Constant Practice

“No excellence in music is to be acquired without constant practice,” said Jane Austen’s famous character Lady Catherine de Bourgh—a despicable figure with some fairly good advice. If you’ve struggled or excelled at instruments (for me the former), you’ll agree that constant practice (or a lack thereof) is really the only influence on the quality of one’s playing. Or as I once heard a piano teacher say, “Every day you practice, you get better. Every day you don’t, you get worse.”

The content of this annual report speaks to the quality of La Grua’s “playing” this year, and it leads me to a single conclusion: La Grua practices constantly.

If you’ve attended an event this year, you may have noticed the results. Maybe you observed the skill of an artist; more diversity in our audiences and performers; the brilliance of Russian pianist Yury Martynov; or the palpable joy of hundreds sitting on the library’s lawn taking in this year’s Stonington Sounds Summer Music Festival.

I’m proud of these results, but I’ve also had the privilege of watching the practice: volunteers planning for next year the morning after this year’s event; a patron lending us that second piano; an executive director winning a first ever grant from the CT Arts Endowment and another from the Community Foundation of Eastern CT; a team building fruitful partnerships with SVIA, Merrill House, the library, the historical society, and Stonington Public Schools; a board supporting its employees with healthcare plans; committing itself to diversity, equity, and inclusion training; and turning with intention to strategic planning.

In short, seeing the practice behind the scenes is the true reward of leading an organization. And as I pass on that responsibility to Muireann O’Callaghan and Jim Quinn, I do so with the knowledge that constant practice is in their blood and that the excellence of La Grua’s next chapter will be the reward we all enjoy.

So enjoy this report, which I share with my deep gratitude to our talented staff Lori Robishaw and Kelli Rocherolle, our board, our volunteers, and loyal supporters like you.

Paul Leeming
President, Board of Directors
Music Matters concert-goers were treated this year to two recitals of Bach’s six keyboard Partitas by Andrew Willis on his own traveling Florentine Baroque piano. Renowned Stonington poet J.D. “Sandy” McClatchy was remembered with a late 19th-century chamber afternoon featuring a return engagement by pianist Artem Belogurov, this time joined by Octavie Dostaler-Lalonde on cello. American-French soprano Diana Higbee brought us a packed house in her afternoon of song, featuring Mozart arias, as well as showtunes from Gershwin and Sondheim.

Our eclectic series of talks ranged from Dr. Sam Harrington on end-of-life issues to journalist Elena Mannes on the spiritual life of animals. Additional topics included learning about the new National Coast Guard Museum from retired Capt. Wes Pulver, rural education in South Africa from Megan O’Neill, and the harrowing journey of accidental sailor Nelson Simon who survived 1991’s “Perfect Storm.” Visual artists exhibiting with us included a trio of artistic visions in one show from Marija Pavlovich McCarthy, Sky Hoyt, and R. Douglass Rice, and varying works from Women Photographers of Connecticut and the Love family of artists—Tim, Kate, Mac, Eliza, and Harrison. Further, we welcomed more musicians to our stage including the Connecticut Gilbert & Sullivan Society, singer-songwriters Glenn Jones and Bergin O’Malley, and jazz saxophonist Sarah Hanahan, a student at the Hartt School of Music.

We were very happy to conclude the year with a pop-up exhibition of the works of David Black.

We’re always grateful for the talented group of seasoned local artists who shared their expertise with young budding artists in our 8th Annual Youth Summer Art and Holiday Art Workshops, and we again presented the annual Celebrating Art in Autism exhibit in April.

By the Numbers

We presented 28 concerts; some 30 lectures, films, and panel discussions, including those of our partners; six art exhibitions and one craft fair; three youth workshops; and five weekly wellness, yoga, and dance classes—welcoming more than 10,000 visitors through our doors.
Partnership

Our closest nonprofit cultural neighbors are the Stonington Historical Society, Stonington Free Library, James Merrill House, and the Stonington Garden Club, which all use the center regularly for their public programming—we continue to value and build upon our important relationships with them. We are active members of the Stonington Nonprofit Roundtable, the Stonington Borough Merchants Association, the Southeastern Connecticut Cultural Coalition, the Westerly Regional Arts Partnership (WRAP), and the CT Arts Alliance, as well as our three closest chambers of commerce—Greater Mystic, Ocean Community, and Eastern CT. We were delighted to host a Business After Hours this past winter with our neighboring restaurant Breakwater in partnership with the Chamber of Commerce of Eastern Connecticut.

HIGHLIGHTS

RUSSIAN VIRTUOSITY

We were thrilled to bring in the extraordinary Russian pianist Yury Martynov, who combines the finest of Russian and Western European traditions. He made his Northeastern U.S. debut, giving us two wonderful concerts, playing Schumann’s Symphonic Variations, Op.13 and Liszt’s Troisième Année de Pèlerinage on the 1886 Chickering concert grand owned by Christopher Greenleaf, and Bach’s Six French Suites on harpsichord.

OUR NATIVE NEIGHBORS

Two talks this past year helped us learn much more about the tribal nations in our region, starting with Jason Mancini’s talk about how Indians in Southern New England responded to land dispossession and maintained kinship networks during colonization and beyond. Jason, now the executive director of CT Humanities, was the former executive director and senior researcher of the Mashantucket Pequot Museum and Research Center. On the 25th anniversary of federal recognition of the Mohegan Tribe, former chairman and longtime member of the Mohegan Tribal Council Mark Brown joined us for a conversation with Bill Stanley of Yale-New Haven L+M Hospital to discuss the past 25 years and how the Mohegan Sun has impacted the tribe’s culture and history.
STONINGTON SOUNDS

After four years of iffy weather, the sun finally came out and helped us attract some 700 people for the fifth annual day-long summer music festival, **Stonington Sounds**. We hosted six eclectic performances: jazz—both Dixieland and Afro-Cuban, barbershop, a concert for kids, classical piano, and Portuguese fado in partnership with the **Portuguese Holy Ghost Society**. We’re deeply grateful for the major support of the festival again provided by the **Stonington Village Improvement Association**, which included underwriting the performance of the U.S. Coast Guard Dixieland Jazz Band on Wadawanuck Square.

Our Volunteers

We owe a big “thank you” to all our artist and other volunteers who came out two Sunday mornings in July to make our **Youth Summer Art Workshops** possible: Emerson Baltrukonis, Karin Bastidas, Barbara Ginsberg, Karli Hendrickson, Eva Leong, Vincent Loiacono, Dan Potter, JJ Stinton, Lauren Vossler, and Jen Rothman of Stone Acres Farm.

All of our programming is made possible by the dedication of our volunteer advisory committees and event/office volunteers, as well as the many presenters who give us compelling lectures. As always, we extend our gratitude for their donated time and personal commitment to La Grua Center.

**ADVISORY COMMITTEE AND EVENT/OFFICE VOLUNTEERS**

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Nancy Potter
Shau-Wen Lucia Sokol
Tom Sheffer
Stonington Garden Club
Barbara Timkin
Trish Watson
Ruoqi (Rachel) Wong
Wick York
Elena Zamolodchikova
Financials

Income
- Direct Contributions $227,694
- Program Related Sales and Fees 42,154
- Fundraiser (net) 24,940
- Rental income 5,445
- Misc. Income 2,013
- TOTAL $ 302,246

Expenses
- Salaries and Benefits $ 131,116
- Marketing & Support 31,799
- Insurance & Office Related 12,250
- Facility & Equipment 43,469
- Programming 36,166
- Depreciation 29,192
- TOTAL $ 283,992

Board of Directors and Staff

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Jim Quinn, Vice President
Muireann O’Callaghan, Secretary
Barbara Heuer, Treasurer
Mary Anne Butler
Harriet Crane
James Eckerle
BJ Gaynor
Sharon Lynch
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Lori Robishaw, Executive Director
Kelli Rocherolle, Program Director
Donors

We thank the following donors to the Annual Fund who make our programming possible with their financial support. The list also includes individuals who attended our Summer Soirée fundraising event and/or contributed to our paddle-raise. All donations to La Grua Center were made between the dates of July 1, 2018 and June 30, 2019.

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Eugene and Georgia York

We thank Cove Ledge Beer, Wine, & Spirits for providing beverages and bar service and the following donors who contributed items to our auctions at the Summer Soirée.

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While every effort has been made to ensure accuracy, please accept our sincere apology if there are any errors or omissions with your name. If your listing requires correction, please let us know.

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