

- 1. Jessica, You have over 10 years of experience in the arts and music education for nonprofit organizations. With all this experience, what is the lesson that has helped you apply most to GMYS especially now during the pandemic?**

The most important lesson that I have learned in my time of service to the community is to listen. Listen closely to the needs of those you serve, those you work with and cater your product or service to those particular needs. All too often nonprofit professionals think they are providing something unique and desperately needed to the community without checking with those IN the community. I have been this person. Ask questions. Conduct surveys What is needed? How can we help? What resources are already available? How do we address these challenges in innovative and accessible ways? This is how I make critical decisions – with community guidance – and the same practice has helped us be successful through the pandemic. Listen, reflect, act.

- 2. What are the main problems facing a non-profit organization like GMYS in Covid-19 times? And what are you doing to face this new reality?**

Some of the more obvious problems faced by not only our organization but many others is of course the economic impact. Enrollment is reduced. Hosting ticketed performances is challenging. However, the problem that has been the most thought-provoking is loss of artistic purpose. This feeling of emptiness many of us feel after months of not being able to collaborate, perform, rehearse and create art together within the same space. For those of us in creative fields, we have struggled to find our identity throughout the pandemic but we have found so many other ways to be resourceful and imaginative which has helped push us through. We've been able to work with videographers for layered video performances, provide both free and ticketed virtual events and what has been most exciting is that the pandemic has provided us with the unique opportunity to connect with guest artists, teachers and other students from all around the world. We are very proud of our artistic accomplishments over the last several months but nothing can replace the magic of live performance.

- 3. Now in times of pandemic many children, adolescents and young people suffer lack of concentration due to Covid-19. Music education has always been connected with better performance when learning in schools, aid in cognitive, intellectual and emotional development. What's your opinion on that?**

Music is excellent for the brain and its development. Numerous studies have been done on the positive impact of music on babies before they are even born, growth in academic success as students, used for therapy for adults with depression and improve memory of those with dementia. Music is beneficial to our development in every stage of life.

- 4. Can it be said that if your child struggles to combat negative feelings as a result of the pandemic, GMYS music programs help them focus, even if the classes are online? Why?**

Music is all about feeling. It's not only a great way to express how you feel but that within the dynamic of the ensemble, it is expected. We consider our classrooms (virtual or otherwise) to be a safe space for creatively expressing emotions. Through guided practice, students can express how music makes them feel and why, giving them the appropriate language to express themselves in other areas of their lives and developing their social and emotional well-being. Over the last several months, we have had students compose short pieces inspired by the pandemic. It has been a beneficial and therapeutic process for many.

5. How many young musicians participate each year in GMYS and of what ages?

In a typical year GMYS has upwards of 600 students from all over Miami-Dade County ranging in age from 5 to 18. This season we have just under 200 students enrolled.

6. What are the forecasts for this year, for this new season 2020-2021? Is there an increase in registrations expected in these difficult times or the opposite?

We've definitely seen the opposite in terms of enrollment. Numbers are lower but we have been able to strategically create smaller class sizes, paid teacher office hours and purchase additional software that allows for more individualized instructions of the students. While enrollment is down, the experience is much more impactful.

7. What tools can most help children, youth and adolescents focus on these times? Are there instruments that help more in concentration or all alike?

I believe that all instruments contribute to increased focus in students. They are all equally challenging and rewarding in their own way and all play an important role within the ensemble. I do, however, find that some instruments are more therapeutic. This is simply a personal opinion based on my own performance background. My main instruments are the euphonium (a brass instrument) and the djembe (West African drum). Playing my drum is a much more emotionally satisfying experience for me.

8. We understand that for the 2020-2021 season, classes are virtual and, later, a hybrid schedule with face-to-face and online classes

a. In the virtual environment, students have weekly classes in a small group of 9 to 15 students. And in face-to-face classes, how many students will there be per class?

Once we move to in-person, classes will have a very strict class ratio of 9 students to 1 teacher.

b. What other measures or proposals besides online are being implemented to implement the programs safely?

We will be strictly following CDC guidelines with a no tolerance policy in place. Classes will be kept small and only an hour in length. Each rehearsal space will be extensively cleaned between each group. Students and other visitors will have their temperature taken before they are permitted on campus and everyone is required to wear a mask at all times. Wind

players will have specialized masks and bell covers for their instruments for an additional layer of safety.

- c. The inclusion of a virtual component will create a safety net for families who may still feel uncomfortable with in-person offerings, but how do you think it has affected students that music classes are virtual?**

As mentioned earlier, there is a sense of loss in regards to being unable to create music together in-person and this feeling is no different with our students. They miss rehearsals, performances and their friends. It is an emotional burden for many. However, physical health and safety is also the priority for some families and there is a sense of gratitude and relief at the option to remain online. We are very focused on allowing our families to choose the experience that works best for them.

- d. You've already experimented with GMYS summer camps online. What have you learned from this experience to apply now to these new programs?**

The major learning experience that came from hosting a completely virtual summer camp was really getting to know the extraordinary talent and creativity of my team. They pulled off what seemed impossible in so many ways and did so without sacrificing quality. I started my position right as the pandemic began so I am still exploring the team dynamic in regards to time and talent. While we did learn a lot in regards to videography, the creative processes of virtual learning, sound engineering and so much more that will apply to the coming season, the knowledge that we can do anything together and do it well is what will continue to help us succeed in the coming year. I am so proud of what the staff has accomplished in these difficult times.

9. We spoke about the programs.

- a. The preparatory program (Preparatory Classes) is for younger people with little or no previous musical experience. Can all children play an instrument or not all? All kinds of musical instruments? At what age is it advisable to start playing an instrument?**

Our prep students represent a wide range of abilities but are all still considered beginners. We have classes for students who have never played an instrument before and classes for those who have a year or two of experience. We offer all band and orchestra instruments at this level. Our program starts students as young as 5 years old but many students begin on a string instrument as young as two. It is advisable for students to be in their later elementary years before beginning most band instruments simply because their lungs are more fully developed. Many of our teachers utilize recorder in preparation for students to move to other wind instruments.

- b. The String Ensembles program is for different ages. The Young Mozarts Orchestra is for beginner string instrument musicians, with 1 or 2 years of experience. The Strings Orchestra is for string instrument musicians with 2 or 4 years of experience. And the Concert Orchestra requires a more advanced intermediate level. The Brass and Wind**

Ensembles, the program for percussion bands such as Concert Band, Junior Varsity Jazz Band, Varsity Jazz Band. And the Symphony Orchestra, which is the most advanced. Music always helps to grow at any age, what are the main benefits of developing musical skills, even through online classes?

When I think of musical skill, I think of it in the context of the whole person. Head, heart and hands. It develops critical thinking, problem solving, concentration, provides proven academic improvements and the rational basis for creativity and change (head). It helps cultivate social and emotional intelligence and an expressive attachment or commitment to the art (heart). Lastly, advances tactile skills through the intricate actions required to produce sound from their instrument or voice (hands).

c. Are there free programs for Miami's most marginalized communities such as Little Havana, Little Haiti, Overtown and Allapattah?

No student is turned away from GMYS for any reason. Students of all backgrounds, abilities and incomes are accepted into our programs. Thanks to support from The Children's Trust and other local sponsors, we are able to provide scholarships and other programs which are completely free to the community, including free performances for the community.

d. Are there grant programs for the most disadvantaged? How many types of scholarships? Who can apply what does a family have to do to get a scholarship for their children?

Yes, the majority of our scholarships and free programs are supported by local grants. We offer 2 types of scholarships: One for students with disabilities and one for those families facing financial hardships. Typically to receive scholarship, families must provide documentation that shows they are in one of these two circumstances. That can be everything from an Individualized Learning Plan to an annual tax return.

e. Would you say that music transform lives? what does a person who wants to support GMYS financially do?

Absolutely. Music is transformative in many ways. It has worked wonders in my life and I have seen it change the lives of so many. Music reaches beyond the stage and into our lives providing social / emotional understanding, job skills, team work, problem solving and a simple but transformative feeling of joy. Anyone who wishes to support GMYS programs can do so by making a donation online at gmys.org/gmys-donations/. The best time to donate is on Give Miami Day on November 19th when gifts have the potential to be match by the Miami Foundation. You can pledge your donation early at forms.gle/rkFgdt1JhiTLoA5p9. Any and all gifts are greatly appreciated and assist us in continuing our *Total Community Project*.