

# Helping Sounds

By Jasmine Liu

Five orchestra musicians are doing critically important work in their communities—work that is being honored by the League of American Orchestras' Ford Musician Awards for Excellence in Community Service.

Increasingly, orchestras are reinterpreting and expanding their roles in their communities and recognizing that some of their most valuable work may take place outside the confines of concert halls. Orchestras and their musicians have developed partnerships with local nonprofits, schools, residential communities, and hospitals, and musicians are bringing music to those who likely do not hold season tickets but still benefit from world-class music all the

same. This is in direct contrast to old stereotypes in which orchestras were often seen as institutions of fine art housed in beautiful state-of-the-art halls, dressing up was *de rigueur*, and the audience's role was to passively and unobtrusively absorb the performance.

Every year since 2016, the Ford Musician Awards for Excellence in Community Service, presented by the League of American Orchestras and made possible by the generosity of Ford Motor Company Fund, have recognized five musicians who have displayed deep commitment to community engagement. This year's award-winning musicians

have done just that—and have shown resilience in the face of hardships posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. All have found ways to continue their work even as physical gathering became impossible, reflecting the personal importance of their work. That work ranges from helping patients in hospitals, bringing music and food to peoples' homes, providing music therapy as part of mental health programs, and providing music education at a time when many public schools' music programs were on hiatus during the pandemic. The Ford Musicians Awards are now in their sixth year, and the work these musicians are doing is gaining new



When the Knoxville Symphony Orchestra launched the Music Wellness Program in 2003, violinist **Sean Claire** joined the string quartets that played in hospital lobbies. Claire became a certified music practitioner. Over the years, the Knoxville Symphony's Music Wellness Program also expanded. A music therapist also joined the staff and guided musicians in how to navigate the hospital milieu better.



Top: Knoxville Symphony violinist Sean Claire performs (with Knoxville Symphony violinist Sarah Ringer) at Knoxville's World's Fair Park amphitheater for the orchestra's Independence Day concert in 2021. Bottom: Knoxville Symphony violinist Sean Claire plays for chemotherapy patients at the University of Tennessee Medical Center.



Sean Claire poses with a patient after playing violin at the University of Tennessee Medical Center oncology inpatient unit.

Ford Musicians' work ranges from helping patients in hospitals, bringing music and food to peoples' homes, providing music therapy as part of mental health programs, and providing music education at a time when many public schools' music programs have been on hiatus during the pandemic.

urgency given increased community needs during the pandemic. What follow are the stories of the community work that Sean Claire, Jeremy Crosmer, Lorien Benet Hart, Miho Hashizume, and John Turman have tirelessly done over the past year and more.

### **Sean Claire/Knoxville Symphony Orchestra**

From a young age, Sean Claire understood that classical music had special, inexplicable life-giving properties. One experience he remembers took place on a visit to his chiropractor's office. While waiting in the backyard for his appointment, Claire took out his violin and began practicing. When the patient before him left, his chiropractor told him that his violin music had engendered a breakthrough: he had struggled to work through the problems his previous patient had until the sounds of Claire's violin wafted over. Claire's violin playing had released his chiropractor's "energy blockage," and allowed him to resolve the issue at hand.

When the Knoxville Symphony Orchestra launched the Music Wellness Program in 2003, Claire was immediately intrigued, and he joined the string quartets that played in hospital lobbies. As the program continued, Claire—and four other musicians who regularly visited hospitals to play music—sought to hone their expertise in music therapy. Several of them enlisted in the Music for Healing & Transition Program, a nonprofit that trains and certifies musicians to provide live therapeutic music, which taught them how to use music with individual patients. This included learning how to read patients' reactions and conditions, and how to tailor their music to specific needs. They also learned how to choose music to match certain moods. When was it appropriate to play quieter, more introspective music, versus celebratory, happy music? Would it make a difference to play music in Dorian, Phrygian, versus Mixolydian

modes? Claire became a certified music practitioner. Over the years, the Knoxville Symphony's Music Wellness Program also expanded: they played music in several hospitals in addition to the University of Tennessee Medical Center—the main hospital partner—and beyond just lobbies, they brought their music to inpatient areas and the neonatal intensive care unit (NICU). A music therapist also joined the staff and guided musicians in how to navigate the hospital milieu better.

Claire says that one particularly poignant, moving moment for him unfolded in the NICU. He had been playing softly for several infants in the unit, but one infant in particular was fussy and wailed loudly. The infant had been recovering from a drug addiction that he inherited from his mother. After Claire had been playing for several minutes, the infant began to quiet down, and visibly searched to locate the source of the music. "You could see his eyes coming out of this fog of wherever he was, focusing on the instrument and hearing the music coming from it. He just stared at it for a while," Claire remembers. When the nurse asked the infant if he liked the music, he made a noise—the first time he had responded to human communication.

This fall, Claire and his fellow musicians will record five-minute set lists that patients can listen to while at hospitals, which they can access by scanning QR codes.

### **Jeremy Crosmer/Detroit Symphony Orchestra**

"The Unstable Table"—that's the name of a song that was birthed by several Kadima Mental Health Services participants in collaboration with Detroit Symphony Orchestra cellist Jeremy Crosmer. The song explores themes of blurred realities and dreams. "The floor opens up and you fall into the sky, / Beatle Paul was there and he didn't even die, / I was dreaming that I was dreaming about going home,

## **LEAGUE OF AMERICAN ORCHESTRAS' FORD MUSICIAN AWARDS FOR EXCELLENCE IN COMMUNITY SERVICE**

Since 2016, 25 professional orchestra musicians from across the country have received Ford Musician Awards for Excellence in Community Service from the League of American Orchestras. Supported by Ford Motor Company Fund, the awards recognize professional musicians' deeply impactful work outside the concert hall, much of it virtual this year due to the pandemic. In addition to receiving their awards at the League's National Conference, the musicians are featured in a Conference session highlighting their inspiring education and community-engagement work. The five 2021 recipients were recognized on June 7 at the opening session of the League's online National Conference, and presented their work at "Partnering Effectively," a June 14 Conference session for musicians and education and community engagement staff. Each musician receives a cash award of \$2,500 and complimentary registration to the Conference. The musician's orchestra receives a grant of \$2,500 to support professional development for its musicians, as well as complimentary registration for one staff member to attend the Conference.

Read more about the 2021 Ford Musicians at <https://bit.ly/ford2021awardees>. Videos of the musicians in action are posted on the League's website at <https://americanorchestras.org/videos/2021-ford-music-awardees/>.



/ But then it turns out, I was really just alone,” the lyrics go. Weekly jam sessions like this take place at Kadima, a residential facility that provides therapeutic and social services to people who face mental health challenges, and which partnered with the Detroit Symphony Orchestra beginning in 2017. Under the auspices of Kadima’s Creative Expressions program, Crosmer, other musicians at the orchestra, and music therapists work together to design, and lead participants in, creative musical activities.

Group composition is just one of many activities for participants. Mood vectoring is another: in this activity, a participant chooses a mood that they identify with, a musician plays a musical motif associated with that mood, and the musician slowly guides the music toward a more positive mood motif. Just sitting back and listening to music is another. “From what I’ve observed, often just playing music together, or listening to music together—there’s so many times when I’ve seen participants who may be

really shy or nervous, and as soon as they start making music, they open up completely and their entire personality shines through,” Crosmer says.

“What I do is bridge the gap between professional musicians who are used to reading sheet music and playing what’s on the page, with the music therapists who have very specific hands-on activities and interactions that they need to be doing with the participants in the group,” Crosmer explains. Crosmer’s involvement with Kadima at the Detroit Symphony Orchestra continues the work he did at Grand Rapids Symphony, where he designed booklets musicians could use to aid music therapists in their work.

DSO Principal Percussionist Joe Becker and bass clarinetist Shannon Orme have worked with Crosmer since the start of the Kadima project in 2017. Guest artists from the orchestra frequently visit their classes, and during the pandemic, musicians have dropped by—virtually—almost every week to talk about their instruments and discuss their favorite recordings. Although classes have moved to Zoom for the ostensible future, Crosmer reports that they’ve made

virtual jam sessions work. If they play at exactly 92 beats per minute, the latency lag is unnoticeable. “I find ways to allow the symphony musicians to participate without being too far out of their comfort zones,” Crosmer says.

### Lorien Benet Hart/Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra

In the fall of 2016, violinist Lorien Benet Hart, along with a few other Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra musicians, volunteered in a food delivery run with 412 Food Rescue, a newly established Pittsburgh nonprofit that arranges for food wholesalers to donate pallets of food to city centers, senior housing facilities, and Section 8 housing, while allowing volunteers to use an app to complete smaller deliveries. Donning Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra T-shirts, the musicians encountered a handful of people who had never gone to a PSO concert. When Hart asked what prevented them from making it to a concert, they cited a variety of reasons: they didn’t know if they belonged in the space of the concert hall, they weren’t sure they had the right clothes to wear, they didn’t know exactly what music would be

“The Unstable Table”—that’s the name of a song that was birthed by several Kadima Mental Health Services participants in collaboration with Detroit Symphony Orchestra cellist **Jeremy Crosmer**. The song explores themes of blurred realities and dreams. Weekly jam sessions take place at Kadima, a residential facility that provides therapeutic and social services to people who face mental health challenges.



Detroit Symphony Orchestra



Detroit Symphony Orchestra

Top: Detroit Symphony Orchestra cellist Jeremy Crosmer. Above: John, a Vietnam War Veteran and former Detroit police officer diagnosed with PTSD (at right in photo, speaking with Crosmer), at a sensory-friendly open rehearsal of *The Firebird* in fall 2018. John said, “You make veterans feel good. This is what we fought for.”



Detroit Symphony Orchestra

Cellist Jeremy Crosmer (center, in orange and blue shirt) at a Detroit Symphony Orchestra rehearsal, prior to the pandemic.



Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra violinist **Lorien Benet Hart** initiated efforts to launch the Body and Soul Partnership, a collaboration with 412 Food Rescue. PSO musicians volunteer as food deliverers and perform pop-up concerts in lobbies for 10 to 15 minutes at each stop. “They come out of this process not only with food to feed themselves and their families, but with a lighter sense of being,” Hart says.



Top: Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra violinist Lorien Benet Hart (front center) and fellow musicians perform pop-up concerts in building lobbies while participating in a partnership between the orchestra and Food Rescue 412, a nonprofit that donates food to city residents. Bottom: Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra musicians volunteer as food deliverers and perform pop-up concerts during visits to city centers, senior housing facilities, and Section 8 housing.

on offer, or they didn’t have childcare or transportation. Hart and the musicians realized that they could extend far more than the brute strength of lifting boxes. “How can we get music into these communities?” Hart asked.

That’s when Hart initiated efforts to launch the Body and Soul Partnership, a collaboration between the Pittsburgh Symphony and 412 Food Rescue. PSO musicians would volunteer as food deliverers, while bringing their instruments along for the ride, performing pop-up concerts in lobbies for 10 to 15 minutes at each stop. For Hart, it was about “feeding the hearts and stomachs of our communities. There’s no dignity in a handout. At the very base level, the act of needing food is not a dignified place for a human,” Hart says. “By providing this music, we elevate that process, and we at least distract from that. They come out of this process not only with food to feed themselves and their families, but with a lighter sense of being.”

When residents hear live music

performed in their apartment buildings as part of the Body and Soul Partnership, they are often initially wary. But Hart has noticed people’s heads popping out of windows as crowds slowly gather. When buses drop kids off at home after school, they often flock to the musicians. And Hart says people have sung, danced, and beatboxed along with their music.

In-person performances have been put on hiatus, but during the pandemic, Hart got in touch with city and county housing offices to arrange for video clips of their music to be placed in community spaces.

### **Miho Hashizume/The Cleveland Orchestra**

Before the pandemic hit, Cleveland Orchestra violinist Miho Hashizume accompanied music instructors to their weekly lessons for second graders at Mound Elementary School in Cleveland’s Slavic Village neighborhood. She played a mostly supportive role, checking on progress and helping students. But when

the staff involved in the music education program were let go, she became the only member of the project.

In 2020, as coronavirus arrived in the U.S. and lockdowns took effect in cities nationwide, Hashizume uploaded instructional videos on Class Dojo, an educational app in which students could receive virtual lessons digitally. But she noticed that only one or two of the 30 students in the class were accessing those lessons. Curious to find out why students were not logging on, she called parents one by one. She proposed offering private lessons over Zoom or FaceTime. Although they expressed excitement at the prospect of taking classes with a professional musician, parents were cautious of connecting online. Many families lacked the necessary bandwidth to reliably connect to virtual classes. Hashizume discovered that the digital divide in Cleveland was severe, and she decided to scrap the online lessons altogether and organize classes in front of the school. But even then, only three or four students participated.



The difficulty of arranging transportation prevented students from showing up. So Hashizume began going to students' homes, where she gave lessons on their porches. She was able to teach 15 students regularly, as frequently as once per week.

Beginning in May, protests following the murder of George Floyd and systemic police violence roiled Cleveland. On her way to an outdoor lesson, Hashizume saw a street blocked off with a huge Black Lives Matter sign. As she got out of her car and walked to the sign, she saw mothers and grandmothers weeping. The scene left a strong imprint on her, and gave her a renewed determination to continue the music program at Mound Elementary. Reading books like *Caste* by Isabel Wilkerson and *The Color of Law* by Richard Rothstein gave her a deeper understanding of systemic racism in the United States, and the resolve to do what she could to make an impact through music. "Music gives us a chance to be together," Hashizume explains. "The biggest

accomplishment we gained was trust from that community. My prime goal is not to train them to be classical musicians, but to give them tools to achieve their goals."

Hashizume is aware of the challenges her students face; she was informed early on that at least 10 percent of her students were likely exposed to lead poisoning, which is known to cause attention deficit disorder and memory problems. She believes that music enables self-expression and heightened focus. She remembers in particular when a student who had been suspended from school earlier in the day practiced music for a short period of time, and then was able to explain to her with perfect lucidity why she had been unable to control her anger. Her introspection impressed Hashizume. "From simple exercises, they have this amazing ability to flourish," she says.

#### John Turman/Seattle Symphony

In 2018, the Seattle Symphony's education department approached horn player

John Turman: would he be interested in hosting a program for children aged zero to five? Thus was born the symphony's Tiny Tots series, introducing the youngest children to instrument families and the musicians in the orchestra. The goal is to present great music to young audiences, and children are encouraged to participate actively during concerts through movement and song.

Then came the pandemic. It would have been easy to simply put the Tiny Tots series on pause: the proposition of keeping young kids engaged with virtual programming was a tricky one, and physical gatherings were out of the question. A couple of weeks into Washington State's initial lockdown, Turman was talking with fellow brass musicians, who had already been rehearsing for the next Tiny Tots show, when it occurred to him to propose that they all record themselves using a click track. Each player agreed and sent in brief clips of themselves playing snippets of pieces, demonstrating their instru-



Before the pandemic, Cleveland Orchestra violinist **Miho Hashizume** accompanied music instructors to their weekly lessons for second graders at Mound Elementary School. Later, she uploaded instructional videos on Class Dojo, an educational app. The digital divide in Cleveland was severe, and she decided to organize classes in front of the school. The difficulty of arranging transportation prevented students from showing up, so Hashizume began going to students' homes, where she gave lessons on their porches.



Top: Cleveland Orchestra violinist Miho Hashizume. Above: Cleveland Orchestra violinist Miho Hashizume helps Mound Elementary School string students tune their instruments. During the pandemic, transportation proved difficult for many students, so Hashizume began going to students' homes.



Cleveland Orchestra violinist Miho Hashizume (bottom row, center) in performance with the orchestra.



Above: Seattle Symphony French horn John Turman. Below: Turman hosts a "Tiny Clips for Tiny Tots" virtual session. Turman came up with the idea to transform the orchestra's Tiny Tots music education series into a virtual series; musicians send in clips of themselves playing musical snippets and demonstrate their instruments for young children.

The technical challenges of putting together "Tiny Clips for Tiny Tots" were immense. Seattle Symphony horn player **John Turman** drew from filmmaking lessons he learned in high school, and applied green screen and visual effect techniques he had used in video projects in college.



ments. "Tiny Clips for Tiny Tots" was born. Soon, Turman invited each section of the orchestra to do the same thing the brass section had done.

The technical challenges of putting together "Tiny Clips for Tiny Tots" were immense. Turman drew from filmmaking lessons he learned in high school, and applied green screen and visual effect techniques he had used in video projects in college. And because each musician's recording was done separately, Turman spent a lot of time fine-tuning the audio, ensuring that its quality would be as good as it would have been had they played together in the same room.

Now that musicians are beginning to play in the same room again, repertoire possibilities have exploded for what music can be showcased on "Tiny Clips for Tiny

Tots." And with a complete season under his belt, Turman has streamlined the writing and filming process. "The way that we're writing and filming this season is like a film studio," Turman says. "We have a dedicated writing week. We're going to go through all the shows and programs and make prop lists of all the equipment and filming plans." In the second season, Turman says he will integrate scientific lessons, as well as Seattle area landmarks, with music education. **S**

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