



and music education. But what propelled him into the non-profit world, and the joys that come with it (such as grant writing), was the Arts Leadership certificate program. Alex would be able to flex his entrepreneurial muscles soon, despite his own admission that “he’s not a numbers guy.”

After many meetings with the partners that would come to create ROCmusic, the non-profit was officially founded in 2012, their solution to bringing access of classical music to the city of Rochester, not just its well-to-do suburbs.

Alex was finishing his master’s at the time, and he was fortunate to have a “comfortable job” at the Harley School as their strings teacher, in addition to teaching at the Eastman Community Music School (where he continues as director of ECMS’s Tutti Strings and Camarata Strings). He had admired El Sistema, a Venezuelan institution that brings classical music education to kids at a very young age, and connected with the message of why classical music is important to developing young people. This was the basic idea behind ROCmusic.

He took over ROCmusic in 2013, “terrified” about the exciting opportunity. Now in his sixth year of programming, Alex is bringing his “healthy addiction” to kids, in the same way that he was introduced to it. At ROCmusic, he works to not only develop young students into fine musicians, but to bring a love of classical music to Rochester, especially its urban community, with

increased access and connections to art institutions that they may have lost over time. By combining all of his skills, Alex has overseen the growth of the program from about 30 students to 100, and the expansion to a second location.

A key foundational element of ROCmusic is the partnership between seven key educational and civic partners: the Eastman School of Music, the Eastman Community Music School, the Hochstein School of Music & Dance, the Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra, the Rochester City School District, and the Gateways Music Festival.

None of the ROCmusic partners provide direct financial support; they provide scholarships, tickets to local classical concerts, and teachers and interns. An annual benefit concert at the Martin Luther King Jr. Park raises funds to provide free instruments, education in music and leadership development, transportation, and food for the kids.

Although Alex agrees that every day is filled with small and wonderful victories, he and ROCmusic are proud to report two especially successful high school students. Bassist Gustin Cook was accepted to the national “Take a Stand Festival” in California (El Sistema USA’s summer festival) and the Rochester Philharmonic Youth Orchestra; violist Douglas Rodriguez was accepted to North Carolina’s Eastern Music Festival on a scholarship. (Alex notes that he attended the same festival when he was in high school.)

Both students began their instruction in the pilot year of ROCmusic; Cook started playing the bass with ROCmusic. Both “gentlemen,” as Alex refers to them, were once introverted, but now are excelling at their instruments and becoming leaders in the ROCmusic classrooms and in their respective arts communities. They are also considering careers in music.

While ROCmusic continues the partnerships that have made the program flourish, they are also taking steps to provide classical music education to every kid in Rochester that wants it. ROCmusic plans to expand to its third and fourth sites, especially in the southern areas of the city. Alex and ROCmusic are using the momentum and positive energy of the past five years, as they close out the first chapter in their history.

## Enriching Community Life

Eastman has a long history of bringing music to the Rochester community. Here are several other recent projects which have had enthusiastic results:

**Music for All** began in 1985 as a new and radical undergraduate requirement: that each student develop and be involved in a project “to initiate or foster an interest in music in an audience that does not normally attend concerts.” Music for All initially recruited eight student volunteer chamber music groups to perform locally at schools or at community sites such as senior centers and stores. Today, Music for All is integrated into Eastman’s chamber music curriculum.

**“If Music Be the Food . . .”** was created in 2009 by Carol Rodland, former professor of viola, and is now coordinated by assistant professor of chamber music Mimi Hwang. Eastman faculty members and students, members of the Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra, other local professional musicians, and guests donate their time and talents so that all proceeds can go to the hungry via Foodlink. Audience members are asked to bring non-perishable food items or cash donation. Last season’s concerts raised more than \$3,000 and collected nearly 1,000 pounds of food.

**East High School Outreach** was coordinated by doctoral guitar student Tom Torrisi in the spring of 2017, as a school-wide assembly that brought Eastman voice, jazz, and guitar students, and members of Gamelan Lila Muni, to the East High School stage. The students gave brief performances and held question-and-answer sessions with the students.

**The Gateways Music Festival**, affiliated with Eastman since 1994 and designed to “connect and support professional classical musicians of African descent,” is deeply committed to community engagement. During its six-day Festival in Rochester, in addition to performances at Eastman, 125 Gateways musicians give more than 50 performances in houses of worship, libraries, civic and recreational centers, retirement communities, private homes and more. And, the Festival’s new Young Musicians Institute serves local community- and school-based music programs. (See [gatewaysmusicfestival.org/](http://gatewaysmusicfestival.org/) and the back cover of this issue for more.) *More information on Eastman’s community engagement initiatives can be found on the school’s website: [esm.rochester.edu/engagement/](http://esm.rochester.edu/engagement/)*