

Shelter Music Boston
Final Grant Report
Harvard Musical Association - George Henschel Community Award

Concept

With support from the Harvard Musical Association, Shelter Music Boston (SMB) has just completed our most ambitious artistic project to date. To build on the already high level of interaction that takes place in each concert and to prove to our audiences that classical music is still written today, our collaborative composition project unfolded over the last year and the resulting musical suite, *Water For My Soul*, was performed from August 19 - 24, 2018 in our eight current adult and adolescent program partners.

Through workshops conducted in June 2017, our musicians led each shelter and recovery audience in creating a short piece of new music. During these workshops, audience members heard a simple musical idea and were able to build on it by asking the musicians to play it higher, lower, faster, slower, backwards, forwards, in different rhythms, and many other variations. Each resulting piece was unique and there was a sense of ownership at the end of each workshop. In fact, the women at The Dimock Center left their workshop last year humming the melody they had created! The final compositions were sent to professional composer, Danielle Williams, who shaped the musical themes, ideas, and melodies to create *Wicked Spirits* and *Shells From the Sea*. The other building blocks of this suite were the commission of three movements setting the poetic words of our audience members to music. Renowned composer Yu-Hui Chang wrote *The Path in Front of Me*, Francine Trester wrote *In Our Own Words*, and Danielle Williams wrote *Release*. Each composer was able to attend select performances throughout last week and available to answer questions about their work.

These musical works created with and inspired by people in desperate need demonstrate the enormous creativity of our audiences. Central to SMB founder Julie Leven's original design for this project, *Water For My Soul* was programmed alongside the works of some of the greatest composers in history. From *Così fan tutte*, our musicians also performed W.A. Mozart's *Ob Wind Gently Blowing*, and in celebration of his 100th birthday last week, we closed each concert with Leonard Bernstein's hopeful *Make Our Garden Grow* from *Candide*. To view an excerpt of the performance of this piece at The Dimock Center's women's program, [click here](#).

Achievability

Bringing this project to fruition was an enormous undertaking. The artistic components of commissioning new works and communicating with three different composers, as well as the oversight of our team of seven musicians (our largest ensemble to date!) through rehearsals and performances at different times and locations throughout the week was a significant operation. The music was complex and challenging for our professional musicians and we learned that future projects of this scope will benefit from more than the three rehearsals we planned for and budgeted. Because SMB performs in unconventional spaces, it was sometimes a challenge to fit our large group in the common areas in the shelters and recovery centers where we perform. At one of our new shelter partners, there was no elevator to transport the marimba up to the performance space and shelter guests volunteered to heft it over their heads up a tiny staircase. Our administrative team will be meeting next week to debrief all the details of this concert series. However, despite any challenges, we were buoyed by the overwhelmingly positive audience response and we are already at work on our cornerstone artistic project for 2019. Additionally, the program for our October 11, 2018 benefit concert will include a demonstration of the workshops that resulted in *Water For My Soul* and a performance of at least one movement from the suite.

Measurements of Success

With this concert program so recently completed, our team is still reading and documenting all the written surveys from our audiences. However, we are thrilled with the audience response and participation throughout the concert series and performed for a total of 158 shelter guests or program clients. The enthusiasm for this project was palpable and can be demonstrated in a few comments from listeners. For example, at Lifebridge, a homeless shelter in Salem, one guest, a 41-year old man who has suffered three heart attacks, told us this after the concert there:

“When something’s bothering you, you know, and you’re listening to music, it kind of does something to your spirit, you know what I mean? It kind of allows all that to go away. It kind of vanishes, you know what I mean? That’s how amazing music is, to be honest. I think you all should do them more often. I don’t know about funding or whatever. It should be a lot more in the shelters. I think it takes away people’s problems, just for that hour or two. You don’t have to think about nothing, you don’t have to do nothing. You can just of drift away and get away from yourself. For me anyway...I was stressed before and it’s like, it’s all gone, you know what I mean. That’s what music does.”

At The Dimock Center’s women’s recovery programs that we have been performing at since 2012, one of the women shared her thoughts after the first piece:

“I wanna say how beautiful it is...I feel every word so deeply. I can be free of all my problems, just listen to the music. I used to listen to classical music in my car...such a rhythm to release all that pain. I would fantasize about a better life... [When I listen to music] My soul feels free.”

At Dimock’s men’s recovery programs, one of our newest partners, one of the surveys reads:

How did you feel before the concert: “Lethargic. I was also suffering from a headache. As the music became more intense, my headache dissipated.”

How did you feel after the concert: “Relaxed. Refined. Eager to explore more classical music.”

What did you enjoy most about the concert: “I enjoyed the “controlled chaos” of all the different instruments. The vocalists were stunning. Strings on point. Percussion (marimba) was a welcome addition to the experience.”

It is worth noting that since our proposal, we have finalized our concert survey tool. While we were testing a pre- and post-concert survey at the time of our submission, we ultimately decided to continue administering our survey only after each concert is complete and once our musicians have gained or re-gained trust and/or established rapport with audiences throughout each concert. We adapted our survey to allow for more open-ended responses, as opposed to supplying multiple choice options for our audiences.

Throughout this concert series, we shared many audience quotes, photos, and videos on our social media channels. The Jewish Advocate published an article about SMB and this project the week before the concert series and a reporter for The Boston Globe is in the process of writing an article after conducting interviews and attending one of our shelter concerts. Additionally, we were able to secure a pro bono videographer to film two of the concerts and conduct several interviews with musicians and audience members in order to create a short video about SMB and *Water For My Soul*.

In addition to the comments included in this narrative, we have also attached files of some of our surveys following the *Water For My Soul* concerts.

Sustainability

With this concert program so recently completed, our team has not yet had a chance to debrief the details of each concert and the overall impact of the project. However, we are confident that we can continue to implement artistic projects beyond the scope of our traditional monthly concerts and repertoire. In fact, our 2019 cornerstone project will feature the work of 20th century composer Florence Price, whose *Shortnin' Bread* we performed during our 2017 Women Composers Project (supported by the Harvard Musical Association). Additionally, composer Francine Trester, who collaborated with SMB on *Water For My Soul*, is working on a short opera based on the life and work of Florence Price for us to pair with Price's own work.

Impact of HMA's Contribution

Shelter Music Boston depends on a combination of foundation grants and individual support to make what will be more than 90 concerts possible in 2018. Not only did a grant from the George Henschel Community Award at the Harvard Musical Association supply essential funds to cover the increased costs of this special concert series, but we are so grateful for the credibility that a partnership with the HMA provides for our work. Additionally, grant support from HMA has directly led to our ability to build on past projects in order to develop new and innovative concert programs.



Audience at Dimock Center



Bernstein's *Make Our Garden Grow* at CASPAR



Javier with audience at Dimock Center