



Green Mountain Youth Symphony

"the music is just the beginning . . ."

July 27, 2020

Dear GMYSers and families –

We REALLY, REALLY miss all of you! A LOT! We're looking forward to being able to get back together again, someday. Here's an update about the fall and what's been happening behind the scenes.

At our most recent Board meeting, we officially decided that we cannot safely hold a fall semester for GMYS. This wasn't an easy decision. We'd really like to get the orchestras and intro classes together again, but we all agreed that postponing the 2020-21 season until at least January is necessary. Even if we thought there was a way to hold rehearsals safely, we fully expect that the schools will not allow us to use their spaces for at least the fall. The Barre Opera House is also closed through the end of December.

For now, we are holding out hope that we might be able to restart rehearsals in January or February. If that turns out to be possible, we'll give you plenty of notice about auditions later in the fall. Keep your fingers and toes crossed! But, rest assured that we will hold rehearsals **ONLY** when we're confident it's safe for everyone involved to do so. When that happens, we may also be restricted to strings only because winds and percussion pose a whole separate set of challenges after physical distancing and sanitizing the rehearsal space are solved. We'll keep working on it!

For perspective, I've been watching many professional orchestras who had hoped to simply delay the start of their 20-21 concert seasons decide over the past two weeks to cancel their seasons altogether. Live theater is in the same category. It's been very sad and frustrating to watch performing artists in all genres try to find a new way through this. Those of us who work in large groups or in close quarters are especially challenged. We will come through this, but it will take more time than anyone had hoped.

What we ARE working on for GMYSers:

- **A list of possible virtual classes for the fall.** We have some good ideas, and some instructors have even said they would help. Our current hope is to offer sessions during our usual Saturday rehearsal times (9am – 2pm on Saturdays). These classes will be open to young musicians who can't usually join us for orchestra, too.
- **A way to 'get together' to hold our annual Playathon virtually in late fall.** A small group of Board members, GMYS alums, and staff are working on this.
- **A series of just-for- fun virtual meet-ups each month.** We're working on what we hope will be the first – a movie night in August – and looking at possibilities like watching concerts together.

Stay tuned for more details. Ideas from GMYSers are welcome, so send them along.

A few other things you may want to know about how GMYS plans to survive this weird time:

- Like many other small non-profits, we already operate on a shoe-string budget. The Board has worked very hard for the past 5-6 years to set aside a small contingency reserve to allow us a 2- to 3-month cushion. Needless to say, that wouldn't have been enough, but it's been an enormous help. Bob & I are grateful to all the Board members over the past several years who helped us make this happen.
- No incoming program tuition could have easily shut us down entirely, but we were able to secure both a federal PPP loan (which we hope will be forgiven) and a Vermont Economic Recovery Grant. The PPP funds allowed us to continue paying our small, part-time staff for the first several weeks of the crisis, and the VtERG will allow us to hold on until the spring if we're very careful.
- Crucial elements of 'very careful' include:
 - Our already half-time staff (the Executive and Artistic Directors) have agreed to cut their hours and pay in half starting in August. The quarter-time schedule will allow us to work on the programming ideas mentioned above, and figuring out how / when rehearsal restart will happen, then organizing auditions. Other staff are usually paid only during their programs (concert season or CAMP), and we look forward to welcoming them back as soon as we can.
 - We will price any virtual classes we offer so the costs of holding them are covered, leaving the emergency loans and grants to cover our fixed overhead. But we *will* need to charge some tuition. We will do our best to keep these programs affordable and accessible, and will consider offering some need-based tuition assistance. Purely social activities (like movie nights) will be free.
 - The Board, Executive Director and Artistic Director will be carefully considering other fundraising possibilities as we find them. Our main objective is to avoid placing any undue burden on our current GMYS families and find ways to involve the larger GMYS community of alums, alum families and our other supporters. The first fundraiser we'll work on is the annual Playathon. We can't do it in person, but we have some ideas about fun ways to do it virtually and will keep you posted.

Some of you may know that **the 2020-21 season would have been our 20th anniversary**. We'll be postponing any formal celebration until we can hold rehearsals and concerts in person, but we want to keep that milestone in mind throughout this coming year.

What can you do to help GMYS survive and start on our next 20 years?

- **Stay connected with us!** Follow us on social media, participate in some or all of the virtual activities we host, keep sending us emails with your great ideas (we really are listening).
- **Volunteer to help with an event.** Staff, Board members, and even a few GMYS alums will be working on ways we can 'get together' and we welcome more help.
- **Donate to GMYS when you shop online!** We participate in AmazonSmile, iGive, & GivingAssistant and you can find links to the programs on the [Support GMYS page](#) of our website. All of these programs send a small portion of your purchases to GMYS without costing you anything extra. Every small bit is a big help!
- **Donate directly to GMYS** -- if you have the means. We know that many of our families and donors are confronting financial challenges right now, and we completely

understand. If you are able to make a donation of any size, it will help us get through to the other side of this health crisis. We welcome checks (sent to our PO Box) and we can now accept donations through PayPal. Links are in my signature below and on the [Support GMYS page](#) of our website. Consider a multiple of \$20 in honor of our 20th Anniversary 😊.

At the risk of sounding like a broken record, I want to say WE REALLY MISS ALL OF YOU! This will all end someday, and we'll be ready to make music with you again when it does.

Stay well,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Leah Wilhjelm".

Leah Wilhjelm
Executive Director
GMYS