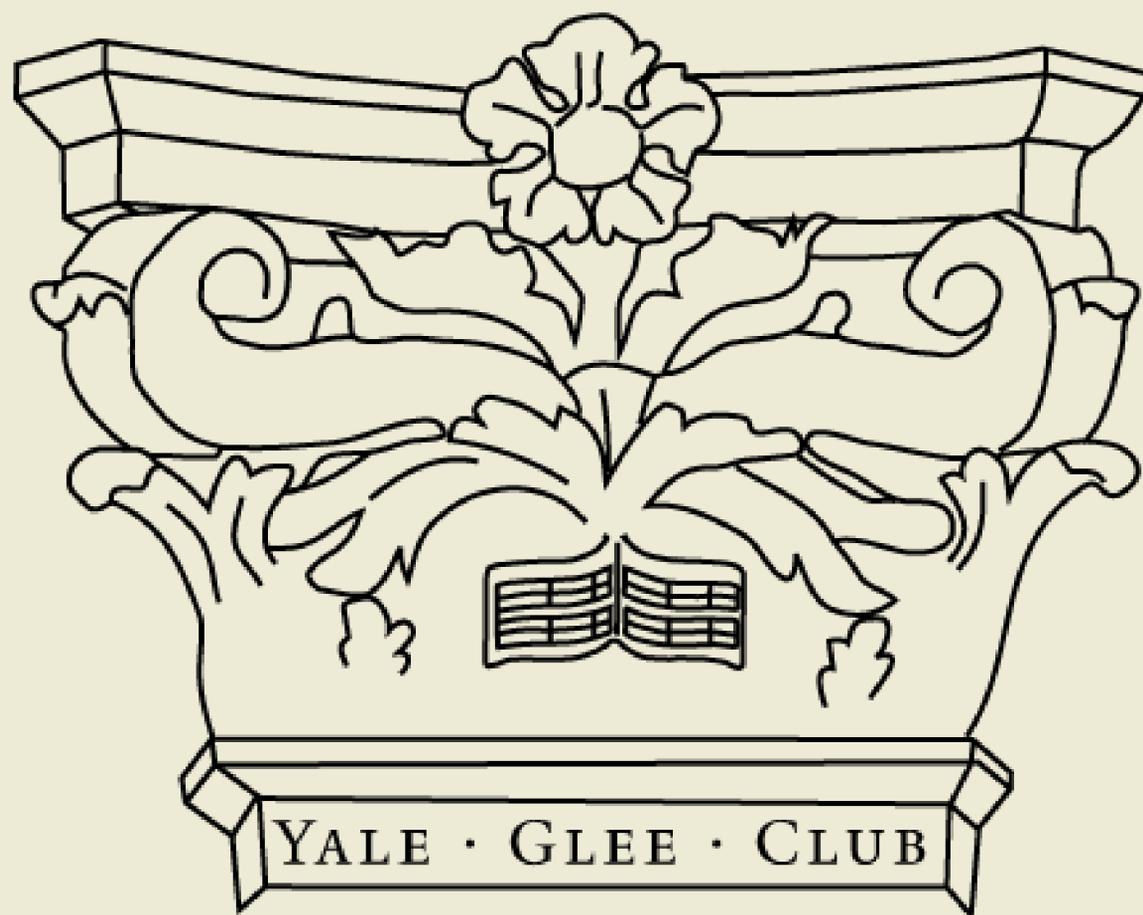


# Fol-de-Rol



Fall 2024

Before you begin reading this newsletter, take a deep breath with us.

It is an incredibly tumultuous time for many across the United States and the world. For members of the Glee Club community living in Southern California, we are thinking of you--and we hope your communities are able to find strength.

We hope reading through this newsletter serves as a reminder of the incredible community you are part of. We are grateful for you.

With love,  
Kyle Thomas and Seung Min

# Letter from the Director

Warmest greetings from Hendrie Hall and from the 164th Yale Glee Club! Every year around this time I reflect on how fortunate I am to be able to work every day with such amazing students and alums, and how fortunate we all are to be the upholders of this long tradition of friendship and community through music. In these divisive and too often acrimonious times, I feel even more grateful for the ways in which singing reveals our shared humanity.

Our fall semester has been joyously eventful. After a successful round of auditions, our first performance was only three weeks into the fall semester – a performance of Beethoven Symphony #9 with the New Haven Symphony Orchestra and several other New Haven choruses. In addition to our many annual fall events – Family Weekend, Princeton, Harvard, our December performance at the Yale Club of NYC, and our Messiah Singalong with the Yale Symphony Orchestra – we were also honored to be invited to perform for the Whiffenpoofs 115th alumni reunion and to share the stage with the wonderful Whiffs and Whim of 2025.

As always, we've had the privilege of premiering several new works, including Carlos Cordero and Julie Flanders' Break Silence, Micaela Carballo's Nuestra mirada, and the winner of this year's Fenno Heath Award for the composition of new Yale songs, Power in our Voices by Omeno Abutu YGC '27. We have also overseen the launch of our very ambitious new music initiative, NextWorks, by commissioning works that will live in the public domain for two years, NextWorks aims to make the transformative experience of performing new music and working with living composers accessible to choral ensemble everywhere at no cost to them. Commissioned composers this year include Melissa Dunphy, Stephen Feigenbaum, Coty Raven Morris, Ayanna Woods, Reginal Wright, and Yiran Zhao, and we will soon announce a new round of five more commissions for 2025.

Just last week, we embarked on our annual Winter Tour, this year to Portland, ME, where we collaborated with Emily Isaacson's groundbreaking music organization Classical Uprising, and to Greenwich, CT, where we shared the concert with a chorus of YGC alum singers. In March, we will travel for the first time since 1965 to the Philippines, performing with several leading Filipino ensembles, including the internationally renowned Philippine Madrigal Singers. I'm also happy to share that the connections forged during our tour to Kenya in 2023 continue: Awuor Onguru YGC '24 is spending the year working for Nairobi's Art of Music Foundation, supported by the Yale Glee Club Service Through Music Fellowship.

We also look forward to many exciting performances in the spring, including Stravinsky's Symphony of Psalms with the Yale Symphony, choral works of Ravel with the Yale Philharmonia, Mozart's Requiem with professional orchestra, and our annual New Haven High Schools Choral Festival. And in the summer, we are incredibly excited to be hosting the Kaleidoscope Vocal Ensemble's first Summer Vocal Academy.

We look forward to our annual Singing Dinner on Saturday, Apr. 5 in New Haven! I very much hope to see you there or at one of our upcoming concerts! Until then, I'm sending you all my wishes for a fruitful new year.

Yours in song,

Jeff

# Introducing YGC 164's Assistant Conductor: Alex Whittington



## **Tell us about yourself!**

Hi! I'm Alex, and I am second-year MM candidate in choral conducting at the Yale School of Music, as well as this year's graduate assistant of the Yale Glee Club. I am originally from New York City and grew up in Manhattan. Growing up, I was primarily a ballet dancer but pivoted towards choral music in high school. In my free time, I love baking, yoga, and playing the latest Nintendo Switch release. I've been at Yale since starting undergrad in 2018 and will be wrapping up my third degree here this spring!

**Your experience is unique among YGC Assistant Conductors, having once been a member of the Glee Club yourself. What inspired you to return to the group as an Assistant Conductor? And how does it feel to now sing and lead a choir that was so central to your undergraduate years?**

I'm incredibly grateful to have been able to study at Yale for as long as I have. Because of that, I've been able to take advantage of a lot of cool opportunities both in and around campus: singing with the Yale Schola Cantorum, directing the Marquand Chapel Choir, working at local churches. These are all experiences that have pushed and molded me as musician. Jeff and the Glee Club, however, are what really set me down the path that I'm on now. This year, I am really looking to hone myself as a teacher and a collaborator, and I felt there was no better way to do that than to work with the group that started it all for me. Coming back to YGC has felt like a real homecoming. The atmosphere of the group is just as welcoming and exciting as I remembered it to be. I also have a couple of friends who were in undergrad with me three years ago, which feels very full circle. When I think back to that time and my role as student conductor in YGC 161, it's a real moment of a clarity and inspiration for me; it's one of the few times I can actually quantify how I've grown. There's nothing like the Glee Club, and it's such a gift to be able to be a part of it one last time.

**What do you do outside of YGC?**

I think the answer to this is supposed to be "practicing," but I promise I get up to plenty of other things! These days, much of my time is spent over at Christ Church New Haven. I serve as choir director there, and despite being right in the heart of campus, it's a nice respite from the day-to-day of academics. I've also been trying to pick up organ over the past year! Progress is slow going, but I love all the new challenges it presents. Recently, I've been trying to get better at instinct-based cooking, too. My family is Puerto Rican, and Puerto Rican food is something I cook fairly often, so I've been asking my grandma for a good deal of advice. I think that is going a little more smoothly than the organ.

**What are the unique challenges that conducting the full ensemble and the chamber choir present? How do you overcome these challenges?** 4. The great thing about YGC is it's so big! Having so many voices in one room is exhilarating, both as a singer and as a conductor. In that respect, I feel like I always have to be precise about how I communicate my ideas. Choral music is an inherently collaborative art, and what inspires me the most about it is how everyone brings something different to the table. I'm not interested in being a conductor to say "my way is the right way," but I do feel that it is my responsibility to bring unity everyone's unique contributions. A big part of my learning experience in YGC is figuring out how to do that. With the Chamber Singers, that gets taken a step up. Although the singers of the group are drawn from YGC, the roster changes from year to year, so part of it is also discovering what our identity is. Figuring out how to make everyone feel confident and supported – that's my top priority. When you have that at the core of your group, it's exponentially easier to confront any challenges that may come our way.

**What piece are you most proud to be conducting this year?**

I'm elated to have the chance to conduct Arianne Abela's piece "Bayanihan." It's this awesome anthem of community with an original text written by Arianne's mother, Barbara Abela. The title refers to a Filipino tradition of coming together to help a family relocate and quite literally move their home. Arianne writes that "bayanihan spirit means helping others in need without expecting anything in return." I think that perfectly encapsulates what YGC is about. We recently performed this for the first time memorized on our winter tour, and the feeling was electric! What I love about Arianne's music is that there is always more to discover. With each subsequent performance, we're all able to connect a little more, and no two iterations are ever the same. I'm so proud and excited to be taking this piece on our spring tour to the Philippines.

# Meet this year's winner of the Fenno Heath Award: Omeno Abutu

## **Tell us about yourself!**

Hi! My name is Omeno Abutu, I'm a composer and music director, and I'm a sophomore studying Music. My family is from Nigeria and currently lives in Atlanta, Georgia. At Yale, I love to sing, conduct, and make music for and with others. More generally, I like keeping my French from getting rusty, playing a good puzzle, and walking leisurely to Hendrie Hall.

## **How has being in the Glee Club informed your interests in music?**

Glee Club has introduced me to a wide variety of pieces and composers, and our repertoire reminds me just how versatile choral music can be as a medium. I've found that the music I've learned follows me far beyond the walls of Hendrie – as I walk to class, as I eat, as I study. In that way, it not only informs my musical interests but also touches my mind and spirit.

## **How does it feel to have your YGC family perform your piece?**

It's indescribable in the best way. They are such phenomenal singers and even better people, and it's heartwarming to get to share my music with them.

## **What inspired you to set the words you did to the melody? Why is it an important message for the Glee Club, and its audiences?**

The main melody is in a musical mode called mixolydian, characterized by its flattened 7th degree when compared to the major scale. To me, this lends the music a sense of peace and calm that helps support the piece's message: that when we are bold enough to share our individual voices, as singers or as people, we can find solace in togetherness and work to create something special.

## **What are you looking to compose next? Are there any sneak peaks you can give us?**

A big goal of mine is to write a musical at some point. I'm fascinated by how effective music can be in storytelling, especially when combined with art forms like acting and dance. So...maybe a musical!



# New Member Profiles

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## Alexander Kingma

- **Year:** 2028
- **Home:** Idaho Falls, ID
- **College:** Pauli Murray
- **Favorite thing about Glee:** The singing itself, with the amazing variety of pieces that Jeff puts together, is definitely my favorite part.

## Alexis Cruz

- **Year:** 2028
- **Home:** Marietta, OH
- **College:** Berkeley
- **Favorite thing about Glee:** I've been able to meet so many wonderful, talented people!



## Andrew Jean-Charles

- **Year:** 2027
- **Home:** Baldwin, NY
- **College:** Morse
- **Favorite thing about Glee:** What I enjoy most about singing with the Yale Glee Club is the group's commitment to making music both community-building and musically engaging.



## Anna Zoltowski

- **Year:** 2027
- **Home:** St. Johnsbury, VT
- **College:** Pierson
- **Favorite thing about Glee:** I love making beautiful music with others which creates a shared joy between the audience and us on stage.





## Ari Tsomocos

- **Year:** 2027
- **Home:** Athens, Greece
- **College:** Saybrook
- **Favorite thing about Glee:** The Greek concept of “Harmonia” singing in harmony while listening to multiple voice parts that blend together to form a beautiful result.

## August Rivers

- **Year:** 2028
- **Home:** Reston, VA
- **College:** Grace Hopper
- **Favorite thing about Glee:** I’m really loving the repertoire right now - every new addition feels fresh



## Aurelia Keberle

- **Year:** 2027
- **Home:** Branford, CT
- **College:** Timothy Dwight
- **Favorite thing about Glee:** The best part about singing in a glee club is the strong sense of community, the inviting, supportive people, and the opportunities to perform and grow together.



## Ben Graham

- **Year:** 2028
- **Home:** Grosse Pointe Woods, MI
- **College:** Davenport
- **Favorite thing about Glee:** I’ve loved meeting so many other great musicians this year!



## Cameron Gray-Lee

- **Year:** 2027
- **Home:** Amherst, MA
- **College:** Davenport
- **Favorite thing about Glee:** It's an incredible group of people to both make music with and get to know, and also I think (with some bias) that we sound really good most of the time.



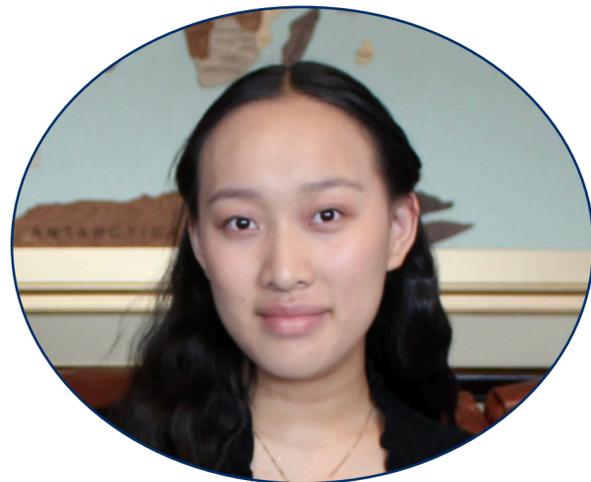


## Cayley Tolbert-Schwartz

- **Year:** 2028
- **Home:** Los Angeles, CA
- **College:** Jonathan Edwards
- **Favorite thing about Glee:** I enjoy the feeling of being part of something greater than myself, and sharing the joy of singing, both on a personal level with the kind souls in the group, and with the larger communities that surround us.

## Claire Zhong

- **Year:** 2028
- **Home:** North Vancouver, Canada
- **College:** Branford
- **Favorite thing about Glee:** The YGC community has become a highlight of my week; I am most grateful for this group of fantastically talented, dedicated, and inspiring artists, and I look forward to many more years of music and laughter!



## Erica Lu

- **Year:** 2028
- **Home:** Washington, D.C.
- **College:** Benjamin Franklin
- **Favorite thing about Glee:** Everyone around you sings with a smile on their face – we're all here because we love to sing!



## Evan Stein

- **Year:** 2028
- **Home:** Guilford, CT
- **College:** Silliman
- **Favorite thing about Glee:** I love the openness with which everyone in the Glee community approaches every interaction.



## Jaden Nicita

- **Year:** 2028
- **Home:** Brunswick, ME
- **College:** Jonathan Edwards
- **Favorite thing about Glee:** Twice a week, I get to enjoy the sound of one of the most beautiful choirs I've ever heard – what could be better than that?





## Jeffrey Yang

- **Year:** 2028
- **Home:** San Diego, CA
- **College:** Benjamin Franklin
- **Favorite thing about Glee:** I love how full the sound is with such a large choir full of passionate singers.

## Joleen Bakalova

- **Year:** 2028
- **Home:** Redlands, CA
- **College:** Jonathan Edwards
- **Favorite thing about Glee:** I sincerely appreciate the opportunities to engage – with people, music, and communities.



## Joshua Li

- **Year:** 2026
- **Home:** Lake Oswego, OR
- **College:** Morse
- **Favorite thing about Glee:** Completing illustrious chords alongside newfound companions, only to find yourselves hopping over together to enjoy amazing eats and drinks at post-concert receptions.



## Kylie Berg

- **Year:** 2028
- **Home:** Boulder, CO
- **College:** Ezra Stiles
- **Favorite thing about Glee:** My high school choirs were never more than 30 people, so it's always amazing to hear the music that 85 can create!



## Liam Richardson

- **Year:** 2025
- **Home:** Phoenix, AZ
- **College:** Pierson
- **Favorite thing about Glee:** Nothing's better than hearing the tuning and rhythm of a challenging passage lock for the first time!





## Logan Gilbert

- **Year:** 2028
- **Home:** Breinigsville, PA
- **College:** Branford
- **Favorite thing about Glee:** My favorite part of singing with the Glee Club is the sense of community it brings.

## Lucas Vander Elst

- **Year:** 2028
- **Home:** Boston, MA
- **College:** Davenport
- **Favorite thing about Glee:** Pronouncing Latin like it's German



## Max Ondik



- **Year:** 2028
- **Home:** Newtown, PA
- **College:** Morse
- **Favorite thing about Glee:** I feel so grateful to be part of a dynamic, welcoming, diverse community of individuals who not only love to sing but also are kind people!

## Mika Hiroi

- **Year:** 2028
- **Home:** Oahu, HI
- **College:** Saybrook
- **Favorite thing about Glee:** I love the sense of community we build while singing beautiful music.



## Myla Toliver



- **Year:** 2028
- **Home:** Vacaville, CA
- **College:** Benjamin Franklin
- **Favorite thing about Glee:** Everyone in the Glee Club has so much enthusiasm for music and such strong connections with one another!



## Nate Stein

- **Year:** 2028
- **Home:** Bowling Green, KY
- **College:** Saybrook
- **Favorite thing about Glee:** This was my first experience singing in a choir that was this big and also this in-synch – it still makes me smile every time we sing.

## Prithvi Narayanan

- **Year:** 2028
- **Home:** State College, PA
- **College:** Silliman
- **Favorite thing about Glee:** At YGC, I most enjoy the breadth of our repertoire and the marked passion for musicianship shared by our tight-knit ensemble.



## Rhea McTiernan Huge

- **Year:** 2027
- **Home:** New Haven, CT
- **College:** Davenport
- **Favorite thing about Glee:** The Glee Club had given me one of the most wonderful communities I've ever found, filled with passionate and caring people.

## Schandy Cordero

- **Year:** 2028
- **Home:** Hillside, IL
- **College:** Davenport
- **Favorite thing about Glee:** Further developing my vocal technique while being mindful of a piece's intended purpose.



## Sofia Sato

- **Year:** 2028
- **Home:** Tokorozawa, Japan
- **College:** Davenport
- **Favorite thing about Glee:** I enjoy singing the Yale football medley in our concerts!

# In just a few weeks... Spring Tour in the Philippines!

Beaches! Breathtaking hills! And most importantly, a vibrant, top-notch choral scene stemming from a rich tradition of vocal music!

We're thrilled to share that YGC is off to the Philippines this March, and we could not be more excited about collaborating with choristers of all ages in the bustling city of Manila and on the beautiful island of Bohol.

This tour, the Glee Club is singing with several outstanding musical groups: the world-renowned Philippine Madrigal Singers (the "Madz"!); college choirs from the University of the Philippines, De La Salle University, and Holy Name University; and Virlanie Voices, a choir consisting of underprivileged children and young adults in Manila.

As part of tour preparation, YGC had an invigorating discussion with Ambassador Harry K. Thomas Jr., a former diplomat who served in the Philippines under Obama. Fellow Yale undergraduates from the Philippines are also visiting rehearsal to chat with YGCers about Filipino culture and youth life!

We want to express a very special thank you to Arianne Abela MM '10, former assistant conductor of the Glee Club. Arianne composed "Bayanihan" for us this year, with original Tagalog lyrics by her mother, Barbara Abela! We are truly honored to perform this warm, buoyant piece in the spirit of Bayanihan — a spirit of mutual support and community, especially in times of need. We look forward to traveling to the Philippines with Arianne and her family in March.

As you may know, YGC has not been to the Philippines for quite a few decades... We cannot wait to share in song once more with fellow music-lovers across the globe.

Salamat to Jeff, Sean, Dr. Beverly Shangkuan-Cheng, the entire Glee Club, and so many more people for making tour managing such a pleasurable experience.

Yours,  
Creed and Kinnia



# From your Alumni Coordinators

Dear YGC,

Our names are Kyle Thomas and Seung Min and we have the immense pleasure of being YGC's Alumni Coordinators this year. Just a few weeks into our first year, in the fall of 2022, we were greeted by YGC's incredible and expansive alumni community at the 160th Reunion. We were both blown away by the strength and longevity of bonds formed through the Glee Club and gained a deeper appreciation for this choir – that is to many of us much more than just a singing group. This year, we hope to serve as liaisons between you, the alumni, and current members to foster connections that span across time and space.

Thank you to all the alumni who signed up to mentor current Glee Club students through our Mentorship Program, which officially kicked off at the beginning of January. If you have any questions, or if you would like to offer your mentorship, please do not hesitate to reach out to us.

Furthermore, be on the lookout for a new initiative we are working on to help current Glee Club students find summer housing. We hope to share more information about this in the coming weeks.

We hope you enjoyed reading this edition of the Fol-de-Rol. We welcome any suggestions, thoughts, comments, and questions; just reach out to [kylethomas.ramos@yale.edu](mailto:kylethomas.ramos@yale.edu) or [seungmin.baikkang@yale.edu](mailto:seungmin.baikkang@yale.edu) and we will get back to you.

With much love,

Kyle Thomas Ramos and  
Seung Min Baik



The newsletter of the  
Yale Glee Club Associates