

Tuesday, November 29, 2021

FROM:

The Students of Westminster Choir College

PETITION TO:

Dr. Gregory Dell'Omo, President of Rider University

Dr. DonnaJean Fredeen, Provost and Vice President of Academic Affairs

Dr. Marshall Onofrio, Dean of Westminster College of the Arts

and the associated administration of Rider University, Facilities Working Group and Campus Transition Team

We, the students of Westminster Choir College (WCC), undersigned, are concerned about our education, our institution, the impact inadequate facilities has on our education, the value that our degrees will hold upon graduation, and the quality of support that we receive from the administration. When the Rider University administration chose to move Westminster Choir College to the Lawrenceville campus in 2020, we were promised better facilities, including an addition to the Fine Arts building, increased support for various performing arts programs including choral, opera, musical theater, and dance. The move was made with promises to build a premier fine arts building, with more practice rooms, teaching studios, performance facilities, dance studios, offices for music faculty, and accommodations for everyone taking courses in the Westminster College of the Arts (WCA) and Westminster Choir College. As we near the end of the Fall 2021 semester, we have yet to see what was promised.

We, the students of Westminster Choir College, chose to attend, despite the pandemic, despite the uncertainty of the move, and to put our trust in the institution and administration. However, it is clear that we are not going to receive what was promised to us by Rider University. **It is imperative that Rider University address and remedy our concerns listed below and provide us with multiple suitable performance and practice facilities, or allow us full academic access to Westminster Choir**

College's Princeton Campus and its facilities that were built for and are uniquely suited to the College's needs.

We, the undersigned, bring the following concerns to the attention of the administration:

FACILITIES:

- Gill Chapel - our primary rehearsal and performance space:
 - **Gill Chapel is acoustically deficient.** Students, professors, visiting professors have all commented on how difficult it is to hear in the room. The numerous ensembles that rehearse in the space are unable to hear well and adjust, resulting in pitchy and unpolished rehearsals and performances. Multiple attendees of recent performances have commented on how “dead” the space is, and how challenging it must be to rehearse in the space.
 - We have used several hours and precious class/rehearsal time on finding the best seating arrangements to “hear” in the space.
 - **Gill Chapel is not large enough to accommodate Symphonic Choir** - it is an inadequate rehearsal space, and a solution must be found.
 - **There is constant need for students to rearrange equipment**, chairs, risers, and the piano to accommodate each different class, ensemble, and event that happens in Gill Chapel, which is most often accomplished by graduate assistants and students. On the Princeton campus, different spaces were available and dedicated to different ensembles, courses, and events.
 - **The floor squeaks incessantly**, everywhere, and is getting progressively worse. At times, the floor is so loud that we can't hear the instructor.
 - **The ceiling has a leak** - towards the middle of the chapel. It makes itself known whenever there are heavy downpours.
 - **There is water damage** in the walls downstairs in Gill Chapel in multiple areas including the practice rooms. There are areas of mold exposed,

which not only poses a health risk but is also structurally unsafe. We are concerned that water damage near the elevator poses a fire hazard. Water damage and leaks also pose significant risk of damage to the instruments in the building.

- Gill Chapel Practice Rooms:
 - **Pianos for students do not reflect a conservatory-level department:** all pianos in Gill Chapel practice rooms are of low-quality and are clearly not maintained. They have tuning issues and sticky keys, indicative of humidity problems. Many of the instruments do not have proper benches. Most are worn, torn, or too low which will affect a student's posture and their ability to play.
 - The performance Yamaha piano in Gill Chapel is clearly not maintained. For a piano used in performance, that is unacceptable.
 - There are not enough practice rooms for students on the Lawrenceville campus.
- Fine Arts:
 - Classrooms are often used for sectionals and rehearsals when another space is needed. **These classrooms are unsuitable for choral and ensemble rehearsals and studio classes.** The acoustics do not support proper music making and critical listening.
 - The pianos in the Fine Arts Building are of poor quality.
 - There have been at least a few instances where a classroom assigned for a Westminster Choir College class in the Fine Arts building was reassigned to Rider students by a Rider department without informing the WCC professor or their students. This is unacceptable.
 - Classroom doors in Fine Arts (as well as Gill Chapel) have been locked during the day when classes are to take place. This costs us class time.
- Talbott Music Library:

- Not all materials required to support the Westminster Choir College curriculum have been moved from Talbott Music Library in Princeton, and students are unable to have timely access to necessary materials.
- Yvonne Theater
 - This performance space is not suitable for opera performances. The acoustics require that students over-sing or force themselves, potentially leading to injury, in order to be heard. Artists in the field rely on acoustics, not electronic amplification.
- Lack of suitable space for voice studio class
 - As of now, there is no suitable space to hold a performance/studio class for voice and piano students. Gill Chapel is frequently occupied, and there are no alternative rooms.

LACK OF WESTMINSTER CHOIR COLLEGE PRESENCE:

When Rider University first partnered with WCC, Rider's obligations were to preserve, promote, and enhance the existing missions of WCC's purposes, programs, and traditions and ensure its separate identity. In addition, Rider University pledged to provide additional funds as necessary from time to time to accomplish the obligations set forth in the initial partnership agreement. However, Rider University has ignored these promises in the following ways:

- **There is a lack of pictures/memorabilia**, anything indicating Westminster Choir College. Gill Chapel is empty. Fine Arts has few pictures, but nothing indicating history or legacy. No tributes to our predecessors or legacy in any buildings in a prominent way.
- Westminster Choir College is the only choir college in the world. It is a full-fledged institution with over 90 years of high-level music making, performances, and prominent alumni, and yet, it is not easy to find on the Rider University Website. It is treated as a small music department or an afterthought.
- **There is no merchandise available for Westminster Choir College** in any form for purchase from the bookstore.

- Omega House - Has retained its name, which indicates a fraternity/sorority, and not any connections to the legacy of WCC. The main doors (with the name of Westminster Choir College) of the building remained locked for half the semester, and are only recently open for students to enter.

DECREASING ENROLLMENT, POOR STUDENT AND ALUMNI

RELATIONS:

- Due to the inadequate facilities, lack of proper communication from the administration, and poor alumni relations, many students have opted not to attend Westminster Choir College this year, or have transferred out to another institution.
 - **Decreasing enrollment** has resulted in smaller ensembles, fewer performance opportunities, and ensembles cut from the program.
 - **The lack of transparency and clear communication from the administration** with the student body, as well as with alumni, has indicated that Rider University is not committed to ensuring a strong and sustainable future for Westminster Choir College.
 - **Repeated attempts to voice concerns from students have been dismissed or ignored by the administration.**
 - Many alumni are withdrawing support both in recommending students as well as withdrawing financial support from Westminster Choir College due to the lack of communication and transparency from the administration, inadequate facilities on the Lawrenceville Campus, and uncertain future of the college due to the transfer.

SCHEDULING:

- Classes - regardless of whether or not they are required for certain majors - are constantly under threat of being canceled due to low enrollment. Considering that Westminster Choir College is a smaller institution, it should be understood that smaller class sizes are expected.

- The class schedules for several core courses were changed. For example, Symphonic Choir now meets for one less rehearsal per week, severely impacting the quantity of music we are able to prepare for a performance. In addition, professors were not fully informed of the change until after courses had begun.
- Ensembles that had particular days set for rehearsals had their routine switched due to the transfer to Lawrenceville. This resulted in many students being unable to participate in ensembles they had previously been a part of.
- Westminster Choir College used to have specific courses for its majors with an emphasis on concepts that would apply to their artistry and careers. For example, language courses that were geared towards diction, musical phrases, and the color of a language, were cut in favor of integrating into Rider University's general language courses. In addition to being nonspecific, these general courses (which are required) often conflict with other required courses for their program.

We, the undersigned, are grateful that we have been able to include WCA and other campus students into our ensembles due to the transition. However, the facilities provided to us are severely lacking, and our inability to regularly use the Princeton Campus has drastically hindered our ability to create high-quality music and performances. We, the undersigned, love our institution and would like to preserve the high level of artistry and musical expression that has historically been part of Westminster Choir College. It is not clear that this can be achieved with continued lack of access to proper facilities and the apparent lack of concern for our future from the administration. It has become increasingly difficult to justify the expense of time and money to attend the institution. In order to retain current and future students and ensure the success of the school, **it is imperative that the administration address our concerns listed above, and provide adequate facilities or make Westminster's**

Princeton campus available for full academic use immediately for Westminster Choir College and its students, faculty, and staff.

We, the undersigned, feel that the administration has misrepresented its intent and ability to deliver on the promises made to students. We request a response from the administration **before December 15, 2021**, indicating that our petition has been read thoroughly, and providing details regarding how these issues will be addressed and resolved.

A note from recent alumni: As recent alumni, we acknowledge the challenges our current WCC students face and fully agree that the described situation above is unacceptable. We stand with current WCC students in their insistence upon maintaining WCC's legacy and add our names with an asterisk (*) to this petition.

Respectfully,

Marion Jacob '22

Debbie-Ann Francis '23

Summer Rae Kuhns '23

Ally Jurgens

Anna Matone '22

Charles Ibsen '22

Anthony Pinkerton

Kayla Freedman '21

Alison Rummel

Abbey Spolidoro '24

Rebecca Kirk '22

Sarah Boone '20, '21*

Yusef J. Collins-Bryant '24

Claire Fritz '24

Adrianna Barnett '24

Haley Califano '22

Jordan Allen '22, '23

Destiny Velez '22

Dr. Chris Drago Fistonich '22

Thaddeus Franzén '22

Tyler Kim '24

Lydia Reifsnyder '21, '23

Morgen Zwicharowski '22

Wen Darr '20*

Annamaria Caputo '21

Chelsea Holbrook '22

Shayna Lee '22, '23

Jason Steiner

Olivia Dunleavy '24

Jacob Keleman

Ashley J. Reinhardt '23
Kyle St. Sauveur '22
Mary Fetterman '22
Joseph Kelley '22
Sophia Obando '23
Rosemary Gurak '21
Michael Martin '21*
Destiny Elazier '21
Corinne Vance
Robyn Baker '20, '21*
Evan Davis
Sam Scheibe '21*
Hannah Schreffler '20
Cassandra Sutter '23
Natasha McFarland Rhoads
Jasmin Villatoro
Chelsea Warner '22
MÉLia Boykin
Caroline Voyack '21
Jennie Mae Sprouse
Allison Fama '25
Orry Walter '23
Devin Embrich '25
Andrew Chojnacki '23
Lillie Judge '22
Elizabeth Boyle '21*
Olivia Venier '22
Ruihang Zeng '21
Juli Chiriboga '24
Abbey Ritter '24

Katie Willey '21
Azhaneet Blackwell '22
Josh Lisner '21*
Emma Moyer
Devon Barnes '21
Zoe Bennett '24
Qichen Lyu '21*
Shai Funk '21*
Tiffany Ye '25
Jordan Mongell '23
Sarah Swahlon '22, '23
Madison "Maddie" Murphy '21
Emily Huguenin '24
Jocelyn Alam '22
Kelly Zuzic '21*
Anastasia Kantilierakis '22
Cyndi Romero '22
Manuel Alejandro Barbará
Emilie Beals '25
Samuel Day
Zoe Beaton '24
Samantha Belinski '23
Michelle Kwok
Minh-Vy Duong
Amanda Duspiva '22
Mary-Kate Hometchko '22
Eleanor Rees '24
Ben Kirk
Alexandra Thomas
Joseph Cocozziello '18, '23

Ashley LiBrizzi '24
Timothy Morrow *
Elizabeth Rosenberg '24
Joseph Richiwine '23
Jenna Sims
Abigail Rose '25
Marcus Timpane *
Kyra Pitagno
Abigail Flanagan '22
Victoria Vazquez '21*
Jade Lin '22
Sienna Grinwald-Alves '24
Casey Wichman '20*
Shannon Lally '21*
Julia Wilder
Michael Phillips '19*
Valerie Dzielski '20*
Mary Fetterman '22
Victoria Borrelli '22
Leigh Huber '22
Lauren Mickley '24
Hyungbin Lim '22
Emily DeMerchant '23
Lindsay Armstrong '20*
Eddie Tamanini '23
Emily Huguenin
Desiree DeMelfi '22
Jacob Hale '25
Christopher Palmer '24
Elizabeth Boyle '21*

Yiran Zhao '21*
Rosalind Ballow '24
Samantha Noble '24
Emily Huber '24
Jordan Klotz '23
John Arlievsky
Christopher Simon '25
Elizabeth Reyna '21*
Raoul Carlo F. Angangco '21*
Samuel Stephenson '23