



# Music Notes

Songcatchers Inc.

June 2021

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## A YEAR LIKE NO OTHER

by Mary Louise Morgan

Like so much of the world, Songcatchers began the school year in virtual mode for the After-School and Early Childhood programs, not knowing how long this new reality would last. Fortunately, our talented young teachers and dedicated mentors stayed with us, and everyone continued to learn and hone newly acquired skills. Our Songcatchers children eagerly looked forward each day to connecting on Zoom with their teachers and friends as they used music to enrich their days. Virtual recitals were held June 15-19.



In December, we were deeply saddened to learn of the death of our Founder, Sr. Beth Dowd, OSU. Her mission of "Reaching for Peace Through Music" has profoundly influenced thousands of children and positively altered the trajectory of many lives. We are grateful to Legislator Damon Maher of District 10 and to the County Board of Legislators for celebrating her life with a Resolution signed by each member, and presented to her dear Ursuline Sisters and to Songcatchers on February 11.

The third season of the "Music In Our Lives" concert series had to be cancelled, but what to do with Composers of the Future?! We met with Barry Hoffman of the Symphony of Westchester, along with Jon Deak and JL Marlor from the New York Philharmonic Very Young Composers. We all decided to continue virtually with our unique Composers program. As a result, ten of our most advanced students were able to hear their original compositions played by musicians from the Symphony of Westchester. Because it was a virtual concert, we expanded our audience and many more family members and supporters were able to attend. It was wonderful!



The mandated shut-down had a positive effect on our operational capabilities. It forced us to move to cloud-based office systems which enabled us to work from home and put us in sync with a 21<sup>st</sup> century workforce. The Board productively used this time to create a Strategic Plan with realistic goals and objectives. New Board Members are in the process of being enlisted with expertise that complements our current board. In addition, a cultivation initiative has begun, reaching out to current supporters — thanking them for their past support and sharing with them our recent accomplishments.

Despite the pandemic, many good things happened at Songcatchers this year. Because of the generosity of HOPE Community Services, during the year we were able to offer regular food and clothing donations to over 26 of our families. A huge shout out to Walter Ritz, Executive Director of HOPE, and all his staff!

In addition, the nonprofits and businesses in New Rochelle came together to support one another with information about grants and loans that were available and ideas on how to engage our constituents virtually. Thank you to the New Rochelle Chamber of Commerce, the New Rochelle Council of Community Services, and the City of New Rochelle for all your help and encouragement!



We look forward to returning to in-person teaching and live performances in the fall. Thanks to your support, we will continue to broaden our outreach and expand all of our services to make the gift of music affordable and accessible to all children.

## INSIDE THIS ISSUE

A Year Like No Other	Pg. 1
Choir Camp 2020	Pg. 2
An Extraordinary Woman	Pg. 2
A Unique Community	Pg. 3-4
Technology / Grants	Pg. 4
Supporters / News	Pg. 5
Evening of Jazz	Back



## Choir Camp 2020 Continued In a Pandemic

by Kathleen McEntee-Lawlor

Last summer, despite the pandemic, the Choir Camp Staff knew that we had to continue the tradition of camp at a time when it was very much needed. Thus, "Virtual Choir Camp: Streaming for Peace Through Music" was born. We kept many of the traditions and activities usually found at Choir Camp and altered them to suit the virtual format – singing during Chorus on Zoom (check out our Virtual Choir videos on YouTube!); learning instruments and making arts and crafts; eating lunches together; creating group skits for Drama; playing Family Feud and other games online during Quality Time; and having virtual Family Time together in the evenings. We also used FlipGrid to record short videos and send them to each other. Sr. Beth even got in on the fun, recording inspirational messages for Morning Reflections, and joining us one evening for Family Time. A great time was had by all!



Unfortunately, we have had to cancel plans for a week-long Choir Camp in 2021. We are currently planning on having a one-day Camp event with camp activities to celebrate the spirit of Camp instead. We look forward to returning to our usual week-long overnight camp next year. **Save the Date—August 7-13, 2022!**



**THANK YOU TO ALL OUR DONORS  
WHO MAKE OUR PROGRAMS POSSIBLE!**

## An Extraordinary Woman

by Kathleen McEntee-Lawlor



As you may know, our beloved founder Sr. Beth Dowd passed away in December 2020. She was an extraordinary woman who believed that peace is possible and that every person deserved the opportunity to learn and enjoy music. After growing up in Holyoke, MA, and attending the College of New Rochelle, Sr. Beth served as a music teacher and choral director in Bethesda, MD, Springfield, MA, and Bronx, NY. She came to New Rochelle in 1976 and began teaching music at New Rochelle Catholic Elementary School (later, Blessed Sacrament Elementary School). Out of the school choir grew Choir Camp, which has continued for the last 41 years. Upon leaving Blessed Sacrament in 1993, Sr. Beth founded and incorporated Songcatchers in 1994. The rest, as they say, is history.

It is impossible to describe the impact Sr. Beth has had on each one of us who were blessed to know her. Sr. Beth's love for music, people, and the Earth has been felt by thousands of children and adults across multiple generations. Whether it was directing the Choir, hearing children in the After-School Music Program perform at recitals, or teaching Early Piano to young children, Sr. Beth loved each person dearly as if they were her own, never missed a moment to teach music, and cherished all the music-making that was going on around her. Inspired by Sr. Beth, many of her former students and Songcatchers participants have gone on to become musicians, teachers, and work in service-oriented fields. Thank you, Sr. Beth, for believing in and seeing the good in each one of us, and for helping us to see and express the music within ourselves. Because we have known *YOU*, we have been changed for good.

We honor Sr. Beth's legacy by doing what she would have wanted: continuing to provide musical experiences to as many children as possible. A board-restricted fund will be set up in her name, which will strengthen our organization fiscally as we look ahead to the future. May she rest in peace.

**Reaching for peace through music — that's what we're all about!**



## A Unique Community

by Mary Louise Morgan

Committed to a common goal of nurturing a lifelong love of music while learning to play a musical instrument -- that is the Songcatchers community! It is a place where students, regardless of their economic resources, come together with teachers who are advanced musicians, who are in turn overseen by a professional cadre of music teachers. "What unites us all", says **Janice Nimetz**, piano mentor, is a "respect for one another and a sense of responsibility (to and for each other) as we strive together toward the common goal of learning music."



Janice

Janice holds Bachelor and Master degrees in Music from the Eastman School of Music and a Ph.D. from Teachers College at Columbia University. She brings a lifetime of teaching and performing experience to her role as piano mentor to our young high school and college teachers. She also says she is grateful to be part of a community which offers "a rich opportunity to so many deserving young people." Our young teachers are grateful to have Janice.

When the After-School Music Program was being designed by the late Sr. Beth Dowd, the mission "Reaching for Peace through Music" served as the guiding principle. This ethos still infuses everything. Lessons begin with everyone participating in a game, followed by private or small group instruction, and ends with performance time. There, as Janice says, everyone listens to what each student is learning, "sometimes a whole piece of music, sometimes part of a piece, sometimes a scale and sometimes just one note where being able to 'make' that sound is a big accomplishment". The spirit is always one of support and encouragement.



Nora

"An amazing program that changes the lives of all of its students", is how **Nora Shefferman**, piano teacher and graduating senior from New Rochelle High School, describes Songcatchers. Nora herself started taking piano lessons at Songcatchers when she was only six years old. "Each week I was excited to show my teachers what I had practiced, and over time the volunteer teachers became friends in whom I could confide. When I was old enough to transition from being a student to a volunteer, I jumped at the chance! I wanted to pass on my love of music and create the same bond I once had." Over eleven years, while Nora was involved with Songcatchers, she also nurtured her talent by private study with a teacher from the Larchmont Music Academy. When she started to give back in her role as volunteer teacher, she had so much to share.

Over the last year, Nora says the most difficult challenge was transitioning from teaching in-person to teaching virtually. "It took me a little while to figure out the best angle for my camera at the piano and the best way to transmit sound over Zoom. I had to adapt my explanations to be as clear as possible when explaining a concept since it's harder to understand when you can't demonstrate physically. Despite the challenges, my students are learning so much and are enthusiastic about their instruments. This makes my time at Songcatchers, the highlight of my week."

There is a direct correlation between learning to play a musical instrument at a young age and overall school success particularly in math. Our very own Nora Shefferman has proven that point. She will start Princeton University in the fall as a member of the Class of '25. While there she plans on majoring in Molecular Biology. Congratulations, Nora!

**Alejandro Lopez** is eleven years old and a student in our After-School Music Program. He studies both guitar and drums and said that when looking at a piece of music, he doesn't just see a group of notes, "I see a feeling, a beat that makes you want to be yourself. It makes you want to be calm and happy...and that's the thing that keeps me going." Clearly Alejandro is someone who has benefited from the opportunity to study music and is now experiencing some of the many benefits.



Alejandro



Zoom Lessons



Zoom Lessons

Continued on p. 4



## A Unique Community

continued from page 3



Karen

The heart of all non-profit organizations is that of the Board of Directors, and over the years Songcatchers is fortunate to have had some of the best. By providing stable leadership while setting policy and ensuring fiscal viability, Songcatchers has endured and grown. Today we welcome our newest Board Member, Karen Selman. Karen is a well-known community volunteer in New Rochelle who previously enjoyed a successful career as V.P. at Deutsche Bank. She holds a BA in Economics from Tufts and a MBA from NYU's Stern School of Business. She is also the mother of two children both of whom volunteered at Songcatchers. Karen says, "I first learned about Songcatchers when my son Taylan began to teach saxophone. It was a great opportunity for him to give back to the New Rochelle community and share his love of music with younger students. I watched him over the four years he volunteered as he became more confident and passed on his expertise and inspired others. Later my daughter Leyla volunteered in a different capacity when she helped organize sheet music as part of her Silver Award for Girl Scouts."

"As we know," Karen said, "music is a universal language...which brings people together, and research has proved that exposure to an instrument at an early age improves mental performance and memory, and even positively impacts mental health. I have seen first-hand what a positive impact Songcatchers has had on my family, and as a result, I look forward to continuing to support the program as my children have done."

**Karenann Carty**, a former Board President and current Board Member said succinctly, " Songcatchers is one of the most worthy, mission-driven organizations I know." As a well known and respected educator, Karenann should know. She currently serves as VP for Academics and Chief Academic Officer at Monroe College after having earned multiple degrees including, BA from the College of New Rochelle, MA from Teachers College, Columbia University and EdD from the University of Pennsylvania. Referencing the past year as one of perseverance against the pandemic, she said Songcatchers remained "true to our values and priorities of serving our students and their families" — continuing our programming through virtual lessons and support for basic family needs. "We are emerging stronger and more vibrant, ready to enhance our offerings and expand our reach!"



Karenann

This is the challenge for Songcatchers: to maintain the quality of our teaching as we increase the number of children we serve, improve our physical space and broaden our community outreach.

**With the continued support of all of YOU, our donors and friends, we will make it happen!**

## New! Online registration for students and teachers.

Songcatchers has entered the 21st century of technology! The Covid-19 lockdown showed us that we were not prepared technologically to work from home. We quickly rectified the situation by subscribing to an online donor database and online financial system, and applying for a technology grant from the Westchester Community Foundation. **We are happy to announce that we received a \$25,000 grant to update all our computer and phone systems in the office!** Included in this grant is one full year of IT support that includes a 24x7 helpdesk, training, cyber security oversight, and more. We now have new laptops that are equipped with the latest software, Google Workspace, and the ability to connect, create and collaborate as a staff no matter where we are. We invested in a professional Zoom account to accommodate our music lessons and meetings with board, mentors, staff and students, and transitioned all registration forms to online Google documents. *Thanks for being patient with us as we transitioned to these new systems — it has been a learning experience for us all!*

## GRANTS RECEIVED SEPTEMBER 2020 - JUNE 2021

Serviam Ministry Fund: \$25,000  
Westchester Community Foundation: \$25,000  
Sills Family Foundation: \$16,875  
Rebound New Rochelle: \$10,000  
ArtsWestchester: \$7,500 Challenge Grant  
The Thomas & Agnes Carvel Foundation: \$7,500  
ArtsWestchester: \$5,000 Basic Support Grant  
The Cappelli Organization: \$5,000  
New Rochelle Campership Fund: \$5,000

Dominican Sisters of Amityville: \$4,500  
Henry E. Niles Foundation: \$2,500  
The Dean and Ann Witter Fund for Charitable Giving: \$2,500  
D'Addario Foundation: \$1,500 & \$750 in-kind donation  
Dominican Sisters of Hope: \$1,500  
Rotary Club of New Rochelle: \$600  
Con Edison: \$500 matching gift  
New Rochelle Bar Association: \$250  
Home Depot New Rochelle: In-kind product donation



# Thank You to Our Corporate & Foundation Supporters!

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WESTCHESTER COUNTY GOVERNMENT



# THANK YOU TO OUR INDIVIDUAL DONORS AND SUPPORTERS!

We are deeply grateful for your donations of time, talent and wealth —  
all of which keeps Songcatchers alive with music!  
(Individual donors will be listed in the annual report.)

Do YOU or someone you know have a news item to announce?

## News Corner

If so, let us know!  
Email: [info@songcatchers.org](mailto:info@songcatchers.org)

### Congratulations to:

- ♪ The Rosales Family on the birth of their son in August 2020. He joins big sister Mia in the Songcatchers family.
- ♪ Kathleen McEntee & Brian Lawlor on their wedding in October 2020. Members of Songcatchers' Concert Choir and Ensemble sang and played at the ceremony!
- ♪ Eileen Monahan and husband Kevin McGrath, who were married in June 2021.
- ♪ Vanessa Torres and fiancée Joseph Antolino on engagement and upcoming wedding in September 2021.
- ♪ Michelle Carty and fiancée Jonathan Minich on their engagement and upcoming wedding in October 2022.
- ♪ Volunteer Wenting Yu, who was named a 2021 National Merit Scholar.
- ♪ Volunteer Matt Irving, who was recently featured on WCBS Newsradio 880 for his work at Songcatchers.
- ♪ Students Yeray Lopez-Ibarra (clarinet), Dayanara Rosa (flute), and Charlotte Press (voice) for being accepted into New Rochelle High School's Performing and Visual Arts Education (PAVE) program for the fall 2021. Bravo, Yeray, Dayanara, and Charlotte!

### Condolences to:

- ♥ Dawn Grisanti Nasti, Stephanie Grisanti Carlson, & family on the death of their father, Joseph, in November 2020.
- ♥ Natasha & Joshua Fonseca and family on the death of their father, José, in November 2020.
- ♥ Daniel Morales & family on the death of his father, Jorge, in November 2020.
- ♥ The Dowd Family on the death of their beloved aunt and Songcatchers founder, Sr. Beth, in December 2020.
- ♥ The Cordoba & Ibarra families on the deaths of their mother/grandmother, Celia, in May 2020, & father/grandfather, Manuel, in January 2021.
- ♥ Kathleen McEntee on the death of her mother-in-law, Eileen Lawlor, in April 2021.
- ♥ The Diaz family on the death of their daughter/sister, Veronica, in April 2021.
- ♥ The Owen family on the death of our dear friend, John, longtime financial consultant for Songcatchers, in May 2021.

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*Reaching for Peace through Music*

**SONGCATCHERS**  
BY THE  
**SOUND**

**JULY 22 2021**  
6:30pm-9:30pm  
DOORS OPEN AT 6:30PM

**VIP COUNTRY CLUB**  
600 DAVENTPORT AVE,  
NEW ROCHELLE, NY 10805



As the Northeast begins to open up, we are excited to invite you to an in-person summer jazz event on **Thursday, July 22, 6:30 pm at the VIP Country Club**. Former New Rochelle resident and renowned jazz pianist, **Joey Calderazzo**, will be our headliner. Tickets are on sale at \$175 each. A silent auction will be held including painted violins by local world famous artists Charles Fazzino, Alvin Clayton and Susan Sills. All proceeds will go to Songcatchers.

Tickets and details at: <https://jazz21.givesmart.com>

**COME JOIN THE FUN!**



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