



GNOYO

greater new orleans youth orchestra

the musicians of tomorrow....today!

Marianna Roll
Executive Director

June 25, 2006

Dear Fellow String Teachers,

Since Hurricane Katrina struck New Orleans and the Mississippi Gulf Coast nine months ago, even the most fortunate have been profoundly affected: Lives lost, homes, neighborhoods and businesses destroyed, jobs eliminated, and communities shattered. These days, it doesn't take much to reduce anyone around here to tears.

As our community slowly tries to piece things back together, profound depression and suicide rates are skyrocketing. Mental health professionals are overwhelmed. Many adults are having trouble emotionally day to day. Kids are struggling in new schools and some kids can't attend school at all. For many, their pre-Katrina lives are a distant memory and "normalcy" has taken on a new surreal meaning. Although progress is being made in the recovery effort, it is slow and frequently disheartening.

For anyone living elsewhere, this is all but incomprehensible. Since my family returned in December, we have given more than thirty house guests on a tour of the 80% of New Orleans that sat flooded for three weeks. Uniformly, they've come away shocked and stunned that things were and still are this devastated. Unfortunately, a disaster like this is simply impossible to fully comprehend without experiencing it personally.

Among the damage that we couldn't show them were the many destroyed or severely crippled nonprofit arts organizations that had made pre-Katrina New Orleans such a rich and vibrant city to live in.

This brings me to the point of my letter. I am writing to ask members of the American String Teachers Association to help save the Greater New Orleans Youth Orchestra (GNOYO, affectionately known as "Guh-Know-Yoh).

Several weeks ago, while representing GNOYO at a local charity benefit, I met a mom and her two boys (both youth orchestra participants) who were there for the same reason. When I was introduced to her as one of GNOYO's founders, to my surprise she began to cry and hugged me hard for a very long time, thanking me profusely through her tears all the while. It was a bit overwhelming and I ended up in tears as well.

Although their home had been destroyed by 8 feet of water and the school where she'd been principal had been destroyed by 11 feet of water, they considered themselves fortunate: She'd been relocated to one of the few schools that have been reopened and her family of six had found a two-bedroom apartment, albeit located in a somewhat rough neighborhood.

She told me that GNOYO was helping Jared and Linton reconnect with friends that they'd lost touch with during the long evacuation and giving them new friends with similar interests. She told me that the weekly rehearsals gave her boys a much needed emotional outlet, and that GNOYO was the only normal part of their lives left post-Katrina. She told me over and over again how grateful she was that GNOYO was already up and running.

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Since I co-founded the Greater New Orleans Youth Orchestra twelve years ago, I have poured my heart and soul as an unpaid volunteer into long hours of work to ensure that it grew and flourished. With the help of many others, flourish it has!

Pre-Katrina, GNOYO had grown from two tiny orchestras, 60 kids and initial expenses provided by our family's credit cards in 1994 into a thriving nonprofit arts organization with a lean \$300,000 annual budget, five orchestras, 250 kids, an instrument-scholarship outreach program for underprivileged kids, a chamber music program and a summer festival. It became the official youth orchestra of the Louisiana Philharmonic Orchestra and the resident orchestra at the prestigious New Orleans Center for the Creative Arts high school.

GNOYO became the "poster child" of the greater New Orleans nonprofit community, respected for its efficient management, outstanding educational programs and fiscal responsibility. We've had eleven years in the black! If this were not enough, in 2003, GNOYO received a special award for Outstanding Arts Education at the annual New Orleans Tribute to the Classical Arts.

And then last August, Hurricane Katrina destroyed GNOYO's office, computer equipment, and almost all of our instruments. She also "blew away" our executive director and music director (Katrina-related relocation) and about 40% of our young musicians.

Katrina's financial impact upon GNOYO has been staggering for several other reasons:

- The loss of tuition from evacuated and relocated GNOYO students
- Reduced ticket sales due to our scattered audience
- Most individual and business donors were severely impacted by the storm and hence lost at least for the short term.

Despite these challenges, GNOYO's five orchestras began rehearsing in mid-October and have since performed 6 concerts! They have all been powerfully emotional experiences for performers and audience members alike. Over the past six months, many other parents have told our staff and board members over and over again how much GNOYO has helped their children deal with the emotional aftermath of the storm.

So far, our office has been relocated, and our computers and most of our musical instruments have been replaced. Although our board has worked long hours fundraising and creating a realistic balanced budget for 2006-2007, GNOYO is nonetheless currently projecting a budgetary shortfall (for the first time ever!) of \$50,000 for the current fiscal year.

I have personally committed myself to raising as much of this shortfall as soon as possible because the cause is so important to me and to the kids of our community. Because many of GNOYO's traditional supporters here in New Orleans are still struggling, I'm reaching out for help to anyone and everyone that I can think of.

I know that many of you have already generously contributed money, supplies and/or volunteer time to the ongoing Katrina recovery effort. I am writing to ask if there is any way that you could find a way to help me ensure that GNOYO's award-winning programs survive Katrina.

Contributions at any level will be gratefully received. In addition to having their physical

needs met, today, tomorrow, and next year, our community's children desperately need their hearts and souls nurtured as well. And what better way to do it than through music!

Contributions should be sent to:

The Greater New Orleans Youth Orchestra
938 Lafayette Street, Suite 206
New Orleans LA 70113

• Be sure to put "ASTA" on the memo line so that GNOYO can alert me to thank you personally!

If you'd like further information on GNOYO, please contact me, visit www.gnoyo.org or call our executive director, Marianna Roll at the GNOYO office at 504-528-7720

With your contribution comes the knowledge that you have helped GNOYO go into its 13th season as financially strong and secure as it was before Katrina, enabling it to maintain its programs' outstanding breadth and depth. Your name will be listed (unless you ask otherwise) as a donor in next season's programs as well as being forever etched with gratitude in my heart.

Please pass this on to others who might be interested in helping with this effort.

With my deepest thanks for your support,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Tracey Sherry". The signature is written in black ink and has a fluid, connected style.

Tracey Sherry
GNOYO founding member