

TLHLife



REPLAY THE HITS

LISTENERS SHARE THE VIRTUAL EXPERIENCE WITH TSO AT HOME

Amanda Sieradzki
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“One of the first things I thought when I realized that we would have to cancel our upcoming concerts was, ‘How are we going to keep the music playing?’” said Amanda “Mandy” Stringer, CEO of the Tallahassee Symphony Orchestra.

The answer was the “TSO At Home” virtual series. Curated by a different musician, board or staff member every week, audio files from past performances are shared in TSO’s email newsletter and on their website.

“While I strongly believe that there is absolutely no substitute for live music, I think the reason that ‘TSO At Home’ is resonating with so many people is because it takes them back to a place in time where a shared experience transported them,” says Stringer. “It is more meaningful to them than simply playing a CD or watching a YouTube video. It is personal for our patrons and reconnects us through a shared memory.”

The instrumentation in George Walker’s “Lyric for Strings” trickles from a gentle stream into a steadily flowing river. Sounds swell and surge as the orchestra builds inside what Stringer calls a “haunting movement” in her description of the



Amanda Stringer, CEO of the Tallahassee Symphony Orchestra, keeps the music alive with the “TSO At Home” virtual series. TALLAHASSEE SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

piece showcased in a recent week’s newsletter. “Lyric for Strings” was originally performed live on March 31, 2019 as part of TSO’s “Ode to Understanding” concert.

The concert combined forces with The Village Square, The Florida A&M Concert Choir and the Morehouse College Glee Club to inspire discourse about human

rights and community. Stringer chose to re-share the music given the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the larger community’s consciousness.

“It is a beautiful, contemplative work for string orchestra,” says Stringer. “[Walker] wrote it after his grandmother passed away, so for me right now it is poignant because you are thinking about the people in your life that are susceptible and vulnerable to this virus.”

As she listens to the work, Stringer’s thoughts drift to her own parents. Her mother was a professional pianist and the driving force behind her early introduction to music. She would often sit underneath the family piano while her mother practiced, and eventually fell in love with the history, discipline and language associated with the instrument.

“The piano can play harmonies as well as melodies,” says Stringer. “I love that it is like a mini-orchestra. It can make all sorts of different tone colors and sounds.”

She most enjoys the distinctive works of Chopin, Ravel and Debussy. In high school, Stringer won a competition and played onstage with the Jackson Mississippi Symphony, and went on to earn her bachelor’s, master’s and doctorate de-

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A member of the Tallahassee Symphony Orchestra plays during *Ode to Understanding*, a musical event to inspire civil discourse at Ruby Diamond Concert Hall on Sunday, March 31, 2019. TORI SCHNEIDER/TALLAHASSEE DEMOCRAT

Symphony

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greens in piano performance. She appreciated her mentor at Vanderbilt University, Amy Dorfman, and her multidimensionality which eventually inspired Stringer to pursue arts administration.

"When we worked together, we would talk about how music fit into society and what it meant to the world," recalls Stringer. "She made it a broader education than just learning the piano."

As a result, the majority of Stringer's creative energy and artistry is now channeled into presenting inspirational concerts for Tallahassee. While she enjoyed teaching music theory in higher education, Stringer says she truly connected with her calling, many years ago, while working for the Tallahassee Youth Orchestras and seeing the impacts she could make from behind the scenes.

This will be her 10th year at the helm of TSO. She remains inspired by the mu-

sicians, patrons and board of directors, and is proud to have been able to expand offerings in the community and widen the orchestra's national network. Stringer works closely with TSO's conductor, Darko Butorac to bring new pieces and artists to the area every season, with highlights including their 2015 Renee Fleming Gala and their 2017 "Requiem of Resistance" concert.

"I find it to be really creative work," says Stringer. "We get together once in the fall and Darko brings a menu of pieces he would like to conduct. We are very collaborative in our organization."

The orchestra is comprised of 60 to 90 musicians for any given performance and includes university faculty, students and community members. Stringer says a handful have played since the orchestra's inception forty years ago. She is hopeful they will be able to go full steam ahead into their 40th anniversary season which kicks off this fall.

Her vision for the next 10 years includes doubling performance nights and expanding children's programming.



Amanda Stringer at last year's Ode to Understanding concert.

MICHAEL SCHWARZ

"My hope is that the TSO will continue to expand our audience to include folks who are currently not part of our tribe," says Stringer. "We want to continue to provide access and opportunity

for more and more people, especially young people through our educational offerings."

TSO recently hosted a Facebook Live "Family Game Night," to keep people connected. Butorac served as their host while Stringer kept score for "symphony trivia." She says TSO is working to out more ways to stay connected with their friends and fans by offering levity in these kinds of programs and music to stay engaged during this difficult time.

As the uncertainty surrounding the pandemic's aftermath grows, Stringer is confident in music's ability to inspire calm and make a lasting impact.

"It has been interesting to see how this pandemic has set into relief how important music is because it is something you can do from home," says Stringer. "It can bring you hope. It can bring you joy."

Amanda Sieradzki is the feature writer for the Council on Culture & Arts. COCA is the capital area's umbrella agency for arts and culture (www.tallahasseearts.org).