Ph.D. Music Ed Students Partner with Visually Impaired Learners

THE MIAMI LIGHTHOUSE for the Blind and Visually Impaired, Inc. is the oldest and largest private institution of its kind in Florida. Its Better Chance Music Production Program aims to help visually impaired music students acquire marketable skills that lead to independence and employment in the music industry, by pairing them with fully sighted music students.

The Frost School of Music began partnering with The Miami Lighthouse on the program last year. Music Education Ph.D. candidates Rob Saunders, Vimari Colon Leon, and Johanna Abril were first recruited to collect data for an evaluation of the agency. President and Chief Executive Officer Virginia Jacko then offered Saunders a position to manage it.

Saunders helps visually impaired learners gain meaning from the musical sounds they hear, while he’s gaining valuable experience with cognition research and administrative roles. He oversees eight staff members and 67 intergenerational clients ranging in age from 4 to 75 years old.

New Tools to Tell Our Story

Build yourself at Frost is a new marketing campaign for the Frost School of Music that is rolling out this year. Alumni, current students, and faculty are encouraged to share the information with prospective music majors, and encourage them to visit and apply. New digital and print advertisements, a bold and attractive prospectus, and coordinated posters with audition dates all reinforce aspects that are "uniquely Frost" such as its innovative curriculum, real-world experiences, collaborative opportunities, award-winning faculty, and the sizzling Miami arts scene. To view or download the new prospectus, go to music.miami.edu/admissions.

UMindfulness Makes Meditation Meaningful for Musicians

PEOPLE WORLDWIDE have practiced various forms of meditation for more than 2,500 years and its health benefits are well documented. At the University of Miami, the UMindfulness Research and Practice Initiative (UMindfulness) is an interdisciplinary organization that shares neuroscience research on the benefits of mindfulness.

Trombonist Tim Conner, associate professor of professional practice, joined the UMindfulness initiative and offers weekly mindfulness classes to interested music students. He has been studying and practicing mindfulness since 2010 when he went on his first silent meditation retreat with forest monks in Thailand. He has completed mindfulness-based stress-reduction training and other mindfulness training programs.

"Being more fully present, in the moment, is a skill that all musicians value and cultivate in their performing lives," says Conner. "Mindfulness practice delivers just that: the ability to pay attention more fully to what is actually happening. This is not some hippy-dippy, feel-good fluff. These are practical, evidence-based strategies."

In his weekly sessions, students spend 20 minutes in silence, with a lightly guided meditation that uses the sensation of breathing as a focal point. A short discussion follows. Regular attendees say they get more restful sleep, feel more alive, and have an increased sense of gratitude for what is happening in their lives.

"I have always had trouble maintaining concentration in classes or rehearsals. Since starting a regular mindfulness practice, I notice that, not only can I achieve a clear focus quicker, I can also maintain it for longer periods of time," says Gabriel Benitez, an undergraduate performance major.