

QUARTER NOTES

News for Hartford Symphony Orchestra Donors & Friends

DE COM POSED

Decomposed: an exploration of the composers we want to know better.

WILL MARION COOK

(January 27, 1869 – July 19, 1944)

Our Winter issue of Quarter Notes introduced William Levi Dawson, and in this installment of Decomposed, we shift our focus to Will Marion Cook.

Do you know the name Will Marion Cook? We all should.

Frederick Douglas organized a fundraiser to send this gifted young Black violinist to Europe to further his musical studies,¹ and, thanks to Frederick Douglas, Cook studied with Joseph Joachim, an associate of Brahms and one of the most famous violinists of his time.² As a young musician, Cook also studied with Antonin Dvořák in New York City at the newly created National Conservatory of Music. Cook's father, an attorney, who was in the first class of students at Howard University Law School, went on to become the school's first dean.³ Despite Cook's stellar achievements and his family's accomplishments, very few of us recognize his name. But no history of American music is complete without him. Please meet **Will Marion Cook**.

Born in Washington, D.C. to highly educated parents on January 27,



1869, Will Marion Cook's early career was centered entirely around classical music and violin performance.⁴ He began violin studies at age 13, and at 15, he studied at Oberlin College.⁵ As one of the most important figures in pre-jazz music, Will Marion Cook

had a brilliant career as a composer, conductor, teacher and producer, but his hopes for a career as a classical violinist were crushed when he was told that audiences did not want to hear classical music performed by a Black man.⁶ Cook was left bitter, hurt and demoralized. It is reported that Cook stopped playing the violin after a concert at Carnegie Hall in 1895, in which a reviewer remarked that Cook was "the world's greatest Negro violinist."⁷ The story is that Cook went to the writer's office and said, "I am not the world's greatest Negro violinist, I am the greatest violinist in the world," and then proceeded to smash his violin on the desk and swore never to perform again.⁸

But Cook did perform on violin at least one more time. He became chorus master and assistant conductor of the Clef Club Orchestra, an important ensemble of all Black musicians led by James Reese

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

TO SUPPORT THE HSO IN OUR TIME OF GREATEST NEED, please go to <https://hartfordsymphony.org/individual-support/donate-now/> OR

[CLICK HERE TO DONATE NOW](#)



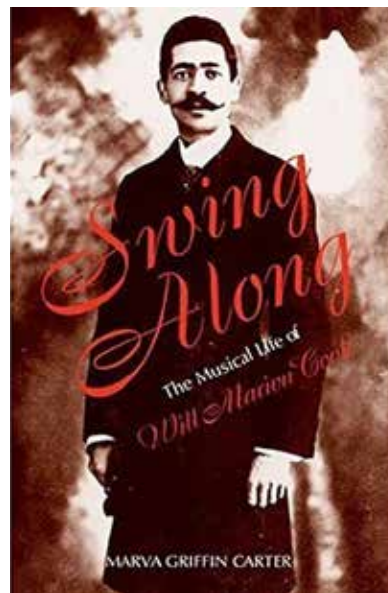
Europe, an American ragtime and early jazz composer and bandleader.⁹ Europe organized an historic concert at Carnegie Hall on May 2, 1912 that was intended to present the full range of music by African Americans.¹⁰ The event, billed as a "Symphony of Negro Music," included waltzes, liturgical works, tangos and choral music performed by a 150-voice chorus.¹¹ Cook agreed to play with the group on stage, as long as he would not be introduced or asked to bow.¹² When some members of the audience recognized him, his performance was met with enormous applause and cries of "speech!"¹³ The applause lasted so long, and Cook was so overcome, that he was rendered speechless, and all he could do was bow.¹⁴

Closed out of the classical music world, Cook turned his energy to composing ragtime, the era's most popular music. He went on to become one of the foremost musicians of his generation and was regarded by many in the Black community as the leading composer of his time.¹⁵ By the turn of the century in 1900, Cook had already made his mark as a composer of musical comedy productions.

Cook's first big success was the 1898 musical *Clorindy or The Origin of the Cakewalk*.¹⁶ The show was written,

directed and performed by an all-Black cast, a first for Broadway.¹⁷ Cook approached the music publisher Isador Witmark to help produce the show, and Cook later recalled that Witmark told him he was "crazy to believe any Broadway audience would pay to listen to Negroes sing."¹⁸ But the show made history and Cook was the first Black musician to conduct an all-white orchestra on Broadway.¹⁹ For the first time in Broadway history, performers sang and danced simultaneously, and the one-hour show was a triumph.²⁰ Cook reportedly said he was "so delirious" with joy that he got "drunk on a glass of water."²¹ He later wrote, "Negroes were at last on Broadway and there to stay. Gone was ... the minstrel! Gone the Massa Linkum stuff. We were artists, and we were going a long, long way."²²


In 1899, Cook married Abbie Mitchell, a gifted performer in her own right.²³ Abbie was 14 years old when she married Cook, then 22 years her senior. She studied voice with both Cook and Harry T. Burleigh.²⁴ Mitchell was an actor/singer who enjoyed an extensive career. She performed as a vocalist with Cook's orchestra, the Southern Syncopators, which became known as the New York Syncopated Orchestra.²⁵ With Mitchell, the group toured Europe, performing before George V of England.²⁶ Band member Sideny Bechet, a brilliant clarinetist, who began playing soprano saxophone on the tour, went on to become one of the jazz legends²⁷ featured in the episode called "Minstrelsy" in the



Ken Burns PBS documentary, *JAZZ*. Cook also continued to conduct the Clef Club Orchestra and often featured the vocalist Paul Robeson.²⁸

Cook first met Duke Ellington in the early 1920's.²⁹ Both men were born into the "Black elite" of Washington, D.C. or the Talented Tenth, to use a term coined by W.E.B. Du Bois.³⁰ In his autobiography, Ellington wrote that he called Cook "Dad" and, as a young 20-something, asked Cook for help with his unfinished compositions.³¹ Ellington recalled Cook's advice: "You know you should go to the conservatory, but since you won't, I'll tell you. First you find the logical way and when you find it, avoid it, and let your inner self break through and guide you. Don't try to be anybody but yourself."³² Ellington never forgot Cook's words.

In addition to musical theater, Cook wrote operas, art songs and instrumental pieces, but the last 20 years of his life marked a decline in his career.³³ Cook died in New York's Harlem Hospital on July 19, 1944. He is buried in Woodlawn Cemetery in Queens, New York.³⁴ Cook's son, Mercer Cook, had

a long and distinguished career as a professor of French and English at Howard University.³⁵ In the 1930's, he briefly collaborated with his father as a songwriter, and in the 1960's he served as U.S. Ambassador to Senegal and Gambia.³⁶ He went on to head the Romance Language Department at Harvard until he passed away in 1987.³⁷ 



Alive through great music!



Institute of Living

200 Years of Recovery

Hartford Symphony Orchestra and the Institute of Living: *Working together to shine a spotlight on mental health*

HSO's April concert features the music of **Rachmaninoff** and **Tchaikovsky**, but it is also a special collaboration with Hartford's renowned Institute of Living, in celebration of their 200th anniversary and work on the cutting edge of psychiatry. The concert and the collaboration highlight the longstanding link between music and mental health.

A June 2020 AARP article reported, "research continues to show that music can have a beneficial effect on brain chemicals such as dopamine, which is linked to feelings of pleasure, and oxytocin, the so-called 'love hormone'."³⁸ The AARP article includes findings from the 2020 AARP Music and Brain Health Survey, a nationally representative survey of 3,185 adults which found that listening to music, whether in the background, by focused listening to recordings, or at musical performances, had a demonstrable positive impact on mental well-being, depression and anxiety.³⁹ The clear link between health and music is unquestioned. Not only is music therapy helpful for depression and trauma but listening to music has been shown to reduce heart rate, lower blood pressure and decrease stress levels. We also know that music has the power to improve cognitive performance.⁴⁰

Research shows that music, specifically classical music, increases focus. So, listening to classical music while working is likely to assist your completion of the task at hand.

The important connection between music and positive mental health is at the heart of the partnership between the Hartford Symphony Orchestra and the Institute of Living. Our April concert is the perfect launching pad for our collaboration, as the concert features the music of Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky and Sergei Rachmaninoff, two legendary artists who both endured lifelong struggles with depression. In furtherance of the HSO's mission to "enrich lives and community through great music", we have joined with the Institute of Living to underscore the importance of mental health treatment and the benefits of music.

As we learn more about the lives and struggles of Tchaikovsky, Rachmaninoff and so many other great musical artists who endured mental health challenges, we recognize that we are bound

together by our shared humanity, and that all of us have individual struggles that require acknowledgement and patience. There is nothing as profound as music to help us better appreciate our emotions and the deep connections we share with one another.

While great musical geniuses have struggled with mental illness, showcasing these two artists at a time when the IOL is celebrating 200 years as a leader in the field of psychiatry is a poignant reminder that mental health challenges and addiction can happen to anyone, but there is hope for recovery and success.

Please join the Hartford Symphony Orchestra for Rachmaninoff and Tchaikovsky, April 8-10, 2022, to hear soloist Henry Kramer perform Rachmaninoff's Piano Concerto No. 3, in a concert that also features Tchaikovsky's Symphony No. 5. AND PLEASE - don't forget to join us one-hour before each performance for our FREE pre-concert discussion

about the connections between music and mental illness, featuring HSO Music Director Carolyn Kuan in conversation with Dr. Javeed Sukhera, MD, PhD, and Chair of Psychiatry at the Institute of Living and Dr. Hank Schwartz, MD, former Psychiatrist-in-Chief at the Institute of Living.



Dr. Javeed Sukhera



Dr. Hank Schwartz

CONGRATULATIONS DR. COLETTE HALL, ON TEN YEARS WITH THE HSO!

Dr. Colette Hall, HSO Director of Artistic Operations, has reached a milestone: TEN years with the HSO, making her currently the longest-serving member of the HSO staff. In our industry, while longevity is common among orchestra musicians, it is markedly uncommon when it comes to staff.

Colette, who is generally backstage during performances, is the person we turn to ensure that everything our audience sees on stage is seamless. Colette joined the Hartford Symphony as a part-time Ticket Services Representative in October 2011. Since that time, she has seized on every opportunity to learn more, assuming greater responsibilities along the way. From her part-time position with the box office, Colette became Assistant Box Office Manager, Interim Box Office Manager, Artistic Coordinator, Assistant Manager of Artistic Operations, and

Artistic Operations Manager until her most recent promotion to the title she now holds: Director of Artistic Operations.

In the spring of 2018, Colette was named as an Elizabeth L. Mahaffey Arts Administration Fellow, which included a grant award for professional development for emerging arts leaders presented with support from the Department of Economic and Community Development, Connecticut Office of the Arts.

In May of 2015, Colette graduated with her doctorate in saxophone performance from the University of Hartford's Hartt School in Hartford, CT. She had previously earned a master's degree in Performance from Duquesne University in Pittsburgh, PA, and graduated summa cum laude with a Bachelor's Degree in Music Education from the Crane School of Music at SUNY Potsdam in Potsdam, NY.




Dr. Colette Hall



Dr. Colette Hall and her saxophone ensemble, Resurgam Quartet.

In addition to her considerable responsibilities at the HSO, Colette also teaches private saxophone lessons and performs in the Greater Hartford region. As a matter of fact, her saxophone quartet, Resurgam Quartet, will be our featured guest artist on the June 2022 Masterworks, when we perform a composition by Philip Glass, Concerto for Saxophone Quartet and Orchestra. A native of the Hudson Valley area in New York State, Colette now resides in her new home in Wethersfield with her twin cats, Hank and Waldo.

Congratulations, Colette, and a sincere thank you, for all you do to make it all look so easy, when we know it really isn't! 

THE HSO HOSTING PROGRAM IS BACK UP AND RUNNING – AND WE NEED HOSTS!

Almost six years ago, we created the HSO hosting program to foster a deeper sense of community between our musicians and audiences. As many of our musicians travel significant distances to perform with the HSO, the hosting program paired out-of-town HSO musicians with community hosts who could offer housing while musicians came here to rehearse and perform in our many musical programs such as school concerts, our summer Talcott Mountain Music Festival, Masterworks, POPS! and more.

The Hosting Program was an instant success. We matched community members who had space to share (bedroom and private bathroom) with musicians in need of a safe space to practice, relax and prepare for a concert. Every musician is all too familiar with the stress of trying to rehearse in hotel rooms, fearful of disrupting guests in adjoining rooms, as well as the uncomfortable feelings of isolation and loneliness when you have no friends in a new community. The hosting program was the solution. We knew the program would build community and relationships, but we had no idea where those relationships would lead.

The remarkable bonds between hosts and musicians are testament to the success of our program. Lifelong friendships have emerged, and multiple hosts frequently travel to see "their" musician perform on other stages. Some have traveled as far as Finland and Chile to maintain the connections with their newfound musician friends.

In anticipation of our return to in



Hosts Chloe and Wes Horton, with bassoonist Rebecca Noreen

person performance during the 2021 summer Talcott Mountain Music Festival, we carefully brought back the hosting program, but with some new and important guidelines: all members of the hosting household must be fully vaccinated, and all musicians participating in the program must also be vaccinated. Most of our hosts returned immediately, but families with children too young to be vaccinated could not immediately resume as hosts. (Hopefully, when children are fully vaccinated, those families will also return as hosts.)

Our hosts have made it possible for us to return to the concert stage this season. We could not have survived without each one. Now, with the return to full programs which will include two POPS shows this Spring (*Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* on April 23 and 24th, as well

as *Aretha: A Tribute*, on June 2) and the **Talcott Mountain Music Festival** throughout July, we hope to increase the number of host families. Hosting a musician in your home for brief periods of time during the concert season (for rehearsal and performance) is the surest way to build a friendship that will last a lifetime.

Enthusiastic comments from participating hosts are encouraging others to join:



Hosts Jeff and Orit Tager with violinist Gary Capozziello

"(Hosting)... has been an absolutely amazing and sensational experience for us. As much as Marshall and I have felt committed to the HSO over the years, getting to know not only Brian, but several of the other musicians, has given us an opportunity to engage, learn, and understand more of what makes this organization so very special."

Sandra & Marshall Rulnick, hosts to HSO's principal trombone, Brian Diehl

On the rare occasion that host volunteers are compelled to stop hosting (usually because of a downsize in living quarters), they invariably express deep regret. But the special friendships formed



Host Connie Mindell with bassist Julianne Russell

through the hosting experience remain intact, and those relationships provide ongoing gratification.

"... Sharing space and time with Scott was a fantastic opportunity. He is most cooperative. I easily entrusted him with my home! The downside of moving to Seabury is having to end the hosting side of our friendship."

Wendy Haller, host to HSO's principal trumpet,
Scott McIntosh

We need you – now.

We work continually to enlarge our roster of hosts, but the need is especially important right now. If you have an extra private bedroom in your home with a separate private bathroom, plus an inquisitive nature that delights in meeting new people and expanding your horizons, you fit the definition of a perfect HSO host. Our guidelines (for musicians and hosts which we will happily share upon request if you're curious) serve to manage expectations and ensure that hosts will want to continue with musicians as the perfect guests.

Our program operates much like a "B and B." You are always in control and have the right to decline if a requested hosting stay is not convenient for you. While you are asked to provide breakfast selections, you are never asked to provide any transportation.

Does this sound like a great adventure for you? Just say yes! We deliberately arrange gatherings to connect the host families with one another through special events that might even include tables at the Talcott Mountain Music Festival! **Contact Ruth Sovronsky, Director of Development, for more information and details at 860-760-7321 or rsovronsky@hartfordsymphony.org.** 

THE HSO'S ANNUAL BRAVO GALA IS BACK: LIVE AND OUTDOORS – FOR THE FIRST TIME.



After three years, the HSO's celebrated annual Bravo Gala is back – in person, and, for the first time, outdoors. We've moved our celebration to the Farmington Polo Grounds, for a glorious outdoor garden party that celebrates the return to live music.

Join us to celebrate the return to live music after more than two years of a global pandemic that kept all of us apart, gazing at one another through computer screens. **EVERYONE is invited to the party!**

Here are the details:

WHEN: **Thursday, June 16, 2022**

WHERE: **Farmington Polo Grounds
Farmington, CT**

ATTIRE: **Garden party cocktail attire**

SPECIAL HONOREES:
Rebecca Corbin Loree and Jim Loree

Please visit our website for more information and a chance to celebrate in the best way possible – together. <https://hartfordsymphony.org/bravo/>

A LOVING TRIBUTE TO FRANK LORD: SPONSORSHIP OF SUNDAY SERENADES

Frank Lord was devoted to the city of Hartford. HIS city. He was honest and respectful, quietly brilliant, with a dry sense of humor. His life was filled with adventure that always included bicycling (everywhere), great coffee and good food (which rested on Frank's cardinal rule, "no breakfast foods for dinner!") When he retired from his work as an Enrolled Actuary and Assistant VP in the pension retirement division at The Hartford, he gave even more of himself to Hartford. Frank served as Commissioner of the Hartford Pension Commission, as Vice-Chairman of the Greater Hartford Transit District Board, and as President of the Board of the Mark Twain House. He was the Treasurer of Hands On Hartford, Vice President of the Bushnell Park Foundation and served on the Steering Committee of the Catalyst Endowment of the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving. He was Treasurer of the Hartford BID (Business Improvement District), and a Founding Member and President of SoDo, the Hartford neighborhood of "South Downtown" where he and Suzanne Hopgood, his loving wife for 37 years, made their home. For decades, Frank followed and supported a broad range of cultural interests that always included the Hartford Symphony, the Hartford Ballet, TheaterWorks, Hartford Stage, the Mark Twain House, the Hartford Whalers and UConn Hockey, just to name a few. Frank knew the



Frank Lord and Suzanne Hopgood


importance of service and he lived what he believed.

Although a stroke in 2018 brought unforeseen challenges, Frank remained a visible presence in Hartford. With easy access from their downtown condo, and with the assistance of two compassionate and devoted live-in caregivers, Leroy Samuels and Dwayne Greenland, Frank and Suzanne continued to enjoy everything Hartford could offer, from concerts and block parties on Pratt Street to Monday night jazz in Bushnell Park. They frequented Max Downtown, Salute, The Russell and looked forward to Sunday breakfasts at Ashley's. Together, they attended

events at the Hartford Library and Hartford Symphony Orchestra's Sunday Serenade chamber concerts at the Wadsworth Atheneum. In the summer, they had a front row table at the Symphony's Talcott Mountain Music Festival, which they filled with guests, great food and laughter. Frank was quick-witted, generous and a champion of all that is Hartford. His passing on July 3, 2020, left a gaping hole in many hearts.

In February of 2022, Suzanne made the decision to become a sponsor of the Symphony's Sunday Serenades Series, and lovingly named the sponsorship in Frank's memory. Suzanne's new sponsorship was announced at the February 20, 2022 concert to a sold-out crowd. Suzanne explained her reasoning simply and lovingly: "Because people who knew Frank will smile when they hear his name." You are so right, Suzanne. We are indeed smiling.

Looking for a way to honor someone special? What better tribute than to name a concert in memory of a loved one?

Our sponsorships are renewable annually and we are always here to explain how it works. Please contact Ruth Sovronsky, Director of Development, at rsovrnsky@hartfordsymphony.org, or 860-760-7321. Together, we will create a living tribute or a memorial through the gift of music. 

HELP THE HSO RAISE \$7,000

AND "MAX OUT" OUR MATCH FROM ENDOW HARTFORD 21!!

Local philanthropist, Henry Zachs, designed **Endow Hartford 21**, a community-wide 1:2 matching gift endowment campaign, to help organizations build critical endowment funds. The Hartford Symphony Orchestra was selected as one of the 51 beneficiary organizations, in recognition of HSO's critical role as a vital economic engine for our community.

Thanks to the Zachs Family Foundation and other lead donors, nearly \$2 million in matching funds was available to the chosen organizations with a fixed match available to each. This enormously successful endeavor has raised nearly \$1 million community dollars, not including the matching funds.

And now, **EndowHartford21** is approaching its conclusion. The one-year program began in June of 2021 and with just a few months until June 30, 2022, the Hartford Symphony needs only an additional \$7,000 to exhaust our share of matching dollars. **We need your help to cross the finish line!**

How does it work?

- Your gift to **EndowHartford 21** can be matched **IF** it is in addition to your usual Annual Fund support for the HSO in whatever amount is customary for you. Why? Because the creators of **Endow Hartford 21** wisely recognized the importance of **continuing annual support**, while simultaneously building an endowment. We need BOTH.
- If you've already made your Annual Fund gift or will do so simultaneously with your **EndowHartford 21** support, you are eligible to participate.



- Gifts to the HSO through **EndowHartford 21** between \$250 and \$10,000 per donor/household per organization are eligible for the match. The wonderful 1:2 matching opportunity immediately transforms your gift of \$300 to \$450, and your gift of \$1,000 to \$1,500!

A special thank you gift – just for donors to HSO's EndowHartford 21 Fund!

- Gifts between \$250 and \$999 will receive a sturdy HSO thermal tote bag, great for summer picnics!
- Gifts between \$1,000 and \$10,000 receive a handblown glass paperweight, donated To the Hartford Symphony by renowned glass artist Robin Lehman, to honor Beethoven's 250th Birthday.

Here's how you can help us cross the finish line:

- HSO has nearly exhausted our available matching dollars – but not quite. With just \$3,500 in matching funds still available to the HSO, right now YOU

can help us raise the additional \$7,000 needed to exhaust the match and reach our goal. Make your gift via the **Endow Hartford21** website, at <https://www.endowhartford21.com/organizations/>

- Once you're on that page, just find the HSO logo and click the link just below our logo to make your gift via credit card directly to the HSO's fund at the Hartford Foundation for Public giving. Your gift can also be made by check or appreciated stock.

Please think community.

To learn more about the other 50 organizations involved in this project, please take a moment to investigate all whose logos are displayed on the **EndowHartford 21** webpage. Learn about them and consider lending your support.

Questions? Contact Ruth Sovronsky, HSO's Development Director, at rsovronsky@hartfordsymphony.org, or by calling her at 860-760-7321.



A NEW MUSICIAN SPONSORSHIP:

BOB & FRANKIE GOLDFARB SPONSOR VIOLINIST DEBORAH TYLER

Bob & Frankie Goldfarb have had a life-long love affair with the arts. They support theater, music, dance, museums and more, and if you're lucky, you might have had the good fortune to greet them at a performance at The Bushnell Center for the Performing Arts, Hartford Stage, TheaterWorks, Playhouse on Park, at various Hartt School performances, or at the Sunken Garden Poetry Festival at the Hill-Stead Museum each summer.

A charitable foundation they created, the Ellen Jeanne Goldfarb Memorial Trust, honors the memory of their daughter, a student flutist. Their passion extends to the support of young musicians and dancers, and other youth arts education programs, including various Greater Hartford music programs such as Gifts of Music, Pops 'n' Jazz, youth dance studies and performances, the Bushnell Partners in Arts & Education Program, and the Hartford Symphony's Young Artists Competition. A recent grant enabled the Northeast Jazz Exchange and Curriculum Enrichment Program, making it possible for students from two West Hartford High Schools, Hall and Conard, to participate in a multi-day exchange, residency, and curriculum share focused on jazz, and the contributions of so many Black musicians to the art form.

As long-time supporters of the Hartford Symphony Orchestra, Bob and Frankie have now chosen

to sponsor one of our wonderful violinists, Deborah Tyler. The connection with Debbie goes back years to when Frankie taught Debbie's children in preschool at the Children's Museum. Debbie Tyler joined the Hartford Symphony Orchestra in 1993 and, except for one year's leave of absence, she has played continuously with the symphony since that time. Debbie and her family make their home in West Hartford. To be honored with a sponsorship is indeed the highest form of praise for our wonderful musicians.

What is a musician sponsorship?

The opportunity to sponsor a musician is available to anyone who contributes to the Annual Fund on a consistent basis. Your support serves to help underwrite that musician's salary for the duration of the sponsorship.

How much and how long?

Sponsorship involves a three-year commitment at the designated financial level associated with a particular musician. Benefits include an annual Musician Sponsor event that is held for sponsors and the sponsored musicians. Our current



Deborah Tyler

list of sponsored musicians includes Leonid Sigal (concertmaster), Gene Bozzi (principal timpanist), Barbara Hill (principal French Horn), Rick Rozie (principal bassist), Aekyung Kim (assistant principal cello), Carole Olefsky (cello), Paul Cho (clarinet), Gary Capozziello (violin) and Ann Drinan (violinist), and Jeanne Wilson (flute/piccolo.) We hope one of YOU will be our next sponsor!!

The opportunity to sponsor a musician is available to anyone who contributes to the Annual Fund on a consistent basis.

Interested in finding out how you can create a special bond with a musician you admire? To learn more, contact Ruth Sovronsky, Director of Development, at 860-760-7321 or rsovrnsky@hartfordsymphony.org

STAFF SPOTLIGHT:

ASHLEY OVERTON

HSO'S MARKETING & DIGITAL MEDIA COORDINATOR

Ashley, born in Raleigh, North Carolina, joined the HSO in July of 2019. In less than a year, everything changed when we all shifted to a remote work protocol in March of 2020. During the pandemic, Ashley moved to Brooklyn, New York, but her contributions are so important that she is now our only permanently remote employee. We thought it was about time we introduced her to you!

QN: Where did you go to school and how did you wind up in Connecticut?

Ashley: When I graduated from UNC at Chapel Hill, I had the opportunity to work anywhere I wanted. My partner at that time got a great job offer in Connecticut, so it made sense for me to move with him. My first job was the marketing/events assistant for Hartford Flavor Company, which is right near where we lived on Arbor Street in Hartford.

QN: Was marketing your field of study in school?

Ashley: Actually, no. My undergraduate degree was in psychology, with a specialty in neuroscience. In college, I worked as a research assistant in a lab. I began to work with museums to create "brain awareness" events, and I became responsible to market those events. I realized I enjoyed marketing more than the neuroscience, so I left the lab and took a job at a local toy store, where I worked on their marketing strategy.

QN: Did the pandemic change your work?

Ashley: It absolutely did. I was briefly furloughed by the Hartford Symphony, and my boyfriend's job moved him to New York. Our lease in Hartford was up, so we decided to move to Brooklyn. We found an apartment in Park Slope, and I have come to love it. I can walk everywhere, I'm just 8 blocks from Prospect Park, and we were lucky to move across the street from good friends, so the move has really been great for us. And pretty quickly, the Symphony brought me back to work.

QN: Despite the move, you opted to stay with the Hartford Symphony?

Ashley: Yes. While I love the music (I played piano as a child), the best thing about the HSO is the people. It's a small dynamic group of people who really care about one another. We all invest in one another, and it's more like a close family than a working environment.

QN: What's the hardest part of your job?

Ashley: Trying to engage most deeply with our patrons, especially those who don't use social media such as Twitter, Instagram and Facebook. And social media is a challenge because things have shifted dramatically in the last two years. With changing algorithms, you have to figure out how to stay in front of people and how to appear on their pages. Another platform, Tik Tok, really took off during the pandemic. The trick to all social media is the consistency of posting. The more you post, the more the algorithm pushes you up, but even that is



Ashley Overton

tricky. While you must post regularly, you can't just be repetitive, and you must not "over post." It involves lots of creativity. My job at the HSO is to create content for everything and to make sure the public knows the many wonderful things we do.

QN: And finally, what are the pros and cons of working remotely?

Ashley: The HSO is a very social group and it's hard not to be right next to my colleagues. I miss the hands-on partnership and having lunch with the HSO team. On the other hand, I can arrange my time as I want. If it's a gorgeous day, I can take a walk at noon, eat lunch at home, and extend my hours as much as is needed to be sure the job is getting done. I still make a point of "dressing" for work because it is important to feel that you are part of a work environment. Another benefit is that my boyfriend, Ethan, also works from home. He used to have to work very late, often not returning until after 8 pm. Now, we can eat lunch together, take a walk together and the only challenge is creating enough space for both of us to have an "office" in our small New York City apartment! 

Endnotes:

¹ <https://www.loc.gov/item/ihas.200038839>

² Ibid

³ Ibid

⁴ Ibid

⁵ Ibid

⁶ <https://www.encyclopedia.com/african-american-focus/news-wires-white-papers-and-books/cook-will-marion>

⁷ Ibid

⁸ Ibid

⁹ <http://encyclopediaofalabama.org/article/h-2470>

¹⁰ Ibid

¹¹ Ibid

¹² <https://www.encyclopedia.com/african-american-focus/news-wires-white-papers-and-books/cook-will-marion>

¹³ Ibid

¹⁴ Ibid

¹⁵ <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/cgi/viewcontet.cgi?article+1075&context=musicianfacpub>

¹⁶ <https://www.loc.gov/item/ihas.200038839>

¹⁷ <https://www.encyclopedia.com/african-american-focus/news-wires-white-papers-and-books/cook-will-marion>

¹⁸ Ibid

¹⁹ Ibid

²⁰ Ibid

²¹ Ibid

²² Ibid

²³ Ibid

²⁴ <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/cgi/viewcontet.cgi?article+1075&context=musicianfacpub>

²⁵ <https://www.encyclopedia.com/african-american-focus/news-wires-white-papers-and-books/cook-will-marion>

²⁶ Ibid

²⁷ Ibid

²⁸ Ibid

²⁹ Ibid

³⁰ Ibid

³¹ <https://www.encyclopedia.com/african-american-focus/news-wires-white-papers-and-books/cook-will-marion>

³² Ibid

³³ <https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/cook-will-marion-1869-1944>

³⁴ Ibid

³⁵ <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/cgi/viewcontet.cgi?article+1075&context=musicianfacpub>

³⁶ Ibid

³⁷ Ibid

³⁸ <https://www.aarp.org/health/brain-health/info-2020/music-mental-health.html>

³⁹ Ibid

⁴⁰ <https://thekimfoundation.org/music-and-mental-health/>