

**Memphis Music Initiative**  
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## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### **Memphis Music Initiative Grants Relief Funds to Local Creatives and Arts Organizations**

The COVID-19 pandemic has left no sector of the Memphis economy untouched. The arts, which have sustained many through this crisis, have been particularly hard-hit. Musicians, students, and grassroots arts organizations serving Memphis youth—especially those in black and brown communities—have suffered devastating financial and creative setbacks, if they have been able to continue working at all.

In response to this crisis, Memphis Music Initiative (MMI) established an Emergency Relief Fund to provide short-term, immediate relief for individual musicians, young people, and youth-serving music nonprofits who are part of our extensive network of in-school, out-of-school, and community partnership programs. These grants were made possible by support from an anonymous donor and ArtsMemphis.

**In total, the Fund granted \$98,450 to 11 organizations, 43 individual musicians, and 18 youth to replace lost income and support ongoing youth engagement during the COVID-19 crisis.**

Current and former MMI Works students were invited to submit the following grant proposals: a) proposals for technology to enable applicants engage in remote work experiences this summer; b) proposals for commissioned music or artwork in response to the COVID-19 crisis; or c) requests for recovering funds lost due to canceled performance or contracts. Here are a few of the outstanding proposals MMI received:

- One student will compose an aria to highlight experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic. The composition will feature expressionistic techniques, as well as a vocal component describing the emotions of the people affected by the pandemic. "I want to tell the story of the people," she said, "while also sharing mine."
- Another is developing an original song highlighting his creative and personal growth in isolation. "This pandemic has left me alone in my dorm room for months, and I have never been more self-assured than I am now," he said. "My proposal is for a toast. To all the money and opportunities lost, that will eventually come back around."
- A third student is creating a series of artworks about her experience in self-isolation, which she notes has been a time of both positive and negative change. The series will include four painted works created from direct observation. Specifically, they will explore "the realism and fear of this pandemic while showing the positive. In other words, demonstrating real life."

Individual musician Fund applications demonstrated significant financial loss as a result of COVID-19, including loss of paid studio time, venue bookings, show cancellations, contracted expenses, lessons, and more. Applications included requests to recoup the following:

- Musical engagements at Carnegie Hall, Nashville Opera, North Mississippi Symphony, and many more: "These events were to help me subsidize my income for summer months," said one musician. "I depend on my outside singing engagements for that purpose."
- Weekly performances at senior homes, local churches, and with local bands
- Group studio and private music classes from the Spring 2019 school semester through the summer

Local arts and grassroots organizations were likewise overwhelmed by the swift changes brought about as a result of the COVID pandemic crisis—particularly as it impacted live performances, programming, and studio time. As creatives, they rebounded, innovating new ways to engage young people and serve their communities during these unprecedented times, but seeking capital investment to implement these changes.

These organizations have been disproportionately, negatively impacted by the pandemic. Organizations led by people of color statistically [receive less grant money](#)—and are given less freedom in determining how that money is used—than organizations with white leadership. These organizations, along with local student and professional creators, play critical roles in shaping our arts economy. Their passion and creativity sustain Memphis' storied cultural heritage and propel Memphis arts into the future.

"MMI is pleased to be able to provide some relief to the artists and organizations that are integral to what makes Memphis great—our stories, our music and our culture," said Amber Hamilton, Executive Director, MMI. "We'll continue to seek financial resources and other supports to ensure that black music and art survives through these unprecedented times in Memphis."

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**MMI** leverages targeted philanthropic investments, programmatic offerings, and strategic capacity building to strengthen youth, community arts, and music engagement activities for primarily black and Latino youth in communities across Memphis and the Mid-South. MMI invests in two ways: through direct programs that connect youth to high-quality in-school, after-school and summertime opportunities, and by providing funding and resources to advance organizations working with young people.

In addition to operating direct programs that expand access to music engagement opportunities for black and brown youth, MMI also supports the ecosystem of community organizations that work to extend music and arts engagement opportunities for black and brown youth. Their supports enhance the capability of nonprofit organizations to deliver programs and to secure funding/resources beyond those provided by MMI, so that youth always have access to high-quality music programming.

*For more information on how we are impacting youth, through transformative music engagement, visit our website at <http://memphismusicinitiative.org/> or find us Social Media: Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter @mmusinitiative.*