

MOUNTAIN TOP

||: music  center :||

Annual Report

July 1, 2020 — June 30, 2021



Then and Now



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Note: These are the personnel during the
fiscal year 2020–2021. At the October 2021
annual meeting Judy Kennedy was elected Chair,
and Becky Mulkern became a member
of the Board of Trustees.

Message from the Executive Director

Greetings!

As Mountain Top Music Center closes the book on another year, a hit song from 1967 comes to mind: *The Beat Goes On*. If ever there was a time of uncertainty and change, it's this "era of Covid-19." But this year in the classroom and on Zoom, in the concert hall and on the couch: the beat went on.



Mountain Top's year was defined by resilience and adaptation. To say that the challenges of the year – my 10th as Executive Director – were unprecedented, is an understatement. But our amazing team didn't skip a beat. Lessons and classes found new modalities as the virtual and "real" worlds merged. A silver lining of teaching online through the lockdowns was having a window into our students' homes and practice routines; this experience emphasized the role of music in everyday life, and brought us closer together in spite of being physically separated. When in-person lessons resumed, the joy of being back in our beautiful new home in Conway Village energized our music-making. With safety measures in place, the beat went on.

When we couldn't safely gather in the renovated Majestic Theatre, we used livestreaming technology to bring performances from the Majestic into homes worldwide. Teachers, students, and local musicians used the Majestic stage to stay engaged with homebound music lovers. The beat went on.

The beat didn't go on all by itself - it took community effort. We are profoundly grateful to our supporters, grantors, volunteers, donors, patrons, friends, musicians, and audiences - without whom the past year would have gone silent.

As we move forward into a new year, the beat goes on. Enrollment in our Educational Programs is growing, Mountain Top musicians are performing at community events, and an exciting array of concerts are planned in the Majestic Theatre. Keep in touch – sign up for lessons, take a class, attend concerts, follow our streaming media outlets. Your participation supports our mission of "enriching lives and building community through music." Let's keep that beat going strong!

George Wiese, Executive Director
(With inspiration from Sonny & Cher...)

Message from the Chair, Board of Trustees

Mountain Top Music Center is all about keeping the music playing. When one of our trustees sent me this quote from George Gershwin "Life is a lot like jazz - it's best when you improvise," I found my inspiration.



Thanks to our wonderful staff, faculty, trustees, and devoted volunteers, a whole lot of *improvising* has been going on to keep our organization alive and moving forward. The obstacles have been numerous and often difficult, but everyone has worked diligently, together and separately, to meet the challenges. From switching to online lessons at the start of the pandemic, to streaming live and recorded concerts, and organizing in-person concerts in safe settings, Mountain Top Music has '*improvised*' often to meet its goals and mission.

Rehab and restoration work has sometimes been *improvised* in our Majestic Theatre to fully outfit the space to reach its full potential. While our hopes of having a grand opening on the 90th anniversary of its inception were dashed, new hopes and dreams will still be realized in many ways and *improvisation* employed wherever and whenever needed.

Thanks to all our treasured sponsors and supporters who continue to play a huge role helping Mountain Top Music Center keep the music playing.

Beth Funicella, Chair, Board of Trustees

Reflections from the Director of Education

While the spring of 2020 brought sudden lockdown and rapid changeover to remote learning and hiatuses for many of Mountain Top's programs, the commencement of the school year in September 2020 was accompanied by a gradual return to face-to-face activities. There was uncertainty, change, and a great deal of hard work to be able to safely adapt to new formats. It has been inspiring to see the creativity with which teachers and students have approached the changeable circumstances of the past year, whether by finding ways to adapt technology to suit remote music studies, switching up lesson formats, or trying out new projects (such as composing original music, learning to record, making backing tracks, trying new genres of music, or starting a fresh practice strategy such as focusing on sight-reading).



There certainly have been challenges, such as keeping motivated during a time when performances, ensembles, and other rewarding "end goal" events were on pause, overcoming technological hurdles such as dealing with unpredictable internet service in our rural region, and changing from remote to in-person and back again at times, often on short notice. Yet through it all, graciousness, patience, cheerfulness, and a game outlook have shone through.

Continued on next page



Masks and shower curtain dividers allow Chad Cummings to teach in-person in the time of Covid.



George Wiese teaches via Zoom.



Sharon Novack teaching from behind the curtain.

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In speaking with many of our students, family members, faculty, and audience members over the past year, I have often heard how music has been a bright spot for many—a source of personal satisfaction from making progress, a chance to connect with others, perhaps a welcome distraction, or an activity that could continue with some sense of normalcy while many other activities remained suspended. One student described her weekly lesson to me as “a lifeline.” In addition, an influx of new students from ages 4 to over 70 joined us as they found themselves with new spare time in their schedules or identified a desire for connection, expressive outlets, or self-improvement, to name a few reasons incoming students have mentioned.

One major project during the spring term was putting on our annual 24 Hours of Music as a virtual event. Students, faculty, and several local musicians worked very hard from February to early April to prepare and record what amounted to more than 200 hours of video performance footage. This was a new experience for many of the performers—video and audio recording is quite a different scenario to live performance, and thus was a valuable learning opportunity. Performers also got an early chance to experience playing on the stage of the Majestic Theater, with the added enjoyment of inviting close family as their audience. The enthusiastic participation in this project resulted in a weekend-long streaming festival with hours of multi-camera, multi-track video and audio, professionally

edited. Though the project was complex and large-scale, it proved worthwhile considering the anticipation, excitement, and pride shown by the students during their recording sessions.

Editing the hundreds of hours of video became a pleasure when I could see joyful outtakes such as the beaming smile of a young ukulele student after completing her first-ever performance, a teacher expressing their pride in a student for overcoming stage nerves, a musician jumping for joy after nailing a tricky passage that took more than one take, or the loud applause of grandparents upon seeing their grandson perform in person for the first time.

The summer term saw a welcome but cautious return to small group programming, with four ensembles resuming rehearsals and the latest installment of Jazz History class, this time delivered in a hybrid in-person/live-streamed/on-demand format. While remote technology continues to be a useful tool, many students were excited and relieved to be able to gather and play together once more, and both students and audience-goers are eagerly looking forward to in-person performances and events safely resuming as planned over the autumn and winter. As we hopefully continue to reinstate or begin programs and events anew, it is a prime moment to reflect on the new tools, skills, ideas, and resources acquired and developed over this highly unusual year and how those might fit in going forward as Mountain Top Music Center continues to adapt and grow.

Dr. Julia Howell, Director of Education



Student learning from home



Justin Ramos teaching from his home studio



Chris Nourse teaching violin via Zoom.

2019-2021 Concerts and Events

Mountain Top's 2020 concert schedule got off to a blazing start in Fall 2019 followed by high expectations for our most successful concert season ever with a raft of exciting bookings already set for the rest of the year.

But, storm clouds soon gathered and on March 13, 2020, NH Governor Chris Sununu declared a state of emergency in response to what was now formally acknowledged as a coronavirus epidemic for the country and the world. His order was extended and modified time after time as the valley masked, stayed home, and quarantined.

In response to the pandemic, MTMC immediately adopted emergency goals of our own, designed to keep the music school operating safely. All in-person concerts and events were cancelled, including the highly anticipated opening of the Majestic Theatre, until it was deemed safe to gather in groups again.

As Executive Director George Wiese said, "I am reminded of the classic Charles Dickens quote, 'It was the best of times. It was the worst of times. Our mission of 'enriching lives and building community through music' became holding our community together through music."

At first, it really did seem like the worst of times, but then, thanks to an anonymous donation that allowed us to acquire excellent audio/video equipment, we started to

cautiously book selected monthly performances to live stream from the newly renovated Majestic Mainstage direct to the comfort of listeners in their own homes. Offerings included a concert by meditative pianist Dana Cunningham, followed by a robust Mardi Gras party with the Heather Pierson Trio on the day itself, and then a solo classical guitar concert performed by virtuoso Jose Manuel Lezcanos.

With the unexpected but much celebrated gift of a beautiful Steinway concert grand for the stage of the Majestic, valley favorite and seacoast pianist Tom Snow was invited to test the new-to-us "Queen B" in a dazzling live streamed jazz performance at Mountain Top's annual "24 Hours of Music" in April with his friend NYC saxophonist legend, Ken Peplowski, much to the delight of a select in-person audience, masked and distanced and cheering, as well as to the many happy music lovers online in the valley and beyond.

As another sage once said, "whether it's the best of times or the worst of times," it's the only time we've got. Undaunted by a new challenge, Mountain Top rose in these uncertain times, as it has done for two decades, and found creative new ways to enrich the cultural life of our community and the people in it.

Judy Kennedy
Chair, Concert Committee

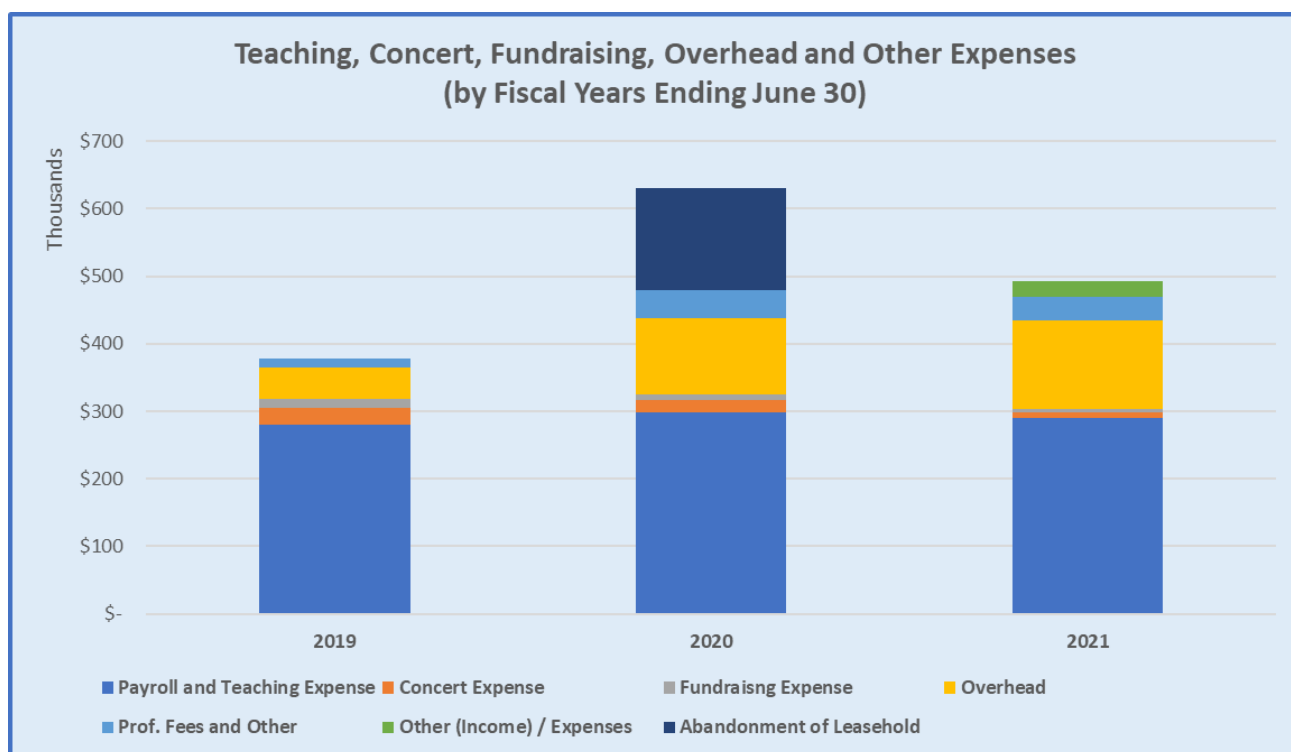
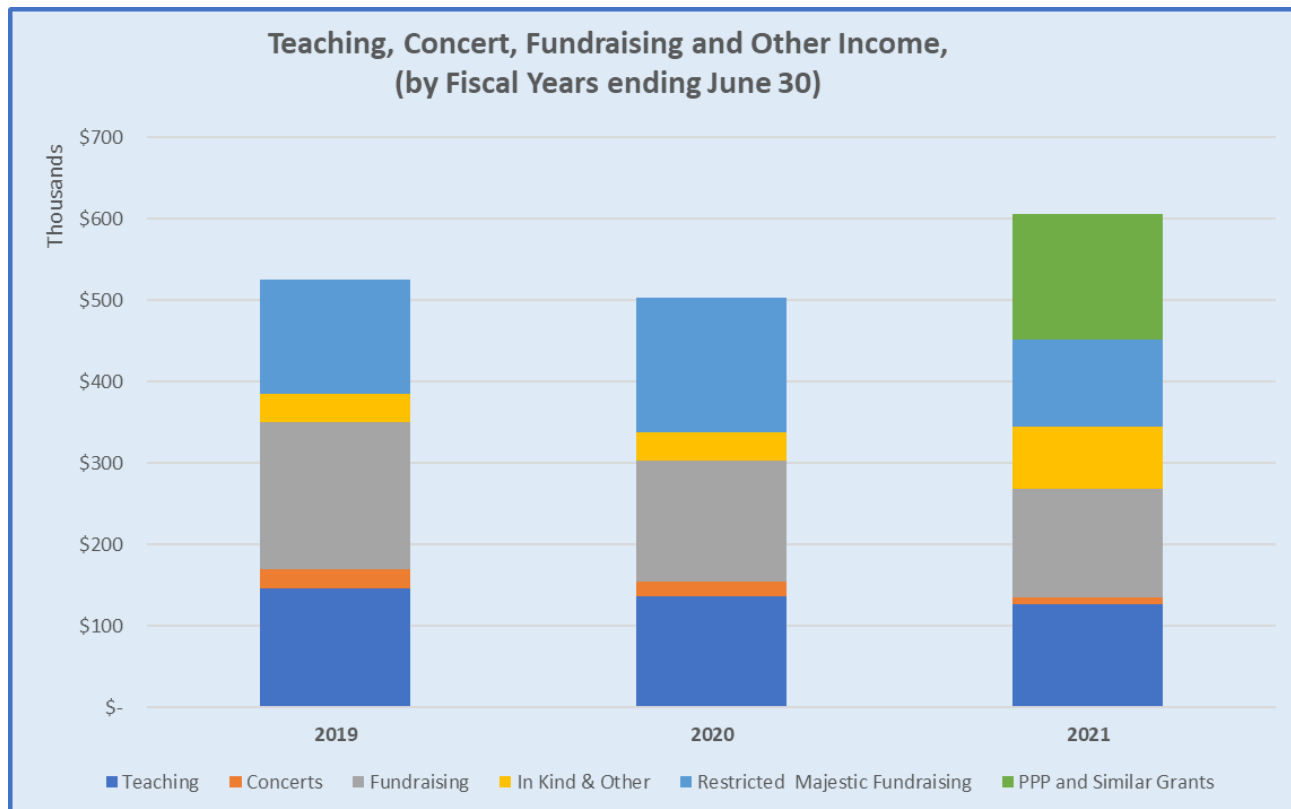


Masked, distanced and streamed, George Wiese tests the renovated theater's acoustics with the "Queen B" Steinway piano.

Financial Report

As shown by the charts below, the Covid-19 pandemic substantially affected Mountain Top Music's finances. With group and contract classes paused and concerts cancelled, income from those sources halted. In addition teaching expenses increased with the need to switch to remote teaching and the installation of Covid mitigation measures. Fortunately all of this was offset by funds from the Paycheck Protection Program and related grants.

The move to the Bolduc block increased overhead in FY'20 and FY'21 as well as adding the non-cash charge for the abandonment of the 111 Main Street leasehold in FY'20.



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