

February 14, 2019 at 7:30pm | Richardson Auditorium in Alexander Hall

CROSSROADS SERIES

Drawing musicians and music from around the globe, distilling chamber music to its purest and most elemental form, and highlighting music's steadfast intimacy and uncanny capacity to tell stories

GABRIEL KAHANE:  
**BOOK OF TRAVELERS**

Sound Engineer: Dave Sinko

This performance will last approximately 75 minutes  
and will be performed without intermission.

*This performance is dedicated to the memory of  
Michael Friedman (1975–2017): friend, mentor, listener, traveler  
—Gabriel Kahane*

# How the Amtrak Dining Car Could Heal the Nation

By Gabriel Kahane © 2017

On Nov. 9, 2016, I boarded the Lake Shore Limited, Amtrak's overnight service from New York to Chicago. I had with me a small suitcase stuffed with a week's worth of clothes, half a dozen books, a bright blue Casio wristwatch, and a cheap digital camera I'd picked up at Best Buy on my way to Penn Station. My phone remained at home.

Over the next 13 days, I would log 8,980 miles aboard six trains, traversing 31 states, subsisting mainly on Three Cheese Tortellini with Creamy Pesto Sauce and Vegetable Medley. During this time, I had conversations with upward of 80 strangers, almost all of whom I met over meals in the dining car. Aside from what I was told by other passengers, I consumed no news in any form during my trip.

In the months leading up to the presidential election, I'd been working on a passel of new songs for a run of shows at the Brooklyn Academy of Music, and, on the heels of years spent zigzagging the country in a tour bus, I was thinking about travel, and the varied impulses that have given rise to travel throughout history, as an organizing principle. But I wanted to write something that was at the very least framed by a personal journey, if not entirely personal in its content.

At the same time, I was also keenly aware — who wasn't? — of the rupture

in our body politic, and decided that I might kill two birds with one stone by taking a trip that would wrest me out of my New York City bubble while offering the narrative frame I was seeking. So in early October, I bought a series of train tickets and decided that regardless of the outcome, I would set off the morning after the election.

Meals in the dining car work like so: If you're in a sleeper car, an attendant walks through midmorning and takes reservations; you're handed a slip of paper with the time and number of people in your party. At the appointed hour, an announcement is made inviting those holding reservations to appear at the threshold of the dining car. If you're in a party smaller than four, you'll be placed at the next open table, leading to stochastic seating arrangements that create unexpected social and cultural adjacencies.

In the course of my travels, I chatted with postmasters, real estate agents, nuclear engineers, schoolteachers, farm equipment saleswomen, nurses, long haul truck drivers, retirees headed to the Grand Canyon, retirees headed back from the Grand Canyon, a sea-steadying software engineer, a prominent TV personality, a cowboy, a national park trail crew leader, an aspiring music publicist, a public utility employee focused on solar energy who nevertheless professed to

be a climate change skeptic, a flight attendant, an actuary, an air conditioner salesman, two ultramarathoners, and two train enthusiasts who met on an online forum and now maintain a food blog documenting everything that they eat during their trips. The list goes on.

Where much of the digital world finds us sorting ourselves neatly into cultural and ideological silos, the train, in my experience, does precisely the opposite. It also acts, by some numinous, unseen force, as a kind of industrial-strength social lubricant. To be sure, I encountered people whose politics I found abhorrent, dangerous, and destructive, but in just about every instance, there was something about the person's relationship to family,

and loyalty to family, that I found deeply moving. That ability to connect across an ideological divide seemed predicated on the fact that we were quite literally breaking bread together. Perhaps it also had something to do with the pace at which we traveled.

Limping along obsolescent track at speeds averaging 55 m.p.h., the American train is tremendously inefficient; it takes almost four full days to cross the continental United States via rail. But that inefficiency is precisely what made this train trip revelatory. Rail culture, in contrast to the digital, proposes a fundamentally different relationship to time, and to time's modern bedfellow, efficiency.



Travelers during a smoke break aboard the Empire Builder in Stanley, North Dakota  
Credit: Gabriel Kahane

There are categories of experience and thought threatened by our devotion to efficiency, and in our fast-paced lives, we may be blinded to the loss of those ways of thinking. I mourn the decline of complex truth, the ability to hold two sides of an argument in mind, the desire to understand rather than simply to be right. We have, for the most part, retreated into pure binary thinking.

Our inability to think dialectically, and by extension, empathetically, stems both from our shortened attention spans and the flattening of public discourse, but also from our fear of being shamed — in an ideologically divided society — for acknowledging any iota of truth to the

grievance of the other side. After a few days of the dining car routine I began to wonder if the train might be a salve for our national wound, bringing us into intimate conversation with unlikely interlocutors, and allowing us to see each other as human rather than as mere containers for ideology.

On the train, I slowed down. I thought more deeply. I listened better, and longer. We moved at such a languorous pace through what would otherwise have been a blink of a town that I could feel, for just a moment, that this tiny hamlet, with its single pub, gas station, antique shop and general store, was the center of the universe.



The parlor car on the Coast Starlight, somewhere in central California

Credit: Gabriel Kahane

When I returned from my trip a few days before Thanksgiving, I stared at the pile of translucent blue *New York Times* bags that had accrued. Over the last year, in writing songs about my experiences and the people that I met, I've often felt that I ought to read or at least unwrap those newspapers, to understand how that brief period was described by journalists. But

for some reason, I couldn't bring myself to do so, for fear that the tenderness and salvation I felt aboard those trains would be lost. I still haven't opened them.

This article was printed in *The New York Times* on November 28, 2017 and is reprinted with permission.



Keeping people fed on the long journeys  
Credit: Gabriel Kahane

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*from Princeton University Concerts*



# About Gabriel Kahane



**Gabriel Kahane** Singer, Songwriter, Composer, Pianist

## **This concert marks Gabriel Kahane's Princeton University Concerts debut.**

Gabriel Kahane would like you to know the following ten facts about his life:

1. Despite his Eastern Euro-Prussian Jewish roots, Gabriel is a devoted Italophile, saucing pasta with obsessive precision (emulsify, emulsify, emulsify!) and spending many a Sunday in the aisles of D. Coluccio & Sons in Bensonhurst, Brooklyn, where he can often be found ogling sleek packages of bespoke bucatini. #YOLO
2. As a kid growing up in Rochester, New York and then Santa Rosa, California, he was a fiercely competitive chess player, traveling around the United States to compete in tournaments that took place in hotel ballrooms air-conditioned to temperatures that wouldn't be out of place in a steakhouse's walk-in refrigerator. In 1998, Gabriel beat Hikaru Nakamura at the U.S. Open; Nakamura would go on to become a grandmaster and four-time overall U.S. Chess Champion. (Okay, Hikaru was twelve at the time, but still!)

3. Gabriel's career as a musician began in earnest at a Chinese restaurant in a small town in New England, where, at the age of four, he picked up a solitary chopstick and began conducting an imaginary performance of Brahms 2nd Piano Concerto. Or at least that's the story his parents tell. He has not conducted since.

4. Questions about genre and categorization seem to crop up like kudzu around discussions of Kahane's work, which, he admits, draws readily and promiscuously from Romanticism, Modernism, Dadaism, folk traditions, architecture, poetry, experimental fiction, journalistic practice, political activism, and Italian cuisine. But the truth is that he finds these questions somewhat dull and would prefer that the listener attend to the musical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual content, rather than getting hung up on what to call something.

5. His fourth album as a singer-songwriter, entitled *Book of Travelers*, recounts an 8,980-mile train trip that Gabriel began on the morning after the 2016 presidential election. Unlike his previous records, which are densely populated by strings, woodwinds, and brass, keening guitars, the clattering of drums, and electronic bleeps and bloops, *Book of Travelers* finds Kahane singing alone at the piano. You should check it out. It's a statement.

6. Gabriel has never lived in Los Angeles as an adult, despite having written his third album, *The Ambassador*, about the city.

A staged version of *The Ambassador* was seen at the Brooklyn Academy of Music (BAM) in 2014, directed by acclaimed English theater director John Tiffany.

7. Some of Gabriel's favorite writers include: Anne Carson, W.G. Sebald, Thomas Mann, Matthew Zapruder, Joan Didion, James Baldwin, Jorge Luis Borges, and Lewis Mumford.

8. In the 2019–2020 season, Kahane begins a three-year term as Creative Chair for the Oregon Symphony, for whom, in 2018, he wrote *emergency shelter intake form*, an oratorio on themes of housing and homelessness. More than half a dozen orchestras around the country have declared their intention to perform the piece; Gabriel will believe it when he sees it.

9. There's an extraordinary community of musicians working in these heady times, and Gabriel is proud to have worked with a number of them, including singer-songwriters Paul Simon, Sufjan Stevens, and Blake Mills, instrumentalist Andrew Bird, the Brooklyn Rider String Quartet, Phoebe Bridgers, the Punch Brothers, and Orpheus Chamber Orchestra.

10. Gabriel is married to an extraordinary woman named Emma; they have a daughter, Vera Rose, whose age is still being tallied in months, and a rather self-possessed cat named Roscoe Greebletron Jones III, who spends his days trying to monetize his good looks on Instagram.

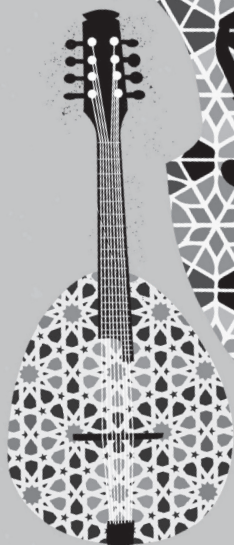


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## Glimpses of a Remarkable History: Princeton University Concerts over the Past 125 Years

By Professor Emeritus Scott Burnham, ©2018

Imagine Princeton in 1894, the year Princeton Borough began governing itself as an entity fully independent from Princeton Township. And now imagine the Old Princeton Inn, a building that stood where Borough Hall stands today. At half past three on a Monday afternoon in late October, a group of music enthusiasts gathered there to enjoy a concert performance by the renowned Kneisel Quartet. They concluded with a piece of new music, namely Antonin Dvorak's most recent string quartet, the so-called "American" quartet, which the Kneisel players had premiered in Boston some months earlier and which was one of the fruits of Dvorak's extended stay in America.

That inaugural concert was organized by the "Ladies Musical Committee," founded in 1894 by Philena Fobes Fine. Mrs. Fine was a remarkable spirit who persuaded the community to rally round and underwrite this new venture, which in its early years presented about six concerts annually. She was the first in a long line of such spirits: to an extraordinary degree, the history of Princeton University Concerts is a history of determined women making wonderful things happen. The initial committee was all women, and the driving forces for supporting and managing the concert series throughout the entire history of Princeton University Concerts have been mostly women, exclusively so for the first fifty years. Mrs. William F. Magie became chair of the committee after Mrs. Fine's death in 1928 (in an interesting parallel, her husband, William F. Magie, had succeeded Mrs.

Fine's husband, Henry B. Fine, in the role of Princeton University's Dean of Faculty back in 1912). And for a fifteen-year span during the 20s and 30s, Mrs. Williamson U. Vreeland did much of the heavy lifting, organizing the concerts, choosing the artists, and managing the finances.

Had you been around in the 1920s, you would have caught the Princeton debut of violinist Fritz Kreisler in March of 1920; or heard Pablo Casals, then lauded as the world's greatest cellist, play Bach in 1922; or heard 23-year-old Jascha Heifetz play five encores after his concert on April 7, 1924; or attended the historic concert in 1925 that featured Polish pianist, composer and statesman Ignaz Paderewski in a program including Beethoven's "Waldstein" Sonata and Liszt's Hungarian Rhapsody. Not to mention a steady array of orchestral performances by the New York Philharmonic, the Philadelphia Orchestra, and the Boston Symphony Orchestra.

A turning point for the Ladies Musical Committee came in 1929, marking a new and crucial stage in its relationship with Princeton University. The first move was to stabilize and augment the committee's finances. Mrs. Fine had led the concert series for over thirty years at the time of her death. During those years, she had managed to raise about \$35,000 to support the concerts. In 1929, Mrs. Jenny Hibben and others helped increase that number to about \$52,000, and the committee established a fund in Mrs. Fine's memory, stating that the monies had "been raised for the purpose of securing for Princeton audiences better

music than they could otherwise afford." The name of the committee changed to Princeton University Concerts Committee at this time as well, but its constitution insisted that "at least a majority of the members shall be women" (this wording was not altered until 1977!). In accordance with the name change, the University became increasingly involved throughout the 1930s and 40s. Nominations to the committee had forthwith to be approved by the President of Princeton University (the President at the time was John Grier Hibben, husband of Mrs. Jenny Hibben); the university Controller's Office soon began keeping the books; and in 1946 President Harold Dodds authorized payment for the building of a stage set that would enable the chamber concerts to move to McCarter Theater, where the orchestral concerts and showcase recitals were already happening.

When Mrs. Magie resigned in 1944, Professor Roy Dickinson Welch took over as head of the committee. Welch was also the father of the Music Department, which began in 1934 as a subsection of the Art and Archaeology department. A dozen years later, in 1946, Music became an official university department, housed in Clio Hall. In that same year, Welch hired Mrs. Katharine (Kit) Bryan as concert manager. They had collaborated before: in 1935, Mrs. Bryan co-founded the Princeton Society of Musical Amateurs with Welch; the group still exists today.

Among the many highlights during Mrs. Magie's tenure was the historic 1937 appearance of American singer Marian Anderson, who sang four sets of arias

and Lieder and then concluded with a stirring set of spirituals. Also notable were several concerts by the Trapp Family Singers in the early 1940s. Highlights of Mrs. Bryan's early years as concert manager include performances by the recently formed Bach Aria Group, founded and directed by Princeton legend William H. Scheide.

When Mrs. Bryan retired in 1964, she was replaced by Mrs. Maida Pollock, who greatly professionalized the entire operation, bringing it up to speed in ways that are still in effect today. A force of nature, Mrs. Pollock ran the Princeton University Orchestra as well, and was also very involved with the Princeton Friends of Music. Due to the greatly increased expense of hiring symphony orchestras, the concert series stopped programming orchestras in 1975 and began focusing exclusively on chamber music. In a recent interview, Pollock asserted that her most cherished goal was to get a worthy concert hall for chamber music up and running at the university, and in the 20th year of her 22-year tenure, her efforts were finally rewarded. Richardson Auditorium became the concert hall it is today in 1984, thanks to a donation from David A. Richardson '66, in memory of his father David B. Richardson '33, a lifelong enthusiast of classical music.

One of the most memorable nights of Mrs. Pollock's reign was almost a disaster, because Spanish singer Victoria de los Ángeles had to cancel at nearly the last minute. Pollock quickly obtained the services of Russian soprano Galina

Vishnevskaya, who happened to be the wife of Mstislav Rostropovich; he played the piano for her in an electrifying performance.

After Mrs. Pollock retired, Nate Randall took over in 1988. Randall broadened the purview of Princeton University Concerts, introducing programs of jazz music and world music. He also oversaw the 100th anniversary season of the series, and assisted with the inauguration of the Richardson Chamber Players, along with their Founding Director, Michael Pratt.

Our current Concert Director, Marna Seltzer, came to Princeton in 2010. Recognized by Musical America in 2017 as one of their "30 Movers and Shapers," Seltzer's many audience-friendly innovations have clearly established Princeton University Concerts at the forefront of the future of classical music. These include new ways to interact with the musical artists, such as live music meditation sessions, late-night chamber jams, and "Performances Up Close" that feature onstage seating. In introducing these additional ways to get involved in music, Marna Seltzer continues to honor the original and sustaining intention of Philena Fobes Fine: that Princeton University Concerts should reflect the values of our community as a whole. As such, it enjoys pride of place as perhaps the finest ongoing town/gown affiliation in Princeton.

The history of Princeton University Concerts has been remarkably consistent for these past 125 years. Passionate,

committed women (and a few men) have presented the premier musical artists of their age, from fiery 20-somethings taking the concert world by storm to larger-than-life stars who can captivate us merely by taking the stage. An exalted lineup of the world's finest string quartets has always maintained pride of place in the series, from the Kneisel Quartet in the first decades through the Budapest Quartet in the 1930s to the Takács, Brentano, and Jerusalem Quartets today. A special relationship has always endured between all these musical artists and their Princeton presenters. Back in the day, Mrs. Fine, Mrs. Magie and Mrs. Vreeland often entertained artists after the concert; as an early history of the Concerts Committee put it: "the

artists came to think of Princeton people as their friends." That holds true now more than ever, for our visiting artists regularly declare that they love playing in Richardson Auditorium, they love the way they are treated by Marna and her staff, and they love all of you, who so demonstrably value the experience of music, who take in and give back the brilliant energy of their cherished performances.

"Music offers infinite capacity for infinite self-renewal." This is what Music Department founder Roy Dickinson Welch fervently believed, and this is what Princeton University Concerts will continue to offer us, one unforgettable concert after another.

# SUPPORT US

Supporting Princeton University Concerts is critical to our future. Ticket sales cover less than half of the cost of presenting the very best in world-class music. Remaining funds come, in part, from our generous endowment, left to PUC by the Ladies' Musical Committee in 1929. We remain eternally grateful for the support of the Philena Fobes Fine Memorial Fund and the Jesse Peabody Frothingham Fund.

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