



MOHAWK VALLEY CHORUS

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Saratoga Arts Council funds Mohawk Valley Chamber Ensemble's innovative *Harmony Bridge* program

Project will link student musicians with older adult population; Masterclass and kickoff concert scheduled for Columbus Day weekend 2019

AMSTERDAM - The Mohawk Valley Chamber Ensemble (MVCE), an affiliate of the Mohawk Valley Chorus, has been awarded a \$2,410 Community Arts Education grant by the Saratoga Arts Council, to support the development of a new program called *Harmony Bridge*.

MVCE Director Stephanie Boice - a longtime music educator, instrumental director and performer - is the Project Coordinator for *Harmony Bridge*.

The Harmony Bridge concept

Harmony Bridge is the brainchild of Mike Levine, founder and artistic director of the *Dallas Brass* ensemble. After performing at a small South Dakota high school, the *Dallas Brass* made an impromptu visit to a local nursing home, where they played some familiar tunes and chatted with the residents. Levine was struck by how much the residents, many of whom were frail and using wheelchairs, enjoyed the music and the personal interactions.

In Mike Levine's own words:

I thought about the fact that we have millions of people in senior care communities all over America. They are not there by choice. It's bittersweet. They have lived long lives, but they are now limited physically and/or mentally, and somewhat isolated from the society where they were once active, vibrant people.

But it also occurred to me that – thanks to school music education in America – we have millions of kids, from coast to coast, in every size community, who have the ability to bring joy into the lives of these seniors that is absolutely priceless. I felt like I had been given a mission to bring these two worlds together. And that mission became known as Harmony Bridge...

Harmony Bridge's concept is simple – nurture young band students to go out into their communities and share their music. The program presents an opportunity for these students to realize the power of music, and the power they have as individuals, to bring joy into the lives of others – particularly seniors who may be isolated or lonely.

Currently, there are 19 Harmony Bridge projects across the United States – all school-based programs. Students attend a multi-day masterclass at their school and then go out in their local community to perform at local nursing homes, assisted living facilities and other senior citizen gatherings. More information about the program is available at harmonybridge.net.

MVCE's project is the first community-based (non-profit) *Harmony Bridge* program in the country.

MVCE's Harmony Bridge program

MVCE's *Harmony Bridge* project is unique because it is housed within a community-based organization – not a school - and will be open to young instrumental students from any area school, public and private.

It is a great fit for MVCE, an instrumental (band) ensemble for community student musicians and adults in the Mohawk Valley region. MVCE currently has student musicians from several local schools participating in the ensemble, which meets Saturday mornings in Amsterdam and performs several times a year in concert. MVCE Director Stephanie Boice and her colleagues who coach and mentor the student musicians are all volunteering their time. MVCE is strongly committed to making the program accessible and affordable to all young instrumental students.

“While attending a Symposium for the New York State Band Directors Association in Syracuse, I sat in on a presentation for Harmony Bridge,” said MVCE Director Stephanie Boice. “At the time, the presenters were teachers in Horseheads, and had implemented the program with enormous success. Everything about this program is positive, for the musicians and the audience members. Connecting generations through music can only be seen as a win-win for all! Our clinic will be held in Amsterdam, but the music can travel all over our area. As an area music teacher, I have always received phone calls from area assisted living, or nursing homes for student musicians to visit and perform. The problem was always ... where do I get appropriate music that students of varying levels of musicianship can play?”

“That is where Mike Levine saved the day! The program has three levels -advanced beginners, intermediate and advanced- and in addition has flex scoring for interchangeable parts. Above all, the music sounds fantastic, highlighted with creative scoring of many American folk classics. We will also have the experience of working with Mike Levine in a

two-day masterclass where he will work on skills such as showmanship, musicianship, and communication. Mohawk Valley Chamber Ensembles is proud to offer this amazing opportunity for our community musicians.”

**Masterclass planned for Columbus Day weekend in Amsterdam;
kickoff concert at the Sentinel assisted living facility**

Boice and Levine have arranged to hold the MVCE Harmony Bridge masterclass over Columbus Day weekend, at the United Presbyterian Church in Amsterdam. The first session runs from 6-8 pm on Friday, October 18th; sessions II and III will follow on Saturday, October 19th. Following the conclusion of the masterclass on Saturday, there will be a free kickoff concert at 6 pm at the Sentinel of Amsterdam. Registration fee for the masterclass is \$20, which includes the MVCE membership cost. The masterclasses are open to all area middle and high school band students, and participants will have additional opportunities to perform at local nursing homes, assisted living facilities and senior housing complexes.

Rehearsals for the masterclass start on Saturday, September 14th, at the regular MVCE rehearsal day – Saturday, 9-11 am at St. Stanislaus Church’s Arts and Wellness Center in Amsterdam.

If you want to register for the program, or would like more information, please contact Stephanie Boice at 518-331-7436 or stephboice@gmail.com.

Also - MVCE’s *Harmony Bridge* project is seeking additional financial support to fully fund the program. The Amsterdam Rotary has contributed \$500 to cover the cost of T-shirts for the student performers. MVCE hopes to raise an additional \$3600 to help cover the cost of the masterclass and purchase of music books for the student performers. Please contact Stephanie Boice at 518-331-7436 or stephboice@gmail.com if you are interested in making a financial donation; or you can mail a check to the Mohawk Valley Chorus, P.O. Box 61, Amsterdam, NY 12010 – please write “Harmony Bridge” on the check.

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