

# MYS 50<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY

by Mark Mandarano

Seven years ago, when my daughter was ten years old, my wife and I sought out a program that would enhance her musical education. After a number of years studying violin with a private teacher, she had progressed as a player, but the ensemble aspect of music-making was lacking in her school. Where could we turn to find an ideal environment that would inspire and excite our child about music, while at the same time assure us as parents that she's being offered a sound musical education with great repertoire and rigorous instruction?

*The answer for us was the Minnesota Youth Symphonies, which celebrates its 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary this season.* MYS, based right in Saint Paul, offers a music program that's fun, yet demanding and rewarding. My daughter joined at the entry level, the Strings, and she absolutely loved her rehearsals with Patricia Kelly who is so engaging for a young player to work with, yet who teaches and cajoles and improves the musicality of every player and brings out the best in them.

*The thrice-annual performances of MYS at Orchestra Hall are a model of what a youth orchestra program should be.* Young players have the opportunity to envision themselves eventually moving up to the first-level full orchestra, the Philharmonic, led by James Bartsch. Further off into their progress, they might see themselves in the advanced orchestra, Repertory, (which, when we joined, was led by Claudette Laureano). Or, maybe someday, if they worked very hard and achieved the highest conservatory-level orchestra, Symphony (led at that time by Manny Laureano). Hearing that top group play pieces like the *Scherzo* from the 10<sup>th</sup> *Symphony* of Shostakovich with authority and high drama was an inspiration to everyone.

To my ten-year-old daughter, the members of the Symphony were like superstars. But, every Saturday morning, they rehearsed at the same time and in the same building that she rehearsed in. She dropped in occasionally to listen to them prepare and, through this observation, began to understand that what the older students accomplished wasn't some kind of magical wish-fulfillment; it was merely the logical outcome of a step-by-step process of practicing, learning repertoire and maturing as a musician. In other words, she just needed to continue what she was doing and she would inevitably end up just like them—which turned out to be true because now, as a high school senior, she is a violin member in that top orchestra.

*When the Board of Directors at MYS invited me to become the new Artistic Director and Symphony Conductor to lead MYS through its 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Season and into its next chapter, I couldn't have been more thrilled.* I see brilliant times ahead for MYS. Together, we plan to maintain the bright flame of its traditions: the pursuit of excellence, the importance of art and culture in the lives of a community, the civic-mindedness of its parents and administration. We also want to build an MYS for the future by welcoming into our ensembles members of our community who have been excluded in the past. This includes, among many initiatives, broadening our repertoire and recent programs have included music by Florence

Price, Alberto Marquez and Samuel Coleridge-Taylor, and on upcoming programs we will perform the *Gaelic Symphony* of Amy Beach. As we shape the next phase of MYS, we are very interested in the needs and ideas of our musical community and we look forward to discussion with our partners in music education.

MYS offers a comprehensive musical practicum for students. Members regularly receive sectional coachings for strings, winds, brass and percussion from outstanding professionals in the Twin

Cities including members of the Minnesota Orchestra and the Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra. Because we believe in educating the whole student, MYS also offers classes in music theory and history taught by composer, educator and laureate from Yale University, Soomin Kim. The Artistic Staff is absolutely top-notch and includes, in addition to those mentioned above, Nicholas Ellison, who leads the entry-level ensemble for Winds and Lucas Shogren, who is the new director of the Repertory Orchestra. And the guest artists are a thrill to collaborate with—most recently, Bill Eddins,

who played a knockout performance of Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue* with the Symphony at Orchestra Hall (November 2022).

*Are you a former member of MYS or do you know someone who is?* Please get in touch with us! [mys@mnyouthsymphonies.org](mailto:mys@mnyouthsymphonies.org) MYS wants to strengthen our relationships with our thousands of alumni. Among them are many professional musicians and members of major orchestras, such as Daniel Kim, violist with the Boston Symphony and the sisters Sarah (violin) and Lydia (viola) Grimes, both of whom are now members of the Minnesota Orchestra. Many more MYS alumni have pursued other professions, such as in the sciences or medicine or law—but whatever path they have ultimately chosen, all MYS alumni retain that unforgettable experience of high achievement which lasts a lifetime. At our next performance on February 5<sup>th</sup>, 2023, at Orchestra Hall, we have invited Claudette and Manny Laureano to join us so we can honor them for their many years of service. We're encouraging as many alumni as possible to join us in celebrating the legacy that's continuously being passed on to future generations of young musicians.

*While we look back and celebrate the many wonderful highlights of MYS over the past 50 years, our primary focus is on strengthening MYS for the next 50 years of meaningful moments of education.* What MYS has achieved thus far has been made possible through strong partnerships with a community of music educators. We are immensely grateful for the many dedicated and creative music teachers in our region. There's no doubt that a bright future is possible by continuing to develop these partnerships for the mutual love and growth of our students.

*Mark Mandarano became the Artistic Director of the Minnesota Youth Symphonies in 2022. He is an Associate Professor and Director of Instrumental Music at Macalester College and the Artistic Director of the Sinfonietta of Riverdale (NY). [www.mnyouthsymphonies.org](http://www.mnyouthsymphonies.org)* ♪



Mark Mandarano leading the Symphony of MYS at Orchestra Hall, Nov. 2022