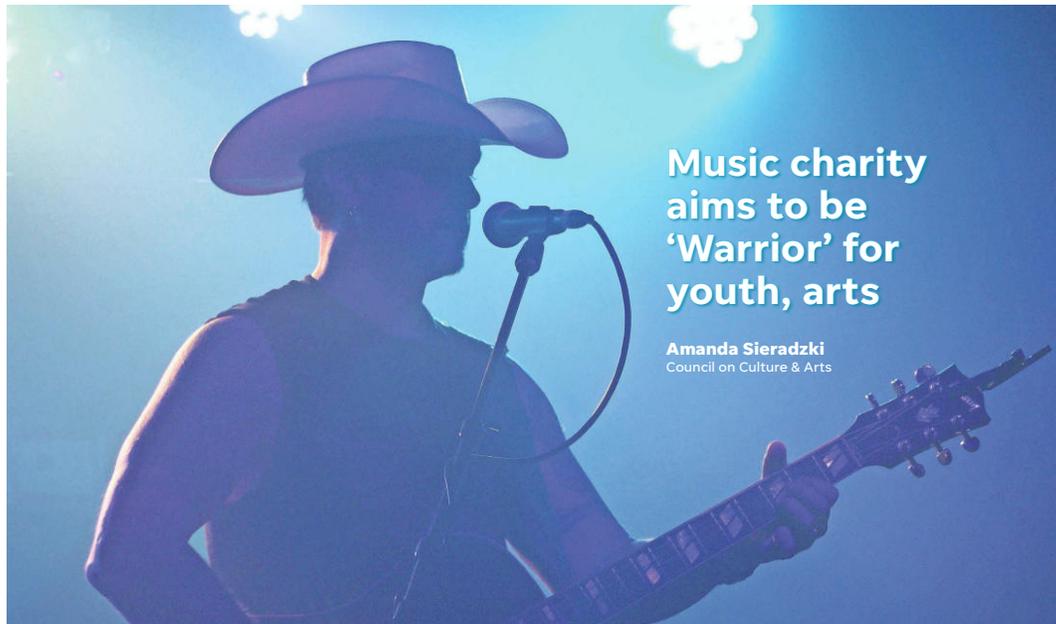


Recorded possibilities



Music charity aims to be 'Warrior' for youth, arts

Amanda Sieradzki
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The Tallahassee Live Music Community Charity Group records artists at Warrior on the River. SPECIAL TO THE DEMOCRAT

This year has not been kind to many, least of all it seems to The Tallahassee Live Music Community Charity Group. Their journey to opening their doors has been fraught with growing pains. The nonprofit got off the ground in January 2018 thanks to the vision of founder Christopher Godwin.

His dream of hosting live music performances to raise money for at-risk youth programming became a reality when Alicia Kilman came on board as executive director. Together, they took nine months to renovate the "The Riverfront" building overlooking the Ochlockonee river, now known as "The Warrior on the River."

In the midst of their first planned festival launch in October 2019, Hurricane Michael devastated the Panhandle and put all programming on pause.

In March, they received their performing arts center license and were ready for a grand opening just days before getting shut down by COVID-19. Kilman says the board met immediately to see

what they could do for the local music community during the pandemic, especially for musicians who were hurting financially.

"We came up with the Recorded Features series," says Kilman, who coordinated the socially distanced, live recording of invited musicians and bands. "We thought it'd be a great way to keep them motivated and help them develop the content they need so they can take it and market themselves. We release the videos on our charity group webpage as a fundraiser and reinvest our portion of the money in marketing to help them grow a fan base."

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The exterior of Warrior on the River. During the pandemic, The Tallahassee Live Music Charity Group has been using the space to record artists. ALICIA DEVINE/TALLAHASSEE DEMOCRAT FILES



Alicia Kilman: "We release the videos on our charity group webpage as a fundraiser and reinvest our portion of the money in marketing to help them grow a fan base." ALICIA DEVINE/TALLAHASSEE DEMOCRAT

Music

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Inside their 3,500 square foot music hall, audio technicians mixed sound while a volunteer videographer professionally recorded the performances in high definition. Kilman says they left a week at a time in between acts to sanitize the space and have hosted numerous bands and individuals in the past few months.

"So far we've raised \$3,000 and reached 60,000 people with 30,000 impressions online," says Kilman.

Kilman is also a passionate musician, self-taught on drums, guitar and piano. She's managed many non-profits in the past but has never felt more connected to a mission as she does with The Tallahassee Live Music Community Charity Group.

In her teen years, Kilman was in and out of the juvenile justice system and a ward of the state. Her parents lacked the resources to provide her with musical training or instruments. Kilman empathizes deeply with the students in Title 1 schools. The charity group aims to abate juvenile incarceration and foster artistic talents by offering free music lessons and extracurricular activities.

"Our overall goal is to not only help expand existing in-school and after school programs, but offer them at our venue as well," says Kilman. "We believe that providing these types of programs to at-risk youths can be beneficial to their well-being. There are a lot of studies out there that show children who participate in music and performing arts programs succeed academically. I wished I would have had something like this when I was younger."

With the Recorded Features series, Kilman is proud to provide the same structures for success to local and new musicians who need an extra push to share their original music and ideas with the Tallahassee community. It has also been an opportunity to partner with established groups like Tallahassee Nights Live who have been a springboard for artists to go to the next level.

Tallahassee Nights Live founder Darius Baker says the band had a wonderful time recording their featured video in the charity group's state-of-the-art space. Although their national and international engagements were put on hold this summer, they found solace in sharing music to connect with a virtual audience.

"It serves as a tool to bring folks together who normally wouldn't open themselves up to being the same room or same space," says Baker. "Music and the arts does that. It gives the world an emotional outlet to just release."

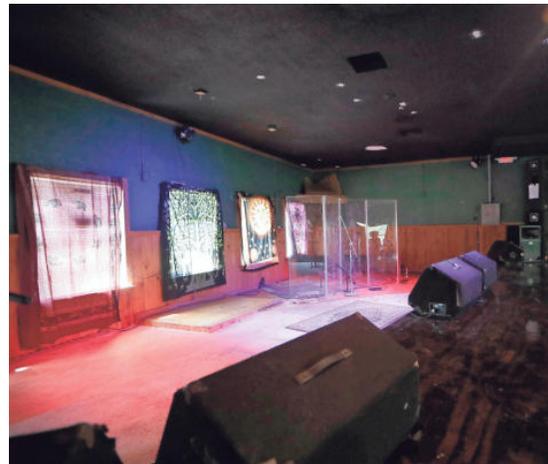
On the other side of the spectrum, new band on the scene, The Retrograde, saw the Recorded Features series as a chance to put themselves out into the world. They only performed a handful of gigs before the pandemic shut down live music venues, and are using the momentum and footage from the series to get in touch with music producers and record their first EP.

"We received a lot of shares and positive feedback from community," remarks drummer Carson Degner. "To quote musician Art Blakely, 'music washes away the dust of everyday life,' so when you're actively engaged in live music, it doesn't matter where you're from or what you went through the past year. It's about what's happening in the moment, and I think that more now than ever is important to engage a community in a healing atmosphere."

Kilman believes in the charity group's ability to overcome just about anything. In the past month, they've been able to provide outdoor events, launch an



Tallahassee Music Charity Group has partnered with Tallahassee Nights Live band, shown here performing at Cascades Park, and other local artists with recordings during the pandemic. HALI TAUXE/TALLAHASSEE DEMOCRAT FILES



One of multiple stage areas at Warrior on the River. The Tallahassee Live Music Charity Group has helped revive the old club but is now using the space for recordings. ALICIA DEVINE/TALLAHASSEE DEMOCRAT FILES

apprenticeship program for students to learn vital production skills and have given away donated instruments. One of the young women who received a guitar from the group sent Kilman a video of her playing "Stairway to Heaven" just two weeks later.

"We really believe in what we're trying to do, just knowing that there are kids out there with the passion, talent and drive, and knowing what it feels like to be a troubled youth where all you wish was that you had extra help," says Kilman. "No matter what, we're going to have things that knock us down when we're doing great, but in the end, we're going to be stronger because of it."

To learn more about the Tallahassee Live Music Community Charity Group, and donate to the bands in the Recorded Features Series, visit tallahasseearts.org.

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). This article is part of COCA's Creativity Persists collection which highlights how our community uses the arts to stay connected and inspired during the COVID-19 pandemic.