

The Brandenburg Project: Fostering Collaboration and Leadership Through Chamber Music Community Music School of Ann Arbor | Final Report

Brief description of request:

The grant request was for \$5000 to support the Brandenburg Project, a unique youth-led ensemble dedicated to the study and practical application of historically informed performance practice of the music of J. S. Bach and his contemporaries. The program aims to inspire, engage and empower youth as they gain an entirely new perspective on what is possible, both in themselves and in music. The Project is conductor-less and therefore each member has an equal say in making musical decisions during rehearsals. With leading questions from their coach they discover strategies on how to make improvements and communicate musical ideas both verbally and non-verbally.

For the 2017-18 year, the Project had 16 youth members and their main works of study were Bach's Brandenburg Concerto No. 1, Vivaldi's Concerto in B Minor for four violins, Vivaldi's Concerto in G minor for two cellos, and Thomas Tallis' *Spem in Alium*. In addition, smaller chamber groups within the ensemble studied works by Rosenmueller and Boccherrini. As Brandenburg No. 1 features wind and brass instruments, the Project worked with guest ensemble Piffaro, a renaissance band specializing in early music wind instruments. Other guest teaching artists included Rene Schiffer of Apollo's Fire and Prof. Gascho from the University of Michigan. The Project also collaborated with the Ann Arbor Camerata, a community ensemble led by students of the University of Michigan.

The Project had a total of eight performances last year, one of which was a unique community collaboration that involved a total of 55 community musicians ranging from 13 to 87 years old (see accompanying program) and featured the instrumental presentation of Thomas Tallis' 40-part motet *Spem in Alium*. Details of each performance:

- **December 10th**: CMSA2 Winter Chamber Recital; performed movements from Brandenburg Concerto No. 1
- **January 27th**: Featured ensemble as part of Zion Lutheran Church concert series. Performed a full program that included Rosenmueller, Vivaldi, Handel-Halverson and Boccherrini.
- **April 28th**: *Strung Together in Hope* collaborative concert. Performed the full Brandenburg Concerto No 1, Vivaldi's Concerto for 4 violins and Thomas Tallis.
- **May 5th**: Celebration Showcase; performed Vivaldi's Concerto for 2 cellos.
- Four community outreach performances for underserved audiences.

How monies were applied:

| Description of Expense | Cost |
|---|---------------|
| Weekly coach: Kasia Bielak-Hoops | \$2400 |
| Guest Teaching Artist: Rene Schiffer | \$250 |
| Guest Teaching Artist: Joe Gascho | \$400 |
| Collaborative Artists from University of Michigan | \$550 |
| Harpsichord related expenses | \$210 |
| Rehearsal Venue | \$480 |
| Performance Venue: May 5 th Celebration Showcase | \$400 |
| Purchase of 2 violin Baroque bows | \$300 |
| Total Distribution of Funds | \$4990 |

The majority of the grant monies from the Max and Victoria Dreyfus Foundation were used towards teaching-artist fees, including the weekly coach, Rene Schiffer and Joe Gascho. (Note: Fees for the ensemble Piffaro ended up being generously subsidized through the Early Music Academy.) Funds were also used for honorarium given to collaborative artists from the University of Michigan, including oboe and horn soloists for the Brandenburg concerto and 2 violin soloists for Vivaldi. The harpsichord related expenses included the transport and tuning of the instrument for the April 28th concert and the venue expense was for the May 5th concert. In addition to 10 bows donated in-kind by SHAR Music, funds were used to purchase 2 more bows for new members.

Resulting Impact:

This past year, students exhibited a profound sense of ownership and commitment to their music as a result of both the teaching approach implemented by their coach and the inspiration they gained from the visiting guest artists and collaborating soloists. This propelled them forward, enabling them to exceed initial expectations and learn and perform more repertoire than any previous year, and perform more frequently, building mutual respect and trust between members with each performance. The grant also allowed the School to direct other funding to support three need-based scholarships. One of the scholarship recipients, Makayla Harris was formally recognized by the School for being a role model within the ensemble and for her dedication to her own personal growth as a musician.

As part of the *Strung Together in Hope* Collaboration, students were asked to submit answers to the question: "How do you think music can unite our community?" Most commented on the fact that music is a universal language and how the process of playing music together bridges divides and brings mutual understanding. Here is one example from a Project member:

Music helps bridge the gap between people in a community, because it unites a lot of people under musicianship. Music also can help people understand each other better. Each person's playing style can show you their personality and their attitude towards playing. Music also prompts people to meet each other and allows people to make new friends. -Sean Farnum

For other answers to this question, please see the accompanying program.

SHAR Music generously donated 10 Baroque bows (4 violin, 2 viola and 4 cello) to the Project, and the grant allowed the School to purchase 2 more for members that joined later in the year. Having the opportunity to apply the historical performance techniques and concepts whilst using historical bows has been a revolutionary experience for the students.

The momentum gained over the year inspired members of the Project to think big. Without prompting, they committed to a major project of recording all six Brandenburg Concertos over the next two years. And the advances they made gained the attention of others in the community resulting in an invitation to collaborate with Boychoir of Ann Arbor in 2019 as part of a major concert series held in Manchester, MI, and an invitation to play for Rachel Barton Pine this fall as part of a workshop hosted by SHAR Music. They were also personally invited by the Executive Director of Early Music America to apply for their 2019 Emerging Artists Festival, which usually highlights groups on the collegiate level, not high school, because so few youth programs in the country specifically focus on historical performance practice.

We invite you to view the accompanying DVD with a 3 minute video that provides clips of the Project's performances and experiences over the past year, all made possible with the support of the Max and Victoria Dreyfus Foundation.

This same video can be viewed on a special page: cmsa2.org/dreyfus_report