

CLASS OF 2020

Stars in the Arts: Vivian Kammerer and Cooper Stewart



Vivian Kammerer

Editor's note: John Henry Martin continues his profiles of members of the class of 2020 in Napa County. This week, he goes to Napa High.

JOHN HENRY MARTIN

**Vivian Kammerer
Napa High School**

Senior Quote: **"Do what you want now. We are not living in eternity. We have only this moment, sparkling like a star in our hand and melting like a snowflake..."** — Francis Bacon

One of the many things I learned during my interview with Vivian Kammerer, a recent gradu-

ate of Napa High School, was that her GPA was penalized because she took choir classes. Her final GPA was 4.8, as Advanced Placement classes are worth five points, rather than four. But because she took one or two choir classes each year, which are only worth four points, she was deprived of a 5.0.

She does not regret the decision. "Choir was the most enjoyable thing I did in high school," she said. "I think a lot of people want to find the easy way out and just look at numbers. I think that taking a more holistic approach looking at how people have contributed to the culture or the commu-

nity as a whole is more important than just looking at academics."

She started in Treble Choir her freshman year. Then through a process of auditions, she joined Concert Choir her sophomore year and progressed to Chamber Choir and Vocal Music Workshop her junior and senior years. Vocal Music Workshop is Napa High's a cappella group.

In Chamber Choir, Kammerer recalled two challenging pieces of music. The first was Josef Rheinberger's "Abendlied" or "evening song" written in 1855. The lyrics are taken from the Book of Luke in Martin Luther's German trans-

lation of the Bible. This required Kammerer and her choirmates to learn the German to evoke the right emotions in the song. Making it even more complicated was the fact that it was "polyphonic," which means that for most of the song, each person sings a unique part, requiring them to isolate themselves in their singing, while at the same time coordinating their timing with the rest of the choir.

The other piece of music was Ethan Sperry's arrangement of an Indian Wedding Raga called

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YOUR JULY IN BOOKS

Black Authors Matter

Books can be, and often are, an escape from reality. But sometimes, reality demands that we sit up and take notice, and the events of the past month have shown us that this is one of those times.



ELAYNA TRUCKER

The brutal murders of black men and women are eruptions in a landscape that, since the first African slave

was brought unwillingly to this country, has long simmered with volcanic activity just beneath the surface. Books can play a role in helping us wrestle with this past, and to evolve as individuals and as Americans.

Fantastic books like "How to Be an Antiracist" by Ibram X. Kendi and "So You Want to Talk About Race" by Ijeoma Oluo help us to frame our thinking on the subject and move forward.

Representation in all genres is another crucial part of this story, though. White readers can always find themselves in books: there is no shortage of white protagonists, male or female, and plenty of book covers featuring white people. There are far, far fewer books in which a black, indigenous or person of color can recognize themselves.

Black children walking into a bookstore and seeing only a sea of white faces on all the books will not feel safe, or welcomed, or loved. Representation can make the difference between a child who loves reading and one who dreads it as a chore. Additionally, those of us in a position to do so should strive to lift up and elevate voices of black, indigenous or people of color. With my picks for the coming month in publishing, I intend to do just that.

Kenya Rankin, an award-winning author and speaker, collects a wide array of inspiring words from anti-racist thinkers, politicians,

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PHOTO COURTESY OF MALICK KOLY

The late Wallace Roney and Malick Koly perform in June 2019 at Symphony Space NYC for the "Wall to Wall John Coltrane" tribute. Roney, who was Koly's mentor and band leader, died this year of COVID-19.

Malick Koly is drumming for the world

A St. Helena High grad makes music in New York City

TONY POER
"Jazz is the big brother of Revolution. Revolution follows it around." — Miles Davis

On a mid-summer afternoon, the video shoot in an empty Calistoga field is both a documentary and a metaphor.

Its subject is Malick Koly, a New York musician and St. Helena High School alum. The young jazz drummer walks to the middle of the tall grass field and takes a seat at his three-piece kit. With no one around but the pair of cameramen tracking him, he launches into a crisp and energetic solo.

The short video, which Koly participated in during a return visit to California, is part of a YouTube documentary about remote audio recording. Visu-

ally, though, the 2017 clip plays like a scene from a near future of social distancing, taken to a creative extreme.

Just 22, Koly is an accomplished jazz artist. In this respect, he's accustomed to exploring his own creative boundaries. For as long as he can remember, he's been performing solos, first as a child percussionist in West Africa and France, then a budding music student and transplant to Napa Valley, and now as a busy drummer in New York.

But jazz is also about collaboration, a *non grata* concept during the coronavirus pandemic, especially in his adopted city. Over the past few months, a schedule of zero New York gigs with his bandmates, coupled with cancelled performances

around the country and internationally, has been an adjustment. The young man was on quite a ride before most of the world shut down.

"2019 was just the busiest year of my life so far," Koly said on the phone from his home in Harlem. His first language is French, courtesy of his formative years, but his accent is subtle after less than a decade speaking English, which he does with near-fluency. If conversation with him is drawn out, it has more to do with his thoughtful answers than command of English.

He talked about growing up on three continents while recapping his music career to date. He also spoke in terms of a personal jazz philosophy that belied his age.

"It's been not only touring the

whole wide world with Wallace Roney but also, you know, getting that absolute validation because of him—from the people who respected me prior and helped shape me to get there, and from new people who just discovered me because I was all over the world with Wallace."

"So yeah, 2019," he laughed. "Simply the busiest and most fruitful year of my life yet."

The excitement and productivity have been tempered by somber reality.

Like many New Yorkers, Koly hasn't gone untouched by tragedy amidst the pandemic. In late March, Roney, his band leader and mentor, died from complications of the coronavirus. The

Please see **MALICK**, Page C2

NAPA VALLEY ARTISTS IN RESIDENCE

Caitlin Dukes and her father, David

ROSEMARIE KEMPTON

Caitlin Dukes, whose realistic portraits are stunningly detailed, has always enjoyed drawing faces — especially of people in their later years. This week, she is drawing a portrait of her grandmother, Patricia Zunino, who passed away last May.

"My grandmother was a very kind and loving soul, who held a rare and deep compassion for everyone. She was also very artistic and taught me many things in the art world and beyond," said Dukes, who grew up in Napa.

Besides introducing her to the world of art, Dukes' grandmother, a landscape painter, taught her granddaughter how

to garden, sew and crochet.

How has the threat of COVID-19 impacted her life?

"Sheltering in place has been difficult for me at times," she said. "I miss my family a lot."

Being away from her job at Az-zuro Pizzeria e Enoteca has given her time to spend doing things she hasn't always found time for in the past.

"I am fortunate to not live alone," she said.

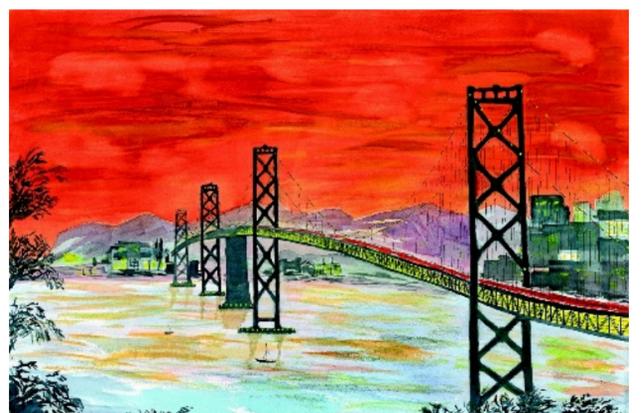
Dukes lives with Joel Rodriguez, her life partner of 15 years, and his son, Dakota, and their two dogs and a cat. She has been spending most of her sheltering-at-home time in the garden, playing with her dogs, cleaning

and cooking as well as doing artwork.

"Sheltering at home has impacted my artwork in that I tend to start one project and then the next day want to start another project," Duke said. "This has resulted in many new projects but few of them are finished. Some days I draw or sketch, some days I sew or crochet."

Growing up in a family that appreciated and encouraged her art, Dukes has always been drawn to portrait art. She enjoys drawing people and said she has had the "privilege of drawing portraits for family and friends of their loved ones and also their pets."

"I really enjoy capturing the



SUBMITTED PHOTO

The Bay Bridge, by David Dukes.

emotion in the photograph they give me and reflecting that into my art," she said.

In her portrait of an African father and his young child, Dukes

has captured the deep love and connection between them.

Somehow, her portraits appear

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Malick

From C1

celebrated trumpeter was 59, the youngest in a lineup of music greats in and around New York to succumb to the virus this year. It was an almost incalculable loss to jazz.

In its lengthy obituary, The New York Times described the musician as “Miles Davis’s only true protégé.” Roney, whose style according to The Times, “bespoke an investment in the entire lineage of jazz trumpet playing,” represented a single degree of separation between his own protégé, Koly, and the great trumpeter Davis — an extraordinary through line back to the young drummer.

A little over a year ago, Roney invited Koly to join his band, a quintet made up of players much younger than himself. The lineup echoed Roney’s days in the ‘90s, when he toured and recorded with four of jazz’s most accomplished players—Tony Williams, Ron Carter, Wayne Shorter, and Herbie Hancock—in the acclaimed Miles Davis tribute band. All but the drummer, Williams, are still alive and performing.

Koly debuted on May 24-25 at Jazz Forum, a club in Tarrytown, New York, playing in shows that coincided with Roney’s 59th birthday weekend. In a video of the performance online, he’s mostly concealed behind the “Big Man” Roney, because the stage at Jazz Forum is tiny. The audience is out of the frame, listening with rapt attention.

“There’s a certain kind of crowd that goes to a jazz club in New York,” said Bobby Bradford, a Pasadena-based jazz trumpeter and longtime History of Jazz instructor at Pomona College.

Over the phone, the 85-year-old bebop and “New Music” veteran was pleased to report that “then and now, they go to hear this music that’s difficult to listen to. They don’t go to these jazz clubs for a party. They don’t go to do a lot of loud talking, or celebrating somebody’s birthday, making a lot of noise, you know? Like you would if you go to a club where you want a band to play, sort of for want of another name, just to ‘entertain’ the crowd!”

Judging by the quality of the jazz, the crowd gathered before Roney’s bandstand last year did enjoy themselves. Koly recounted that his own path to that bandstand began several years earlier, after a chance encounter in Harlem in 2013.

While exploring the St. Nicholas Terrace neighborhood, where they live to this day, he and his mother, Malian, performing artist Awa Sangho, bumped into her friend, fellow dancer Nia Love. Love is married to the saxophonist Antoine Roney, Wallace’s younger brother. When he found out Koly was an aspiring jazz drummer, he arranged an introduction to the trumpeter. “Antoine wasn’t going to talk about his brother like you didn’t know him,” he said, “but he made it very clear that there are people that were gatekeepers and legacy-holders in this music that still re-

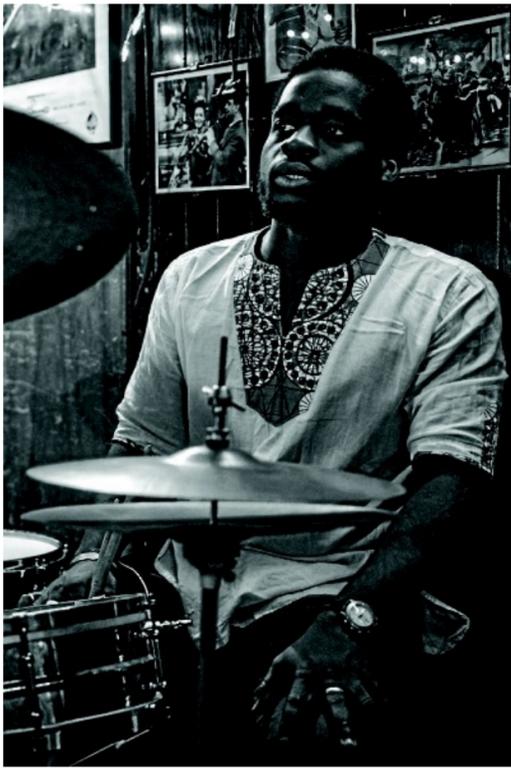


PHOTO COURTESY OF MALICK KOLY

Malick Koly was a child percussionist in West Africa and France, before he came to live in St. Helena. Today, he’s a professional jazz musician in New York City.

main.”

A short time later, he continued, “I went to New Jersey with Kojo, Antoine’s son, to visit his uncle Wallace. And Wallace had me play the drums, and he was impressed. I mean, for me to have him impressed with my 15 year-old self? It was like, ‘That doesn’t really make sense. He’s probably either being really nice, or something is just not right.’”

Roney’s enthusiasm for Koly’s playing was genuine, however. They exchanged contact information and developed a working relationship that eventually led to a spot for the young drummer in the Wallace Roney Quintet. The process was anything but rushed.

“You know, the interesting about it is that I’d been playing with him in his basement. I had been coming over to do rehearsals for about a year prior to actually integrating in the band. So, my audition was an extended one.”

Koly realized that Roney was surrounded by great drummers he’d already worked with. “I was just a young kid that was promising up until about exactly a year ago. So, last May was the first official time actually with Wallace as part of his band.”

The subsequent tour of clubs and concert venues around the U.S., Asia, and Europe was, he noted, open-ended, with an additional trip planned for Africa. He had every reason to believe the quintet would still be performing to this day if tragedy hadn’t struck in March.

Moving backwards on his timeline, Koly brought up the subject of music study in college and connected it to the pre-pandemic days in Roney’s band.

In 2016, he explained, “I graduated high school, and I’d been accepted to a few universities. I decided to go to The New School for Jazz and Contemporary Music” in New York’s Greenwich Village. “I already had my thoughts and beliefs about music school and art school.

And I went anyway because I thought it would be a good idea to make some connections.”

He emphasized he wasn’t bragging when he said that he’s always had a great sense of timing in his life. But he felt that music college, even one as prestigious as The New School, “was somewhat of a waste of time” and, furthermore, that the connections he’d made prior to college meant that “when the time actually came to go on the road, it wasn’t a choice for me to stay or to go. It was like, ‘I don’t really have to stay here.’ So, I left.”

Of course, had his French-speaking parents not sent their son on his original U.S. road trip—to stay with step-family members in California, attend high school, and learn to speak English—who can say where Koly might have ended up?

It’s still a safe bet that jazz would have taken hold. Many of the music contacts he made through Wallace Roney, along with the early stages of their mentorship, happened while he was a teenager. The unlikely part of the story is that this West African French citizen guest of New York City was actually a teenager in tiny St. Helena.

To call Koly’s route to Napa Valley circuitous would be an understatement.

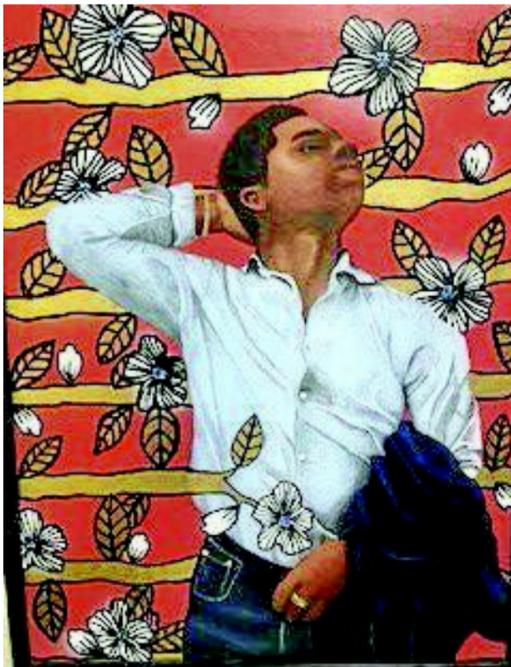
In an interview from April with the Chicago drum dealer and podcaster Steve Maxwell, Jr., Koly flashed his musical chops by performing the show’s introduction, along with two of his Roney Quintet bandmates, Oscar Williams II and Paul Caffari. Maxwell thoughtfully dedicated the episode to their boss, who had passed away just a couple of weeks earlier.

The piano-bass-drums trio played “a spontaneous composition reflective of John Coltrane’s ‘Impressions,’” as Koly would later call it over the phone. The 10-minute tune, viewable on YouTube, was swinging but straight-ahead—a contrast to his formative years, which he described to Maxwell as



PHOTO COURTESY OF MALICK KOLY

Malick Koly with his drums.



COURTESY OF HANNAH GRACE

St. Helena High School student Hannah Grace painted this portrait of her classmate, Malick Koly.

“so complicated.”

“I was born in Ivory Coast,” he explained. “But I have no roots whatsoever there; I just happen to be born there. Then I grew up between Ivory Coast and France, and I went to high school [in California].”

With a mother from Mali and a father, the late playwright Souleymane Koly, from Guinea, his roots may not be Ivorian, but they’re still firmly West African.

He said over the phone that the region’s political instabilities during his youth necessitated that his parents move him around. “I ended up growing up between Montpelier, in the south of France, and Abidjan, the capital of Ivory Coast. And so every summer I would go to the other on and off.”

Koly’s artist parents balanced his peripatetic upbringing with regular exposure to the performing arts, music in particular. He received his first real drum set from his father before he hit double digits, but he was already obsessed with percussion. “I started playing drums when I was two,” he said, “and so I very much grew up in music and always knew that it was my calling.”

When, years later in Harlem, he met Antoine Roney, his West African roots would become the foundation of a future career. As he recalled, “Antoine knew from my mother that I was a drummer. So, he became a mentor of mine because he’d spent a lot of time in West Africa, and in Africa in general. He had an understanding of where I came from and knew about my father. And so we automatically connected.”

Around the age of 10, Koly’s parents split. His mother moved to New York to remarry, but he continued to live in France and Guinea with his father until 2011, his last full school year in Africa. “My parents weren’t really

based anywhere,” he said. “They’re very nomadic, and they were constantly working at the time, traveling a lot. And so it was much easier that I’d be with a family where I would adapt quite well to the environment.”

The following year, Koly’s father sent him to live semi-permanently in Harlem. That summer of 2012, he and his mother, along with her new husband, New York percussionist Daniel Moreno, came to Napa Valley to visit his stepfather’s sister, Sandy Moreno-Crump and her family resided in St. Helena.

An idea took hold in Koly’s mother that Napa Valley would be a good place for him to relocate. While she knew there were music opportunities for him in New York, he was also “pretty much into sports, and big on soccer,” as he put it, a challenging activity for a transplanted city kid. “And it was important that I’d be in a space where I would be forced to speak English and figure out how to do it, rather than being with my mom and going home to speak French with her.”

With his two new step-sisters having gone to St. Helena High School, that was where the decidedly ESL Koly was enrolled.

“I kid you not, I did not speak a word of English,” he confessed. “And to tell you the truth, my first semester of high school was catastrophic. I was in a regular English class trying to make out what my homework was going to be. I mean, it was tough!”

The bright, French-speaking freshman was undaunted, “because to me language is like music, and also being social, I wanted to integrate as well as I could. So I learned. And by the end of my freshman year, I was close to fluency.”

He described other cul-

tural challenges, being the only black student in his St. Helena class. But by his senior year, he’d integrated himself fully enough into the fabric of the school to initiate a popular — and ambitious — music program he called Jazz in the Quad.

“I was one of these kids who didn’t really have a group of friends. I was friends with everyone on that campus,” he said. “With St. Helena being the place that it is, and having, you know, the huge wage gap and the different lives in that space, I thought that playing in the quad would bring people together. It would be not only a great experience for us to play every Friday but, you know, just getting people to enjoy themselves at lunch.”

Koly and four or five St. Helena jazz bandmates drew an enthusiastic crowd at the end of each week. At the end of each school year while he was in California, he would return to New York to practice in the milieu of one of the world’s pre-eminent trumpet players. The juxtaposition is amazing: one wonders if the school community ever realized what a talent they had in their midst.

Koly’s favorite St. Helena educators, drama director Patti Coyle and the assistant principal, Greg Fetters, did.

“Malick learned that he ‘fit in’ better as a band student,” Coyle wrote in a recent email. “He had lived and traveled outside the bounds in comparison with most of the students. I love learning from people, so I loved to hear about Malick’s parents—both professional musicians—and life on the road when they would take him along for gigs, concerts, and tours.”

Separately, Fetters emailed, “He is so talented and a genuinely good person. It makes me very happy to hear that good things are happening for him, and that others appreciate and foster his talents.”

Koly was born with the drummer’s gift of a great ear for music combined with excellent hand-eye coordination. The good things that have come along later have allowed him to make the most of that, and other, musical gifts. Perhaps the best of those things was that chance encounter with Antoine Roney in 2013 that led to him meeting his future mentor and bandleader, even if the relationship ended before it was meant to.

“You know, I never really believe in, like, being chosen and all that stuff,” he said about his first visit to Roney’s home back in 2013. “It was just like, ‘That doesn’t make any sense, because I’m terrible, and that’s Wallace Roney we’re talking about!’ I don’t know what he heard in me.”

He paused to think for a moment, then added, “You know, only his ear could hear that sort of thing. And he used to say that about Miles as well. He said, ‘Miles heard things that you could not hear. So it’s OK to let him say whatever he says, because he hears from the outside in.’ And Wallace was the same way.”

To this day, Greg Fetters has a whimsical portrait of his former student hanging in his office. The detailed piece was painted by a friend and classmate, Hannah Grace. In it, a younger Malick Koly is standing, but in a pose with one hand behind his head, so he could almost be lying down. He stares off at an angle and appears, more than anything, to be listening.

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