CREATING PERFORMANCE ART IN THE TIME OF COVID-19
A MESSAGE FROM THE STAFF AND MUSICIANS OF THE HARTFORD SYMPHONY

We miss all of you so much.

Performance art was never meant to be private. It was meant to be shared, in a public space, so that, as a community, we could experience the incredible emotion of art as one body, together. Live performance - whether music, dance, theater, or something else - brings together strangers who have the profound privilege of experiencing the art and resulting emotions together.

In the magic of each single performance, the performers and the audience are one. For the span of that performance, artists and audiences enter a unique symbiotic relationship, each responding to the energy of the other. If we are truly lucky, the magic of the performance bleeds into the space outside the performance itself and leaves its lasting imprint on each of us as we leave the concert hall.

No two audiences are the same, and, as a result, no two performances could ever be the same. A great performance is enhanced by the reaction of the audience, and without that reaction, an otherwise stellar performance is nowhere near as thrilling or exhilarating. What more proof could there be that we need each other. Without you, our audience, we are forced to improvise, feeling our way in the dark.

Unlike visual art, created in private and presented as a finished piece to the public, performance art must include a live audience in real time, and invent temporary substitutes for the need for human contact. Your emotional and financial support is filling our hearts with hope, and we hope our music is doing the same for all of you. As we are temporarily unable to perform in front of the curtain, Quarter Notes will focus on stories from “behind the curtain.” And most importantly, let’s never take for granted what we mean to one another, and how much better we are when we’re together.

TO SUPPORT THE HSO IN OUR TIME OF GREATEST NEED, please go to https://hartfordsymphony.org/individual-support/donate-now/ OR CLICK HERE TO DONATE NOW
Have you viewed HSO’s Firebird video yet? If you missed it, it can be viewed on our website at https://hartfordsymphony.org/firebird/or by clicking here. We are so proud of the finished product that took more than 1,000 hours of combined time by the staff, our musicians, and the production team. We welcome you “behind the curtain” to explore the creation of this moving tribute to the heroes in our midst.

The original idea for the project grew out of a discussion between senior management of the Hartford Symphony Orchestra and The Bushnell Center for the Performing Arts. We are two distinct organizations, but we operate together under a defined services agreement, so the concept of this collaboration was a natural outgrowth of our partnership. While our initial conversations envisioned the recognition of health care workers, the discussion rapidly expanded to include the vast numbers of ALL essential workers on the front lines, who have remained in their jobs at great personal risk, to protect the safety, security and health of the rest of us.

The video production team included HSO Music Director Carolyn Kuan, HSO operations staff Colette Hall and Doug Donato, artistic video editor Ryan Glista from The Bushnell, and Justin Kurtz, a sound engineer who routinely works with the Hartford Symphony on our archival recordings. We quickly defined the project goal: it had to be a thank you to our essential workers, and those workers had to be featured prominently.

The next big step was the selection of the music. We wanted something triumphant and celebratory, to uplift the spirits of those watching and of those being thanked. The music had to convey a message of gratitude and hope. It was critical that the music evoke the emotions we wanted to underscore in the visuals and the message. After our review of countless selections, the team finally settled on the finale from The Firebird Suite by Stravinsky. Its quiet, introspective opening builds: stronger, faster, and culminates in one triumphant sound.

As the artistic frame for the production began to coalesce, we formed the idea of allowing the musicians to visually enter the scene by gathering around our music director, Carolyn Kuan, as she delivered her opening message, in order to create a clear image of a unified collective. An email was sent to all HSO musicians, inviting them to participate in the process. We immediately recognized the technology learning curve that would be involved which meant that without basic equipment (such as computer, smart phone or tablet and earphones), many would be unable to join. Of our 86 rostered musicians, 46 volunteered for the project and others have now expressed regret that they didn’t.

Then the technical work began. Using the HSO’s own archival recording of the Firebird, we created a reference recording for...
distribution to each musician. By listening to the recording through an earpiece, each musician performed and recorded their part, in a process best described as “orchestra karaoke.” Playing with the reference recording allowed each musician to hear the music and imagine themselves playing within the full orchestra, thus helping them blend with the group as they would in a real performance. The reference recording included a two measure “click-track” (a recording of a metronome) introduction, which set the tempo and allowed the musicians to feel the beat before coming in with their part on the third measure. Musicians received specific instructions on how to set up their cameras, create the recording, and select the background and clothing (red and white.) They were provided with step-by-step details on the technique of listening to the archival recording while simultaneously recording their own part. As they prepared to record, they were instructed to clap on the first beat of the second measure. In so doing, each created a single visual and audio signal that the sound and video engineers needed to re-align sound and images, as the many individual recordings were stitched together. Each musician’s recording had to be achieved in one complete take, lasting for the entirety of the piece. Multiple recordings or “takes” could be created, but the musician was asked to select the best version for final submission. They were given a two-week period in which to complete and submit their recordings.

Like every orchestral piece, the Firebird has specific instrumentation. Of the 46 musicians who participated, Steve Wade, Assistant Principal oboe, offered to submit two separate recordings, for oboe 1 and oboe 2. Similarly, Brian Diehl, Principal trombone, created one recording on trombone 1, and another on bass trombone. Rob McEwan, Principal percussionist, recorded all percussion parts, except for timpani, which was provided by Gene Bozzi, Principal timpani. The resulting sound of the final video is rich and vibrant. It is the sound of all 46 HSO musicians, performing their newly created recordings from home.

While the musicians worked on their recordings, staff contacted our many community partners (all listed at the end of the video) to request photographs of essential workers, their employees, wearing PPE and doing their jobs. The response was immediate, enthusiastic, and overwhelming. Our written message was assigned to various musicians and staff, who crafted the handmade signs displayed in the video. Carolyn provided artistic direction on the sound mixing, working directly with Justin, and the Orchestra Committee offered their artistic input and approval of the recording. Other than minor transitions and color adjustments, to keep the various “reds” consistent, our final version closely resembled the first edition visually.

The video has been widely shared throughout the country and even internationally, with almost 60,000 views to date. Two separate articles in the Hartford Courant showcased the video, and the response has been overwhelmingly positive. While all of us would prefer to be performing live for our audiences, music, our common language, helped us to express our gratitude to those who are now making it possible for us to continue our lives.

While all of us would prefer to be performing live for our audiences, music, our common language, helped us to express our gratitude to those who are now making it possible for us to continue our lives.
The HSO’s annual Bravo Gala is a live, in-person event which gathers symphony lovers throughout the Greater Hartford region and beyond for one over-riding purpose: to raise critical funds for our education and community engagement programs.

As of March 12th, we’d already spent months planning the 2020 Gala, scheduled for May 2nd at the CT Convention Center. Our theme, “Ignite Joy,” was a testament to our season’s title “Ode to Joy.” The beautiful invitations were designed, printed, mailed and ticket purchases were being received. The next day, we were sent home to work remotely, with the belief we would return in two weeks. Two weeks has since stretched to sixteen weeks and counting. Governor Lamont’s early directive initially limited the size of gatherings through April 30th. With our Gala set for May 2nd, we were faced with only three choices: cancel, postpone or persevere. We decided to persevere. But how?

The HSO staff researched, investigated, attended webinars, asked questions, pushed for answers, and found the only solution: create a virtual Gala. We tackled the project head-on, believing that with enough determination and creativity, anything is possible.

In the spirit of relentless optimism, our Gala theme of “Ignite Joy” became “Reimagine Joy” because when life is most difficult, the joy of music is needed more than ever. We then addressed the two biggest challenges in the creation of an online presentation:

1. An understanding of the technology needed to create a virtual event and
2. How to reimagine the Gala as a “movie,” since our audiences would be viewing the event on a screen.

The first two weeks were spent investigating and determining the technology we would need both for the broadcast and the individual presentations. The next step was the creation of a Gala “storyboard,” a visual outline of the arc of the story we wanted to tell. We had to create an entertaining event that would also transmit a clear message of urgency, namely that without community support, the Hartford Symphony would quickly cease to exist. With concert halls empty, our new imperative is immediate and critical: raise funds to support our musicians and to develop new on-line learning and engagement tools for students, seniors, music educators and families.

With only four weeks remaining before the Gala date, we had to use an unfamiliar medium to deliver a serious message on an entertaining platform through which the Gala audience would experience urgency, joy and hope – all in the span of no more than 45 minutes.

To achieve our goal, the original storyboard was crafted into a script that included detailed visual images and precise musical selections to underscore every segment of the text. We divided the tasks among our small staff production team. We reviewed thousands of digital photographs from our files, looking
for just the right images to help tell the story. One staff member designed the opening graphic, a swirling blend of 1,000 carefully selected photographs that would morph into the HSO logo. Others reviewed hours of archival concerts, searching for multiple musical selections that would serve as the underscoring for the text and visual images. HSO’s Music Director, Carolyn Kuan, an integral part of our team, worked alongside staff to select the musical underscoring and oversee a high level of musicianship.

New performances were essential. Musicians were asked to submit short, uplifting musical selections (alone or in collaboration with fellow musicians) and were encouraged to prepare a presentation that would welcome audiences into their homes. Our musicians responded joyfully, donating their time, their music, and their artistry.

With the raw materials in place, everything had to be stitched together in a way that would feel seamless. Each photograph was choreographed to coincide with a specific line of text, while Carolyn created clever introductions for each musical performance.

The entire staff created a “teaser” video, inviting everyone to attend our Gala, at no cost. Musicians joined in the fun and created their own “teasers.” You can see it all at https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL-bVO6MVK9TDJUhfMEJT5Xm5zZ91uLOI or by just clicking here.

A great gala needs a great meal! Our restaurant partner, Doro Group (owners of Treva, Zohara and Avert in West Hartford, and the Artisanal Burger Company in Manchester), said “yes” without a moment of hesitation, when we asked if they’d create a special meal for our “guests.” Doro is an exceptionally generous community partner, which has supported many of the arts organizations in our community, including the Symphony. And behind the scenes, Doro has been preparing meals for first responders, out of their own pocket. Doro created a gourmet four-course gala meal for ‘pick-up’ or ‘delivery’ (with a choice of three different entrées) for $50, including the ingredients to create the Joyful Spirits Cocktail, the evening’s signature drink. All proceeds from the sale of the Gala meals went directly to Doro, to help them continue the good works they’ve been doing for our entire community.

The result was a virtual Gala that achieved our goals: an evening of celebration, which simultaneously raised essential funds to help the Symphony continue our mission: to enrich lives and community through great music. It was a resounding success, and participants shared their photos with us.

Artists are always in service to humanity. And when humanity is set upon by impossible burdens, the job of artists is to create an oasis of hope in the midst of anguish. We hope that our Gala did just that.

You support is more important now than ever before. Become a hero by making your gift through our website, by check, or by donating here. Please help the HSO bring music to those who need it most. No amount is too small. Every gift brings meaning and continues to spread that magic ingredient we all need to see us through: joy.
In the spring of 2020, faced with the realization that all concerts and public gatherings would not be held, we quickly realized the need to create new solutions. The impact meant the loss of all POPS! and Masterworks concerts, as well as all chamber concerts (Sunday Serenades and HSO: Intermix), our school day Discovery concerts for students throughout the greater Hartford area including Link Up (a year-long program offered to second and third grade children in the Hartford public schools, in partnership with the Weill Institute at Carnegie Hall), all visits to schools (through our Symphony In Schools program), plus our Family Concert Series and Instrument Discovery Labs, in which children are given the chance to test, try and listen to various instruments in the different orchestral families.

After we were obliged to cancel our March programming, the passing weeks mandated the cancellation of more concerts and programs. The magnitude of the loss brought an urgency to remain connected to our community and to provide meaningful content for different audiences. While adults have the resources to find music online, we were especially concerned about children and the long-term detrimental impact on them from the loss of musical experiences.

Timothy Brown, HSO’s Education and Community Engagement Manager, quickly reached out to classroom teachers and music educators throughout the state, asking their opinions and guidance for the creation of content that would be most valuable to their students. The response from teachers was enthusiastic and remarkably clear. They needed content in three distinct categories that would help meet specific needs.

1. In the absence of in-person experiences, students need virtual introductions to the various orchestral instruments, to help them choose the one they want to learn when school resumes in the fall.

2. Students who were already learning music in school programs needed short, instructional videos to help them learn techniques unique to their instrument, such as double-tonguing on trumpet, or playing a glissando on the clarinet.

3. Performance videos of small ensembles (brass, string trios, etc.) are needed to offer enrichment and inspiration for students already involved in music.
In response, we created a virtual platform entitled **HSO To Go**, on which we could post a variety of content, such as small ensemble performances that HSO musicians were creating with their colleagues, as well as the instructional videos requested by teachers. We secured permission from the musicians’ union for the release of past archival performances by the Hartford Symphony. **ALL content on the HSO website which may be accessed at** https://hartfordsymphony.org/hso-to-go **is offered entirely free to everyone.**

**HSO To Go** is a public experiment, which permits us to test drive different types of digital programs so that we can figure out what works – and what doesn’t. Every musician of the HSO has been invited to join in the creation and sharing of content, and we hope to add virtual master classes as well as interactive programs, which will be more engaging not only for students, but also for the general public.

All of the digital musical content is free and available on **HSO To Go**, including a virtual performance of the last four minutes of Stravinsky’s *The Firebird Suite*, a tribute to essential workers, performed by HSO musicians from their homes. The logistical and technical work in the creation of content for **HSO To Go** remains daunting, but offers the opportunity for partnerships, as we venture across musical boundaries to collaborate with other art forms.

**HSO To Go** also offered a solution for the continuation of our **Young Artists Competition**, open to high school musicians who reside in Connecticut. The original plan was to hold a public final round that would feature our four selected finalists, thus affording each student finalist the ability to publicly perform with the HSO, an opportunity rarely granted to any high school musician.

### Maintaining our Young Artists Competition in the face of Covid-19 required some innovation and improvisation, and as an organization of musicians and artists, we agreed that it was imperative that our young musicians not be deprived of the right to be recognized for their extraordinary discipline and hard work, especially now, when so many other opportunities were taken from them.

While we could not hold the final round of the competition in a public performance, as was originally envisioned, our plan B garnered much enthusiasm and gratitude from our young musician contestants.

By the early spring, we had already narrowed the field to 11 semi-finalists. In isolation, many students were continuing to practice their art, continuing their studies through virtual music lessons and daily discipline. To give them the opportunity to showcase their hard work, we offered each the choice of using their original submission or submitting a new recording of the required works, which would be the basis of the final round of competition. Of the 11 semi-finalists, nine chose to submit a new recording.

By offering our young artists the chance to prepare a new submission, we were also providing them with a new opportunity to work toward a specific goal, which helps all musicians shape their practice and discipline. The submissions were forwarded to our panel of three judges: Lenny Sigal (Concertmaster), Jia Cao (Assistant Principal cellist) and Barbara Hopkins (Assistant Principal flute.)

All 11 of our young artists received important feedback and comments from EACH of the judges, and we congratulate our first, second and third place winners, as follows: Matthew Hill (violin), Tyler Tan (violin) and Maggie Slap (cello). Please watch for performances from our winners, which we plan to feature on the **HSO To Go** page.
MEET ERIC HUTCHINSON
HSO’S NEW CORPORATE AND FOUNDATION RELATIONS MANAGER

In February of 2020, Eric Hutchinson joined the Hartford Symphony Orchestra as the new Corporate & Foundation Relations Manager. With barely a month in his new position, we were suddenly out of the office. Our entire staff has been working from home since March 14, 2020. But Eric jumped in with both feet and within just days, it felt as if he’s always been part of the team.

Quarter Notes: One of the exciting things we learned about you in our interview process was that you are a professional musician! This is something shared with others on our staff. Can you tell us how you came to choose music as your first career?

Eric: I was very lucky to grow up in a musical family. My mother was a pianist and my father was a drummer. It is no surprise that my three sisters are also very musical. I started piano lessons and singing in the church choir at the age of five. By the time I started the sixth grade, I was certain that I’d have a career in music. I earned my Bachelor’s Degree with a triple concentration in Music Education, Performance and Songwriting from Berklee College of Music in Boston.

With drums as my primary instrument, I began performing with talented locals in the Boston area and legendary musicians from around the world, sharing the stage with humbling artists like my mentor and friend, Livingston Taylor, Wynton Marsalis, Melissa Etheridge, Corey Glover, and the late Aretha Franklin, to name a few. When I wasn’t on stage or in the studio, I developed a passion for teaching and directing; leading the Jazz Bands and Marching Bands at several Connecticut schools, including The Norwich Free Academy, Killingly High School, and Rockville High School. I have several records available to purchase or stream, anywhere digital music is sold. If you’d like to learn more, please visit http://ericlhutchinson.com

QN: Before joining the Symphony staff, you also had a history of working in the nonprofit sector. Can you tell us what prompted the switch from professional musician to nonprofit administration?

Eric: I’ve always been excited by the work of impactful nonprofit organizations, and the knowledge that we can make a difference in the lives of so many. Early in my life, I was the Artistic and Music Director for several nonprofit youth theatres. I have spent the last ten years of my career in executive leadership positions for the YMCA, serving in such roles as Executive Director for the Glastonbury Family YMCA, Interim Executive Director of the East Hartford YMCA and District Executive Director for the YMCA of Greater Hartford.

It didn’t take me long to realize that nonprofits are terribly underfunded and commonly forced to do so much with so little. I went back to school in 2013 and earned my certification in Grant Writing for Nonprofits. In November of 2017, I took over as the second Chairman and CEO of Rob the Drummer Educational Programs, a West Hartford-based nonprofit organization that uses a pro-arts, pro-self-esteem message to help eradicate substance abuse and bullying amongst the nation’s youth. When the opportunity to work with the Hartford Symphony became available, I jumped at the chance to become a part of an organization I have known and loved since childhood. And I couldn’t be happier to be part of this incredible team!

QN: You are the Manager for Corporate & Foundation Relations for the HSO. Tell us what that means.

Eric: The Hartford Symphony Orchestra would not be able to sustain its 76-year legacy without the generous support of corporations, foundations and institutional donors. It is my job and my pleasure to create, steward, foster and maintain the relationships between these incredible partners and the HSO. In partnership with the philanthropic institutions, including foundations and businesses (from large national corporations to smaller local business owners), we dream together about a musical vision that will serve every member of our community. We are always in search of institutional partners who share our love of community and will help us devise new and creative ways to fund innovative projects. It is my privilege to work with leaders and visionaries who recognize and understand the profound impact that music has on a community.

QN: We know you spend hours on the important work of the HSO, but tell us about your life outside the symphony, Eric: As an artist myself, I enjoy performing and writing music, and attending concerts. I’m also a big fan of standup comedy! I serve as the Music Director for Grace Lutheran Church in Plainville, CT, a small but wonderful community of kind and loving people. It’s no secret to anyone who knows me that my greatest joy in life comes from time spent with my family. I love to explore our state and try new things with my two-year-old twins, Will and Amelia, their six-year-old half-sister, Annabel, and their beautiful mother, Rebecca. They are, and will always be, my whole world.

ERI HUTCHINSON

Eric Hutchinson is always part of the team. Since March 14, 2020, he has been working from home with the HSO staff.

STAFF SPOTLIGHT

HARTFORD SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

Alive through great music!

HSO PROGRAMS ARE FUNDED IN PART BY:

Connecticut
government;
Community Foundation
Office of the Arts

Hartford Foundation
Greater Hartford
Arts Council
Fal CID PIANOS

RICHARD P. GARMANY FUND

Hartford Foundation