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When we launched our 2019–20 Season in October 2019, we expected it to be memorable because it was the first time we had programmed an entire season around a single theme. At the time, we had no notion that our theme, “Empathy,” would turn out to be so relevant.

Our last performance on the Meany stage (though we didn’t realize it at the time) was on March 4, 2020 — ending the season 2 ½ months earlier than planned. That night, we hosted pianist Hélène Grimaud in an extraordinary concert that earned four encores. One week later, due to COVID-19 we canceled the Jerusalem Quartet, and the week after that the Los Angeles Master Chorale. By April 1, we had canceled the rest of the season.

The word “unprecedented” has been used so much to describe recent events that it is in danger of becoming a cliche — but there is no other word to describe the global emergency that has caused such a sudden and immediate change in every aspect of life.

The weeks following the cancellations were hectic, disorienting and, frankly, frightening as we struggled to navigate the immediate challenges before us and plan for an uncertain future simultaneously. For the first time in its forty years, Meany Center was shut down — for how long, nobody could say. There was no road map for us to follow, so we had to make our own.

I am proud to say that the Meany staff rose nobly to the test — though working in isolation from home, we were connected in working together with a shared sense of mission toward a common goal. Along the way, we discovered untapped talents, new ideas, innovative approaches and creative ways to keep connected to our artists and our audiences, even from a distance.

During those difficult first days and weeks, there was one thing that raised Meany spirits more than any other: the immediate and generous outpouring of support from you, our donors, our patrons, our friends.

We realized that our original theme of empathy was manifesting daily in your actions: you donated back your unused tickets instead of asking for a refund; you made additional donations on top of what you’d already given; you honored pledges to underwrite shows we had to cancel; you kept hope alive and our organization intact through harrowing circumstances. To know that Meany is so beloved in our community has been a huge motivator for all of us here.

At the end of every season, we compile an Impact Report in which we share with you, our friends and donors, the significant ways your support has sustained artists, audiences, students and community members across our region and beyond. “Empathy” was the theme we asked visiting artists to incorporate into their programs this season, but as recent events have shown us, it is also the foundation upon which Meany Center stands.

Truly, without you, there is no us.

STEVE KORN

MICHELLE WITT
EXECUTIVE AND ARTISTIC DIRECTOR
On the MEANY STAGE

GARRICK OHLSSON
Our dear friend returned to share the beauty of Chopin’s nocturnes for solo piano and his powerful virtuosity in Brahms’ technically intense Paganini Variations — all accompanied by brilliant remarks from the stage.

SANKAI JUKU
This Japanese contemporary butoh troupe’s new work, Meguri: Teeming Sea, Tranquil Land, communicating the passage of time and the seasonal transformation of the earth, was both a meditation and a catharsis.

THE PACO DE LUCÍA PROJECT
It was a night to remember for flamenco lovers. Javier Limón honored the legacy of the great Paco de Lucía while showcasing the electricity and power of contemporary flamenco through its new champions.

SHAI WOSNER
When Jonathan Biss came down with the flu, celebrated pianist Shai Wosner stepped in with exceptional artistry and creative insight. His quick turnaround from New York to Seattle at the last minute made him our hero of the season.

DANISH STRING QUARTET
“The Vikings of the Strings” conquered Meany audiences once again and held them transfixed with their profound interpretation of late Beethoven, J.S. Bach and Shostakovich, paired with an encore by Danish composer Carl Nielsen.

PILOBOLUS
In an extraordinary collaboration with the UW’s Chamber Singers, Pilobolus combined dance, video, theater and interactive live music to create a visual and kinetic journey through new worlds, highlighting the biological and environmental structures that ground us.

GABRIEL KAHANE
The singer-songwriter performed from his album Book of Travelers. He painted an engaging portrait of America that showcased his empathy, insight, brilliant lyricism and ability to connect to our enthusiastic Meany audience.

JONATHAN BISS
The pianist blew us away with his generosity and artistry. After having to cancel his first concert of Beethoven sonatas, he returned for his second concert ... and his first! He performed two superb programs back-to-back and gave a lecture during his memorable stay.

JOMAMA JONES
Singer and lyricist Jomama Jones — the alter ego of Daniel Alexander Jones — lit up the Jones Playhouse with her eye popping, engaging, smart and very entertaining musical show Black Light, that got everyone onto their feet and into their hearts.

MIDORI WITH JEAN-YVES THIBAUDET
From the moment Midori and Jean-Yves took the stage, the audience knew they would be part of an evening of refined playing of the highest caliber. Beethoven’s sonatas for piano and violin beautifully highlighted the interplay of these two luminaries.

BRIAN BROOKS MOVING COMPANY
Brooks’ audacious choreographic style was on display in his remarkable new solo piece and his company’s exciting premiere entitled Closing Distance in which whirling bodies paired with Caroline Shaw’s Pulitzer Prize-winning composition Partita for 8 Voices.

ORLANDO CONSORT
Britain’s stunning vocal ensemble performed a live 15th century score to Carl Theodor Dreyer’s silent film La Passion de Jeanne d’Arc (1928), presenting a rare opportunity to see this moving film on the big screen and hear music that gave us goosebumps.

GRUPO CORPO
We can’t say enough about this stunning dance company who brought us two outstanding Seattle premieres combining the sensuality of Afro-Brazilian dance with the formal perfection of Latin American Baroque music.

NIYAZ
This Iranian Canadian ensemble presented an intoxicating multimedia feast in celebration of the first female Sufi mystic. Their trance music, Persian folk songs and immersive projections brought us together in a cultural experience that was uplifting and mesmerizing.

HÉLÈNE GRIMAUD
Little did the enraptured audience know that this unforgettable concert would be the last to take place in person for a long time. Grimaud held us aloft in a state of sonic joy throughout her program of miniatures and mountains for the piano with three exquisite encores.
**Things Left Undone**

When pianist Hélène Grimaud left the Meany stage the evening of March 4, 2020, we still had eight artists and 11 performances on the schedule, not to mention several of our most exciting community outreach events yet to come!

To honor the artists who put so much time, talent and passion into creating work they were unable to present, we’d like to share with you what would have happened on our stage and in our community had the pandemic not turned our world upside down.

**JERUSALEM QUARTET**

This would have been our second time presenting the Jerusalem Quartet — an evening of Mozart, Brahms and Korngold. In place of a live performance, the Quartet created a charming video for us in which they talked more in depth about the program they had planned to perform.

**LOS ANGELES MASTER CHORALE**

We were so excited to present the Los Angeles Master Chorale performing an incredible feat: singing Orlando di Lasso’s fiendishly complex Renaissance masterpiece, *Lagrima di San Pietro*, in its entirety, completely from memory.

**RUBBERBAND**

Hailing from Quebec, RUBBERBAND lives up to its name, stretching the boundaries of modern dance with a powerful infusion of hip-hop, contemporary dance and ballet. The Company’s projected K–12 student matinee was completely subscribed — with a waiting list.

**HAGEN QUARTET**

This cancellation really broke our hearts. The Vienna-based Hagen Quartet almost never tours on the West Coast, and we were thrilled for this very rare opportunity to present them to our Seattle community. Alas, it was not to be.

**GEORGE LI**

We were looking forward to finishing our President’s Piano Series with a performance by George Li, silver medalist at the 2015 International Tchaikovsky Competition. At 15, this dynamic young pianist won first prize in the 2010 Young Concert Artists International Auditions. The following year, he played at a state dinner in the Obama White House.

**THIRD COAST PERCUSSION WITH SÉRGIO & CLARICE ASSAD**

Another heartbreaker. In addition to their mainstage performance, joined by Brazilian father-daughter duo Sérgio and Clarice Assad on piano, guitar and vocals, they were planning a massive community music-making project, involving as many as 100 people of all ages, backgrounds and musical abilities at a free public performance at the Olympic Sculpture Park.

**STEP AFRIKA!**

We were eager to co-commission Step Afrika!’s new work about the 1739 Stono Rebellion — what a timely production it would have been this year. Step Afrika! would also have been our last student matinee of the season — and was fully subscribed with a waitlist.

**DAVID FINCKEL & WU HAN WITH PHILIP SETZER**

Our 2019–20 Season would have ended with a sublime performance by these three dear friends of Meany, playing a program of Beethoven, Mendelssohn and the heartbreaking lamentation of Shostakovich’s Trio No. 2.
Thematic Programming

The decision to program an entire season around a single theme arose from many months of conversation between Meany’s Executive and Artistic Director Michelle Witt and performance artist and Mellon Fellow Daniel Alexander Jones about art as a creative force for good in turbulent times — a means of accessing our emotions in ways that spark both contemplation and connection.

Michelle began thinking about programming an entire season that encourages us to leave what we know and bravely embrace a new perspective, and she invited Daniel to join her in developing a set of questions and considerations related to this season’s events that we could pose to both artists and audiences with the aim of deepening our sense of empathy for the artists, the work and for one another.

Here are some of their answers:

"Being a performer of classical music is an inherently empathetic act. We don’t play our own music. The simple task is to try to come as close as possible to an understanding of the mind, heart and soul of another individual."
—Jonathan Biss
What is the role of empathy in your art?

GABRIEL KAHANE
“Increasingly, I find myself interested in stories that involve people whose experiences are radically different than my own. And if I’m going to engage with people and ideas that are at a great remove from my own life, then the only way to do that is through empathy and imagination.”

USHIO AMAGATSU (Sankai Juku)
“Empathy is very important in my art. It is the very bridge, in the minds of people, that connects people beyond the differences of cultures or personalities.”

THE ORLANDO CONSORT
“As we see it, empathy is an essential component of musical expression. Empathy is thus intrinsic to the work of the composer, and to understand the music, it unquestionably helps us to learn about their lives.”

JONATHAN BISS
“Being a performer of classical music is an inherently empathetic act. We don’t play our own music. The simple task is to try to come as close as possible to an understanding of the mind, heart and soul of another individual. This focus on Beethoven’s music has forced me to be more empathetic as a musician than I ever would be. You have to want to share music with others if you want to be a performer. It’s not exactly walking in another’s shoes, but you have to be interested in the individual audience members and what their experience might be. What do they bring to that moment and that music?”

Please share a time when you experienced the arts cultivating a sense of connection between people.

MFONISO AKPAN (Step Afrika!)
“Whenever Step Afrika! travels internationally, we connect with local artists to learn and exchange our art forms. One year, we hosted a camp in Lebanon where we taught kids how to step. The kids in the camp came from different socioeconomic, religious and cultural backgrounds. It was specifically designed that way to bring people together. As one group, they all learned to work together and remain committed to the process. To this day, some of those students are still connected and remain friends.”

GABRIEL KAHANE
“On September 11, 2001, I was a junior in college. The president of the university I attended convened a vigil that night in a lecture hall, and invited students to come to microphones at the front of the hall to share whatever they were feeling at the moment. One young woman, I don’t remember anything about her except that her voice was shaking, came down to one of the microphones and asked if we could all sing ‘Tomorrow’ from Annie. And we all did. And it was ... a weirdly sacred act of communion.”

GRANT GERSHON
(Los Angeles Master Chorale)
“In 1995, I went to South Africa to play recitals with the New Zealand-born soprano Kiri Te Kanawa. Our first concert was a benefit for the Nelson Mandela Children’s Fund, and it was hosted by President Mandela himself. That night at the end of our recital, a South African choir stood up and began singing ‘Nkosi Sikelel’iAfrika,’ a song which had been banned under apartheid and was now the national anthem of South Africa. Nelson Mandela and all of us in the hall stood and sang together. To this day that is the most powerful sound of voices connected in common humanity that I’ve ever heard.”

JONATHAN BISS
“I’ve traveled and performed in many countries that existed behind the iron curtain. Although I’ve never met anyone who was nostalgic for those days, I have spoken to many people who admit that music and art meant more then. In a time when our national politics are so divisive and upsetting, I personally feel music more intensely and feel that the arts are especially vital as a means of connection.”
Between October 17, when Sankai Juku opened our season, and March 4, when it abruptly ended, Meany Center focused on connecting our audiences and community with our visiting artists. We presented two of four planned student matinees, reaching nearly 2,000 students. A member of the Iranian Canadian group Niyaz visited a sixth grade class at Licton Springs K-8 School and led a whirling dervish activity with the students, and later facilitated a workshop on whirling meditation for community members. More than 40 members of the Chamber Music Club at UW organized to attend the Danish String Quartet concert together. There were some other singular achievements, as well.

High Priestess of the Crossroads

We were so proud to present Daniel Alexander Jones’ Black Light, featuring his alter ego Jomama Jones, in December. We were even prouder of the Black Light Ambassadors project, which Daniel suggested, having used it to great effect in other locations. The concept is simple: invite members of diverse communities to meet the artist, learn about the show, attend the performance — and give them complimentary tickets for 10 other people they know. Over three nights, we welcomed numerous audience members who had never attended an event at Meany before. Afterward, one of our Ambassadors wrote:

“I invited my neighbor Camilla. It was her birthday. Her 57th. She was beside herself with happiness. ‘I am being seen!’ she kept saying. She called out, ‘Amen,’ and, ‘I witness!’ and, ‘Mm hmm!’ every chance she could. She sat on the edge of her seat the whole time. Her queer, POC self was ecstatic! A true gift.”
Backwards Beethoven

Jonathan Biss was on our President’s Piano Series twice this season, as part of our year-long celebration of the 250th anniversary of Beethoven’s birth. He was to appear in November with an evening of early sonatas, and then again in December to play middle and late works. Sadly, he was forced to cancel his November appearance due to illness. He more than made up for it, though, a month later when he agreed to play the two concerts back to back in reverse order: late works first in the Kathryn Alvord Gerlich Theater, followed the day after with a lecture and performance of early works in the intimate 240-seat Studio Theatre.

Everybody’s a Critic!

It’s true that over the years local media has cut back on its arts coverage — but rest assured, criticism is alive and well at TeenTix! When we presented Grupo Corpo in February, several of our younger audience members attended in a professional capacity as part of a workshop on writing dance criticism. After a pre-show lesson taught by dance artist, writer and teacher Kaitlin McCarthy that covered the basics of dance criticism and how to approach writing a dance review, teen participants attended Grupo Corpo’s performance. They met the following day for discussion and writing practice.

These kids don’t pull their punches: “I think that Pederneiras’ method of communicating the contrasting versions of baroque was mildly successful,” wrote one 10th grader. “When viewing the piece, I could clearly see a division between sections, but I think there was still room for personal interpretation as opposed to a more obvious one.”

Rodrigo Pederneiras, are you listening?
The arts have always depended on the generosity of patrons and donors. But this year, more than any other time in our 40-year history, that point was driven home by the impact of COVID-19. The first week in March, we were open; by the second week, we were closed. And by the end of the month, we had canceled the rest of our season, losing more than $400,000 in expected revenue in an instant.

But then you stepped up.

More than 62% of ticket holders donated back their unused tickets. Two of our donors made sure our student ushers would be paid through the end of the quarter, even though the theater was empty. Many of you made significantly larger gifts than usual, or additional ones on top of earlier donations. Sponsors for programs we were forced to cancel fulfilled their pledges anyway. With your enthusiastic support, our virtual gala surpassed the goal we had planned to hold in March. Finally, we are grateful to local and national government and foundation supporters for much-needed emergency relief funds.

So ... with the theater dark from mid-March on, you might be wondering what Meany staff have been doing to keep busy. The answer to that is: a lot!

**DEI+A= Stronger Together**

Like other historically white-led arts organizations, Meany Center is taking a hard look at ourselves, and committing to do the work to become an actively anti-racist institution. Our Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Access committee meets regularly; plans include a racial literacy resource list, facilitated training for staff and board, expanded recruitment and hiring practices, and an organization-wide framework for engaging around issues of race and racism among Meany staff, board and our wider community.
The Show Must Go Online

For more than 40 years, Meany Center has been a presenting organization. Practically overnight, we became producers. Between mid-March and the middle of June, Meany staff conceptualized, developed and produced 32 videos to support a range of mission-critical goals.

CURTAIN SPEECHES

Our first concern was for the artists whose performances we were forced to cancel. Though we couldn't present them on our stage, we still wanted to make sure their work was seen and heard. So we created video “curtain speeches” for each of the eight artists featuring an introduction by Executive and Artistic Director Michelle Witt (shot on an iPhone from the piano bench in her own home), that linked to online content of their work. The curtain speeches were sent out on the day the live performance would have happened, making sure that artists and audiences could still find each other.

TINY LIVING ROOM CONCERTS

A critical element of Meany Center’s live gala, Center Stage, has always been a performance by a leading artist during the event. When we decided to pivot from a live gala to a virtual one, we knew we still wanted to include performances. With no stage and no visiting artists, we decided to turn to the deep pool of talent at Meany Center. We asked several of our staff and board to video themselves on cell phones performing in their own homes. Thus was born our Tiny Living Room Concert Series.

We were thrilled that the brilliant pianist Joel Martin, who had been invited to perform live at the gala, contributed his own Tiny Living Room Concert — a jazz version of Beethoven’s “Moonlight Sonata” — from his home in Connecticut.

THE MOTHER OF INVENTION

Necessity spurred us to develop online content — and in the course of doing so, we began laying down a framework for the future, even after live performances on our stage resume. Technologies such as livestreaming can expand access for our community, while additional online content such as video interviews or interactive Q&A with artists can deepen audience engagement. It will also support performances by students and faculty in the UW academic arts departments when having an audience in the theater is not possible.

We’re already planning our first virtual outreach project with Third Coast Percussion in the fall in place of the community event we’d originally scheduled for May.
The extraordinary generosity of our patrons and donors allowed us to meet our original contributed revenue goal for this fiscal year. However, losses in earned revenue (ticket sales, fees) due to COVID-19 totaled approximately $440,000. We offset these losses primarily through savings on direct show expenses (travel, hospitality, artist fees, production, marketing), as well as savings due to fundraising and general administration costs that had been allocated to activities that did not occur.
2019–20
PLANNED GIFTS & ENDOWMENTS

Total Market Value: $7,026,000 (as of July 1, 2020)
New Contributions to Principal: $1,166,000
Endowment Distribution: $222,000

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SEE PAGE 12

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Our Core VALUES

EXCELLENCE
We are dedicated to the pursuit of excellence and the expansion of human potential through arts and learning.

INNOVATION
We encourage artistic risk-taking and collaboration to advance new creative expressions and engage important issues of our time.

CONNECTION
We bring diverse artists, community, students and faculty together in transformative experiences that promote the exchange of ideas and perspectives from around the world.

INSPIRATION
We cultivate the capacity to find joy and meaning through creativity and artistic exploration.

Meany Center MISSION
Meany Center for the Performing Arts at the University of Washington fosters innovative performances that advance public engagement, cultural exchange, creative research and learning through the arts. Meany Center provides opportunities for diverse artists, community, students and faculty to connect in the discovery and exploration of the boundless power of the arts to create positive change in the world.