



September 2010

Dear Friends and Associates of the Hartford Conservatory:

On September 9th the Board of Trustees made the extraordinarily difficult but financially necessary decision to conclude Hartford Conservatory operations at the end of the academic year in May 2011.

The Hartford Conservatory's post-secondary Diploma program is not sustainable with the small number of full-time equivalent students – under 50 – enrolled annually over the past decade. A mix of competitive and economic factors has made it difficult to increase the number of students and achieve operating efficiencies, particularly:

- **Diploma versus degree** – Students graduate with 70 credits of focused training for careers in the performing arts but are not credentialed to teach outside the studio setting. As 21st century higher education has shifted to a degree orientation to meet the demands of the job market, graduates need further education to train for a vocation.
- **Cost** – Diploma tuition is \$13,000 per year versus \$3-4,000 per year in community colleges. The Conservatory's cost reflects the amount of individualized instruction students receive.
- **Competitive pull from other educational institutions** – Community colleges have added performing arts-related courses in recent years. Capital, Manchester and Naugatuck Valley provide broader career preparation for employment in today's workforce.
- **Accreditation and authorization requirements** - The Conservatory is accredited by the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC) and authorized by Connecticut's Department of Higher Education (DHE) as a technical college offering a diploma rather than a degree. However, our accreditation and authorization requirements are similar to those of a community college and include significant expenses for administrative and academic personnel: a President, Chief Financial Officer, Academic Dean, Admissions, Financial Aid and Registrar functions, Library and Resource functions and critical Student Support functions.

Three years ago we began to seek an alliance that would help us achieve sustainability through increased enrollments and reduced infrastructure expenses. These efforts included:

- **University of Connecticut School of Fine Arts**. Although we signed a Statement of Collaboration in May 2009, two key thrusts could not be implemented due to deteriorating economic factors: 1) funding from JP Morgan, derailed by turmoil in the financial markets and 2) infrastructure support, put on hold due to State budget cuts affecting UConn.
- **Significant Federation**. This for-profit company, incorporated in California, purchases troubled schools and turns them around by offering extensive online courses. This endeavor would have required the Conservatory to become an accredited community college. After extensive research into the steps to achieve NEASC and DHE approval as a community college, Significant Federation felt the timeline to offer online courses was too long and risks were too high to justify the substantial up-front investment to develop the required organizational structure and locate a facility capable of online offerings.

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- Hartt School of Music. We met with Dean Aaron Flagg soon after his arrival at the University of Hartford to discuss options for Hartt to subsume the Hartford Conservatory, focusing on the possibility of Hartt offering a diploma in music as well as the degree. Stumbling blocks were the difference in the profile of student each institution serves and the resulting lack of strategic alignment. Hartt students embark on their degree with a skill level attained through prior years of formal training and with competitive high school academic achievements. Conservatory students are often self-taught with a passion for the performing arts and often a lower interest in traditional academic studies.
- Capital Community College. After a preliminary meeting this spring with the Academic Dean, the Chair of the Humanities Department, and head of the Music and Music Industry programs, we provided a proposal for CCC to subsume the Hartford Conservatory. We met with CCC in July to clarify our proposal in preparation for a meeting with the new President, Wilfredo Nieves, on September 8. Our discussion was open and very thoughtful, ranging from CCC's vision for its music program to their interest in Conservatory programs and assets. President Nieves expressed appreciation for the quality of our courses and confirmed that CCC would be happy to accept Conservatory credits for students wanting to pursue an associate's degree. He also expressed appreciation for the role of the community program in addressing the needs of artistically under-served Hartford youth and for our long history. However, CCC is not in a position to absorb Conservatory programs or property.

We will fulfill our obligation to provide diploma students with the instruction they need to receive their diplomas. All students seeking a diploma are on track to graduate in May 2011.

We will work with foundations, Asylum Hill Congregational Church, the Asylum Hill Boys & Girls Club and other service organizations to find a home for our community programs, which include private instruction that can be provided in a variety of settings as well as the grant-supported summer performing arts intensive.

Concurrently, we will work with our Asylum Hill neighbors, the Hartford Preservation Alliance and Northside Institutions Neighborhood Alliance (NINA) to identify an appropriate use for the two historic Victorian houses and the land that are such assets to the Asylum Hill Neighborhood.

NEASC and the Department of Higher Education have been aware of the Conservatory's efforts to achieve sustainability and withheld sanctions that could have ended the Diploma program some years ago. We thank them for giving us time to determine the Hartford Conservatory's destiny and find a way to continue to fulfill its mission.

Over the course of its 120-year history, the Hartford Conservatory has proudly welcomed a wide range of individuals seeking instruction – from youth exploring new horizons to adults following lifetime passions. While there are exceptions, the viability of the stand-alone conservatory concept is challenged by university-affiliated schools of music, dance and music instruction offered in convenient suburban settings, and new online instructional opportunities. Nonetheless, the fervent desire of the Board of Trustees is to sustain the impact of fulfilling the Hartford Conservatory's mission, particularly in Hartford, by bringing performing arts instruction to all, regardless of ability or financial means.

We understand that you may have questions about events leading up to our decision or want clarification about the implications of terminating operations. Please do not hesitate to contact us with your questions or suggestions that will help us make prudent decisions about our assets.

Sincerely,



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