



## The Harmony Concert: online, doing good



*A still from Linietsky's music video for her original song "The Dilletante" with the singer in front of a mural by Barbara Rocas, featuring a quote from Leonard Cohen. The paper bag, Linietsky writes, symbolizes the experience of "trying to cultivate an identity as a young artist with Asperger's syndrome," and insecurity and a desire for anonymity. COURTESY MARIA LINIETSKY*

*Livestreamed on YouTube, Thursday, July 16, 7 p.m.*

*To benefit Start Out Fresh Intervention Advocates*

*Inharmonymontclair.org, YouTube, Instagram; Facebook,  
TikTok: GoFundMe for S.O.F.I.A.:*

**By GWEN OREL**

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“Hey kids, let’s put on a show!”

But not in the barn.

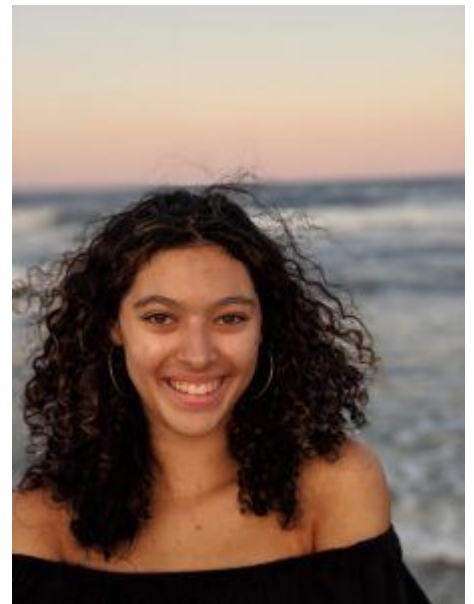
Sorry, Mickey Rooney, the barn from “Babes in Arms” might not have good social distancing.

There will not be bake sales, nor merchandise for sale, in the lobby at the fourth annual Harmony Concert, sponsored by In Harmony Montclair.

The Harmony Concert, which is totally produced and organized by teens, will take place online.

More than 30 people are participating in the event, which will take place on Wednesday, July 16, at 7 p.m.

That is more people than have participated in the past, said rising Montclair High School



MAGGIE BORGEN

senior Maggie Borgen, In Harmony Montclair’s founder and director. “And there are more than 10 new

participants who have not done an In Harmony event before,” she added.

The Harmony Concert began its life as the Imagine Concert in 2015, when Borgen was still in elementary school.

Every year, the concert raises money for a nonprofit organization. This year, the group chose to support [Start Out Fresh Intervention Advocates](#). S.O.F.I.A. provides services, including temporary housing, to women and children at risk of domestic violence. “Domestic violence is heightened even more during the pandemic,” Borgen said.

IHM is supporting S.O.F.I.A. with a [GoFundMe page](#); the concert will be free.

The concert is IHM’s signature event, though not its only event. During the past school year, IHM organized a video scavenger hunt as part of Montclair Design Week. Since 2015, according to a release, IHM has raised more than \$10,200 for local charities.

All of the participants are producing videos that will be edited together, with live emcees — one of whom is Borgen’s 14-year-old brother Chris, a rising freshman at MHS.

The participants have been meeting on Zoom and going into breakout rooms (on Zoom, the host can create breakout rooms where smaller groups of people can interact) by department and team. It is not very different from holding regular meetings, where some people are in a different room, Borgen said.

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READ: [NO ADULTS ALLOWED \(ONSTAGE\): HARMONY CONCERT SHOWS OFF TEEN ACTIVISM \(2018\)](#)

READ: [ELECTION 2020: MHS DEMOCRATS HOLD YOUTUBE FORUM](#)

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At a recent Zoom meeting of performers, Borgen screen-shared the agenda and reminded performers to fill themselves in landscape mode if they use their phone. She showed a participant how to transfer an iMovie to WeTransfer.

Borgen, who has been using film editing programs, including Final Cut and iMovie, since fourth grade, when she went to a film camp, offers technical advice.

A team of teens takes on other roles: Toby C. is one of two musical directors; Olivia North-Crotty is assistant director of performance, Maria Linietsky is doing art outreach; Milanya Navani is one of two heads of merch; Lora Jushchenko is a stage manager; and Ya’Nae Brown is head of fundraising pages.

# TEEN-EYE VIEW

Brown, who has joined IHM for the first time, will perform her original spoken word poem, “Not Just a Female.” “I thought it would be perfect for the foundation we’re raising money for. Women’s position in society is morphed by male-dominated stereotypes,” said Brown, 17 and a rising senior at MHS.

Linietsky, also 17 and a rising senior, will perform her original song “The Dilettante.” “It’s about how the fear of being a poser can warp your view of potential friendships,” she said. “This is the first music video I’ve ever made. It’s a collection of stills with quick jump cuts, pictures of art I’ve done and various murals I’ve done around town.” Linietsky has been involved since the second year of the concert.

Navani, 14 and a rising freshman, is working hard on her first music video, too. Though she’s had some experience with YouTube, making a music video requires more advanced editing, she said. She will sing “I’m Still Standing.” And, she said, “I’m Indian, and dancing to an Indian song.”

Assistant director of performance North-Crotty works on getting the performers camera-ready.

The 16-year-old rising senior at MHS gives feedback on the videos. “I say, ‘Make sure you’re engaging with the camera. At the instrumental bridge, if you’re filming yourself and don’t know what to do when you’re not doing anything, engage with the camera, hum along. Keep the viewer’s attention,’” she said.

She also reminds the performers that the video is the same as a production: They should be in costume and have makeup on. And she is also performing.

Having the concert be entirely student-driven and -created, to make a difference, is empowering to the young people involved, Borgen said.

The IHM anthem, written by Borgen, North-Crotty and Jushchenko, will be sung by everyone — edited together. The anthem was going to be recorded, but then COVID hit.

Its lyrics affirm IHM’s mission:

*We’re all here,  
To make a difference together,  
Rain or shine, share a summer night.  
Let’s gather ‘round the bonfire,  
Lifting one another, we take flight.  
Let’s all reach for the stars tonight.*



Harmony Concert organizers gather on Zoom. GWEN OREL/STAFF

## TOGETHER APART

Producing the concert on Zoom has its challenges.

“Hanging out is one of the most fun parts,” said 14-year-old Toby C., a rising high school freshman who lives in New York.

But on the other hand, meeting on Zoom has enabled more people to join.

“When in person, not everyone can always make the meetings,” Toby C. said. “Since everyone can join from home, we see a lot more people.”

“It’s hard to procrastinate,” Jushchenko said with a laugh. “It’s more productive on Zoom.” But she also misses seeing friends and seeing others perform.

Borgen said when she realized the concert would have to be online she was sad, but also excited to see what the group would do.

She’ll miss the chaotic but good energy of tech week, when everything comes together and people are taking backstage selfies.

There will be an after-party, on Zoom.

And this year the traditional Harmony Concert karaoke that takes place before the show can be full-throttle.

“Everyone’s recording, so nobody has to worry about ruining their voice,” Borgen said.

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## Not Just a Female

**By YA’NAE BROWN**

Must I stand down?  
Why stand down for proving my ground?  
What if when I stand up someone takes my seat?

When I look into the audience, well... when I look down the street  
I see all these faces  
Would they be able to go on if we were to trade places?

Female, a woman or a girl, is that all I am?  
Someone who has to follow the gender stereotype and be called ma’am

No, that’s not me I’m not two-dimensional I’m 3-D  
I have potential and I know what I wanna be

Girl will not be a borderline for what I can do  
Girl does not define me, woman should not confine me  
Females, us, you, me, we, will fight until we’re proven right

The days go on wolf whistles, degrading names and they still don’t believe they’re in the wrong Next few days  
still going strong  
Like a girl, man up, you were asking for it, slut  
Again I turn myself around just to have my confidence beat up  
There must be some sort of mix up because I am not just a female

Don’t tell me the glass ceiling is cracked or broken you cannot just sit there and remain unspoken  
Why should I sit still and look pretty  
while you’re breaking me down  
I don’t need your pity

We're drowning in a pool of oppression  
I am not just a female

Women are spinning in an ongoing cycle and some think we're doing this just to be spiteful  
Men all across America are making necklaces for women with their hands  
And some don't understand that you didn't have plans for this to happen  
But you were afraid  
Afraid of the drama, the judgment, or the effect it could have made

I am not just a female  
I am much more and I will not be ignored



'The Vagina Monologues' raises money and awareness



Actors work on the set of "The Vagina Monologues." GRACE L. WILLIAMS/FOR MONTCLAIR LOCAL

*The Vagina Monologues*

By Eve Ensler

Presented by V-Day Montclair

Studio Playhouse

Feb. 27-29, 8 p.m.

Benefit for S.O.F.I.A., (Start Out Fresh Intervention Advocates), which provides advocacy and more for at-risk women and children of domestic violence

[Vdaymontclair.com](http://Vdaymontclair.com)

Waitlist begins at 7:15 p.m.

**By GRACE L. WILLIAMS**



*For Montclair Local*

As a young child, Sharon Alston observed domestic violence incidents that culminated in the murder of her mother by her father. That's one reason it's meaningful for her to perform in a show that raises money for S.O.F.I.A., (Start Out Fresh Intervention Advocates), a Montclair-based non-profit that provides advocacy, supportive services and referrals for temporary housing to "at-risk" women and children of domestic violence.

The show is Eve Ensler's "The Vagina Monologues," and Alston is performing the scene "The Little Coochi Snorcher that Could." V-Day Montclair, the Montclair nonprofit connected with Ensler's V-Day Foundation, presents the show at Studio Playhouse last night through Saturday.

Since its debut, the play has raised awareness and been produced nationally and internationally. In 2018, the New York Times included it in a list of "The 25 Best American Plays Since 'Angels in America.'" In 1998, Ensler started V-Day, a global non-profit whose mission is to end violence against women and girls through benefits of the play. "The Vagina Monologues" is made free once a year as part of V-Day.

Ensler adds a new monologue every year, highlighting an international issue affecting women.

Ensler's 1996 play begins with the line "We're worried about vaginas."

To craft the narrative for the script, Ensler spoke with over 200 women spanning a spectrum of lifestyles and circumstances. From there, she created characters based upon her interviews. Originally, Ensler performed it as a solo production. It has been performed with three actors, and with many more. In Montclair, it will be performed with more than 20.

Monologues and scenes have titles such as "My Angry Vagina," "Hair," and "Because He Liked to Look at It."



*WILL HARPER*

Community response to the initial casting call was encouraging, according to Will Harper of V-Day Montclair, who is producing the show. The original plan was to cast 12 to 13 participants into the various roles, said

Harper, who produces and directs. Roughly three times that number showed up for auditions, according to Harper. Turnout was beyond “what we even had thought it could be in our wildest dreams,” he said. “We wanted to incorporate as many women as possible. This is a benefit show, and we don’t like to turn people away.”

As a result, a diverse group of women will take the stage and share an evening dedicated to the controversial and mysterious body part known as the vagina using humor, creativity, and cold, hard statistics. Nothing is off-limits or considered too taboo in the play. Sketches cover topics such as body image, genital mutilation, childbirth, orgasm, marriage, and LGBTQIA experience.

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READ: [CHELSEA HANDLER SPEAKS ABOUT EMPATHY](#)

LOOK: [PHOTOS; S.O.F.I.A. WALKS AND RALLIES AGAINST DOMESTIC VIOLENCE](#)

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Community enthusiasm for the play has also translated into robust ticket sales. Harper decided to add a Thursday performance after the initial shows sold out. At 7:15 all three nights, there will be a waiting list at the door for no show tickets, which will be resold at 7:50.

The support from so many has also shined a much-welcomed spotlight on S.O.F.I.A.

“The play allows us to reach a wider audience than we usually do,” said Kristin Wald, vice president of the board and teen workshop facilitator for S.O.F.I.A.

## TALKING OPENLY

Cast member Adee Shepen of Montclair did a lot of acting in high school and college. When she saw the posting for auditions, “something came over me,” she said. “I decided ‘I’m going to go for it.’”

Shepen, who is part of the Vagina Chorus, which reads statistics and facts between sets, said it’s as relevant today as it has ever been. “People think of us as this progressive town, and yet it’s hard to say the word, and it’s hard to say a lot of words in the show,” she said. “To be on stage in this town and still feel awkward about it is surprising.”

Wald said one key initiative of her organization is to remove stigma from victims of abuse. “The more people can be open about it and talk about the experiences they have, the more they will be able to seek help for themselves and their friends,” Wald said. “It’s important to not feel shame, and that includes people who perpetrate violence.”

Despite the “leaning in” and shattering of glass ceilings that often dominate headlines, domestic violence is an ever-present and real problem. In October 2019, the Centers for Disease Control reported that an estimated one in four women would experience physical violence by an intimate partner in their lifetime. One in three women experience some form of sexual abuse within their lifetime, according to the CDC.

Actor Nina Nsilo-Swai, who also performs in “Little Coochi Snorcher,” is an entrepreneur, the creator of the Pee-kaboo Potty Sticker, which assists with potty training.

In “Little Coochi Snorcher,” the narrator takes the audience on a journey back in time to recall memories of traumatic childhood sexual experiences and a “positive healing” experience with an older woman as an adolescent. The skit — which once listed the girl’s age as 13 during the sexual healing and included the line “If it was rape, it was good rape” — is one that sparked controversy and outrage, so much so that the age of the character was moved to 16 and the “rape” line was removed from the sketch.

Through her business, Nsilo-Swai learned that formative events like potty training can lead to incidents of abuse.

“Statistics show that where there’s child abuse, there’s also intimate partner abuse,” she said.



Photos: Biff! Bam! Boom! S.O.F.I.A. superhero workshop



COURTESY S.O.F.I.A.

Stacie Hawes and her son Jace Williams, 5, of Montclair, at the Superhero Writers Workshop sponsored by [Start Out Fresh Intervention Advocates \(S.O.F.I.A.\)](#) at The Community Service Center on Pine Street on Saturday, April 6.

Children 5 and up and parents or caregivers write a story together focusing on their strengths and powers.

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The next Superhero Writers workshop will be held on Saturday, June 1, 2-4 p.m., as part of [Montclair Bounce](#), a collaboration between Toni's Kitchen and the YMCA of Montclair. Montclair Bounce's first annual festival will be held May 31-June 7, and will be a "week full of creative events," according to the website, [tk.slechurch.org](http://tk.slechurch.org).

The workshop will be held at St. Luke's Episcopal Church, 73 South Fullerton Ave.



Caitlyn Byrne leads families in activities for the S.O.F.I.A. Superhero Writers Workshop. COURTESY S.O.F.I.A.