

Biographies

Sarah Wardle Jones, flutist, is an accomplished performer and educator. She currently serves as adjunct flute professor at Radford University where she leads the flute studio and flute choir. As co-founder and flutist of Alma Ensemble, Sarah maintains an active touring and performance schedule across the state.

When not making music, she serves as UX Specialist at LeadPoint Digital, a digital marketing agency in Roanoke, VA, where she writes user-focused web content. Sarah earned a master's degree in music performance from Bowling Green State University, where she studied with Nina Assimakopoulos, and an MFA in creative nonfiction from Queens University of Charlotte.

In her spare time, Sarah enjoys practicing yoga, reading, and spending time with her husband and son.

Michelle Smith Johnson, clarinetist and accomplished music educator, is currently serving as a middle and elementary school orchestra director for her fourteenth year with Roanoke City Public Schools. Due to her outstanding achievements in music education and her positive impact on the lives of her students, Michelle was honored as John P. Fishwick Middle School's 2014 Teacher of the Year and received the Superintendent's Award in 2022.

In addition to her work as a public school music educator, Michelle serves as instructor of clarinet at Radford University. Michelle also enjoys freelance orchestra work, performing with the Roanoke Symphony Orchestra, among other performance endeavors across the state of Virginia.

As a co-founder of Alma Ensemble, she works with her co-founders and community partners to amplify the voices of underrepresented composers and to foster community engagement through chamber music.

Michelle holds performance and Music Education degrees from Radford University as well as a Master of Music in Instrumental Conducting at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville.

In her spare time, Michelle loves traveling, golf, gardening, DIY home-improvement projects, cooking, and spending time with her husband Sheldon and their two Shih Tzu rescues Song and Justine.

Erica Sipes, pianist, received her bachelor's and master's degrees in piano performance from the Eastman School of Music. She currently works at Radford University as a collaborative pianist and practice coach. Previously, she has freelanced as a piano collaborator and coach in Michigan, Idaho, and Virginia. She has also performed with the Roanoke Symphony on occasion and has performed as a piano soloist with the New River Valley Symphony. In the summer of 2012 Ms. Sipes officially launched her own business as a practice coach, offering coaching, workshops, planning sessions, and practice boot-camps for anyone that could use some help with practicing. She is also a prominent blogger, crafting a website called 'Beyond the Notes', writing frequently about her views on performing, learning music, and the classical music world in general.

Additionally, Erica hosts "Sightreading Maverick" every Sunday on her YouTube channel where she takes submissions from audience members and sightreads pieces live!