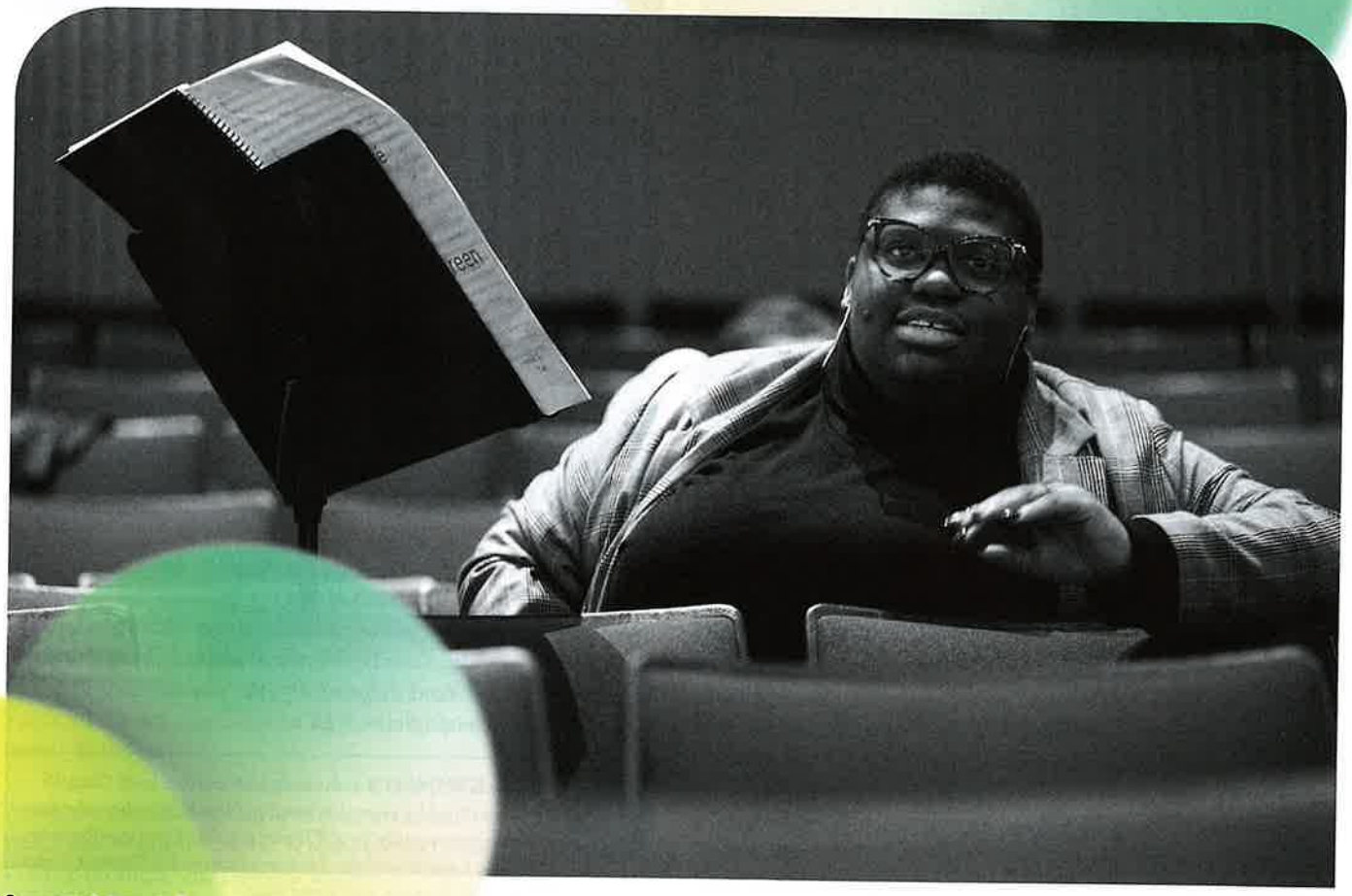
ONE COMPOSER TWO ORCHESTRAS

Brittany J. Green's quick rise in the composing world has included a unique relationship with two Kentucky orchestras. Her stints with the Louisville Orchestra's Creators Corps and Lexington Philharmonic's Composer-in-Residence programs resulted in new music and a new relationship between the Bluegrass State's largest orchestras.

By Rich Copley



Louisville Orchestra

Composer Brittany J. Green during a rehearsal of one of her works at the Louisville Orchestra.

Michaela Bowman

Mélisse Brunet was searching for the second composer-in-residence in her tenure as music director of the Lexington Philharmonic in Lexington, Kentucky when she happened upon North Carolinian Brittany J. Green.

Brunet, who took up the baton for the Lexington orchestra in 2022, was taken by the power of Green's music along with its mix of orchestral and electronic sounds and frequent basis in poetry. So, Brunet brought Green to the Philharmonic's composer-in-residence selection committee.

Little did they know that just over 75 miles down the road, the Commonwealth's other big orchestra had also taken an interest in Green, as the Louisville Orchestra was looking at her for its Creators Corps program. Music Director Teddy Abrams was also drawn to Green's compositional prowess, in which he heard a mix of minimalism and American populist styles. But what sealed the deal for Creators Corps, a program where the composer literally lives in Louisville for the season, was Green's thoughtful approach to community engagement and education.

No one in the Louisville Orchestra and Lexington Philharmonic can name a significant interaction between the orchestras in Kentucky's two largest cities in recent memory. But they couldn't help but notice they had independently selected the same composer for their commissioning programs in back-to-back seasons.

Green was in Louisville's Creators Corps for 2024–25, and she is now in her Lexington Philharmonic composer-in-residence season, which culminated with the world premiere of her *Black Dandelions: An American Triptych* on April 18 at the University of Kentucky's Singletary Center for the Arts.

"I was always an admirer of what Louisville has been doing from an early age, like the 1950s with the fantastic recordings they were doing of new American music, and now with the Creators Corps program that they have," says Brunet, who was a central figure in the 2023 documentary *Maestra*, about women orchestra conductors around the world. "Then Brittany came along, and they had selected her, we have selected her—that's fantastic!"

Abrams, whose first two seasons in Louisville were the subject of the PBS documentary *Music Makes a City*, says, "Everybody's saying so many great things about Mélisse, and obviously they have great taste if they chose Brittney. So, this makes a lot of sense. Let's develop this relationship already."

THE LOUISVILLE ORCHESTRA AND LEXINGTON PHILHARMONIC COULDN'T HELP BUT NOTICE THEY HAD INDEPENDENTLY SELECTED THE SAME COMPOSER FOR THEIR COMMISSIONING PROGRAMS IN BACK-TO-BACK SEASONS.

Brunet is slated to conduct the Louisville Orchestra in the 2026-27 season, and the Louisville Orchestra's sound engineer has been working with the Lexington crew on some aspects of Green's world premiere that push the boundaries of amplified and recorded sound in an orchestral composition for the Philharmonic.

"It's been nice to feel like I'm deepening my connection in Kentucky much more than what I thought I would when I first applied to the Louisville thing," Green says, sitting in the Singletary Center Concert Hall on a February Saturday, a few hours before the Lexington Philharmonic played her *TESTIFY!* paired with Beethoven's Symphony No. 9.

FORGING A COMPOSING CAREER

Green's star has quickly risen in the composing world, including performances in March of her *Letters to America* by the American Composers Orchestra with soprano Karen Slack at Carnegie Hall and participation in a new orchestration of Frederic Rzewski's *The People United Will Never Be Defeated* by the New York Philharmonic conducted by Gustavo Dudamel. As she recalls, her first commission was just earlier this decade from the Emory University Symphony Orchestra in Atlanta. A couple years later, she was in the Louisville program and on Lexington's radar.

The February Lexington Philharmonic concert she was waiting for was the first of four times in a week that *TESTIFY!*, based on Green's memories of her mother playing the tambourine in church, would be played in the Commonwealth. Louisville, in the midst of a Kentucky touring project, played the piece on three stops, including the state capital, Frankfort. The score was commissioned through the Virginia B. Toulmin



Michaela Bowman



Michaela Bowman

Composer Brittany J. Green at the world premiere of *Black Dandelions* on Saturday, April 18, at the Lexington Philharmonic with Music Director Mélisse Brunet and Acting Concertmaster Margaret Karp.

Foundation Orchestral Commissions Program by the League of American Orchestras in partnership with the American Composers Orchestra, which Brunet has conducted, and received its world premiere by the Jacksonville Symphony Orchestra in September 2024.

While the Louisville Orchestra didn't have rights to perform *TESTIFY!* publicly while Green was part of Creators Corps, Abrams points out that the orchestra workshopped the piece for Green while she was in Louisville and says it's a crowd-pleaser the orchestra enjoys playing on tour.

Both Abrams and Brunet tout their respective programs as different from the usual model of commissions.

In Louisville's Creators Corps, the composer basically becomes a member of the orchestra's creative staff and works emerge out of community engagement while living in Louisville. Green's *Lands of Hypnagogia*, for instance, is an animated video soundtrack that resulted from her engagement with students at the Waldorf School of Louisville. Green, who briefly pursued a career as a school band director and teacher before turning to composition, worked with students at the school to develop a mystical story of dreams and dragons and musical themes for their story and characters. Then, University of Louisville students created the animated short and Green orchestrated the music. It was premiered at one of the Louisville Orchestra's Classics series concerts with the Waldorf School students watching their creation come to life.

"It was really special for them, because they're so used to hearing composers being abstract entities, right?" says Jacob Gotlib, senior Creators Corps program manager. "Beethoven, Mozart, Tchaikovsky—these are far away, long-dead entities, and even living composers are abstracted some ways. All of these kinds of experiences with Brittany … this was kind of a culmination of all of those encounters and interactions, and I think people found that to be really touching and special."



Louisville Orchestra

At the Louisville Orchestra, Brittany J. Green discusses her new work with the audience and Music Director Teddy Abrams.

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Louisville Orchestra

Brittany J. Green with other participants in the Louisville Orchestra's Creators Corps program.



Michaela Bowman

At Inside the Score, the Lexington Philharmonic's pre-concert talk with Music Director Mélisse Brunet, composer in residence Brittany J. Green and guest narrator Silas House speak with audience members.

GREEN RECALLS VIRTUAL AND IN-PERSON READINGS OF HER NEW WORK AS "GETTING THE CHANCE TO THINK OUTSIDE THE BOX AND EXPERIMENT AND PLAY AROUND AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE."

Abrams sees Creators Corps as a 21st century iteration of the Louisville Orchestra's project of commissioning and recording new works, which ran from the 1950s to the early '90s. While the Lexington Philharmonic doesn't have the resources to offer a commissioning program at Louisville's scale, Brunet says the Saykaly Garbulinska Composer-in-Residence program is designed to give the composer an engaged experience with the orchestra musicians, offering several readings of the commissioned piece during the year, as well as multiple performances of the composer's works during the season in addition to the world premiere.

"It's super fun, because you get into the brain of the composer for a little bit and discover what they are after," Brunet says. "For me, as a performer, it's fantastic, because a lot of the composers I work with are dead, and you will never be able to ask Beethoven about his Ninth Symphony."

WORKS IN PROGRESS

Brunet says the evolution of Green's new piece for the Lexington Philharmonic had been "phenomenal" from the orchestra's first reading of it in November to the next one in February.

Green recalls that virtual reading in November 2025 and the in-person in February as, "getting the chance to think outside the box and experiment and play around as much as possible. It has been fun, and something that I feel is really unique to this particular opportunity."

Facilitating that process has been Lexington Philharmonic Production Manager Seth Murphy, who engineered the Zoom calls that allowed Green to interact with the orchestra members in real time and helped to create the amplified and recorded sounds in *Black Dandelions*.

"I'm starting to become more aware of a small circle of orchestra production nerds out there," says Murphy, who also helped Green create a piece for the Philharmonic's annual Symphonic Stroll outdoor event that involved multiple boom boxes and cassette recordings. It all fostered collaboration with Chris Kincaid, who works on sound production with the Louisville Orchestra.

As the relationship between the orchestras is just a couple years old, it is not clear where future collaborations between the Louisville Orchestra and the Lexington Philharmonic will go. But Abrams and Brunet say they love that it started with new music, which is something they say is important to Kentucky.

"Kentucky was always considered an important cultural region of America, because it's produced so many heritage and folk musicians that have gone on to represent the country culturally, artistically," Abrams says. "But besides the orchestra's First Editions Records, I don't know that it's thought of as a destination for living composers, and that was our goal with this program.

"I would love to see some kind of Kentucky-wide orchestral collaborations become possible in the next season or two."

Brunet, who is now on the Creators Corps selection committee, says, "I want to see more collaborations. I'm sure Teddy wants to do that as well. And I know everybody at the office in Lexington is oriented the same. What is it going to take? I don't know.

"But it came through new music, which is fantastic." S



RICH COPLEY is a multimedia storyteller based in Lexington, Kentucky who spent 25 years as an arts and entertainment journalist at daily newspapers, including 20 years at the *Lexington Herald-Leader*. He is now a multimedia producer for the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and a freelance writer and photographer.

Author photo by Jonah Falco