

This Year's 'Geniuses' Get Their Reward

By Caroline Porter
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When Chris Thile got a call from the MacArthur Foundation last month, he had to lie down under the sink in a Nashville, Tenn., rehearsal room.

"I got so worked up," the 31-year-old genre-bending musician said. "I just cannot even describe the feeling."

Mr. Thile, who lives in New York City, is among 23 people who got word out of the blue in recent weeks that they had been chosen by the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation to receive \$500,000 each to fund their work, with no strings attached.

Known colloquially as genius grants, the MacArthur Fellowships, given annually, are meant to provide recipients with the freedom to pursue creative activities and ambitious projects unburdened by financial concerns. This year, those activities range from bow-making for string instruments to art entrepreneurship to finding a new way to lift people out of poverty.

... "It is rare to invest in individuals rather than organizations," said Aaron Dorfman, director of the National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy, which advocates for greater accountability and transparency in the philanthropic sector. "You never know what's exactly going to come of it, but you know they are investing in smart, driven people who want to make the world a better place."

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