

15 distinguished artists who got their start in Greater Lansing

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When LSJ set out to feature a few talented artists who got their start in Greater Lansing, the list grew quickly. And, to be clear, this list is not exhaustive. The information and quotes below are from the artists' responses to questionnaires LSJ sent them. Let us know who we missed so we can add them to our list for potential future stories.

***OAA Editor Note** – *This is a shortened version to highlight the eight OHS alumni. The entire article can be found here. <https://www.lansingstatejournal.com/story/life/2024/05/30/musicians-creatives-raised-lansing-educators-michigan-state-msu-influence/73602882007/>*

Ben Schneider - Okemos High School (2001), founder and lead singer of the indie rock band, Lord Huron



Ben Schneider of Lord Huron performs at the 2019 Governors Ball Festival at Randall's Island in New York. Noam Galai, Getty Images

Schneider, who named the band after the water near which his family owns a summer home, played in bands around town beginning in high school and all through college at the University of Michigan. He studied painting at U-M and moved to New York and then Los Angeles post graduation to pursue a career in visual arts while still writing and recording music.

He got his break in 2010, when a journalist reviewed one of the CDs he and his sister Caitlin handed out at a music festival in Northern California. He then enlisted his high school friends, one at a time, to join his band.

Lord Huron, now composed of Lansing-area-raised musicians Schneider, Mark Barry, Miguel Briseno and Tom Renaud, plays about 100 shows a year in locales across the United States and has performed the late-night talk show circuit. Its biggest hit is triple-platinum single "The Night We Met," featured in the Netflix series "13 Seasons Why."

"The high points keep coming every day that I wake up and find that me and my lifelong best friends can make a living recording music and traveling around gigging," Schneider wrote.

Nolan McKelvey - Okemos High School (1991), Arizona-based, internationally known bluegrass performer and songwriter.



Nolan McKelvey, an Okemos High School graduate (1991), is an Arizona-based, internationally known bluegrass performer and songwriter. Courtesy Photo / Jill Knuth

Although McKelvey was schooled in classical string bass, he soon became immersed in jazz, folk and making music with friends – as well as playing hockey. He has never stopped making music.

Named “Best Musician” by the Arizona Daily Sun and dubbed “one of the best songwriters in the Southwest,” McKelvey has traveled to places such as Boston, Belfast, and Los Angeles. The Arizona-based musician has released 21 records.

“Places like White Brothers String Shop and Elderly Instruments (in Lansing) reinforced the idea that music was really important,” McKelvey said. “But, mostly it was the little East Lansing community events that featured local bands that were hugely impactful.”

**OAA Editor Note – Nolan wrote the tribute “Song for Holly Tarr” OHS1990, after her tragic death. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KNBw-QEgo0I>*

Arnie Tanimoto - Okemos High School (2007), Viola da Gamba chamber musician and soloist



Arnie Tanimoto, a 2007 graduate of Okemos High School, is a Viola da Gamba chamber musician and soloist Courtesy Phot / Arnie Tanimoto

Tanimoto began in the fifth grade strings program at Okemos Public Schools under Linda Gregorian and continues to excel in the cello and piano.

"My music development was shaped by playing and listening to chamber music," he said. "My mom would take me to concerts of the Cello Plus programs at MSU and to the Detroit Chamber Music Society."

After receiving music degrees from Oberlin Conservatory and the Eastman School of Music, he began to concentrate on baroque instruments. He became the first-ever viola da gamba major at the Julliard School.

"My highest achievement was winning the Bach-Abel competition," Tanimoto said. "It was a moment of profound validation of my dedication to the viola da gamba."

Felix Wang - Okemos High School (1987), cellist, cello professor, and member of the Blair String Quartet



Felix Wang, Okemos High School (1987), is a cellist, cello professor and member of Blair String Quartet. Courtesy Photo / Felix Wang

Felix Wang studied with MSU cello professor Louis Potter as well as Marilyn Kesler at Okemos. Wang said “just having great mentors like Mr. Potter and Ms. Kesler and a fantastic musical community was supportive, nurturing, and inspiring. “

He remembers his father taking him to concerts and master classes at MSU and Wharton Center. One of those classes, it turns out, was given by the Blair String Quartet, of which he is now a member.

Jordan Lulloff - Okemos High School (2011), classical saxophonist and arts administrator



Jordan Lulloff, an Okemos High School graduate (2011), is classical saxophonist and arts administrator. Courtesy Photo / Nick Zoulek

Lulloff is a true child of the local arts community. His parents are both musicians who taught him the instrument along with Jonathon Nichol, who is a lifelong family friend. He said “growing up around MSU and all the incredibly talented artists here, I had the ability to have so many rewarding music experiences that were hugely influential.”

Now living in Chicago, Lulloff is carving out a robust career in the arts. He founded a saxophone quartet named “Nois,” teaches at the University of Illinois Chicago and manages a performing venue call Space Presents.

A recently released Nois album was named Billboard’s No. 1 classical crossover album and Musical American listed the quartet as the New Artists of the Month.

Saul Richmond-Rakerd - Okemos High School (2009), cellist for the San Francisco Ballet Orchestra



Saul Richmond-Rakerd, an Okemos High School Graduate (2009), is a cellist for the San Francisco Ballet Orchestra. Courtesy Photo / Saul Richmond-Rakerd

Richmond-Rakerd grew up in a rich musical environment but was also interested in science. He was a physics and music major at Brown University. After college, he studied music in Italy and the die was cast.

He appreciated the teaching he had in Okemos. “Marilyn Kesler (orchestra teacher) was a shining example of imprinting the kind of discipline that it takes to make it in the music world.”

Richmond-Rakerd said he enjoyed the great shows he saw at Wharton Center and had “wonderful childhood memories of the Great Lakes Folk Festival every summer.”

After playing as a freelancer in several orchestras in Italy and the San Francisco Bay Area, he finally landed a permanent appointment with the San Francisco Ballet Orchestra.

Michael Lluberes - Okemos High School (1997), artistic director and playwright



Michael Lluberes, Okemos High School (1997), is an artistic director and playwright. Courtesy Photo / Michael Lluberes

Singing and theater were always Lluberes' main interests. He was in all the plays at Okemos High School and was greatly influenced by choir director Frank DeWald and private teacher Janine Novenske Smith. In addition, Lluberes was in plays produced at Lansing Community College and The Turner House.

"I saw touring shows at Wharton Center and lots of plays at Boarshead Theatre, which were very influential."

Lluberes received a BFA in acting from the University of North Carolina and moved to New York where he performed in off-Broadway plays as well as several theaters around the nation.

He came back home to Michigan to become the artistic director of the Flint Repertory Theater. His biggest career achievement was when he conceived and directed the new LGBTQ+ version of the musical "The Fantasticks." It became the longest running musical in the theater's history and he is now preparing a production of it for New York.

Leo Eguchi - Okemos High School (1995), cellist, professor, arts administrator



Leo Eguchi, an Okemos High School graduate (1995), is a cellist, professor and arts administrator. Courtesy Photo / Justine Cooper

“I didn’t grow up in a classical music house and as such my interests and influences are all over the place,” Eguchi said.

Eguchi received two degrees – in physics and music. Based in Boston, Eguchi is a symphony musician, freelance cellist and is co-founder and co-artistic director of the Sheffield Chamber Players and the Willamette Valley Chamber Music Festival.

In addition, Eguchi is on the faculty of Boston College and an affiliated artist with MIT.

He greatly values the variety of music he is able to play.

“There was a single week in which I got to perform with the Boston Pops, The Who’s “Quadrophenia” with Pete Townsend and the music of Star Wars with John Williams conducting. That week was a real thrill for me.”

Ken Glickman is a freelance writer. Read his blog at Glickarts.blogspot.com.