

# James Nixon Curry

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## STATEMENT OF RESEARCH, SCHOLARSHIP AND CREATIVE ACTIVITY

### INTRODUCTION

Throughout my career as a cellist and teacher of cello, I have navigated through diverse areas within the art. These include teaching masterclasses, writing articles, presenting research at national conferences, playing in multiple orchestras; but above all things, my distinctive passion is chamber music. Since joining the UNF faculty in the Fall of 2007, I have continued to be increasingly active in each of those ways. My passion for chamber music has led to the formation of the Lawson Ensemble (UNF's resident chamber music ensemble), multiple CD recording projects, two significant international tours, and countless performances around the region. I have presented masterclasses and performances at many distinguished music schools and have served as a regular faculty member at the Aria International Summer Music Academy since 2016 with faculty from leading institutions in the cello field. My research has also led to regular invitations to present at national conferences including five presentations in the last three years. Since joining the UNF faculty in 2007, I have received the highest possible ratings from the department chair in the areas of research, service, and teaching.

### CHAMBER MUSIC PERFORMANCES

One of my major research interests since coming to UNF has been to create and contribute to meaningful chamber music projects that fulfill my passion and promote high level chamber music playing to the UNF students. I have played with Trio Florida, the Florida Chamber Music Project, the San Marco Chamber Music Society, the Ritz Chamber Players, and, of course, the Lawson Ensemble.

In 2007, I joined Gary Smart and Simon Shiao to form Trio Florida. This piano trio performed regular concerts at UNF, performed new music premieres at the College Music Society national conference in Boston in 2013, and recorded the premiere of Gary Smart's *Bright Eyed Fancy* on the Albany Records label, released in 2016. In 2011, Dr. Cara Tasher and I performed a summer concert tour. We were invited to perform with pianist Maya Klinar in Feldkirchen, Austria, and were featured in the Imago Summer Festival in Ljubljana, Slovenija. We brought a different program to Spain and performed with pianist Pau Baiges, and Derrick Gay, Baritone which was presented by Associacio Musical de Mestres Directors, Centre San Pere Apostol. That same summer, I was invited to present a solo concert of entirely different musical repertoire in both France and Turkey, the latter concert serving as a benefit the English Chaplaincy. Alongside tenor UNF faculty member Jimmy Hall, I was featured cello soloist on the Chamber Singers tour to South Africa in 2012. From 2014–2016, I performed as part of the Florida Chamber

Music Project in several concert programs at the Ponte Vedra Concert Hall and around Jacksonville.

In 2015, the Lawson Ensemble was formed in part due to an annual donation from a generous donor with company matching. The other members of the ensemble include Aurica Duca, principal second violinist of the Jacksonville Symphony, and Clinton Dewing who sits section first violin in the Jacksonville Symphony. We have established a free concert series at UNF where we present five different concert programs each year. To diversify the programming, the ensemble invites guests to join the ensemble for many concert programs. The group collaborates frequently with the San Marco Chamber Music Society, a relationship which has led to two international concert tours. The 2016 England concert tour included a concert at the famous Holywell Music Room where Franz Joseph Haydn once performed. In 2019, the Germany concert tour entailed six performances throughout Berlin and Hamburg. These included concerts at prestigious venues such as Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial Church in Berlin and Laeiszhalle Concert Hall in Hamburg, the largest and most modern concert hall of its time in the country. The Lawson Ensemble and San Marco Chamber Music Society collaboration also led to the recording of “Songs and Dances” on the Albany records label. In this collaborative project, we became the first group to record Bill Douglas’s “Song and Dances.” After this CD, Albany Records agreed to be involved in the Lawson Ensemble’s project to record the entirety of J.S. Bach’s three-part inventions as well as his Trio Sonata No. 6 in G Major, BWV 530. Those recordings have taken place; however, the group’s inability to meet in person due to COVID-19 has put the editing process on hold, and we are hopeful to complete the edits by 2021. To date, the Lawson Ensemble has played nearly 100 concerts as an ensemble, averaging about twenty performances each year. The group is frequently invited to play on chamber music series around the region and our concert series at UNF is very well attended. This initiative has helped to create a culture of high-level chamber music at UNF that connects the University to the community.

Another significant chamber music outlet in the past few years has been being invited on numerous occasions to collaborate with the Ritz Chamber Players. I have performed with them alone and also as part of the Lawson Ensemble. The mission of the Ritz Chamber Players is to celebrate the African diaspora through classical music in ways that transcend all barriers and inspire all people. As I am a white male cellist, it was rare and humbling to be invited to join them. Members of this ensemble hold principal positions in the New York Philharmonic, the Boston Symphony, the Chicago Symphony, the Philadelphia Orchestra, and the London Philharmonic. The group performs internationally and throughout the US, receiving numerous honors and is cited in many established publications. My first collaboration with this well-respected group led to a performance at National Sawdust, known for presenting world class chamber concerts including programs of new music from emerging artists in Brooklyn, NY.

### **ADDITIONAL PERFORMANCES**

I have been invited to play in an eclectic variety of ensembles and venues since moving to Jacksonville, collaborating with well-known artists such as Il Divo, the Trans-Siberian Orchestra, Josh Groban, Electric Light Orchestra, Johnny Mathis, and Bernadette Peters. Josh

Groban has been nominated for four Grammy awards and has won two Billboard music awards, and Bernadette Peters has won two Tony awards and has been nominated for a Grammy award. I have collaborated with principal players of the Orlando Philharmonic for a series of chamber music concerts in 2015. In 2019, I joined members of the Stetson University faculty for a series chamber music concert in Maitland, Orlando. I was one of three musicians invited to perform in the presence of President Barack Obama and John Kerry at a private residence in Jacksonville in 2017. I have collaborated with the UNF choral ensembles frequently, and when I am unable, due to my schedule, I coach one of my students to perform in my place. At the American Choral Directors regional conference in 2013, I performed as soloist with the Mississippi State Chorale. I have given performances at several other higher education institutions including Vanderbilt University, Northwestern University, South Dakota State University, Florida State University, Mercer University, Ball State University, St. Thomas University, Minnesota State University at Mankato, the University of Alabama Huntsville, and the University of Florida.

Before my Osprey tenure, I performed as a soloist on NPR's *Prairie Home Companion*, for 4,000 people live and approximately 4,000,000 people on radio! There were numerous newspaper articles about this performance; the show was re-broadcast multiple times; and the program is still available on the *Prairie Home Companion* website. I also performed two 10-day tours of Taiwan with the faculty piano trio from South Dakota, with concerts in Taipei, Taichung, Tainan, Kaohsiung, Ping-tung, and Kenting. We performed concerts in the Kaosiung Cultural Center and presented multiple masterclasses at each college and performing arts high school we visited. Schools included SooChow University, Taiwan University School of the Arts, Taipei Municipal University of Education, Normal University, and I-Shou University, as well as in the cities of Feng Shin and ShiShin. I have had the pleasure of performing in Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Iowa, Minnesota, Nebraska, New York, South Dakota, Tennessee, and Vermont. Demonstrating my versatility of professional engagements, it should be mentioned that I was an invited performer on Oprah Winfrey's television show *Lovetown U.S.A.*

## **SUMMER MUSIC FESTIVALS**

The invitation to join the faculty at the Aria International Summer Music Academy in 2016 allowed me to teach alongside leading teachers from some of the finest music schools in the country. In this Academy, I teach private cello lessons with faculty from Julliard, Eastman, Rice, Michigan, Northwestern, Oberlin, the Cleveland Institute of Music, and the Cincinnati College Conservatory. Additionally, I present research in masterclasses and lectures on various topics related to cello technique and specific works for cello. This annual summer music festival has boosted recruitment at UNF and raised the University's profile while allowing me to make connections that have led to other professional invitations in my field, as well as to more prestigious guests for UNF masterclasses. Before Aria, I taught for two summers at the Meadowmount School of Music, one of the best known and respected festivals for string players in the world. Both Yo-Yo Ma and Itzhak Perlman attended this festival as young artists.

This summer, I taught private lessons and presented masterclasses for four weeks at the Cincinnati Young Artists Virtual Cello Academy, one of the most prestigious new cello festivals

in the country and which, given the status of music festivals in the time of COVID-19, became one of the most highly sought after camps for students of all ages. The Cincinnati Young Artists Virtual Cello Academy is a cello festival for pre-college and college students featuring faculty who are leading teachers and performers in the field. In the first week, other faculty members included Hans Jensen (Northwestern University) and Richard Aaron (Michigan and Julliard). This was a highly competitive week for admission and three of my students, two college and one pre-college, were admitted. The second week I taught alongside Melissa Kraut (Cleveland Institute of Music) and Clive Greensmith (Colburn faculty and long-time cellist in the Tokyo Quartet). The third week's faculty included Mark Kosower (principal cellist of the Cleveland Orchestra) and Natasha Brofsky (Julliard). In the final week I taught alongside three of the great cellists alive today: Paul Katz, a longtime member of the famous Cleveland Quartet who teaches at Eastman; Johannes Moser, internationally known soloist and recording artist who has performed and recorded with the top orchestras in the world; and Ralph Kirschbaum, who holds the Piatigorsky Chair at the University of Southern California and has recorded and soloed with the top orchestras in the world. To be asked to be a part of this faculty is a high honor and is a boon to the University, most specifically in the areas of recruitment and recognition. It was also enormously valuable to the participating UNF students.

## **CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS**

Another way I have raised the profile of UNF and become better known in the field has been my consistent visibility as a presenter at the most important national conference for string players in the country. In each of the last three years my proposals have been accepted to present at the American String Teachers Association (ASTA) National Conference. Acceptance to present at these conferences is less than 50%. I also was selected to present at the Suzuki Associations of the Americas National Conference in both 2018 and 2020. The 2020 conference was postponed twice due to COVID-19, and I plan to present my research at this conference once it is safe to do so. The Suzuki method is the most well-known gold standard method for teaching pre-college string students. After my presentation in 2018 in Minneapolis, due to the popularity of my presentation, Suzuki invited me to be a part of their online series entitled "Parents as Partners." I recorded a five-minute video on efficient practice strategies with a UNF cello student and that content is available on the Suzuki website for parents, teachers, and students. Within these two professional organizations, I have been invited to present at the most prestigious conferences for strings five times in the last three years. In addition, I have presented at the ASTA national conference in 2012 and at the Florida Music Educators Association state conference three times and have also presented research and performed in two different College Music Society (CMS) conferences (one national and one regional). The performance with Trio Florida at the CMS national conference in Boston in 2013 was newly composed music for piano trios and the invitation came from a competitive recording submission.

## **MASTERCLASSES AND WORKSHOPS**

An essential way to connect to other teachers in the field and to recruit prospective students is through presenting masterclasses and workshops. In the past year, I have given masterclasses

at the University of Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music, the University of Tennessee, Miami of Ohio, and Vanderbilt University. I have also presented two masterclasses at Franklin Pond in Atlanta, which is a chamber music program for pre-college students run by members of the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra. In former years, I was invited to lecture or present masterclasses at Western Kentucky, the University of Nevada Las Vegas, Mercer, Ball State, South Dakota State University, for the Jacksonville Youth Symphony, and at various high schools. In 2018 I gave a master class at the esteemed Latvian Music Academy in Riga.

In addition to the summer festivals, I am regularly invited to serve on the faculty of cello festivals that run during the academic year. I was on faculty and performed at the Tennessee Cello Workshop (2014) and at Cello Fest in Cincinnati (2017). At these two festivals I joined faculty members and shared the stage with cello faculty from the Cleveland Institute of Music and the Eastman School of Music. These festivals involve presenting research on various cello topics and teaching students in the masterclass setting. I have been the main guest clinician for *Cellobration* in Boca Raton (2010), where I worked with nearly 100 cellists. I have also been the featured guest clinician at *Cellobration* in Orlando (2012), where I worked with over 60 cellists. I was asked to return as the guest clinician for Orlando's *Cellobration* this year, although the event was cancelled due to COVID-19. At these festivals, I am meeting cellists from around the country who could be prospective students at UNF.

Perhaps the most successful workshop endeavor has been the 2017 creation of the Jacksonville Cello Workshop, an annual gathering of master teachers and promising young cellists held at UNF each February. Some of the country's most famous cello teachers have graced our event, and attendance has rapidly grown to 80 students from the Southeast U.S. It is an exhilarating, busy three days and, with each subsequent year, the UNF Cello Workshop further raises the profile of our University and our music program.

## **RECORDINGS**

In addition to the Trio Florida CD and the two recording projects with San Marco Chamber Music Society and Lawson Ensemble, all on the Albany Record Label, I have been involved in other meaningful recording projects. In 2016, the top graduates from the Northwestern University cello program were asked to return to Evanston to record a CD on the Sono Luminos label with current cello students there that involved premieres and also a recording of Mahler's *Adagietto* from his Symphony No. 5 for sixty cellos and harp. I am also featured soloist on two professional recordings of the UNF Chamber Singers. Finally, I was featured soloist on multiple tracks and recordings with Frank Ralls and Bill Wren on the Ponderdust Publishing label. Tracks from the last projects are heard regularly on Sirius Spa radio.

## **AWARDS**

It was an honor to be part of the inaugural thirteen faculty members receiving the Presidential Leadership Award, chosen by a committee that included the Deans and President at UNF. The award honors skill, effort, and leadership. In 2016, I was the recipient of the Gerson Yessin Professorship. This two-year professorship allowed me to start the Jacksonville Cello Workshop. The cello workshop was further supported when I received the Eisen Experiential Grant in 2018.

Finally, it is crucial that college music students attend the highest level of music festivals in the summer to continue their learning and to make connections for graduate school and future professional engagements. Some, however, are not able to afford the costs. It is engrained in my personal philosophy to ensure that each student can attend, regardless of their financial situation, and I help my students learn to write grants and to fundraise. Since 2014, cello students at UNF have been awarded ten different awards including Transformational Learning Opportunities (TLO), the Dean's Leadership Council Award, Office of Undergraduate Studies grants, and SAILS awards to assist in summer study. The combination of these awards totals nearly \$20,000.00 in aid in the past six years alone. These additional learning and networking opportunities are skill-expanding and life-changing for our musicians and immensely enhance our program.

## **ARTICLES**

Traditionally in my field, the expected creative and scholarly activity includes performing, recording, presenting masterclasses, and conference presentations. I have also had two articles accepted for publication. One, an interview with world renowned composer Richard Meyer, was published in 2010 in the American String Teachers Association Journal, the leading publication for string players. The second article, on practicing intonation, was published in 2011 in the National American String Teacher Association Journal.

## **SUMMARY**

While serving on the UNF faculty, in addition to my rigorous teaching and performing schedule, my scholarly activity has been highly active and balanced across several platforms. I have performed in eight different countries since 2010, including concert tours of England and Germany in the past three years. I have three recordings with Albany Records (two completed, one in process) since 2016, as well as six other recordings. To significantly enhance the chamber music culture at UNF, I formed the Lawson Ensemble. Our twenty or so concerts a year and our recordings have brought positive attention to UNF around the region and beyond. My presentation proposals have been selected by ASTA four times, the Suzuki National Conference twice, the College Music Society twice, FMEA three times, and MTNA once. In the past three years alone, my research contributions have been accepted at the leading national conferences five times. I have given masterclasses at prestigious schools and I have taught alongside some of the most respected leaders in my field at summer music festivals and other cello festivals during the year. My students have won grants to assist their summer study and I have won faculty awards and grants. I take pride in having brought new energy to the program and tremendously positive recognition for UNF through my teaching and playing. Finally, by helping UNF students to expand their network and their musical progress experiences beyond campus during the summers, I help to enhance their futures as well as the reputation of our program.

I am personally grateful to the University and its leadership for their support of all these activities and for the freedom that UNF has afforded me to undertake new creative endeavors and to bring new ideas to our growing music program.