

{Intro Music}

This is the Institute for Music Leadership

Stephen (from tape): ...ok...I'm gonna start the recording now. You never know, this may make for some fun material to pull from!

Stephen (narration): Welcome to another episode of Create. Inspire. Lead. I'm Stephen Biegner. Today we have another short episode for you, this time led by DMA student Emma Gierszal. And she's talking with one of her old intern supervisors.

Stephen: It looks like Laura is here...admit...I think I did it. There she is.

Laura: Hey! How are you?

Stephen: Emma interned last fall with the group fivebyfive and learned a lot about how a small ensemble works together, makes decisions together, and plans a lot of events - sometimes with multiple partners and collaborators. Lots of moving parts. So, we wanted to sit down and chat with someone from fivebyfive and talk about an upcoming project they have on the horizon and what went into that, especially in the time of COVID.

Laura: My name is Laura Lentz. I'm artistic director and flutist for the Modern Chamber Quintet five by five here in Rochester. I am a flute professional, flutist and teacher.

Stephen: Laura also teaches as an adjunct professor at the Rochester Institute of Technology. And before that, for nine years, she was head of music at Marymount International school. She lived in Rome, Italy for a number of years - that's where she met her husband - though, we couldn't quite figure out the exact time frame.

Laura: I think I said nine years, which is incorrect. It's actually eight years. Yeah, I lived there from 2001 until 2010. 2008. 2009. No, 2002. OK, I'm sorry. 2002 to....

Stephen: Regardless, we talked about Rome for a while and it sounded amazing. She had moved to Rome to teach English for Procter and Gamble and then ended up meeting her husband there, having her son, before they all moved back stateside in 2008. Or was it 2009? Or...Anyway - she's here now, and when she got to Rochester -

Laura: ...started talking to some people here in Rochester and fivebyfive was born. And we are flute, clarinet, electric guitar, bass, and piano - wide color palette, marvelous instrumentation. And we've been together now since 2015, in fact. We incorporated as a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization in 2017 and we are going strong and loving every minute of it.

Stephen: Throughout Emma's interview with Laura, there's this throughline of community - being involved, being kind, trying to make changes for the better through music.

Laura: There's definitely a community organizer component to being a musician, I think.

Stephen: Even when I asked Laura what her COVID passion project was, it was centered in this selflessness.

Laura: I ended up creating this beautiful collection called *Comfort Pieces* for flute - solo flute. I had nine composers write me - including my son - write me pieces for solo flute. And I compiled it into a collection. And all proceeds went to benefit the United Way Crisis Fund. And so I raised like \$350. Not a lot of money, but something.

Stephen: We'll link to Laura's website where you can listen to some of those Comfort Pieces and also watch these short videos with animation that some friends made to go along with the music. Not featured on Laura's website is her other current passion project:

Laura: And another one is I'm learning accordion.

Stephen: Very fun!

Emma: I've seen your videos! They're amazing!

Laura: I'm awful. I'm so terrible!

Stephen: We don't have any accordion playing to share with you, but, hopefully you can already get a sense of how passionate and warm Laura is. And she was so great to talk to. So, without further ado, let's dive into Emma's conversation.

Emma: All right. So I see you have an event coming up on November eight called *For the Future: The Susan B. Anthony Historic District (Music, Art, and Action)*. I was wondering if you could introduce that event for us.

Laura: Absolutely. So this is a free virtual program that will celebrate voting, women's rights and local history. It will involve music, a community discussion, and a neighborhood walk. It's a partnership of many organizations. It started with a coffee with Larry Francer of the Landmark Society and myself back in 2019 after discovering that Landmark Society had a program called Five to Revive. And so I said to him, "It's too good to be true! We have to connect fivebyfive and Five to Revive." So we met at Fifth Frame Coffee House here in Rochester - at 5p.m. You know, you gotta work it. And we had a lot of fun.

We had a great time meeting and brainstorming ideas and we knew that Susan B. Anthony's bicentennial of her birth was coming up. We knew the one hundred - the centennial of the 19th Amendment women's right to vote in New York was coming up. And so we started brainstorming ideas and then met with Dawn Noto, who is the president of the Susan B. Anthony Neighborhood Association. We decided to commission a new work in honor of Susan B. Anthony and also Lisa Hoffman, a resident of the neighborhood, Susan B. Anthony neighborhood for many years, who we lost last year, unfortunately. And so this piece is dedicated to her.

But it's a it was supposed to be an in-person event. It's been moved online. It'll take place November 8th at two o'clock on Zoom. It's basically - it's free, open to everybody. It'll be a performance of this new work. Actually, we're creating a new video with Mark Webster of Blue on Blue Recording Studio. ROC Music Collaborative is joining us, students of that program, Violin Instruction - the after school program here in Rochester. And we'll be having a community talk back with several panelists who will discuss the suffrage movement and things that we still need to do.

It'll also be an opportunity post-election to reflect on how voting went. Did we have to wait on line long? How did the election go? Do we even have results yet? Also an opportunity just to be together. It's been a really trying time for us, just all of us in Rochester. You know, this is our opening event of the season. We were supposed to start back in September at Fringe with an event I can tell you about a little bit later, but in collaboration with George Eastman Museum and we felt that we wanted to amplify the voices of people protesting about Daniel Prude's killing. And it didn't feel right to have an event at that particular time.

So we decided we wanted to start our season based in Rochester, really celebrating the community, and also reflecting on how we can help each other and support each other through music, art, and action. And the event For the Future: Susan B. Anthony Historic District bringing together many voices in the Rochester community. Leaning on each other and having music be the catalyst for conversation and also art. And then meeting

together at the 1872 CAFE where Susan B. Anthony voted and was arrested along with several other women. And so that'll be the culmination of the event, sort of a culmination of the event. We'll all meet there and walk around with signs that we've made during the - during the event.

So, many moving parts. The catalyst for the whole event, for the conversation that will follow is the commission of a new work by Mina Esary. She's a composer who we met here in Rochester who went to the Eastman School of Music. Now finishing her master's, I believe, in Stony Brook. And she wrote this wonderful work for us. We've had wonderful support from Humanities New York Action Grant for this event. And Rochester Institute of Technology Performing Arts is also supporting this; so, lots of wonderful partners and organizations who are.

Emma: Yeah, awesome. So, yeah, you mentioned you this project has been in the works since twenty nineteen, and so I'm sure you've had to change your vision a lot over the last year, especially with all of the current events, COVID-19, one of the biggest civil rights movements since the 60s, the killing of Daniel Prude and having to move the Fringe show. So I think you already did describe a bit of how you had to reshape your vision. I was wondering if you could explain in a bit more detail how you reshaped the vision as you continue to add community partners to this event. Since you have so many.

Laura: Yeah. You know, I was reminded of a quote of Susan B. Anthony this morning. And I just - I wanna grab my notes here, and I just love it. It says, "The older I get, the greater power I seem to have to help the world. I am like a snowball. The further I am rolled, the more I gain." And as we - as this event came together and I remember, Emma, you may have been there when we were discussing this particular quote and that this event was like a snowball. And we were - it was in the spirit of Susan B. Anthony. And it really has snowballed in a way that is just absolutely wonderful and beyond our, you know, beyond our dreams, because the result of this and during all these difficult times and hardship, and anger and injustice and wanting to, I don't know, feel connected, I think. I think this event really has it's been the it's been a product of love, a labor of love. And the more people that have heard about it have wanted to participate in it.

So we've had to adapt. It was supposed to be in person. We've had to adapt it for a virtual performance. But we're still trying to have an optional, as you know, socially distanced neighborhood walk following the event, because we do what we do feel. It's important to be together. But it will take place on Zoom. It will have a community feel. It will probably be a little bit messy in the sense of that - we wanted to be a community

event, that there's kids from ROC Music and, you know, all of us will be together chit chatting and making art and sharing music. I do think that, you know, it's taken some replanting and rethinking about how to - how to realize this event. But I do think that the end result is going to be something that a lot of people and put a lot of love into.

Emma: Absolutely. And I think putting a lot of love into it. That's exactly what fivebyfive does. I mean, just to read a bit of your mission - "...to engage audiences in the collaborative spirit and creativity of modern chamber music by commissioning, arranging and performing a wide range of works for its instrumentation." So I'm wondering, in your words, why is it so important to engage the community?

Laura: Well, you know, music, I think music can be a connecting force, and I think one thing that we really like to do is create connections with music and art and poetry and dance and architecture and historic preservation and feminism. And, you know, we feel like music has a place and in a way to connect people.

We also think it's of utmost importance that the music that we play is - it represents as many composer voices as possible. We, you know - composer diversity has been always important to fivebyfive. And I think that we have re-committed ourselves, in light of everything happening, that's you know - we want the music that we play to represent the community in which we live.

So we're all community organizers, I feel in fivebyfive. I feel that we are, you know, we're a nonprofit organization. We want to serve the community. We want to be a part of the community. We want to make a difference in the community. And so new music, the music of today, it has a place in making a difference. And so that's what we're trying to do. Sometimes it's bigger, sometimes smaller. Sometimes it might just be making a connection between looking out a stained glass piece of art and hearing music in your mind and make a connection between the colors and the sounds you're hearing. So that's a smaller difference. But it's a - it's one that I think, it shows the connection between us all. And I think that that's what fivebyfive tries to do, is to create conversation and space for those conversations to happen so that we feel connected to each other.

Emma: Yeah. And I really love what you said. You're all community organizers. I'm curious, when you were in school, did you expect that you would be doing this kind of work? And I'm curious if you have any advice for students who are still in school. What do you wish that you would have learned or studied that would help you do what you're doing today?

Laura: That's a wonderful question. I actually - personally speaking - I've been a community organizer my whole - you know, from being in college, I was involved in making a local currency called Madison Hours when I lived in Madison, Wisconsin. We decided that we wanted to have - provide wealth to the community. You know, it's idealistic, but it had a good heart. I've been involved in environmental movements and in several different things over my life. And I think a lot of the lessons that I learned in those experiences, I'm definitely bringing to fivebyfive.

I do think that musicians are - we are pretty capable folks in terms of being able to multitask. We are by nature, I think, we have a good mindset for making connections with people. We are generally, you know, we want to make connections as performers. Right? With our audiences. And so it's the same thing making connections in your community.

I do think that the important thing is if you have something in mind and an idea of how you can make a difference. Go for it. Do it. Because every single person that I've met as artistic director and fivebyfive, there hasn't been one person who didn't want to have a conversation about how to include music to make the world a better place. And there's an idealism in it. But I think that it's, I think that, again, it has heart, right? And it has - the intent is to try to use music to do better for your community in which you live. So I would say trust your instincts.

Also find mentors to talk to, you know, part of the part of the work that I do - I really value people that have - that do similar work as we do. And also, you know, people that I can lean on and ask for advice about how to perhaps connect with somebody, or I may ask somebody to e-introduce me over email. You know, I think it's important to use the connections that you have to build on those connections. You know, doing this kind of work, I do think it's really relationship based and, you know, being kind and empathetic and open to meeting with people. It's a joy. It really is a joy.

But I do think musicians have a good - we have a good start in knowing how to do that, because we are collaborative by nature. We work with each other. We, you know - So I do think, trust your instincts. But don't be afraid to ask questions and lean on people and ask for advice.

Emma: Yeah. Yeah. And I really like how you said when you have an idea, you need to just go for it. And that's something that IML talks about so often - is, you can't wait for an opportunity to fall into your lap that you have to believe in your ideas and talk to people, find mentors, and make it happen. Well, thank you so much for agreeing to let us interview you for the podcast. It's really, really been awesome.

Laura: Thank you so much for the opportunity. Thank you. Thank you.

{Outro Music}

Stephen: Special thanks to Laura Lentz for volunteering her time for this interview. We actually chatted a little bit after about some other fivebyfive projects coming up including a series of concerts being designed specifically for those living with autism by partnering with the Rochester Community Foundation for Sensory Friendly Programming. They've also been awarded a Chamber Music America commissioning grant, there's a series of composer chats coming up, they're also working with the organization Castle of Our Skins which advocates for black composers - lots of things percolating. You can find out more on fivebyfive's website which we'll link in the show notes.

Thank you to Emma Geirszal for running the interview and coming up with such great questions for Laura. If you're a student and you'd like to cover a specific topic for the podcast, we'd love to talk with you. You can send me an email to get more information and talk about how we might collaborate.

As always, if you have questions, comments, or ideas for a future episode, please contact me. My email is linked in the show notes, and you can comment on our SoundCloud page as well. Go out, make art, do good work. From the IML, I'm Stephen Biegner. Until next time.