

# Celebrating Collaboration

*By Carolyn True, NCTM*

**F**aced with writing an article about the two duos being featured at the MTNA 2021 conference, the question was not what to write, but what to leave out. The duos, the McCain Duo (Artina and Martin McCain) and the Nyaho/Garcia Duo (William Chapman Nyaho and Susanna Garcia), have given electrifying and spectacular performances across the globe. Both have given workshops at local, state, national and international conferences; they have adjudicated, presented master classes and held numerous virtual and in-person interviews. Each of these performers serves (or has served) on the faculty of universities from coast to coast, and their CDs and publications enjoy worldwide distribution. They represent the very best of the field—marrying teaching and performing with a passionate commitment to promoting works of underrepresented composers, particularly those of people of color.

## **McCain Duo (Artina and Martin McCain)**

With their signature eclectic style and love of musical fusion, Artina and Martin are on the cutting edge of music making in the 21st century. Coupling beautiful music making and exuberant charm, the duo's appearances have been lauded as "breathtaking, awe-inspiring, and invigorating." The diversity of their backgrounds is showcased in the wide variety of styles that informs their music: gospel,

hip-hop, R&B, pop and more—all couched in European classical music training.

Artina and Martin's collaboration is only enhanced by their stellar individual careers. Martin is the youngest faculty member to attain full professor at Texas State University in San Marcos, Texas. He has performed with the Croatian Army Wind Band, the United States Army Concert Band "Pershing's Own" and the United States Army Brass Quintet, as well as at Yong Siew Toh Conservatory (Singapore), the Zagreb Academy of Music (Croatia) and the Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts. He is a performing artist for S.E. Shires, Reunion Blues Gig Bags and plays on the "McCain" signature mouthpiece series manufactured by Pickett Brass.

Artina's solo piano career has taken her to Mahidol University in Bangkok, Hatch Recital Hall in Rochester, New York, the Cummer Museum of Art and Gardens in Jacksonville, Florida and the Desoto Arts Commission in Desoto, Texas. She was one of the interviewees for an episode of PBS *RoadTrip Nation* entitled "Degree of Impact" (access it at <https://artinamccain.com/watch>). Currently, she is assistant professor of piano and coordinator of keyboard studies at the Rudi E. Scheidt School of Music at the University of Memphis in Tennessee. Artina McCain is a Yamaha Artist.

As the McCain Duo, Artina and Martin have created myriad professional development

videos that explore topics from “Attending Music Conferences” to “Financial Stability,” to their series of interviews “Elevate with the McCain Duo.” (Find these and more on their YouTube channel <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCPkDEaWogeUD6rs5MfIT3nA/videos>)

### **Nyaho/Garcia Duo (William Chapman Nyaho and Susanna Garcia)**

Meeting at the University of Texas at Austin, Susanna Garcia and William Chapman Nyaho became friends in the 1980s. Their musical partnership, however, began in 1990, while both were teaching at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette. Their mutual respect embodies both artistic music making and a desire to enrich and expand audiences of two-piano music. Performing throughout the United States, Europe and Africa, their synergistic duo has been described as possessing “one head, one heart, but four hands.”

Well-known to the MTNA membership, Nyaho is of Ghanaian-American descent. He has given numerous presentations highlighting the works of composers of African heritage at local, state and national MTNA meetings. Enthusiastically attended and universally praised, Nyaho’s offerings are energetic, positive and entertaining, gently nudging listeners to explore composers’ works that should live on in the musical canon.

Nyaho compiled and edited the critically acclaimed five-volume graded anthology *Piano Music of Africa and the African Diaspora*, published by Oxford University Press. The volumes contain extraordinary music, some familiar, most not. With accompanying composer biographies and clean editing, the compositions are varied







in style, length and musical language. There is something for every pianist from late-intermediate to advanced, expanding the performing literature and generating further investigation.

Susanna Garcia is a South Texas native who has performed in concert across the United States, Canada, Ghana and Europe. In demand as a solo artist as well as duo pianist, she has adjudicated and presented in a variety of formats at the International Society for Music Education, the College Music Society, and for many local, state, and national MTA organizations. With the backing of the Mexican government's cultural enrichment program, she traveled the country, playing recitals and giving workshops.

Garcia is currently professor of music at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette, where she has taught since 1990. Garcia holds the Louisiana Board of Regents/Ruth Stodghill Girard Endowed Professorship in Music and in 2001 was named a University of Louisiana Distinguished Professor. In 2012, she was honored as a FOUNDATION Fellow by Music Teachers National Association, and in 2013 she received the Outstanding Teacher Award from the Louisiana Music Teachers Association. Garcia is the co-developer of eNovativePiano: Multimedia Resources for Developing Musicianship Skills, published online at eNovativePiano.com.

In an effort to get to know each duo beyond their biographies, I asked them to respond to a few questions.

**Carolyn True (CT):** By nature of your two duos, the concert looks to be varied and exciting. What works (if you know) are you planning on presenting?

**McCain Duo (MD):** We are thrilled to be presenting works by American composers and written idiomatically well for trombone/piano. The repertoire we pick will create an intimate range of tone colors from energetic to the sublime and imaginative storytelling through David Wilborn's *Jazz Triptych*.





**Nyaho/Garcia Duo (N/GD):** *Two-piano suite*: by Jamaican composer Eleanor Alberga. This work was commissioned to celebrate Jamaica's 25th year of independence. A prolific composer, she has written several works for orchestra, chamber music and works for solo piano, duets and two pianos.

Argentinian composer Carlos Guastavino's *Gato*, is based on a rural Argentinian dance. The composer published several works for piano, songs, choral works and chamber music. Unlike his contemporaries his compositional style was less avant-guard.

Scherzo: *Didn't my Lord Deliver Daniel?* by Thomas H. Kerr, Jr., is a set of variations based on a Negro Spiritual. Thomas H. Kerr received his degrees in theory from the Eastman School of Music. He later became professor and chair of the piano department at Howard University. His compositions range from piano works, art song, to chamber and orchestral works.

**CT: What are some of your favorite memories as a duo?**

**MD:** Some of our favorite memories as a duo come from our international performing tours in Europe and Southeast Asia. Outside of music, we are foodies! In southeast Asia, we love eating a variety of delicacies to every day street food. Another performance highlight is when we went to Croatia. Zagreb architecture is so beautiful and the people were so nice. As Black musicians being in Zagreb was particularly interesting because many of the people there had never seen or heard a Black musician. At one concert when we went on to stage there were deep murmurs in Croatian followed by a sea of flashing photos. We felt like movie stars! It was a healthy curiosity; people were pointing and taking pictures of us all the time. It was great and a one-of-a-kind experience!

**N/GD:** We have been lucky to play in a variety of venues and each performance has been unique and memorable.

One of our favorite memories was our four-hand recital in Rome. It was a special trip for Susie because her Italian family was able to hear her perform live for the first time. Nyaho remembers how attentive and serious the audience was. You could have heard a pin drop!

Another memorable occasion was playing at the Whim Museum in St. Croix. We were surprised to learn that there was no electricity in the old sugarcane plantation house and that we would be performing by candlelight.

Then there was the time that we played a venue where the two pianos were tuned a half-step apart. This was particularly distressing because we were performing new pieces from memory and it took everything that we had to stay focused during the distraction.

Beyond that, though, is the way it feels to play together. It is so much fun, and we bring out the best in each other's playing.

**CT: As we work to effect change in our society, what role(s) do you think MTNA should embrace?**

**MD:** There are a lot of things MTNA can embrace, including featuring an abundance of composers and artists of color. Diversify the leadership nationally and on boards in individual states. Create more opportunities for underserved communities in our organization. You have to be intentional about the change in order for it to become widespread and continuous.

**N/GD:** MTNA should continue to do what it does best: provide continued education and support for teachers, while seeking to expand its outreach and commitment to inclusion.

**CT: What is your vision for music teachers and music education as we go forward?**

**MD:** We would like to see educators be forward thinking and brave in entering in important conversations. In fact, maybe that should be a topic at every conference! This season of 2020 has hit us all in various ways. Whether that be about expanding your technology use or facing the reality of race issues for Black people, diversifying our repertoire or creating equal competition opportunities for underserved communities. We all grow and benefit when we include everyone.

**CT: What thoughts are essential to include, both about you and about your presentation?**

**MD:** At a time when institutions and society need to address difficult conversations of racial equity and social justice we build those answers into our programming. We are purposeful about using music to promote change.

**N/GD:** The Nyaho/Garcia Duo's mission is joy. The joy of being musical partners, the joy of performing together and the joy of bringing great music that is not often enough heard to a new audience.

The overarching theme for both duos is love of music, joy of creating that music together and passion in bringing their performances to the public. In whatever fashion we are fortunate enough to hear them, know we will forever be touched by the performances of the McCain and Nyaho/Garcia Duos.

**AMT**

**Carolyn True, NCTM**, is a compassionate and challenging professor at Trinity University and an engaging performer. In addition to an active solo career, she is a member of SOLI Chamber Ensemble and the Beckman/True Duo.

