Welcome to our New Team Members, Lygia Davenport and Robert Oakley!

This summer Music Haven welcomed our new Social Media Manager, Robert Oakley. Robert is no stranger to Music Haven—he is a 2018 graduate and now attends Western Connecticut State University where he is majoring in Viola Performance and Computer Science.

Robert Oakley, Social Media Manager

A Letter From Our New Social Media Manager

I was 14 years old on the day I got to take my viola home from Music Haven. I didn’t realize the course of my life was about to shift. I also didn’t know back then the extent to which classical music didn’t belong to me, so I jumped in, seized it, and made it mine.

Music changed my world in ways that now, in the wake of American racism, I can see more clearly and understand in a way that is more unsettling. People I never interacted with before would smile at me as I walked down the street. I would get looks of admiration from members of my community and be treated as an object of hope and success. Why? The common thread was that I had my instrument with me. I had marked myself without knowing it.

I began to take more notice of how people treated me with and without my instrument. There were obvious disparities. When I walked the same streets without an instrument, people crossed the street to avoid me. Without a viola, I fit every negative stereotype associated with black men. I was “potentially dangerous.” I was the same person who had won a concerto competition, mentored younger musicians, filled my free hours practicing classical music, and spent my afternoons reading music with my friends. But without my viola, I was perceived as something threatening.

Music Haven gave me tools to help me develop in my personal and professional life. One of the most important was the power to define myself despite society’s expectations. I am a violist, a classical music enthusiast, a computer scientist, a friend, a role model, and soon to be much more. Music Haven helped me realize this power, as it did for so many of my friends. It continues to provide a community for other young musicians to do the same. Today, I work at Music Haven. I couldn’t feel more excited to be working with this team to make changes in the community around us and changes within.

This means all of us taking an introspective look at why we support Music Haven. Do we want to be a hero figure in the lives of underrepresented children to make ourselves feel good? Or are we invested in giving these children the power to take control of their own lives with the skills they learn from music? The mission of Music Haven is to give all kids a chance to play. We have to mean it in both our actions and our intentions. Our kids need to feel like it’s possible for them to become whatever they choose. Our kids need to see that hope in our staff members, supporters, and in their parents as well. We have to help them find what they already possess within themselves that enables them to succeed on their own, not teach them that they can only succeed on our terms, and with our “benevolent support.” This means all of us have to ask ourselves some hard, uncomfortable questions. Why do you support Music Haven? Do you see and understand your young people’s struggles? Can you see and acknowledge the disparities in your family’s life and theirs? What can you do to make a change not only in their lives, but in yours? In what ways do we have to change the world around Music Haven for all of our children to be safe, valued, successful? And what ways do you have to change, stand up, or speak out for that to happen?

Robert Oakley, Social Media Manager (Music Haven Class of 2018)

We are excited to welcome our new Development Associate, Lygia Davenport, who has been a part of the Music Haven family for the past 5 years as a parent of 3 amazing Music Haven students, and served 2 years as a member of our Board of Directors. In September she stepped down from the Board to take on her new role, and has hit the ground running!

Lygia holds a BA in International Studies with a minor in Studies of Progressive American Social Movements from Trinity College, a M. Ed. in Curriculum and Instruction and is currently pursuing her Ph.D. She has worked in the private and public sectors of education for more than a decade. As a teacher and former program assistant for Horizons at Foote School, Lygia has worked diligently to produce successful, inclusive, learning experiences for students of New Haven Public Schools.

NEW THIS YEAR! Music History & Technology Class with Mr. Benn

After several years away from Music Haven, living in Harlem after the birth of my daughter Grace, I am glad to still be considered family, and excited to return this year to continue the tradition Ms. Yaira started with her Time Travel Class. It has been a busy three years since I last taught at Music Haven. Watching my three year old daughter Grace grow up in Harlem and now Stamford as of last year has been a joy. While living in New York I attended Teachers College at Columbia University and took classes in pedagogy and music technology. Little did I know in 2018 how valuable the class on music technology would be. The class focused on using online platforms to teach music.

In addition to my work at Music Haven, I teach middle school strings at the King School as well as afterschool string lessons at INTEMPO in Stamford, CT. I look forward to working with the old Music Haven team, getting reconnected with students I taught years ago, meeting new students and families—and teaching my new Time Travel 101 and 201 classes! When I visited Yaira’s Time Travel class, I was fascinated by how she combined music history with art projects and listening sessions. I was also interested in how listening to and discussing music from previous times makes you think of the context in which the composer and performer lived. For example, the class on Marian Anderson brings up issues of race and segregation, as she broke barriers by being the first African American woman to perform and record everything from Schubert to African-American Spirituals.

Time Travel 101 and 201 will continue these core concepts. Each week we will explore different time periods by listening to music. While we listen, students will reflect on the music by drawing, painting or writing in their Time Travel journals. Students will also learn how to use an online recording and production software to record a “track” that reflects the theme of the class. Themes will include Billboard 100 throughout the years, Africa and the Blues, and Movie Music Now and Then.
Lessons From a Distance
by Marlee, age 9, viola

Doing Music Haven online was weird at first, but it got easier as we did it more. My mom says I’m high tech, so that helps.

The downsides were that it was harder to do viola lessons without my teacher physically there, and sometimes the internet cuts out. Sometimes I can’t hear Ms. Annalisa or she can’t hear me. The sound is also different than it is in person.

But I liked using YouTube videos for my practicing. I already watch YouTube videos in my free time, and my family also watches YouTube videos of people playing music, so it was pretty easy to use it for my viola homework, too. I’m excited to see my Music Haven friends in online group classes this year.

New Opportunities in a Virtual World: Summer Session 2020!

Music Haven’s programming is usually limited to when school is in session because our students rely on school buses to bring them to us for their lessons and classes. This year however, with programming taking place online, and with financial support from the United Way/CFGNH’s COVID Relief Fund, we had a unique opportunity to offer a summer session to all of our students.

Two weeks of lessons and classes in a virtual format culminated in a few long-awaited gatherings to play together in a socially-distanced outdoor setting!

Highlights from the concert [pictured above] featured an all-cello performance of the Twinkle Variations, and Mr. Patrick’s studio giving a captivating performance of the Bach Double violin concerto. We look forward to returning to the park this fall.

In September, our after-school programming resumed virtually, with an open invitation to all of our students to log on every day, and a full schedule of lessons, group classes, homework help and tutoring, and many opportunities to interact with Music Haven friends online.