



QUEER URBAN ORCHESTRA

presents

REFUGE

FEATURING JOHANN PALO, CLARINET
WORLD PREMIERE BY MICHAEL J VILJOEN

SAT • DEC 12 • 2025

Stephen Wise Free Synagogue
30 W 68th St • 8:00 pm

David Bloom Artistic Director

QueerUrbanOrchestra.org

From the Artistic Director

Dear Friends,

Tonight, queer expression in music is in full bloom! Queer Urban Orchestra is delighted to welcome you to our second full orchestra program of our 2025-26 season, *Refuge*, in which each concert takes a different perspective on queer space. Tonight, we play toward a sense of home.

Especially demonstrative of this theme is QUO cellist **Michael Viljoen**'s new work *Tafeni* — *on finding home*, drawing inspiration from the resonances of mountainous ancestral land in South Africa. We are honored to present the first-ever performance of this work tonight. Winner of QUO's **2025 Concerto Competition**, our very own **Johann Palo** is our featured soloist in brilliant music by Debussy.

While **Tchaikovsky** had to go to great lengths to hide his queerness in his life, I believe his music is a powerful expression of his queerness. His Second Symphony, *Ukrainian*, is no exception. Within, he shares his love for the rich folk traditions of Ukraine boldly and unabashedly. Opening the evening, Kanaka Maoli composer **Leilehua Lanzilotti**'s stirring *ao kuewa*, which translates roughly from 'Ōlelo Hawai'i as "the realm of the homeless spirits," weaves a story of renewal and care for the land.

Thank you for joining us tonight, and please come back soon!

Lots of love,



David Bloom



Council on
the Arts

This program is made possible by the New York State Council on the Arts with the support of the Office of the Governor and the New York State Legislature.



This program is also supported in part by public funds from the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs in partnership with the City Council.



Refuge

Saturday, December 13, 2025 | 8 pm
Stephen Wise Free Synagogue | New York, NY

ao kuewa (2021)

Leilehua Lanzilotti

Derek Weagle — conductor

Première rhapsodie (1909–1911)

Claude Debussy

Johann Palo — clarinet

Tafeni (2024)
world premiere

Michael J Viljoen

Derek Weagle — conductor

— Intermission —

Symphony No. 2, Op. 17

Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky

"Ukrainian" (1872, rev. 1879–1880)

- I. Andante sostenuto — Allegro vivo
- II. Andantino marziale, quasi moderato
- III. Scherzo & Trio. Allegro molto vivace
- IV. Finale. Moderato assai — Allegro vivo

Please silence your phones, and recording is **strictly prohibited**—let's keep the spotlight on the music!

Violin I

Phong Ta ♦•
 Rafael Albertini
 Wiqar Farooqi
 Brian Harrington
 Andrew Holland
 Elaine Lee
 Michael Lee
 Arielle Lubin
 Connor Madsen
 Amanda Nguyen
 Richard Nguyen
 Emerson Olson
 Joey Plaster
 Farzaneh Sarafriz
 Dane Stalcup
 Navida Stein
 Liz Taub
 Liann Wadewitz
 trevor wadleigh

Violin II

Tank Tan ♦•
 Klaudia Amenabar
 Jeanne Azzouni
 Christian
 Balmaseda-Lucca
 Jonathan Balsano

Julia Case
 Jocelyn Cheng
 Peter Fifield
 Andre Gillard
 Aaron Haines
 Mel Martini
 Ligia Sakurai
 Melissa Seefeldt

Viola

Noah Green *
 James Di Meglio •
 marion lederer
 Hilton Marcus
 Maggie O'Connor
 JohnMark Ofrasio
 Mason Pilevsky
 Genevieve Pool
 Nicholas Singletary
 Jacob Szilagi
 Dustin Zuelke

Cello

Michael Viljoen*
 Navin Manglani •
 Alex Humesky
 Lucie le Blanc
 Maurice Lee
 Steve McLure

Kate Penrose
 Michael Richman
 Nick Saunders
 michael shattner
 Penglong Zhu

Bass

Jared Chamoff ♦•
 Ulises Amaya
 George Nicholson
 Andrew Op't Hof
 Adrienne Schoenfeld

Flute

Craig Devereaux •
 Bianca Morris*
 Scott Oaks

Piccolo

Craig Devereaux •

Oboe

Matthew Hadley •
 Jeanne Azzouni
 Alan Hyde
 Brian Shaw *

English Horn

Taemin Ahn

Clarinet

Daniel Olson •
 Francis Novak

Bass Clarinet

Chris Burrow

Bassoon

David Lohman ♦•
 Kevin O'Brien
 Cross Brandon

Contrabassoon Percussion

Cindy Lauda

French Horn

Kyle Walker*
 Lynn Caron •
 Bryan Jacobowitz
 Eric Peterson

Trumpet

Julia Cohen ♦•
 Ron Nahass
 Ryan Yacos

Trombone

Ryan Gochee*
 Nick Denton

Bass Trombone

Alex Arellano •

Tuba

Adam Rosenberg

Harp

Liann Cline

♦ Concertmaster
 * Principal
 • Section Leader

Musicians

QUO performing in 2023 at Symphony Space

Photo by David Lohman

About the Artists



Photo by Jiyong Chen

David Bloom QUO Artistic Director

David Bloom (he/him) is a conductor equally at home in orchestral repertoire, opera, and new music, noted for his "dazzling precision and grace" (*San Francisco Chronicle*), "intelligence, elegance, and passion" (*Opera News*), "ferocious and focused" (*The New York Times*) performances, and "breathhtaking and inspired programming" (*Shepherd Express*). He dedicates his work to collaborating with artists and communities to inspire creativity, empathy, and joy.

In such venues as Carnegie Hall, Lincoln Center, Walt Disney Concert Hall, Kennedy Center, and Park Avenue Armory, Bloom has guest conducted the Los Angeles Philharmonic, American Composers Orchestra, Washington National Opera, Opera Omaha, Central City Opera, Tri-Cities Opera, Bang on a Can All-Stars, The Crossing, Ensemble Connect, and Kronos Quartet and worked with such soloists and Dashon Burton, David Byrne, Anthony Roth Costanzo, Helga Davis, Isabel Leonard, Iarla Ó Lionáird, Courtney Love, Hila Plitmann, Dawn Upshaw, and Andrew Yee, and composers Clarice Assad, Courtney Bryan, John Corigliano, Donnacha Dennehy, Du Yun, inti figgis-vizueta, Michael Gordon, Nathalie Joachim, David Lang, Tania León, Andrew Norman, and Julia Wolfe. He conducted the opening of Lincoln Center's 2024 Summer for the City festival with a program of operatic standards and original songs with drag artists Sapphira Cristál, Monét X Change, and Thorgy Thor.

Since 2022, he has been Artistic Director of Queer Urban Orchestra, the only orchestra in the Northeast rooted in the LGBTQ+ community. He is also Principal Conductor of the orchestras at New York University, Co-Artistic Director of Contemporaneous, and Principal Conductor of Present Music. He has conducted over 500 world premieres, including the orchestral version of Philip Glass' *La Belle et la Bête* with Jean Cocteau's 1946 film, Dylan Mattingly's six-hour opera *Stranger Love*, and Raven Chacon's *Voiceless Mass*, which went on to win the 2022 Pulitzer Prize. He has recorded for the Nonesuch, Sony Masterworks, Cantaloupe, New Amsterdam, Innova, New Focus, Starkland, Kairos, and Navona labels.

Derek Weagle QUO Associate Conductor

Musician/Educator/Wearer-of-Many Hats **Derek J. Weagle** (they/them) is a Brooklyn-based artist and healer working in the medium of sound. Seeking the deepest joy in all things, they are invested in the disruption of cultural barriers around music-making, preserving it as a vital act of humanness. With a practice rooted in syncretism, Derek's musical and teaching styles draw from a wide breadth of experience, modality, and tradition. They are passionate about the fusion of these approaches as a means of authentic connection and collective healing.

Derek holds a M.M. with Academic Honors in Composition with a minor in Choral Conducting from the New England Conservatory and a B.M. in Music Education from the University of Massachusetts Lowell, certificates in Sound Healing from the Sage Academy of Sound in Woodstock, NY, and Biosonic Sound Repatterning with Dr. John Beaulieu. In 2025, they completed an Artist Diploma in Composition with a citation for Exceptional Achievement and a certificate in Contemporary Collaboration as a member of the Gabriela Ortiz Composing Studio at the OAcademy Music Conservatory.

Derek's current engagements include work as a Sound Practitioner at Official Ritual, Founding Artistic Director of Bloom Sound Collective, Faculty at Juilliard Extension, Associate Conductor of the Queer Urban Orchestra, Co-Director of the Khôra Consort, Core Member of The Why Collective, Resident Music Director and Composer with Lucada Mélange, and the Refugee Orchestra Project Board of Directors. Their work as a composer has received recognition both nationally and internationally, including the American Prize in Composition, the International Horn Society, and in the International Composition Competition Harelbeke.



Photo by Erik McGregor

Johann Palo Clarinet

Johann Palo is a Filipino-American clarinetist based in New York City, performing as a solo, orchestral, chamber, and studio musician. Raised in California, he began his clarinet studies at age ten and went on to train with Kristi Van Kopp and Mary Moore, former principal clarinetist of the Bakersfield Symphony.

In 2022, Johann was a finalist in the American Single Reed Summit International Clarinet Competition. Recent highlights include concerto competition wins with the Queer Urban Orchestra and California State University Northridge. In 2016, Johann was featured in a solo performance broadcast by KVPR–NPR/89.1.

Johann's orchestral work includes performances with the Brooklyn Chamber Orchestra, Park Avenue Chamber Symphony, and JWM: A Theatrical Company. A dedicated chamber musician, he is a founding member of the Late Night Trio — a vocal, clarinet, and piano ensemble committed to commissioning new works from Filipino composers. His studio recording credits include short films, commercial media with brands such as Ouer, and as the bass clarinetist in Sophie Seng's *Plastic Star*. He has shared the stage with artists such as Aida Cuevas, Andrew Yee, Jasmine Rice LaBeija, and Loren Allred, among many others.



Photo by Sean Solomon

He holds a Bachelor of Music from California State University Northridge, where he studied with Candis Badgley Carlson and Dr. Julia Heinen, and a Master of Music from New York University under Pascual Martinez-Fortez, and bass clarinet studies with Pavel Vinnitsky. He has participated in masterclasses with leading artists including Boris Allakhverdyan, Stephen Williamson, Alexander Fiterstein, Jessica Phillips, and Anton Rist.

A committed educator, Johann has taught at New York University as a graduate adjunct instructor and serves on the clarinet faculty at Usdan Summer Camp for the Arts. He maintains a vibrant private studio offering both in-person and online instruction.

About the Music

Claude Debussy (1862–1918) *Première rhapsodie*

Sponsored by **Navin Manglani**

Claude Debussy (1862–1918) was a prominent French composer whose profound music played a critical role to early 20th-century music. Similar to paintings such as Monet's *Impression*, *Sunrise* or Renoir's *Bal du moulin de la Galette*, Debussy's music evokes moods and atmospheres on an aural level. Although he was strongly associated with Impressionism, Debussy rejected this notion. In frustration, he wrote to his publisher: "I'm attempting something different, realities in some sense, what imbeciles call impressionism, just about the least appropriate term possible."

In 1909, Gabriel Fauré, then serving as Director of the Conservatoire de Paris, or the Paris Conservatory, appointed Debussy to its board of directors, *le Conseil Supérieur*. The Paris Conservatory's famous annual competition acts as examinations to evaluate each student's ability and mastery of their instrument. As a board member, Debussy was expected to adjudicate the competition and serve as a juror.

In 1910, Debussy was asked to compose a *solo de concours* (competition solo) for the Conservatory's clarinet competition. Students were expected to perform two pieces, one to test sightreading capabilities and another, prepared one month in advance, to be performed from memory. The 1910 competition produced two outstanding works by Debussy, *Petite pièce* and *Première rhapsodie*. Contrary to the institution's conservative musical attitudes and concepts, Debussy was often at odds with the Conservatory due to his experimental compositional technique. To his surprise, members of the jury were rather impressed. Debussy wrote to the publisher Jacques Durand: "The clarinet competition went extremely well and, to judge by the expressions of the faces of my colleagues, the Rhapsodie was a success."

A relatively short work, the *Première rhapsodie* is dedicated to Prosper Mimart, clarinet soloist and professor at the Paris Conservatory. This piece takes the listener on a journey from soft reverie to resplendent brilliance. Like a kaleidoscope, this piece has a full palette of colors transitioning from one shade to the next.

The Rhapsodie opens with a hushed delicacy, creating the effect of being suspended in time. The clarinet pulls the listener from this stillness to warm, cozy lyricism, yet it yearns for freedom. As the piece progresses, the clarinet is constantly oscillating its expressions from animated flare to luminous introspection — slow, slightly fast, faster, slowing down, fast, slow. As the piece nears the end, Debussy revisits a tender melody from the beginning and intensifies the moment by incorporating more instruments and quickening the pace, propelling the clarinet to a virtuosic showcase.

This beloved masterpiece soon came to be recognized as a staple in the clarinet repertoire and a testament to the performer's musical nuance, technical skill, endurance, breath control, and tonal beauty.

— Johann Palo



Photo by Laura Banchi, courtesy of The Boglioso Foundation

Leilehua Lanzilotti (b. 1983) *ao kuewa*

Sponsored by Navin Manglani

Leilehua Lanzilotti is a composer, multimedia artist, and curator whose works often explore dramatic expanses of color and timbre. By world-building through multimedia installation works and nontraditional concert experiences/musical interventions, Lanzilotti's works activate imagination around new paths forward in language sovereignty, water sovereignty, land stewardship, and respect. Uplifting others by crafting projects that support both local communities and economy, the work inspires hope to continue.

Lanzilotti was a finalist for the 2022 Pulitzer Prize in Music for *with eyes the color of time*, which the Pulitzer committee called, "a vibrant composition...that distinctly combines experimental string textures and episodes of melting lyricism."

As a composer, Lanzilotti's works have been performed in halls such as the Philharmonie de Paris and Tokyo Metropolitan Theatre. The New York Philharmonic, conducted by Gustavo Dudame, commissioned and premiered *of light and stone* in September 2025. As a recording artist, Lanzilotti has played on albums including Björk's *Vulnicura Live* and *in manus tuas*, Lanzilotti's solo viola album debut, which was called "entrancing" by The New Yorker's Alex Ross.

As a part of a larger body of work drawing from Lanzilotti's Kanaka Maoli heritage, Lanzilotti's video installation, *the sky in our hands, our hands in the sky*, honors the *wahi pana* (translated literally as, "places with a heartbeat" in 'Ōlelo Hawai'i) featured throughout.

As an educator, Lanzilotti has been on the faculty at New York University, University of Northern Colorado as the Director and founder of the UNCOMmon Ensemble, University of Hawai'i, and the Banff Centre.

Additionally, Lanzilotti created *Shaken Not Stuttered*, a free online resource demonstrating extended techniques for strings.

Dr. Lanzilotti is a graduate of Oberlin Conservatory of Music, Yale School of Music, and Manhattan School of Music. In addition, Lanzilotti was an orchestral fellow in the Rundfunk-Sinfonieorchester Berlin and New World Symphony, and participated in the Lucerne Festival Academy under Pierre Boulez.

ao kuewa (2021)

ao kuewa tells the story of renewal after destruction, and the importance of taking care of the land.

The piece was originally conceived as part of the Symphony of the Hawai'i Forests, a multidisciplinary project that aims to educate elementary and secondary students about Hawai'i's Forests and the importance of mālama 'āina.

ao kuewa translates roughly as "the realm of the homeless spirits." Traditionally, it was thought that certain trees were homes for spirits. Deforestation therefore also creates a crisis for these spirits. Only through the dedication of restoring the land do the spirits find renewal. The melody is adapted from an electronic work by Gahlord Dewald created using the monome norns.

The piece was commissioned by University of Hawai'i and Hawai'i Forest Institute with the generous support of the Hawai'i State Foundation on Culture and the Arts.

— Leilehua Lanzilotti



Photo by Michael J Viljoen

Michael J Viljoen (b. 1973) *Tafeni*

Sponsored by Navin Manglani

Michael is a South African-born composer, cellist, conductor, and educator now based in New Jersey - proof that life can take you very far from where you started and still hand you a snow shovel. He earned his BMus in orchestral studies and composition from Stellenbosch University and had the privilege of studying with South African modernist trailblazers Hans Roosenschoon and the late Peter Klatzow.

His music for orchestra, chamber groups, and dance-physical theatre, has made its way to the International Horn Symposium, the Grahamstown National Arts Festival, and the Wakkerstroom Arts Festival, to name a few. As a performer, Michael has played in ensembles across South Africa and now throughout the Northeast. This year he conducted Fenix Strings with fellow South African Brendan Vincent, premiering his piano concerto *As the Crow Flies*. He was also honored to have members of QUO premiere his *Khumbula* for horns and low strings to open QUO's 2025–2026 season.

He serves on the board of the Violoncello Society of New York, is a performance clinician, and proudly considers QUO his musical family. When not immersed in music (a surprisingly small slice of the pie), Michael loves traveling with his husband, exploring food, and adopting plants at a rate that suggests no one is supervising him. He takes his coffee seriously and his metronome markings less so.

Tafeni (2024)

One of my college professors said, "music does not exist in a vacuum." Growing up and living all over South Africa, with its diverse natural beauty, peoples, languages, cultures, and sounds shaped my consciousness. A formative experience was making several visits to an ancestral home in the Southern Drakensberg mountains, where the lands of three South African peoples overlap: the Xhosa, Zulu, and Sotho. The space is wide open, green, and lush as far as the eye can see. The towering mountains ground you to the place in a way that is inescapable and magical. It was the first time a place has so viscerally said to me — this is home.

I would later develop my strong internal response into musical ideas while contemplating what finding home and what home mean to me. Particularly, as I was reflecting on QUO, what they mean to me, and also what it means to my QUO family. Finding this ensemble is a homecoming for us all. It is joyous, warm, and deeply fulfilling. The sense of community and connection is quite unique to ensembles of this size. It is a place that feels like home.

The piece traces a journey toward "home," written with the specific personalities of this orchestra in mind so that every section has a moment to speak, to shimmer, and to help weave the tapestry of what home feels like. It begins in a place of stillness: a deep, quiet foundation from the basses that suggests that inner well of memory and consciousness. From that space, a tiny idea in the cellos — just two notes — starts to bloom, growing into a warm, singing line taken up by the violas and violins while the marimba sets a gentle pulse beneath them. The woodwinds answer like distant voices calling across a landscape, and soon the music swells into a communal energy: melodies that stretch and lean toward one another, rhythms inspired by South African song and dance traditions, and a sense of openhearted conversation across the whole orchestra.

As the journey continues, the mood shifts: the texture darkens, the harmonies thicken, and low brass and horns rise with a brooding power before the entire orchestra bursts forward in a surge of momentum, interrupted now and then by the playful mischief of trombones or a sudden sparkle from the harp. A new dance takes shape, full of plucked strings and bright marimba patterns, until everything gathers into a bold, glowing chorale. From there, the memories begin to return: familiar themes reappear in new voices, each echoing something we heard at the beginning, as though recognizing the landscape again after a long journey. The music grows brighter and more joyful, the pace quickens, and finally all the themes come together in an exuberant, full-hearted flourish. It is a moment of arrival, a musical homecoming, and a celebration of the many paths — melodic, personal, communal — that lead us to a place of belonging.

— Michael J Viljoen



Portrait of Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky by Nikolai Dmitriyevich Kuznetsov, 1893

Pyotr I. Tchaikovsky (1840–1893)

Symphony No. 2, Op. 17, "Ukranian"

Sponsored by **Dane Stalcup**

Originally titled "Little Russian," Tchaikovsky wrote his 2nd symphony in 1872 before revising it in 1879–1880. At the time, "Little Russia" was the nickname given to Ukraine, where Tchaikovsky had indeed composed the symphony while on vacation in Kamenka, visiting his sister. He did not title the piece "Little Russian," it was given that moniker by friend and music critic Nicolay Kashkin. Tchaikovsky was inspired by the folk songs and music of the Ukrainian villagers so much so that the piece contains three Ukrainian folk songs, Down the River Volga in the first movement, Spin o My Spinner in the second movement, and The Crane in the fourth movement. Though it may be his shortest symphony, it is a quintessential piece from Tchaikovsky's early years.

The first movement begins with a somber horn solo, of the Down the River Volga song. The theme repeats a few times before the movement eventually kicks up to an Allegro vivo. The folk song is still present, though fragmented and exploded across the entire orchestra with Tchaikovsky's signature energy

and vigor. The movement concludes with a return to the horn solo, and we quietly drift away.

The second movement, which is traditionally a slow one, is instead a march. In fact, Tchaikovsky reworked a march he had written for his unrealized opera, Undine. The Ukrainian folk song Spin o My Spinner can be heard in this movement, over the steady beat of the timpani. Interestingly, this movement is in ABA form, with a short rondo in the middle. The woodwinds and strings exchange phrases between one another, which can only be achieved by having a lighter and more transparent orchestration.

The third movement, though not containing any specific songs, still contains the buoyancy and character of a folk tune. Its high energy opening is temporarily relaxed for its trio section, before returning to the frenetic pace of its opening material. It is rhythmically interesting in its shifting time signatures of 3/8 to 2/8, highlighting both its frenzy and fragility.

The finale, with its folk basis of The Crane is a true tour du force. Instead of weaving the folk song into the piece, he puts it front and center, making it the star of the movement. It goes through several variations but is still solidly present throughout the movement. The piece concludes with intense jubilation vaulting it into a clear work of great Nationalist importance. Although Tchaikovsky was never considered a Nationalist composer, and in fact did have a strained relationship with The Mighty Five, this piece was one that utterly delighted composers such as Rimsky-Korsakov, particularly this finale.

— James DiMeglio

Upcoming Concerts

For more information, visit us online at www.queerurbanorchestra.org

QUOtets

Saturday, January 31, 2026 · 8:00 PM | Judson Memorial Church

An evening of intimate chamber music featuring small ensembles from the Queer Urban Orchestra. **QUOtets** showcases the artistry, individuality, and collaborative spirit of QUO musicians in a night of vibrant, boundary-pushing performances!

QUOfest

Friday–Sunday, March 13–15, 2026 | Church of St. Paul & St. Andrew

QUOfest returns for a full weekend celebration of music, community, and creativity. Across three days of concerts and events, QUO highlights diverse voices, bold repertoire, and the powerful joy of queer musicians coming together to make art.



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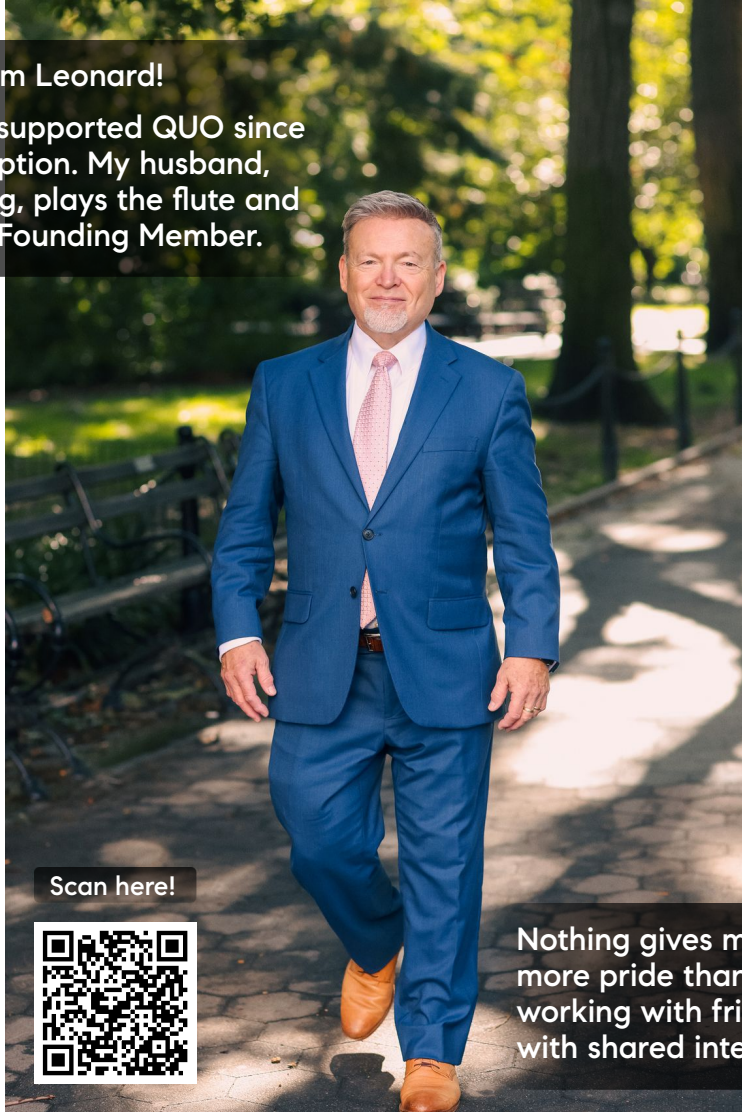
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I've supported QUO since inception. My husband, Craig, plays the flute and is a Founding Member.

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