



George Mathew '91 | HerCampus.com

By: Evelyn Kramer
Posted Sep 21 2013



Mahler For the Children of AIDS at Carnegie Hall, January 2009. (Photo: Chris Lee 2009)

I recently had the opportunity to chat with Amherst alum George Mathew, class of '91, who has done what all of us nervous seniors are hoping to do: used his liberal arts education in conjunction with his passion and talent for music in order to make a difference. At Amherst, George was a music major. He also took a lot of German classes (enough that in retrospect, he realizes he could have declared a double major, oops) and philosophy classes. As a senior, he had two big recitals, one of which was a piano recital, the other a conducting recital. Amherst actually brought in a whole orchestra for him to conduct!

Today, George is the founder and the face of Music for Life International, a non-profit that arose out of the humanitarian concerts he organized. After the 2005 earthquake in Kashmir devastated border areas in India and Pakistan, George decided he needed to do something to help. He had just graduated from the Manhattan School of Music, and he came up with the idea of putting on a humanitarian concert in Carnegie Hall. He was inspired by Leonard Bernstein, the famous musician and conductor who conceived of the New Year's Eve Concerts for Peace. By contacting tons of people and even occasionally inventing email addresses in order to reach people whose names but not contact info he knew, George got together a spectacular orchestra of high profile musicians, with seventeen different American and European orchestras represented. He also received the support of the UN and seven different governments, and he connected with the humanitarian organization Doctors Without Borders.



With United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon at the launch of Music For Life International's YEAR FOR THE CHILDREN OF SYRIA. April 2013. (Photo: Jay Mandal/On Assignment 2013)

The concert was a huge hit. It raised lots of money—enough to give Doctors Without Borders the whopping sum of around \$95,000. Word about the concert had reached the South Asian media, so Carnegie Hall was packed with people of Indian and Pakistani origin. The BBC also showed up, and broadcast a segment of the concert on BBC World Television. People in hospital tents at the site of the earthquake were very moved to watch the concert put on in their honor. George’s parents, who had never seen him conduct before, were also able to watch the concert from overseas.

One year later, people were still talking about the amazing success of the concert, and so George et al. decided to put together a concert for Darfur. The concert happened in 2007, and both Mia Farrow and UNICEF got involved. Unfortunately, it was more difficult to get the support of the UN for this concert because of the political debate over whether or not to call the situation “genocide”. The concert did however receive support from the then head of the organization Refugees International, the late Amherst alum Kenneth Bacon.



Playing Beethoven with Music For Life International Board Member Mark Kuss at the Launch of YEAR FOR THE CHILDREN OF SYRIA. April 2013 (Photo: Jay Mandal/On Assignment 2013)



Piano Four-Hands with Music For Life Board Member, Mark Kuss at Panama For The Children Of Syria, June 2013. (Photo: UNICEF Panama)

While George was putting together the third humanitarian concert, Mahler for children with AIDS, the organization applied for non-profit status. And so Music for Life International was born. This year, Music for Life International is doing a Year for the Children of Syria. They are putting on a series of small concert events in various locations. There was a kick off event in New York, followed by a small concert in Panama, and next up are concerts in Boston, New Haven, and possibly Montreal. The non-profit hopes to generate energy in locations other than New York. The main concert will be in January at Carnegie Hall. It will be a performance of Dimitri Shostakovich's Leningrad Symphony, which Shostakovich wrote after surviving the Nazi siege on Leningrad and the terror of Stalin. The tragedies audible in the music of Shostakovich's symphony parallel the current situation in Syria.

So how does Music for Life International link back to George's time at Amherst?

The organization takes a liberal arts approach to music. For years, people have analyzed music in terms of acoustics and sound. Music for Life International proposes that there are other ways to think about music, such as the behavior it engenders when people get together and play. George suggests that this could be a model for how all kinds of institutions, from governments to the family, relate to each other.

Music for Life International loves when young people get involved, so make sure to check out their website here. The 2015 concert is currently in the works, and will work toward ending violence against women.

About Evelyn Kramer (Amherst)

Evelyn is the Editor-in-Chief of the Amherst branch of Her Campus. She was a features intern at Seventeen Magazine during the summer of 2011 and a features intern at Glamour Magazine during the summer of 2013. She is a French and English major in the class of 2014 at Amherst College. She is also on Amherst's varsity squash team. She is an aspiring travel writer/novelist, and loves running, ice cream, and Jane Austen.