Mellon Foundation Awards $2.5 Million to Prepare Young Musicians from Underrepresented Populations for Careers in Classical Music

Boston, MA — The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation has awarded $2.5 million to New England Conservatory of Music (NEC), in consortium with the Boston Youth Symphony Orchestras, the Community Music Center of Boston, Project STEP, and the Boston Symphony Orchestra, to launch the Boston Bridge to Equity and Achievement in Music (BEAM) initiative. The BEAM Initiative supports a collaborative effort to provide sustained pathways of educational opportunity and advanced preparation to Boston-area middle and high school instrumental musicians from historically underrepresented communities. Its goal is to increase diversity in conservatory and university instrumental music programs, in order to address longstanding inequities in the field of classical music.

"The BEAM partners have come together to support students of diverse backgrounds in achieving the highest levels of musicianship. With a strong commitment to diversity, equity, excellence and inclusion, each partner brings unique capabilities and experience to the collaboration. It’s been inspiring to work with all the Boston partners and with the Mellon Foundation for more than a year to develop the BEAM program, and I look forward to the continued work ahead with the students who will change the landscape of young classical musicians in Boston and beyond."

— Rebecca Bogers, Dean and Director of the NEC Preparatory School

Through the BEAM initiative, 60-75 students each year will receive private instrumental lessons, orchestral experience, chamber music coaching, music theory classes, support for summer program participation, and long-term, individual advising and mentorship. The program will be student-focused, robust, year-round, and adaptable, created and guided in equitable partnership with community representatives and with the families it serves. The Mellon Foundation’s grant will support the project’s first 45 months, including a 9-month planning period and three full years of programming. The first cohort of students will begin the new program in the fall of 2019, after a process of community engagement, recruitment and auditions to be held in the spring.
About New England Conservatory of Music

New England Conservatory (NEC) is recognized internationally as a leader among music schools, educating and training musicians of all ages from around the world for over 150 years. With 800 music students representing more than 40 countries in the College, and 2,000 youth and adults who study in the Preparatory and Continuing Education divisions, NEC cultivates a diverse, dynamic community for students, providing them with performance opportunities and high-caliber training with internationally-esteemed artist-teachers and scholars. NEC’s alumni, faculty and students touch nearly every aspect of musical life in the region; NEC is a major engine of the vital activity that makes Boston a musical and cultural capital. With the recent appointment of Andrea Kalyn to serve as NEC’s 17th President, the Conservatory is poised to embark on a new chapter at the forefront of innovation in education and music.

NEC’s Preparatory School offers “a place for every player,” providing top quality training in a supportive and nurturing environment with opportunities for young musicians of all skill levels—from absolute beginner to near-professional. One of the largest programs of its kind in the nation, the Preparatory School serves K-12 music students from across New England. NEC Prep’s world-class faculty of 250, wide variety of options for private and ensemble study, and outstanding performance and touring opportunities all provide students with an exceptional musical and educational experience. The core components of the NEC Prep curriculum include private instrumental lessons, classes in music theory, history and composition, choral singing, and ensembles of all sizes and configurations including eight orchestras. Recognizing the need for an accessible and affordable entry point for younger students, NEC Prep’s new Musical Explorers program offers curious Boston third-graders with eurhythmics-based general music instruction and the opportunity to begin to learn an instrument.

About the Boston Youth Symphony Orchestras

Founded in 1958 and celebrating its 61st season, the mission of the Boston Youth Symphony Orchestras (BYSO) is to encourage musical excellence in a professional and supportive environment by providing the highest quality orchestral training and performance opportunities to musicians grades K-12 and making its programs accessible to underserved communities through financial assistance and outreach. With nearly 600 musicians ages 4-18 participating each year, BYSO has served thousands of young musicians as one of the largest and most comprehensive youth orchestra programs in the United States. BYSO’s programmatic scope includes a wide array of orchestral and chamber music options, and the Intensive Community Program (ICP), a rigorous instrument training program that provides immersive instruction to students from populations traditionally underrepresented in the classical music field. Now in its 20th year, ICP recruits students from the Boston community between the ages of 4-10, with little or no prior musical experience. Following the interview process, a select number of students are invited to participate in a Music Workshop Series, then those students who show exceptional interest are accepted to join the new class of ICP students. Students receive an instrument, weekly lessons, music theory and ensemble classes, performance opportunities, and the support necessary to successfully audition within two to three years into one of the BYSO ensembles with a goal of joining the Boston Youth Symphony, BYSO’s premier ensemble. To date, 100% of ICP students have graduated from high school, and 100% have gone on to college. Today, BYSO is one of the most diverse youth orchestras in the country, with 18% of its student body composed of students in ICP.
About the Community Music Center of Boston

The Community Music Center of Boston (CMCB) has been committed to supporting marginalized groups since it opened its doors in 1910 as a school for immigrant youth in Boston’s South End. When court-ordered bussing began in Boston in the mid-1970’s, CMCB was one of the first outside partners to provide arts instruction for schools in underserved communities; and is a leading outside provider of music instruction in the Boston Public Schools, reaching more than 4,500 students weekly. With the mission to transform lives throughout Greater Boston by providing equitable access to excellent music education and arts experiences, CMCB reaches approximately 500 students each week at its main campus in the South End and in nearly 35 outreach sites, including public schools, community centers, and social service agencies. Ranging from early childhood through high school, with summer as well as school-year programs, core offerings include individual and group lessons in 25+ instruments, voice and composition/theory, and performing ensembles for all skill levels and genres. CMCB’s Intensive Study Project is an accelerated and comprehensive six-year curriculum for grades 7-12 that prepares youth for advanced study at an institute of higher learning.

About Project STEP

Project STEP (String Training and Education Program, or STEP) was founded in 1982 specifically to rectify the vast underrepresentation of racial and ethnic minorities in classical music. STEP’s mission is to address this imbalance by identifying musically-talented children of color from Greater Boston and providing them with long-term, rigorous music and string instrument instruction. Based at Symphony Hall in partnership with the Boston Symphony Orchestra (BSO), STEP helps primarily Black and Latino students in grades K-12 to develop strong musicianship and life skills through an intensive curriculum of lessons, classes, ensembles, performances, and enrichment opportunities. STEP provides instruments and individualized training for up to twelve years on violin, viola, cello, or bass, placing students with the best teachers in the area including members of the BSO and faculty at NEC, where most STEP students participate in NEC Prep’s orchestra programs. Project STEP is proud that every graduate in the program’s 35-year history has attended college or conservatory, and 62% are currently pursuing careers in music. More than 2,000 students from underserved communities have received high-quality music instruction through Project STEP’s FOCUS (kindergarten) and core programs. Project STEP won a National Arts and Humanities Youth Program Award in 2014, the highest award in the country for youth arts programs, and was invited to perform at a White House State Dinner in 2016. These accolades serve as recognition of the program’s high quality and effectiveness.

About the Boston Symphony Orchestra

Now in its 138th season, the Boston Symphony Orchestra (BSO) gave its inaugural concert in 1881, realizing the dream of its founder, the civil war veteran/businessman/philanthropist Henry Lee Higginson, who envisioned a great and permanent orchestra in his hometown of Boston. Today the BSO reaches millions of listeners, not only through its concert performances in Boston and at Tanglewood, but also via the internet, radio, television, educational programs, recordings, and tours. It commissions works from today's most important composers; its summer season at Tanglewood is among the world's most important music festivals; it helps develop future audiences through BSO youth concerts and educational outreach programs involving the entire Boston community; and, during the Tanglewood season, it operates the Tanglewood Music Center, one of the world’s most important training grounds for young professional-caliber musicians. The Boston Symphony Chamber Players, made up of BSO principals, are
known worldwide, and the Boston Pops Orchestra sets an international standard for performances of lighter music. The BSO’s Education and Community Engagement programs offer interactive education and community engagement experiences designed to provide individuals of all backgrounds with the opportunity to develop their relationship with the BSO and build their ownership of and engagement with orchestral music.

About The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation
The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation endeavors to strengthen, promote, and, where necessary, defend the contributions of the humanities and the arts to human flourishing and to the well-being of diverse and democratic societies. To this end, it supports exemplary institutions of higher education and culture as they renew and provide access to an invaluable heritage of ambitious, path-breaking work. The Mellon Foundation’s Arts and Cultural Heritage program seeks to nurture exceptional creative accomplishment, scholarship, and conservation practices in the arts, while promoting a diverse and sustainable ecosystem for these disciplines. The program supports the work of outstanding artists, curators, conservators, and scholars, and endeavors to strengthen performing arts organizations, art museums, research institutes, and conservation centers.

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