March 2002

Dear Friends,

A bright New Year from Community MusicWorks!

January and February brought an exciting rush of events for Community MusicWorks. A variety of successful student performances, inspiring concert trips and workshops, a faculty conference trip and our Winter Student Retreat have left us exhilarated and full of momentum. We’d love to fill you in on these many events and encourage you to attend one of our upcoming performances in March and April.

Rose Weaver, renowned Rhode Island singer/actress, gave our first workshop of the year. Dazzling our students with her actress’s charm and high style, she led us all through a Salsa version of “If I only had a brain,” generously relinquishing her microphone to intent groups of young, bellowing voices. The workshop gave our students a wonderful sense of how music intersects with drama. At the end of the hour, Ms. Weaver paused to speak about her beginnings in life and in music. Evoking scenes of her country childhood on a Georgain farm, she reminisced in great detail about her first experience hearing a symphony orchestra, and about the transformative impact it made. We couldn’t have hoped for more inspiring words for our students.

Our students were equally spellbound by the many tongues of our Feb. 2nd workshop presenter, Rhode Island storyteller Len Cabral. Thoroughly captivating us with his intricate web of character, imagery and sound, he struck at that place where imagination turns musical notes into stories themselves.

A group of students were fortunate enough to have made earlier contact with storytelling at the Rhode Island Black Storytellers’ Funda Fest on January 26. Invited by Valerie Tutson (a past workshop presenter with Community MusicWorks), a group of our violinists opened the family portion of Funda Fest with performances of Lift Every Voice, We Shall Overcome, and Amazing Grace. It was a moving preview to our February Performance Party.

Some of you may have seen Community MusicWorks featured on Valerie’s television program Cultural Tapestry in January. In addition to an interview segment with Sebastian and Minna, the piece included extensive video footage of our students in Performance Party and lesson settings. It was a thrill to see our students performing to the public on such a wide reaching stage!

Meanwhile, the faculty quartet took a four-day weekend to New York City for our first Chamber Music America national conference. The days were packed with panels on education, speakers on creativity, world class performers, and master classes. We had the opportunity to meet and network with chamber musicians from around the country, and in turn spread news of our work in Providence.

While at the conference, we managed to fit in a late afternoon visit to Maxine Greene, philosopher-in-residence at Lincoln Center and mentor to Community MusicWorks. After a short performance by our string quartet to the backdrop of Maxine’s front lawn (Central Park at dusk!), we retired to her living room for a discussion of teaching, aesthetics, and her new book, The Blue Guitar. We left her apartment that afternoon with her new book in hand, and her inspired ideas in our heads. We’re fortunate to have Maxine’s guidance in the continual development of the program.
Three short weeks later we celebrated our February 9th Performance Party. Taking our theme from Black History month, we opened the program with a newly-commissioned, four-part string arrangement of the Black National Anthem, Lift Every Voice and Sing. This was followed by nearly an hour-long program of string renditions of spirituals and folk tunes, including collaborative performances with drumming guests from Rhythm & Roots. The final performance of the day was another four-part arrangement of the civil rights song, We Shall Overcome, played or sung by nearly everyone in attendance. The potluck meal afterwards was a feast, including Miss Fannie’s Soul Food Kitchen’s famous fried chicken and cornbread and a rich assortment of family favorites. It was a day that will stick in our minds for a long time to come.

One of our most recent concert trips brought us to the Rhode Island College’s Performing Arts Series’ presentation of WinterJazz with violinist Regina Carter. Reaching a wispy five-feet tall in gold stiletto heels, she proved almost as earthily walking onto stage as she did fusing bow to string. Her quartet morphed in and out of styles ranging from traditional R&B to African and East Indian, at times even dropping instruments entirely in favor of their five intoxicating voices. It was a new and captivating experience for students and teachers alike. Nearing the end, when Ms. Carter seemed to have reached her apex for the evening, she threw off her shoes in an exciting African dance, joined by her piano player, while the band exploded into a pulsing crescendo. After the applause we were met with yet another treat: an introduction to Ms. Carter in person. Flushed and inviting, Ms. Carter graciously signed nearly a stack of student programs and the most recent cover of Strings magazine with her picture on the front: “Community MusicWorks,” she wrote “Thank you for supporting young people in music . . .”

Last but not least was our invigorating Student Winter Retreat last week to Canonicus Conference Center in Exeter, RI. After a series of group building activities outside with refreshing views of lake and pines, we proceeded through a half-mile of woods to their ropes course. Engaging in rigorous trust building exercises that included trust falls, log exchanges, a zig-zig course and spiderweb pass, we saw personalities and relationships emerging in whole new ways. The group leaders, Marc, Dan 1 and Dan 2, were great successes, and the cafeteria food, a favorite area of critique, achieved high ratings. Our end of the day discussion elicited eloquent statements on areas of trust, respect, and dynamic problem solving, and the four of us emerged feeling new intimacies had taken root.

Today, the spring calendar is studded with events: concert trips to the Chicago String Quartet at the Rhode Island Chamber Music Concerts and the Rhode Island Philharmonic. Thank you to all these presenters for donated tickets. We’re also gearing up for a terrific series of workshops and our first House Fundraising Party on March 8th from 5:30 – 8:00. Hosted by Robert and Kathy Cox, Mark and Julie Van Noppen, and John and Ann Beekley, and including performances by Community MusicWorks, the House Fundraising Concert with be held @ 24 Messer St. in Providence. RSVP: 351-6348 or 421-4645.

Also, please save the following dates for upcoming performances. Our remaining Performance Parties for the season are on April 6 and June 8 at 3 PM at the Church of the Messiah in Olneyville Square. We hope to see you soon.

Faculty of Community MusicWorks

P.S. If you haven’t already seen our new studio / office space at 1392 Westminster Street, we’d love to give you a tour. Please call or stop in soon!