONS that Nichol Edwards Snagg (BA '22) made through a pilot project offering Black students from the Faculty of Health paid placements in health-related fields led directly to her new career.

A week after graduating from York University as a psychology major, she was employed as a peer support worker at the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH) in Toronto. Now, she runs group programming with a team of interdisciplinary staff including therapists, psychologists and other peer support workers offering a range of services for in-patients. Soon, she will be moving into a knowledge-translation role where she will be working with scientists, researchers, conferences and the public.

Edwards Snagg attributes these developments in her life to Work Integrated Learning for Black Students in Health, a York initiative funded by a Co-operative Education Work-Integrated Learning (CEWIL) Canada iHub grant. The pilot project started with the advocacy from two student-led groups – Black Students in Psychology Association and Black Students Mentorship Program – to provide more real-world experiences for Black students who have been historically under-represented in health-related professions and academia.

Since then, it has expanded from 12 psychology students gaining work experience over July and August, to 18 students from across the Faculty of Health (psychology, global health and kinesiology) in 2023.

“Without this program, I don’t think I would have been able to feel more confident to apply to a job like the one I have now,” Edwards Snagg says.

A collaboration between the Department of Psychology and the experiential education team in the Faculty of Health, led by Anda Petro, the initiative helps students gain experience in their field of interest and develop knowledge and skills to support their academic and professional journeys. It is uniquely positioned to address notable gaps in representation among Black professionals in the health sector – a vision that is shared by the placement organizations.

“These future leaders will be poised to improve research and service delivery for Black communities overall,” says

Monique Herbert, a professor in York’s Faculty of Health and the program’s academic lead.

Herbert also helped to build a support team of experiential education coordinators and faculty advisers to assist students to develop a learning plan for their work placements along with projected outcomes.

Students, who spend 100 hours in their placements, are encouraged to reflect on the experience at the beginning and end of the placement, and create a poster to show the academic team the trajectory of their experiential learning journey.

Orientation sessions focus on being in the workplace for the first time, what it’s like to be Black in a corporate space and how to integrate as students into the workforce.

“Throughout the experience, we had check-in points with our supervisor at our placement and then our York academic supervisor would review the feedback, asking questions to get us to connect with them even further,” says Edwards Snagg, adding that she got to meet “amazing York staff dedicated to making sure there is more diversity in the health field.”

“That kind of synergy of the academic and the experiential is cool because students – some of them for the first time – had one-on-one time with their professor, which was huge for them,” Herbert observes. “A lot of their feedback was around the connections they had with their faculty adviser and the connections they had with supervisors on-site.”

Because students had the “ideal experience” of doing a degree and seeing how that can apply in the real world, Herbert believes it built students’ self-confidence. “They were involved at every step of the process.”

Edwards Snagg’s supervisors ended up being references for her CAMH job, where she now applies many of the skills that she cultivated in the program whose community partners include Sunnybrook Health Sciences, Generation Chosen, Baycrest Health Sciences, and MAP Centre for Urban Health Solutions.

Two more health-care providers joined at the start of the current academic year – Reconnect Community Health Services and Humber River Hospital. Also enhancing the current program are student mentors from the first cohort, plus more culturally relevant training. Says Herbert, “It’s a win-win situation.” ● — *Neil Armstrong*

# MOVING ON UP

## YORK RANKS HIGH IN SEVERAL NOTABLE HIGHER EDUCATION SURVEYS

**A**N INTENSIFIED FOCUS on sustainable development combined with ongoing high-quality, transformative research has pushed York up one spot to fourth position in *Maclean's* annual university rankings report for the current academic year. York posted top-5 results in key areas of evaluation, including faculty awards, medical/science grants, and student scholarships and bursaries.

The move forward builds on York's advancement into the top 40 spot in the 2023 Times Higher Education Impact Rankings, released this past summer. Competing against 1,500 post-secondary institutions from around the world, York attained a strong global standing for progressing the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals in the following categories:

- SDG 1 – No Poverty (21st in the world)
- SDG 10 – Reduced Inequalities (25th in the world)
- SDG 11 – Sustainable Cities and Communities (12th in the world)

York also made a significant jump in the 2024 Quacquarelli Symonds World University Rankings, rising 103 spots to 353rd in the world – a 25-per-cent improvement in the University's standing over the past eight years. York also scored high in the 2023 QS Subject Report Rankings released last March.

The global survey evaluated more than 15,000 programs from 1,594 institutions; York placed high in three subject areas: English language and literature, philosophy and – for the first time – the performing arts.

"These latest QS World University Rankings build on York's positive global momentum," says University President and Vice-Chancellor Rhonda Lenton. "The impressive results are a testament to the high quality, interdisciplinary research, teaching and learning that take place at York." ●

— Staff



to cell damage that accelerates the progression of a variety of age-related diseases. It's all interconnected.

"With age and inactivity, the more mitochondria deteriorate, the less energy they produce, and the less likely people are to exercise. This leads to a further decline in mitochondrial function – a feed-forward mechanism," says Hood, an NSERC Tier 1 Canada Research Chair in Cell Physiology.

A pioneer in the study of exercise physiology, Hood has been studying the phenomenon for decades. Where other researchers are searching for a panacea to help in the mitochondrial renewal process, Hood is adamant that there is nothing better than exercise for restoring mitochondrial function and cellular regeneration.

His research looks to discover if the benefits of exercise at the subcellular level are even greater than we currently know. To shed new light on why poorly functioning mitochondria accumulate in aged muscle, Hood has tasked himself with examining the role played by lysosomes in the aging process.

Known as the "Pac-Man" organelle, lysosomes are responsible for destroying cellular waste, including mitochondria that no longer function as they should. Currently, there is virtually no knowledge about the role of lysosomes in aged human or animal muscle. "The forgotten organelle is what I call it," says Hood, founder of the Muscle Health Research Centre (MHRC) at York, the largest centre of its kind in Canada.

But they are important, he emphasizes. Lysosomes can clear out bad mitochondria from muscle, a process that slows with age. Why does this happen?

To help find out, the Canadian Institutes for Health Research (CIHR) has recently awarded Hood with more than \$1 million over five years.

"We will be studying whether or not the removal of bad mitochondria can be improved by regular exercise, whether there is a biological sex difference between males and females in the removal of mitochondria, and whether it's affected by age," Hood says.

He will also use the funding to explore whether exercise can also synthesize new lysosomes or improve their functioning.

"If we can improve lysosomal function with exercise, then that's another reason to adopt an exercise program – not only for the benefit of synthesizing new mitochondria, but also for the benefit of improving lysosome function." ●

— Nichole Jankowski



PHOTOGRAPHY BY MIKE FORD

## MUSCLING IN

The fountain of youth?  
It might be closer than you think

**E**XERCISE IS KNOWN to be good for you – it keeps you agile, active, healthy and fit. Even better, a growing body of research shows that regular physical activity can help you live longer by slowing the aging process. How does that work, exactly?

According to David Hood, a professor in the Faculty of Health at York University's School of Kinesiology & Health Science, the answer lies in mitochondria, the powerhouses of cells. When mitochondria age they become weak and dysfunctional, triggering the release of molecules that lead

CRYPTO

COUNTDOWN

## A team of York specialists is following the money, as another bitcoin 'halving' approaches

**S**OMETIME IN APRIL, the rewards for mining bitcoins will be cut in half. Currently, crypto mining companies – operating in numerous locales worldwide and all racing against each other to process huge amounts of transactional data that can lead to a big financial win – receive 6.25 bitcoins, valued at roughly \$320,000 as of the time of writing, when unlocking a portion of the blockchain. But come the halving, the price will drop to 3.125 bitcoins, a full 50-per-cent reduction. To an outsider this might seem unfair, if not entirely arbitrary.

Indeed, no central authority approves a bitcoin halving, three of which have happened before: in 2012, 2016 and 2020. But the process is baked into cryptocurrency's very code. It exists largely to push bitcoin's valuation to even greater heights.

But what does the halving mean for bitcoin holders and miners? And how about the rest of us?

These are questions pondered by a team of York faculty and students studying digital currencies from a variety of perspectives. Supported by York University's Catalyzing Interdisciplinary Research Clusters initiative, the crypto scholars are mapping the locations of bitcoin miners around the world, and looking at how cryptocurrencies achieve consensus when validating transactions. They are also following the halving, one of the most fundamental components of bitcoin, to better understand the world's oldest and most renowned digital currency.

It's become an increasingly important field of study because, though once considered a highly risky and esoteric domain of global finance, bitcoin is today becoming mainstream, incorporated into established financial institutions. Some of the biggest hedge funds in the world – more than 300, according to a PriceWaterhouseCoopers report – are now going in heavy. They include such influential business entities as BlackRock and Fidelity Investments. BlackRock CEO Larry Fink said in a report from financial news source Barron's that bitcoin could "revolutionize" finance, and that he wants to make it cheaper for investors through an exchange-traded fund (ETF).

Johnson Jose Mathew (MBA '23) is a research assistant at the Schulich School of Business and a marketing specialist at regulated crypto exchange VirgoCX. He is not surprised that

the business world is becoming bullish about bitcoin. A main reason, he explains, is that bitcoin has a built-in mechanism to avoid inflation, unlike fiat currencies, which is a major reason why it's so attractive to investors. A central bank, he explains, could theoretically print money forever, with no cap on the amount entering an economy, leading to hyperinflation.

Instead, the inventor of bitcoin – an unidentified person or team known as Satoshi Nakamoto – created a fixed cap on the amount of bitcoin in circulation. Only 21 million blocks can ever be created, and every four years that number is downsized by a half to preserve value. "Bitcoin's inventor deliberately made it with this deflationary kind of curve," Jose Mathew says.

Henry Kim is co-director of York's blockchain.lab. He says that a bitcoin halving presents a potential upside for those intent on mining it. "What the miners are banking on, effectively, is that in the long run after the halving, the current prices will eventually double," Kim says.

Andrea Podhorsky, a York professor of economics, agrees, but points out that plenty of other variables can affect the price of bitcoin, from the implosion of a major player such as crypto exchange FTX, to cryptocurrency regulations imposed by governments. Ultimately, she says, the process of bitcoin halving harmonizes the entire cryptocurrency's value and the number of miners validating transactions.

Amirreza Radjou, a second-year master's student in computer science who is currently working with York's crypto scholars, compares the effect of halving to the mining of a precious ore, such as gold. If gold could be mined everywhere, by anyone, it simply wouldn't be valuable because of how commonly it could be found.

The reverse is also true. If gold miners realized the worldwide supply of the ore was far less than they thought, they'd start to worry about where gold would come from in the future. "You would naturally believe that the price of gold per ounce would go up," Kim says. "That's the idea." ●

— Brennan Doherty

## *A York study examines the highs and lows of self-medicating youth on cannabis*

**J**UST OVER FIVE YEARS AGO, when Canada's Cannabis Act legalized recreational cannabis use in all provinces and territories, the rush to light up was noticeable, especially among the nation's youth. Between 2017 and 2019, cannabis consumption by Canadians between the ages of 20 and 24 soared to the point that nearly half of the country's young adults used cannabis – with prevalence rates almost double that of older age groups – according to a 2019 national survey. But are these high rates of cannabis use among youth a problem? Jeffrey Wardell, a professor of psychology in the Faculty of Health, wants to find out.

As the founding director of the Behavioural Alcohol and Cannabis Lab at York University, which examines the multiple determinants of substance use and addiction, Wardell is researching the motivations and potential side effects of cannabis use among youth, including teens and young adults. Their numbers are high.

Citing the most recent data from Health Canada, Wardell notes that 45 per cent of young adults are reporting current use of cannabis. One cause for potential concern is the growing number of youth who say they take cannabis for medicinal purposes to relieve pain, feelings of anxiety and other mood disorders. Yet, most do not seek medical support for cannabis from a doctor, so they may be self-medicating without a clear understanding of the potential risks involved.

“There's a gut belief that cannabis isn't risky,” Wardell says. “But we still don't know if it's going to be safe in the long term. There's just not enough research to validate the assumption.”

But there is research that finds young people who say they use cannabis for medical reasons might be overdoing it.

“I did compare them with those who said they took cannabis for recreational reasons,” Wardell says, “and what we found is that there were a lot of differences in this group,

the biggest difference being that the youth who reported using cannabis for physical and mental health reasons were much more likely to be daily users and more likely to report cannabis-related problems.”

Wardell's investigation – the results of which were published in 2021 in the *Journal of Adolescent Health* – also found that youth who said they used cannabis for medicinal purposes generally had an elevated risk of cannabis-use disorder compared to those who reported using it recreationally.

“I'm not suggesting that cannabis has no benefit to youth who use it,” Wardell adds. “I'm saying we need to raise awareness that such behaviour is happening at an elevated rate, largely outside a health-care context, and that there could be risks involved.”

To mitigate those risks, Wardell and his fellow researchers at York's BAC Lab recently launched a cannabis-tracking smartphone app for youth as part of the next stage of their research program. Featuring a complex design, the interactive app surveys young adult participants' medical cannabis experiences over a two-week period by means of prompts linked to an anonymous online questionnaire.

Some of the questions target times and days of use, solo versus group consumption habits, cannabis strains and quantities, symptoms before and after ingestion, purchasing locations and more. The aim is not to police or even censure cannabis use among youth. “It is to figure out if young people are making smarter decisions when taking cannabis for symptom management,” Wardell says.

“Right now, they are not getting advice from their doctors and they are not asking for it. So we have some catching up to do. The data will help us to target our education efforts towards behaviours that are risky. It will help us to help them to help themselves.” ●

— Deirdre Kelly

# INTO THE WEEDS



PHOTOGRAPHY BY MIKE FORD



*Startup investor Eva Lau, one of only a handful of women to front a venture capital fund, has a well-honed instinct for what is happening next*



# VENTURE ON

BY KATHERINE LAIDLAW PHOTOGRAPHY BY MIKE FORD

**T**O SAY EVA LAU (MBA '05) is on a hot streak would be an understatement. This past fall, she spoke on a panel at Princeton University. She walked the red carpet at the TIFF Tribute Awards gala. She accepted an impact award from WeWorkingWomen, a company that showcases Chinese women's accomplishments, and then received a 2023 *Report on Business* Changemakers award. She gave the keynote speech at Toronto's Small Business Forum; she was on hand to launch Schulich's new MBA in Technology Leadership program as one of its esteemed advisory council members – and an alumna of the school.

But when I meet her at the office of Two Small Fish Ventures, the venture capital fund she founded in 2014, she's beaming with excitement about something else entirely: a circuit board. Moments before, her small office was filled with people. She'd been expecting a founder and two engineers for a meeting, but they brought their entire team to show her what they'd created: temperature-responsive fabric, with a wearable device that she's confident will help form the future of textiles. "It's just an incredible experience to be able to learn from the people who are building the latest and greatest, and be part of that conversation," she says.

Lau is part people-reader, part psychic, all venture capitalist. It's her job to find wickedly smart people creating the next great thing and help them do it by investing with them. To say she's good at it would be an understatement.

**WHEN I ASK LAU** for the secret to her fortune-telling, she laughs, and tells me about a time it failed her. She graduated from Schulich in 2005, with two young children and a husband who'd just quit his engineering job to launch a startup. When he came home one day to tell her his idea – a storytelling platform for people who wanted to read and write on their phones – she rolled her eyes. "Why would people want to do this?" she asked. "I thought, this is the stupidest idea." The biggest phone screen at the time was the Motorola Razr, nothing like the smartphones of today. But

she'd worked with her husband, Allen, enough to recognize the sparkle in his eye when he'd seized on an idea he couldn't let go. She agreed to try it.

"The thing that still keeps me going is I felt, and feel, that I'm sitting at the bleeding edge of technology," she says.

That company would go on to become Wattpad, and would be acquired 14 years later for US\$600 million. And Lau would take every hard-fought victory and lesson she learned along the way to inform what's become a well-honed instinct for what's next.

Lau grew up in Hong Kong, and moved to Canada on her own at 17 to finish high school at a girls' boarding school. She enrolled in industrial engineering at the University of Toronto. During her first year, her parents and sister finished the immigration process and joined her.

Just before her first year of university, she met Allen Lau through the youth group at her church. He was also studying engineering at U of T, though he was a year ahead. The two became friends and, after an eight-year-long courtship, got married. They became early employees at Delrina, one of Canada's first successful software startups, before it was acquired by Symantec. Lau's in-laws thought they were crazy. "At the time, they said, are you guys out of your mind? Two people in the same company? At a startup? What if they failed?" she says. They didn't, and the sale gave the couple enough savings to dive deeper into the world of startups. From there, they worked at Brightspark Ventures, helping founders find market fit and iterate their products.

So the pair knew enough about the industry and each other by the time Allen dreamed up Wattpad that Lau agreed to give him two years. They'd bet everything they had, and two years in, they were on the brink of selling their house to continue funding the company. "I was OK to lose everything," she says. "But at the same time, I had this huge fear of betting my children's future." Still, every time they came close to the edge, another door would open that encouraged them to keep going.

**THEY SAID,  
ARE YOU GUYS OUT  
OF YOUR MIND?  
TWO PEOPLE IN THE  
SAME COMPANY?  
AT A STARTUP?**





**RIGHT NOW,  
IT'S THE MOST  
INTERESTING  
TIME IN THE  
DECADE.  
EVERYTHING  
IS A  
BIG SWING**

After two years of grinding, making no money and going further and further into debt, the Kindle came out, sparking a mobile reading boom that would launch Wattpad into a new stratosphere of readership and possibility. Eva formally joined the company in 2009 as head of content and community, helping to turn the company into a platform with more than 18-million users by 2014.

That year, Lau decided she needed to step back from the company. She and Allen spent their mornings working on Europe time, their afternoons on North America and their nights on Asian readers and writers. She could outsource cooking. She could outsource cleaning. But she couldn't outsource mothering, so she took some time to care for her daughters. "I was trying to figure out what was next for me," she says. "And I started meeting with entrepreneurs." During that time, she began to field calls from entrepreneurs across the country asking for her feedback and advice. She'd scaled a company into a massive success, and they hoped she could guide them to do the same.

As she delved deeper into what founders were thinking about and creating, coffee meetings turned into pitches, which turned into writing cheques. She stayed disciplined, offering angel investments to only the most transformative ideas that crossed her desk. After two major wins from her angel investments in Bitstrips, which was acquired by Snapchat, and Skip the Dishes, she decided to raise her first venture fund.

**BACK AT HER OFFICE**, a room off a hallway filled with offices shared by other enterprises in Toronto's MaRS building, Lau exudes passion and poise in equal measure. She wears a crisp white shirt with balloon sleeves, and white sneakers studded with silver spikes. When I suggest she might fit the definition of "cool mom," she laughs, before recalling it was she who suggested her 21-year-old daughter get on Threads when it was released, not the other way around.

Lau is laser-focused on building out her fund's portfolio. In 2022, she closed US\$24 million for her third fund, with an

eye to investing in startups with two things: gritty, globally minded founders and transformative technology. By last fall, Lau was on track to close US\$30 million for 2023. She's looking for tech that transforms user behaviour, particularly tech related to the next frontier of computing. "Right now, it's the most interesting time in the decade. Everything is a big swing," she says. She's making big bets on everything from AI to blockchain to semiconductors and computing. Some of them have already paid off. Lau was an early investor in Ada, an AI customer service chatbot company that's now reached unicorn status, valued at more than \$1 billion. She also helped mentor and invest with the founders of Bench-Sci, a company that uses AI to accelerate drug development and that aided in the development of COVID-19 vaccines.

Lau's husband, Allen, joined Two Small Fish two years ago as operating partner, continuing their unique decades-long professional partnership. "The fun thing, and the boring thing, is me and Allen don't have a lot of hobbies. Really trying to be at the forefront of technology is what makes us really excited," she says. And while sometimes the two of them are so in tune the rest of their team has to play catch-up, or they have to remind each other just to enjoy morning coffee at the cottage without work talk, their partnership really comes down to: "you watch out for me, and I watch out for you," Lau says.

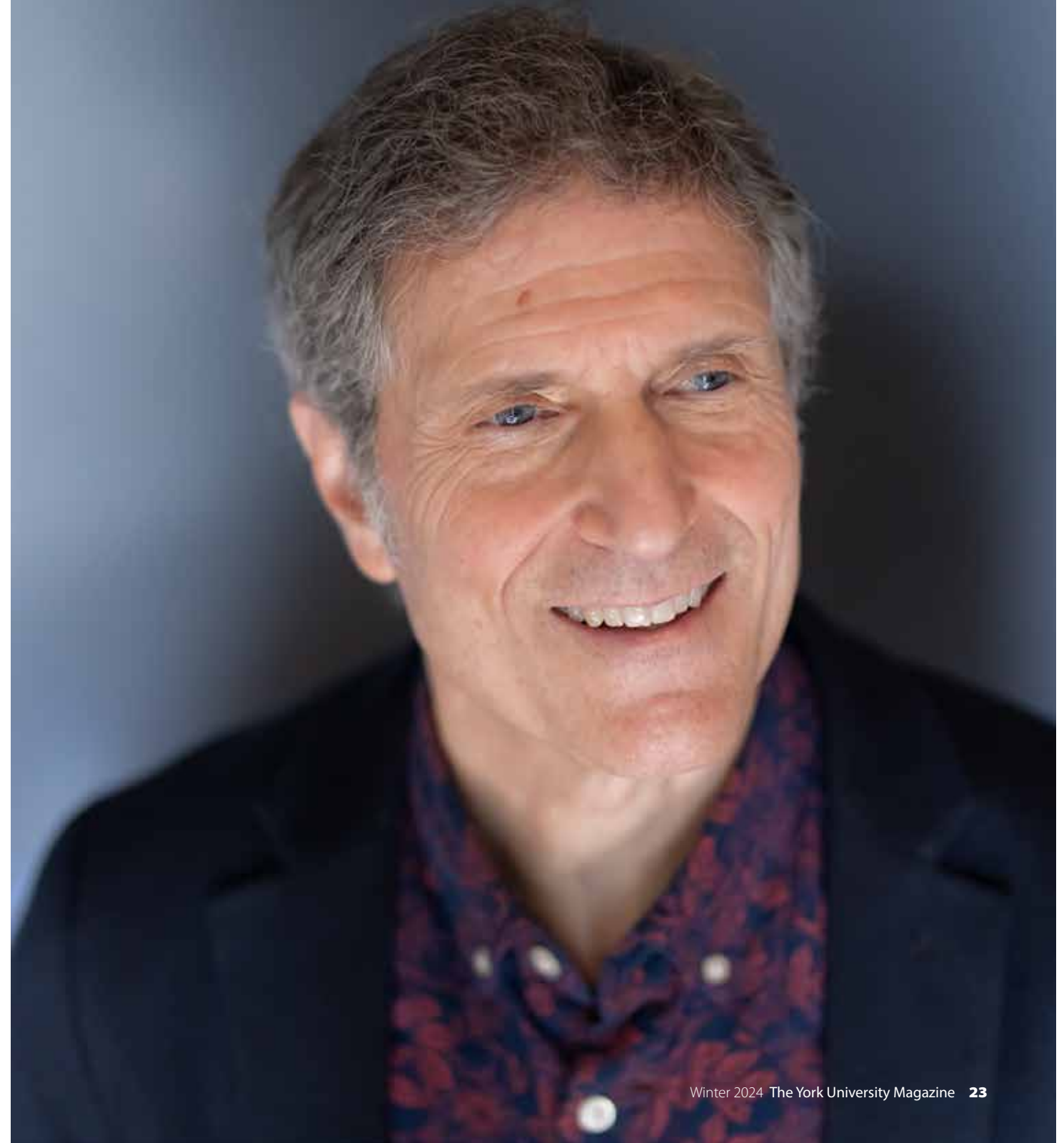
The firm is constantly examining new ideas, seeing upwards of 1,000 pitches a year from aspiring entrepreneurs. "We want to be one of the best-performing funds. And I'm confident we can do that. And I think we also want to create far more success stories. And I think we absolutely can." Lau describes herself as an artist at heart, an engineer by training, and an investor by profession, and what underscores each is a relentless curiosity and desire to be delighted by what's new. After all, who doesn't want to be the first person to know about the next big thing? Meeting the people on the vanguard of that transformation is what keeps her motivated. "We're two small fish in this ginormous ocean of innovation," she says. "But we believe we're two mighty fish." ●

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# THE BEAT GOES ON

BY DAVID JAGER  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY HORST HERGET

*Acclaimed Canadian musician Aaron Davis  
plays it forward with a new collaboration  
involving Canadian cultural heavyweights*



**York gave me a way to listen to  
and understand music from a variety of idioms ...  
without the hierarchy**

**E**CLECTIC IS NOT AN ADJECTIVE that holds a lot of meaning for musician Aaron Davis (BFA '79). But he is the very definition of the word.

In his long and storied musical career, Davis has delved into the dense polyrhythm of Latin and funk with his band Manteca. He has explored every nook and cranny of the jazz, popular, world and pop songbook as founding member and pianist for the internationally acclaimed Holly Cole Trio. And he continues to accompany and collaborate with celebrated Canadian soprano Measha Brueggergosman-Lee on a repertoire that embraces art song, jazz, spirituals and gospel – notably on a new collaboration based on poems by literary giant Margaret Atwood.

If this weren't enough, he has also provided a wealth of tonal soundscapes for film and television that draw inspiration from every available style of the world music palette.

A resident of Toronto since 1975, Davis began his training in musical pluralism at York University nearly 50 years ago.

"York gave me a way to listen to and understand music from a variety of idioms ... without the hierarchy," Davis says during a recent phone call where the audible pep in his voice makes it clear that he remains fascinated and engaged with what he learned at his university. "This was possible," he continues, "because there were so many remarkable teachers there," he recalls. He singles out some of the professors who left an indelible impression.

"For jazz piano and theory, John Gittins really helped. Casey Sokol was a classical prodigy and chamber musician, an improviser in his own unique style. He's always been highly experimental, and he opened my ears to a lot of things. Balinese, classical, African music and all the different global cultures of improvisation."

Davis is adamant that without his five years of training at York, his musical journey might never have blossomed.

In fact, there was a point where he felt it might not develop at all.

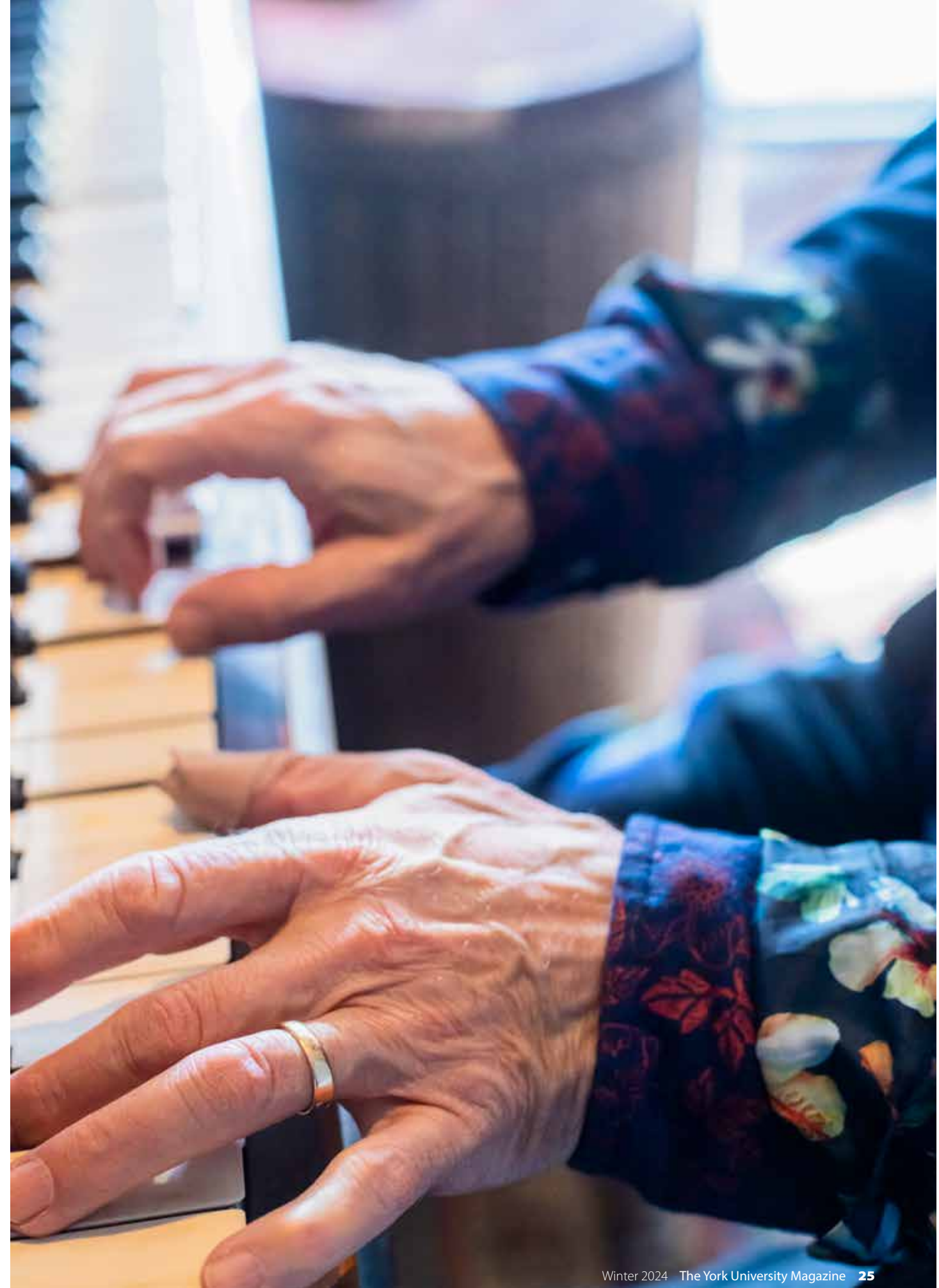
"I had started piano very early, did some classical, but I lost interest as soon as I discovered the Beatles and other pop bands. I formed a band in the fifth grade with my friends and played Beatles covers, Beach Boys, Peter, Paul and Mary. Later, in 1975, I played at the legendary Le Coq d'Or tavern on Toronto's Yonge Street with the Terry Logan Band. As you well know, there was a revolution in music during the '60s."

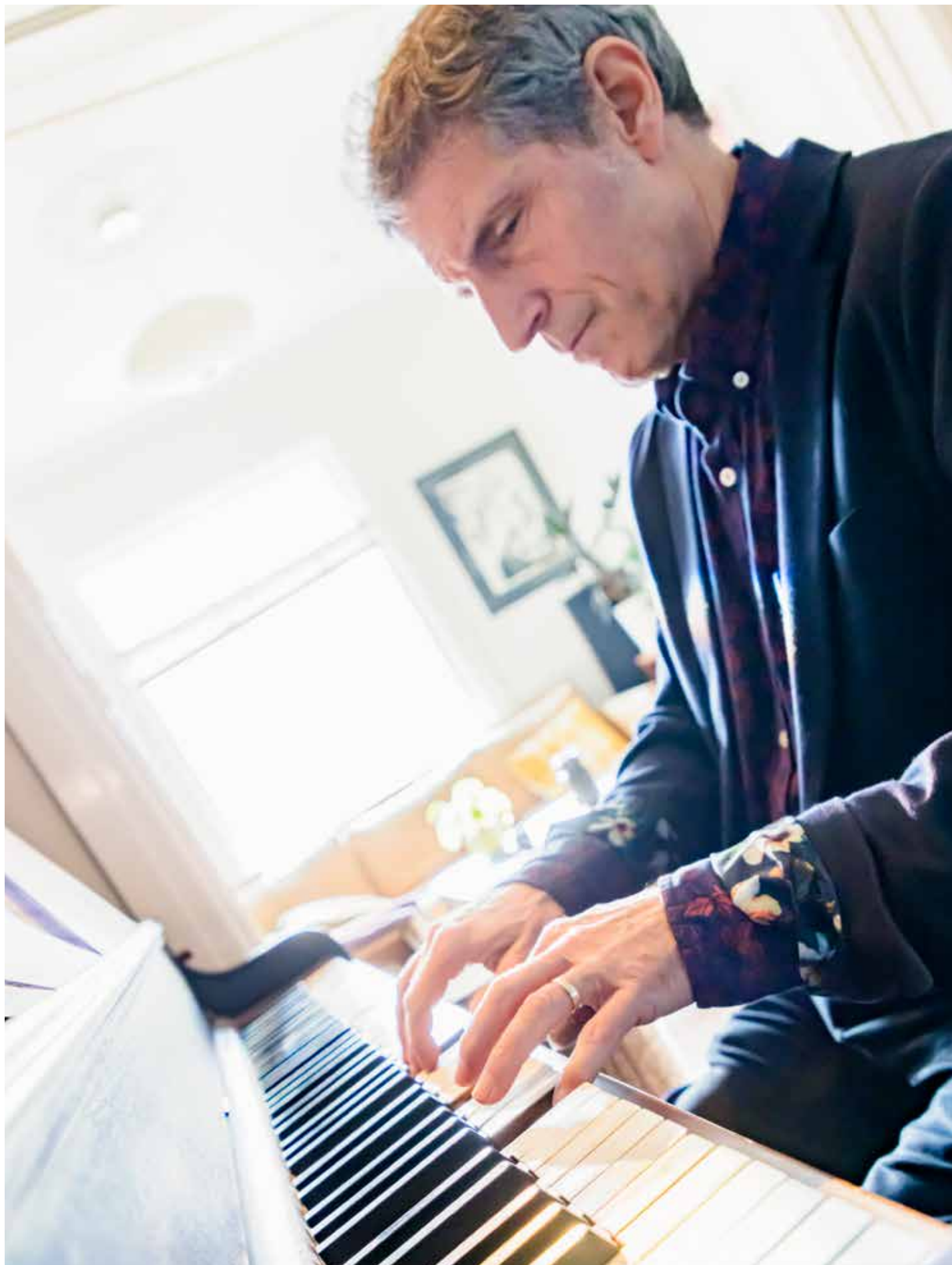
Davis's mother worked as a professor at the University of California, Berkeley, in the late 1960s, so Davis was able to visit and experience the Berkeley music scene firsthand at its epicentre. He remembers an evening at San Francisco's historic venue The Fillmore in 1968.

"Over two nights, I saw Blood, Sweat & Tears, James Cotton, Cream and the Jimi Hendrix Experience among other idiomatically-varied playing innovators, one after the other, all live, and all for the single admission price of around three dollars!" he recounts, still marvelling over his great luck in seeing these late-20th century musical giants all at once. "Everything had shifted. All kinds of music that were previously obscure or unknown were suddenly very cool. Blues, jazz, soul, funk, country, Indian classical, classical, world music. It was suddenly possible to delve into anything. It was like being a kid in a candy store."

But still unsure of his direction, musical or otherwise, Davis then returned to eastern Ontario to join a hippie-esque intentional community with a shared purpose involving home-grown food and shared manual labour.

"We were back-to-the-landers without heat, water or electricity. We were trying to live differently. But I wanted to pursue something other than just homesteading. That's





**With so many well-versed teachers who were also performers and improvisers, they were able to approach me at my level and help me find a way into music. It just clicked for me**

when someone told me about the amazing program at York, and I decided to attend.”

Largely self-taught when he entered the program, Davis knew the gaps in his musical understanding needed to be filled in, but without compromising his passion or curiosity.

“I was so green, I didn’t even know theory,” he says. “With so many well-versed teachers who were also performers and improvisers, they were able to approach me at my level and help me find a way into music. It just clicked for me.”

The training was as rigorous as it was exploratory. He remembers that Lorne Lofsky, a jazz student and guitarist in the program with him, was committed to memorizing three tunes a day. Davis himself was enrolled in five courses that helped him to develop a deep interest in polyrhythm and world drumming, among them the classes he had with Trichy Sankaran, a master of Indian classical Carnatic drumming. “The emphasis on world music and rhythm is still very strong at York, but it was really unique for the time,” he says.

This blend of different musical universes moulded Davis into the musician he is. Success followed soon after he graduated from York.

Davis started out as the pianist for Latin and world music pioneers Manteca, where his love of polyrhythm and brass arrangement skills came very much in handy. He then founded the Holly Cole Trio, which is recognized as one of the premiere jazz and adult contemporary ensembles of the last 30 years.

Established with Canada’s internationally acclaimed jazz-diva Holly Cole and bassist David Pilch in 1986, Davis’s audacious and adventurous ear no doubt contributed to Cole’s incredibly diverse repertoire and unique sound. The trio moved from success to success until it threatened to overwhelm his life.

“Manteca kept me busy from 1979 to 1991. I was also working with the Holly Cole Trio for much of this time, which

was playing everywhere. Eventually it got too busy. I chose to leave Manteca after the scheduling conflicts just became too much.”

Holly Cole remained a musical constant for Davis, while he also became involved in composition, as well as a cluster of ongoing musical projects, such as the Aaron Davis Circle of Friends, a shifting lineup of leading Toronto instrumentalists and singers who perform Davis’s compositions.

Today, his collaborations include new projects with, among others, Brueggergosman-Lee. At home with both the operatic and jazz worlds, the internationally acclaimed singer has specialized in art song recitals that have graced the stages of New York’s Carnegie Hall, London’s Wigmore Hall and Washington’s Kennedy Center.

Davis’s musical flexibility once again ensured that her repertoire would be as broad as Holly Cole’s has been. They collaborate actively on repertoire and arrangements that incorporate classical, jazz, gospel and dance, with Brueggergosman-Lee relying on what she calls “the unwavering genius of Aaron Davis on my side.”

With Davis, she is premiering a new song cycle inspired by Margaret Atwood’s 2020 book of poetry, *Dearly*. Billed as a “unique blending of the classical concert aria and jazz-influenced art song,” *Zombie Blizzard* will have its world premiere at the Jane Mallett Theatre in Toronto on March 3, with Davis performing with the Hannaford Smaller Band. “These are seven songs based on Atwood’s recent poetry,” Davis explains. “I composed the arrangement for piano, Measha, bass drum and ten brass instruments from the Hannaford Silver Street Band: a 33-minute-long song cycle. It was challenging because there is no regular metre or rhyme to these poems, but the journey has been very exciting.”

His unwavering devotion to the innovative, genre defying and yes, eclectic in music continues to astonish and delight new listeners everywhere, no small thanks to York’s innovative faculty and music program. ●



BY MICHAEL GRANGE  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY MIKE FORD

Women's basketball head coach Christa Eniojukan  
builds community on and off the court

# COACHING CULTURE

**WHEN DONE RIGHT**, coaching is a calling. It's not a job that gets left behind at the end of the day. It's a lifestyle where goals and challenges are ever-present, and where powerful, long-lasting bonds often form, with lessons extending well beyond the field of play.

But when first proposed to her as a possible career path, Christa Eniojukan (B.Ed. '04) wanted nothing to do with it.

It's funny to reflect on that now, given that the Guelph, Ont., native has been coaching basketball since she graduated from the University following a decorated playing career with the York Lions women's basketball team. The former guard played with the Lions for two seasons (2003-05), and was awarded most valuable player in her final year.

Currently the head coach of York's women's basketball program, Eniojukan is today widely regarded as one of Canada's most respected female coaches, after decades of success at the provincial and national team level.

So it's funny, but true: what has since become her life's

work was initially something she didn't think she ever wanted to do.

The idea was planted by her former coach Stu Julius, who worked with her when she was an undergraduate at Wilfrid Laurier University pursuing a kinesiology degree.

Having observed Eniojukan's on-court passion and off-court people skills, Julius suggested she take a master's in coaching and consider it as a future profession.

"And for some reason, I looked him dead in his face and I was like, 'I'll never coach,'" she recalls. "I don't know why. Maybe it was because I'd seen everything he'd had to put up with, but I just told him: I'll never coach. No, that's not for me."

She quit teaching to devote herself to coaching full time after a string of high-profile successes on the court. She coached Ontario's U17 provincial team from 2014 to 2017. In 2018, she was named the first University of Ontario Institute of Technology women's basketball head coach. In 2021, she returned to York, where she is now in the midst of her third season with the Lions. Eniojukan has won six national medals

as a provincial coach, including four golds and two silvers. This past summer, she served as head coach of Canada's U23 women's national team at the GLOBL JAM tournament in Toronto. Her team made it to the gold-medal finals, but narrowly lost to the U.S. in a spectacular game.

Those who know Eniojukan best aren't surprised about where she has landed.

"I always knew she was going to do something in coaching, to be honest," says York Lions hall-of-famer and former teammate Kim Gibbs (BSc '07). "She was basically like a coach when she played ... she had the ability to keep calm in high-pressure situations and she had a good connection with her teammates ... she just had that extra edge or that extra vision on the court that not everybody else did."

But Eniojukan wasn't drawn to coaching for her love of the sport alone.

As a Black female coach and mother of two (her son Isaiah, 14, and daughter Zaria, 12, are aspiring players), Eniojukan has come to recognize that she has a unique platform to help empower women through sport, and serve as an example for how basketball can be a conduit for positive change personally, professionally and in the broader community.

"I got into teaching in the first place to help young people grow and be the best version of themselves, and now coaching is an extension of that," she says. "I'm always going to push and challenge people to be better, and it just so happens that basketball is the tool that I use. I tell the girls on the team that it's our job to serve and build the community in any way that we can. I don't even think they fully understand the power and what is in front of them."

Eniojukan is definitely on to something.

While the presence of basketball in general has grown in Toronto and Canada over the past 20 years, driven by the success of the Toronto Raptors and the way the sport has become intertwined with popular culture, women's basketball in particular is having a moment.

Last April, the NCAA women's final set ratings records and was reportedly the most widely streamed basketball event – men's or women's – ever on U.S. cable giant ESPN. The first WNBA exhibition game in Canada, held last May at Scotiabank Arena, sold out in minutes. This all bodes well for women basketball players in this country. The Canadian women's national team – several members of which Eniojukan coached in the development leagues – is today ranked

fourth in the world, and is poised to qualify for its fourth straight Olympic tournament.

"The women's basketball space is totally growing, especially in Canada," says Tamara Tatham, a two-time Canadian Olympian, and friend of Eniojukan, who coaches at University of Toronto, York's crosstown rival. "You can just kind of see it. It's tremendous."

This past October, Tatham joined forces with Eniojukan to help organize the Athlete Women Empowered Classic, a four-team U Sports women's basketball tournament that took place at York's Keele Campus. The other organizers were Concordia University's women's basketball head coach Tenicha Gittens, and Trinity Western University's women's basketball head coach Cheryl Jean-Paul – together representing the only four U Sports women's basketball teams coached by Black women in Canada.

The five-game, pre-season tournament went beyond just playing ball. The event included workshops, panel discussions and networking sessions with coaches, athletes and industry leaders. The hope is that it will become an annual event that rotates across the four founding post-secondary institutions.

For Eniojukan, it's come full circle.

She wanted to be a leader and to have an impact on her community, going back to her playing days at York, but didn't initially realize those goals could be achieved through basketball and coaching.

Her view now?

Coaching women's basketball at a school like York couldn't be a better place for her to achieve those goals.

"It took me a while to understand the platform coaching could give me because ... I never saw someone like me doing what I do," she says. "So maybe that's why I never considered coaching initially, because there was nobody coaching that looked like me ... then you layer it with [being a] Black female, but then you layer it with even being a mom ... there's barely anybody that has all those different facets.

"Now I try to lead with that, and try to make sure that the people that I surround myself with also have the same heart. Our [York women's] team motto is, 'Build an emphatic winning culture,' and that means not just winning games. It means emphatically caring for others, and that caring extends not just to your team, but to your community, too." ●

**I TELL THE GIRLS  
ON THE TEAM  
THAT IT'S  
OUR JOB  
TO SERVE  
AND BUILD THE  
COMMUNITY  
IN ANY WAY  
THAT WE CAN**





# Alumni

## Building a Legacy

Meet the artist-educator  
behind nearly 30 years  
of Black History Month posters

BY NICHOLE JANKOWSKI  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY MIKE FORD

**O**RDER OF CANADA recipient Robert Small (B.Ed '14) staged his first political protest nearly 40 years ago, after encountering another student's assignment on South Africa hanging in a hallway of his North York secondary school. Small was in Grade 12 at the time, but he remembers the moment that galvanized him into action.

"Their project was what are the top-5 good things about Black people and what are the top five bad things," recalls Small. "This is something that a student not only made, but that a teacher allowed to be put up on the wall."

After Small's complaint, the project was taken down.

It wasn't until nearly seven years later – when he was 25 – that Small first considered making his own poster and righting that wrong.

A self-taught illustrator who once dreamed of working in comic books, Small set his mind to creating a poster that would celebrate Black history and the contributions and accomplishments of Black Canadians.

That initial poster marked the beginning of a national educational initiative that, in 2007, Small developed into Legacy Enterprises, a Toronto-based business that uses posters to educate the public about the contributions of Black people worldwide.

"When I was thinking about creating the poster," Small says, "I was actually thinking about that [high school incident], and thinking about how just passing by, I read something that disempowered me." His aim was to create a poster that would empower people every time they looked at it, and stay up on the walls a long time.

It is now three decades later, and Small has since sold more than 400,000 of his Legacy posters to schools, businesses, public institutions and individuals across Canada. The Bank of Montreal distributes Small's posters through its many branches.

Priced at \$15 each, the posters feature Small's hand-drawn portraits of Black Canadians, along with short bios highlighting their contributions to society. He estimates that he's profiled more than 100 different Africans and people of African descent in his work.

Today, they form an essential component of Black History Month celebrations across the country.

Toronto-area school boards became early clients, such as the East York Board of Education and the Scarborough Board of Education (before the amalgamation of the City of Toronto).

"They probably looked at what I provided them as a god-send, because it made it seem like they were doing a lot, when actually they were just buying a poster off one guy and sending it to every school," Small surmises.

"There's still so much more work to do."

That work involves realizing how important it is "to educate Black youth about the contributions of what Black people have done, so that they can be inspired and know they're capable of doing so much more, given that there's a precedent for accomplishing great things."

He cites Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech by way of illustration. Often recited and studied in schools today, its venerated status implies it inspired progress, Small says.

**ROBERT SMALL'S  
BLACK CANADIAN LEGACY POSTERS**



Yet, days before his assassination in 1968, King himself voiced doubts about his society's willingness to change. It compelled Small to reflect on the importance of having a community write and record its own history. Otherwise, "you're leaving it up to others to say what they want about that history."

Determined to contribute, while a student at York, Small – a Canadian of Bajan descent – volunteered with the Caribbean Students Association and put on plays. "There was a lot of political activity with regards to the Black community, and memories I have with people that I attended with that were essential to me becoming the person that I am today," Small shared in an alumni profile in 2022.

For his long-standing commitment to highlighting the accomplishments and contributions of Black people in all sectors of Canadian society, in 2022 Small was inducted into the Order of Canada, one of the nation's highest civilian honours.

"I feel like I'm still celebrating it every time that someone brings it up," Small says.

"I'm starting to realize that what I do is impacting society on a greater level." ●



**Noteworthy**

**What If?**

A fiction-writing aerospace engineer changes history in an award-winning story

**A** ROCKET science fanatic from a young age, Eric Choi (MBA '06) was present at the Kennedy Space Center in February 2003 when the space shuttle Columbia disintegrated on its return to Earth, killing all seven astronauts onboard.

The horror of the moment stayed with Choi for years, influencing his early career as an aerospace engineer, and his decision to become a writer of alternate history, a genre of science fiction where a past event is creatively manipulated to produce a different chronicled outcome.

A published author and editor of anthologies, including 2022's *Just Like Being There: A Collection of Science Fiction*

*Short Stories*, Choi recently applied his time-bending narrative skills to the Columbia disaster. His novelette, "A Sky and a Heaven," emerged as the winner of a 2023 Sidewise Award for Alternate History at the World Fantasy Convention this past October in Kansas City, Mo.

It's a dream come true on many levels.

"I always wished that something had been done to try and save the crew of the space shuttle," says Choi, relishing the honour of his literary achievement. "My story provides a glimpse of what might have been." ● — *Deirdre Kelly*



**ENGAGING WITH  
THE CAMERA**

How a dissident filmmaker is using her craft to effect positive change

**W**HEN A GAY FRIEND died under mysterious circumstances in her native Iran, Atefeh Khademolreza (MFA '19) felt compelled to speak out in the most effective way she knew how – by making a film.

*Meteor*, a short feature that debuted at the 2023 Toronto International Film Festival, exposes the state's decades-long oppression of women and members of Iran's LGBTQ+ community. The film was accepted to the American Documentary and Animation Film Festival and Film Fund – an Academy Award-qualifying festival – taking place in Palm Springs, Calif., in March.

"As I grappled with the tragic loss of my queer friend in Iran," said Khademolreza at the time of the premiere, "my aspiration was to lend a voice to his experiences and to all those silenced by oppressive systems."

The film's politically charged subject matter has made it

dangerous for Khademolreza to return to her homeland for fear of arrest.

But luckily for Khademolreza, a protege of the late Iranian filmmaker Abbas Kiarostami, Canada has given her a sanctuary where she can freely create films that expose "the myriad challenges people confront in their pursuit of freedom and justice."

Khademolreza first came to Canada in 2018, to further her film studies with Canadian filmmakers Philip Hoffman and John Greyson (MA '10) at York University. While a student in the department of Cinema & Media Arts, she found an environment where she felt empowered "to be creative and to find my own voice."

Today she uses that voice not just to tell compelling narratives in film, but also to agitate for positive change.

From her home base in Toronto, Khademolreza is a vocal exponent of the "Woman, Life, Freedom" revolutionary movement that erupted following the brutal 2022 death of Jina (Mahsa) Amini, who died after she was arrested by Iran's so-called morality police.

Khademolreza's next project, a feature film whose story is set in Iran, will further the cause. "Film is a journey for me," she says. "I'm telling a story and it has a beginning, but it doesn't end." ● — *Deirdre Kelly*



# Classes

## 1972

**GIBSON, ROBERT**  
(BA '72, POLITICAL SCIENCE)  
Robert retired after 38 years in commercial real estate. He is currently Chair of the board of directors, Peterborough Regional Health Centre, Vice Chair of the board of directors, West Northumberland Physician Recruitment and Retention Services Board, board member of the Port Hope Rotary Club and director of the Trust Fund Committee.

director and choirmaster of the Brody Synagogue in Odessa.

## 1975

**PRICE, JOHN PATRIC**  
(BA '75, THEATRE)  
John began his training as a classical dancer with York's ballet program. He is now a retired musician, currently playing in two local bands in Bowmanville, Ont., which is where he resides with his wife, Patricia.



SEAN CISTERNA

## 1973

**GRANER, RON**  
(BA '73, THEATRE)  
Ron is a playwright and filmmaker, whose play, *Musical Paws*, won the audience choice award at the FRIGID New York Theatre Festival in 2012. Based on a true story, the show uses humour, music and dance to tell the story of composer David Nowakowsky (1848-1921), the celebrated music

## 1981

**BLACK, LUCY**  
(BA '81, BA '87, MA '90, ENGLISH)  
Lucy released her latest novel, *The Brickworks*, a work of historical fiction. This is her fourth book and third novel.

**DAGORNE, SHELLEY**  
(BSC '81, LIBERAL SCIENCE)  
After a successful career in finance and corporate services in the food, high tech, nutrition and health care indus-

tries, Shelley has retired from corporate life. She now lives with her husband, Herb, in British Columbia and runs a life coaching business.

## 1982

**DA SILVA, HUMBERTO**  
(BA '82, ENGLISH)  
Humberto has been a national representative for the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) since 2002. He recently published his first book, *Compassion Fatigue*, a collection of speculative fiction.

## 1986

**BARWIN, GARY**  
(BFA '86, MUSIC, BA '88, BED '01, ENGLISH)  
Gary is a composer, multidisciplinary artist and author of 26 books, including *Nothing the Same*, *Everything Haunted: The Ballad of Motl the Cowboy*, which won the Canadian Jewish Literary Award in 2021. His national best-selling novel, *Yiddish for Pirates*, won the Leacock Medal for Humour in 2017.



GARY BARWIN

## 1989

**CIRCELLI, CARMELA**  
(PHD '89, PHILOSOPHY)  
Carmela's novel, *Love and Rain*, was recently published by Guernica Editions. The novel is described as an exploration of love, and the social revolution that marked the rise of the FLQ in Quebec and the Red Brigades in Italy in the late 1970s.

## 2000

**CISTERNA, SEAN**  
(BFA '00, FILM & VIDEO)  
Sean is an award-winning filmmaker whose 2020 film *From the Vine*, starring Emmy-winner Joe Pantoliano, was picked up by Samuel Goldwyn Films. The film is currently out on Amazon Prime. He is also the director of the critically acclaimed teen cancer drama *Kiss and Cry*, and *Full Out*, a gymnastics film starring Jennifer Beals, both of which have been acquired by Netflix worldwide.

## 2002

**MARCHIOTTI, NANCY**  
(BA '02, PSYCHOLOGY)  
Nancy has served as vice-president of human resources for HUB Customer Central (HCC), one of the largest insurance brokerages operating in both the U.S. and Canada. She is focused on empowering visible minority and newcomer women in finding resources and support they need to succeed.

## 2008

**ALDANA, LUCY**  
(BCOM '08, ADMINISTRATIVE STUDIES)  
Lucy has recently accepted the role of inter-company global process architect at Cargill, the largest agricultural company in the world. She currently resides in Hamilton with her husband and two daughters.

## 2010

**SALIM, BASIM**  
(BCOM '10, ADMINISTRATIVE STUDIES)

Basim is currently working as a marketing leader at a tech company where he oversees and drives growth for various digital products and services. He lectures in his discipline at York University, Seneca College and Conestoga College.

## 2015

**BURLE, EFRAIM**  
(BCOM '15, ADMINISTRATIVE STUDIES)  
Efraim is currently living and working in the Miami-Fort Lauderdale area. He is a private fund associate for a top firm, Greenberg and Traurig, LLP.

## 2016

**PLAHOURLAS, MARY**  
(LLM '16, LAW, INSOLVENCY)  
An insolvency and restructuring professional specializing in personal and corporate bankruptcies and proposals to creditors, Mary is the co-author of the Guide on Legal Information About Consumer Debt. She has also published articles in the Annual Review of Insolvency Law and in INSOL International, among other industry publications.

## 2019

**ASOVSKY, STEVEN**  
(BES '19, ENVIRONMENTAL & URBAN CHANGE)  
Steven's first book, *Brave Survivors are Superhumans*, was released in April 2023. A collection of short stories encompassing environmental issues, dystopian worlds and natural disasters, the book is inspired by Steven's study of climate fiction at York.

## 2020

**KAPADIA, YASH**  
(BENG '20, COMPUTER ENGINEERING)  
Yash is an engineer and software developer who has made impressive strides in the technology sector. Recognized among Canada's 2022 Developer 30 Under 30, his research article on software development practices earned acclaim from companies such as Google and Oracle.

## 2021

**PARSAI, ALIREZA**  
(LLM '21, ALTERNATE DISPUTE RESOLUTION)  
In pursuit of continuous learning, Alireza graduated from Osgoode Hall Law School at the age of 50. The author of *88 Tips On Immigration to Canada*, he credits his York degree with propelling his career as an immigration consultant and public speaker to new heights.

## 2023

**HABIB, KHALID**  
(IBBA '23, ADMINISTRATION)  
Khalid is a recent graduate from the Schulich School of Business who is currently working as a junior analyst for the World Bank Treasury in Washington, D.C.

## IN MEMORIAM

**PRITCHARD, EDWARD**  
(BA '71, ENGLISH)  
Ted was a staunch advocate of medical assistance in dying (MAID) and passed peacefully thanks to the program on June 9, 2023. He was 78.

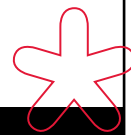
**ROTENBERG, DAVID**  
(YORK FACULTY)  
David Rotenberg spent two decades in the Department of Theatre, including many years as Graduate Program Director of the MFA program. In 2003, he founded the world-renowned Professional Actors Lab. He was a mentor and coach to many in the profession. A prolific fiction writer in addition to being a director of plays in Toronto and on Broadway, David published twelve novels, including the recently released *City Rising: From the Holy Mountain*. He passed away in Toronto on Nov. 8, 2023.

**WANT TO BE IN CLASSES?**

Email us at [magnotes@yorku.ca](mailto:magnotes@yorku.ca)



## Flashback



Have a great photo from your days at York?

Email us at [magnotes@yorku.ca](mailto:magnotes@yorku.ca)

**MY NEW BOOK**, *Releasement: Learning to Dance with Life*, includes memories of growing up on York University's Keele Campus in the 1960s. My father, biologist Dr. David Fowle, was master of Vanier College and one of 13 founding professors of York. We lived in the log house that is now *Skennen'kó:wa Gamig*, the House of Great Peace, a dedicated community space for Indigenous students, staff, faculty and community members. As a child, I played on a tire swing hanging from a tree in our front yard. When the tree came down to make way for Osgoode Hall Law School, I told my parents I would never become a lawyer.

I did, however, join the University as a student for my BA ('78) and my MBA ('85), choosing York both times because of its arts administration courses. My own arts career was another 17 years away.

After graduating, I worked at the Boston Consulting Group for more than a decade, and then became an executive at BMO. In 2002, I joined the board of the National Ballet of Canada, and became board Chair in 2008, and was also a founder and vice-chair of Luminato Festival Toronto. The unique blend of English, business and arts administration at York provided a basis for these pursuits.

My father had always been a strong advocate of the University's signature multidisciplinary curriculum, and now I enjoy the benefit of that education. — *Lucille Joseph*



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