

# GTCYS TURNS 50!

by Megen Balda

## Background

The Greater Twin Cities Youth Symphonies (GTCYS) is celebrating a major milestone this year—its 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary season. In 1972, several independent youth orchestras in the Twin Cities came together in the spirit of collaboration to create broader impact on youth through a unified organization—GTCYS. From the start, GTCYS' priority has been to provide high-quality orchestral programs for music students of all ages and musical abilities.

Thanks to the vision of our founders, artistic director laureate Dr. William LaRue Jones, and our community of supporters, 16,000 students have been transformed by participating in GTCYS since 1972. Students have learned to work independently and together to achieve personal and collective success while developing skills like collaboration, accountability, courage, compassion, and leadership. These life-long skills transfer to all career paths, and GTCYS alumni are shaping their communities as business leaders, scientists, artists, educators, arts patrons, and more:

“In GTCYS, I learned about teamwork, about when to lead and when to step back into the background, and always to listen.” ~ Michael Wu, 2010; Harvard graduate and physician

“GTCYS changed my life. It opened up a world of possibilities for me, exposing me to opportunities I didn't know existed because I didn't come from as privileged a background as many of my fellow members.” ~ Dave Michela, '86; VP, Digital Solutions, Horizontal Digital

“In GTCYS, I learned how to intensely focus, be persistent, and work really hard for the benefit of the team. My experience taught me so much about excellence.” ~ Jennifer Hellman, '94; CEO, Goff Public

“Music is such an important medium for self-expression, and

learning cooperation at the same time makes playing in GTCYS an invaluable experience. Also, learning music is so good for your brain!” ~ Cameron Jarvis, 2011; Visual Artist

“Now more than ever we need people to understand that the arts and music are essential to life, not just a luxury. Even if the students do not enter into a musical career, they



GTCYS Symphony under the direction of Mark Russell Smith

will carry that feeling of accomplishing something as a group and feeling the beauty.” ~Kari Docter, '91; cellist, Metropolitan Opera Orchestra

## Where We Are Now

Now 50 years later, GTCYS is one of the country's leading youth orchestras and has become a pillar in the Twin Cities region. Known for artistic excellence and our commitment to access, more than 1,000 students ages 8–18 of all musical abilities and backgrounds come from across the region to participate in our year-round programs. Program highlights include:

- **10 school-year orchestras** in the east and west metro are tiered from beginning to pre-professional and provide weekly rehearsals, biennial retreats, mentoring, special projects, and performances to develop students' musical and personal skills.
- **Harmony strings instruction program:** In partnership with Riverview West Side School of Excellence (St.

Paul), Harmony provides instruction three times a week before school, plus instruments, performance opportunities, and summer activities for underrepresented students who might not otherwise have the opportunity to learn an instrument. The program creates access for a new pipeline of students who advance into GTCYS' school-year orchestras with full tuition support, instruments and lessons.

- **Summer Camps:** Three weeklong summer day camps provide opportunities for beginning through advanced students to develop musically, make friends, and share a free public concert.

- **Concerts:** GTCYS believes in bringing music to diverse audiences and, in typical years, our students share their talents through 30 free and ticketed performances at Twin Cities schools, homeless shelters, and senior care

centers, plus formal concerts at premier venues like Orchestra Hall and The Ordway.

- **International Symphony Tours:** Renowned for its rich international touring history, GTCYS' flagship orchestra, Symphony, tours biennially, empowering students with musical, social, and cultural opportunities that shape their lives for years to come.
- **Need-based scholarships:** GTCYS believes that all young musicians deserve the opportunity to participate and thrive in music regardless of financial background. GTCYS provides comprehensive support for all our activities: tuition for orchestras and camps, activity fees, reduced price concert tickets, tours, and private lessons which currently total \$215,000 in 2021-22.

## Where We Are Going

With a strong track record of organizational and programmatic growth, financial stability, and strong leadership, GTCYS is poised

for the future. Our short- and long-term planning is grounded in the fact that creating opportunities for students throughout the community has been and will always be at the heart of what we do.

That belief is at the heart of GTCYS' 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebrations and our Play It Forward campaign—a \$250,000 endeavor that will heighten GTCYS' strategic priorities for access and diversity, excellence, and enrichment. The initiative will:

- Help level the playing field by expanding scholarships for private lessons
- Nurture promising Black/African American, Hispanic/Latinx and Native American students through a new Pathways Scholars program
- Support special artistic initiatives like commissions and collaborations with professional artists to inspire every GTCYS student.

By breaking down barriers, creating opportunities for more students, and continuing to provide high-quality experiences,

GTCYS will shape students' lives for years to come and impact the communities in which they live, learn and play.

### Upcoming Celebrations

*Orchestrating Opportunities Benefit, Saturday, April 16 from 5:00-7:30 P.M. at Orchestra Hall.*

All are invited to join us at GTCYS' annual benefit. Admission is waived so all can attend. It promises to be an extra special celebration with honorary guest and GTCYS alum Gretchen Carlson and performances by GTCYS students, including Harmony and Symphony. Learn more at [gtcys.org/support/benefit](https://gtcys.org/support/benefit).

*Spring Festival Concerts, May 14 at 10:30 A.M. & 4 P.M.; May 15 at 2 P.M. at Orchestra Hall*

GTCYS' 10 school-year orchestras perform across 3 concerts in this celebratory concert series. Join GTCYS for this momentous occasion as we celebrate our 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary. Complimentary tickets for music educators will be available in early May.

*Symphony Concert: Italy Send-Off, Sunday, June 12 at 7 P.M. at Ted Mann Concert Hall*

Artistic Director Mark Russell Smith leads Symphony in a send-off concert as they embark on a highly anticipated tour to Southern Italy. Repertoire includes Shostakovich *Symphony No. 5*, Copland *Buckaroo Holiday*, and more! Complimentary tickets for music educators will be available in early June.

### In Gratitude

GTCYS is deeply grateful to the incredible community of music educators—studio teachers, school band and orchestra directors past and present—for their history of collaboration with GTCYS and for their ongoing dedication to music students. GTCYS is truly a community effort, and we look forward to many more years of partnership to empower young people through music.

*Megen Balda is Executive Director of Greater Twin Cities Youth Symphonies.*  
<https://gtcys.org> 🎵