**WE COLLABORATED**

We deepened our partnerships with celebrated artists, including Grammy-winning Third Coast Percussion, Sphinx Symphony Orchestra, Civic Orchestra, world-class drummer Ernie Adams, and more through side-by-side performances, residencies, and original student compositions.

**WE EXPANDED**

Our Greater South Side program moved to Bronzeville Classical School, where we gained valuable space (no more practicing in closets and hallways!), doubled in size, and continued our transportation program to make sure students from across the South Side could get to class safely. We were joined by community leaders, hundreds of families, and First Lady Amy Eshleman at our grand opening in September.

**WE CELEBRATED**

We hosted our most successful Big Night ever, raising over $600,000 to support our mission. Featuring special guest artists, incredible student performances, and 500 of our closest friends, it’s a night we won’t forget any time soon.

**WE WENT VIRTUAL... IN ONE WEEK**

On March 13, we closed our physical doors in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Within one week, we pivoted to online learning with 91% attendance. Our Spring Semester culminated in our Virtual Performapaloozathon, featuring 22 virtual performances including our school-wide “Ode to Joy” performance.

**WE WATCHED OUR STUDENTS GROW**

Despite countless challenges, we watched our students continue to achieve amazing things. Our unstoppable 2020 seniors upheld our 100% high school graduation and college enrollment rate, gaining acceptance to schools such as Juilliard, Brown, Stanford, University of Illinois, Depaul, and more.

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"People’s Music School is helping shape kids’ futures one note at a time.

Chicago Sun Times (October 2019)

“The People’s Music School is an important initiative... which began with a dream that all children would have the opportunity to access music education.”

Univision (May 2019)

“[TPMS] exists to change lives, and to build future leaders of the world.”

Chicago Ideas (August 2019)

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A DREAM THAT BECAME A REALITY

This year in review was created by our student authors:

- Jiana Avila (18) DePaul University 10 years at TPMS, Violin
- Nolan Baumgartner (18) Northpark University 7 years at TPMS, Trumpet
- Senite Barih (18) Loyola University of Chicago 14 years at TPMS, Voice
- Briannah K. Cook (18) Brown University 4 years at TPMS, Clarinet

This past year has been unprecedented for The People’s Music School. So much has changed since last summer, but despite so much certainty, our values have held strong.

This year, we worked hard. We challenged ourselves to practice more, to learn more challenging pieces, and to excel: musically, academically, and socially. We expanded to Bronzeville, making TPMS more accessible, more equitable, and spreading the joy of music across a greater portion of Chicago.

We excelled. We put in the work to better ourselves, our schools, and our communities. We surpassed our fundraising goals, coming together to put on one of the most wide-reaching, successful Big Nights we’ve ever had.

We took advantage of opportunities. This year, we bonded with our SLAM mentors, collaborated with Grammy-winning artistic partners, and worked toward our highest potential. SLAM students represented TPMS with grace and maturity as summer ambassadors, sharing their gifts with people all over the world.

We’ve remained a strong community. With the spread of COVID-19, we were forced into quarantine. Simultaneously, our country seemed to be ripping apart at the seams, with the devastating deaths of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, Elijah McClain, and countless others reigniting the age-old fight for racial equality. Countless families were struggling, and for a moment, it seemed as if the lights at TPMS could finally burn out. But community is not a building; community is a feeling.

So we got creative. As students of TPMS, we know what it’s like to be pioneers. Lessons, workshops, and ensembles moved online. And while it was a jarring transition at first, we persevered, doubling down on our commitment to bettering the world through the power of music, even from home.

This past year has been a whirlwind, but through it all, we stood together. We stood strong.

This year in review was created by our student authors:
BY THE NUMBERS

800+ students served in 2020

1,000+ hours of cost-saving service performed by our families every year

100% high school graduation rate and college enrollment rate

100% couldn’t otherwise afford the opportunity

90%+ students of color

10,000+ students served since 1976

44 YEARS OF TRANSFORMING LIVES THROUGH MUSIC EDUCATION

People’s is founded on the principles of equity, accessibility, and the power of music by Dr. Rita Simo — a groundbreaking female immigrant from the Dominican Republic — who in 1976 channeled her observations, frustration, and vision to found the first tuition-free music school in the country.

STUDENT HIGHLIGHTS

“I knew that our new Greater South Side program site at Bronzeville Classical School was going to be fun and exciting, but I was a bit anxious about the change. I came to love the new sectional space that we have now. I also love that TPMS has always been a safe space to ask questions and learn.” — Marcus C.

“Our 2020 Big Night was one to remember. I sang a remastered version of “Imagine” by John Lennon with my best friend, Mia. Knowing how much of an impact students make on our wonderful donors showed me that we are seen. By raising hundreds of thousands of dollars — and watching it all happen — I can speak for everyone when I say that we were so grateful that we had the opportunity to be there.” — Rubana G.

“People’s always finds a way to make everyone feel included and loved. We didn’t have the graduation we imagined we would have, but seeing everyone’s pictures again in our Virtual Showcase as we honored each TPMS Senior made me feel so much better. I am so glad we still got to highlight each other, especially because we didn’t expect to be finishing our last year this way. It was still wonderful.” — Jiana A.

“At first [virtual learning] was a little weird — not something I thought I would have to get used to. I was sad because we weren’t all physically together. But knowing that we still were able to collaborate together on our recitals and Virtual Showcase made things so much easier. My family from all over the world was able to watch me play the drums at the same time my immediate family did.” — Senite B.

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

COVID-19 has forced us to adapt to a new reality, trading in our physical classrooms for virtual ones. No matter what 2021 has in store for us, it’s certain that The People’s Music School will continue supporting Chicago’s young musicians and staying true to its values.

EXCELLENCE

We’re so grateful to our teachers, who have gone above and beyond to create a virtual community where we can continue to learn and grow. Whether we’re learning in a classroom or online, we must continue to support our students to the best of our abilities.

COMMUNITY

Distance does not mean divide. TPMS is a family no matter where we go. We do not have to be in the same room to be reminded of our lifelong bond. We must continue to work hard to keep connected to each other both in and out of the virtual classroom.

CREATIVITY

We have to communicate with our peers and share our ideas. Students: remain the persistently imaginative and innovative individuals that you are. Your artistry is a hidden power that you should share with the world.

HARD WORK

We’ve worked hard to transition rapidly from the physical classroom to Google Classrooms, SoundSlice, and Zoom. We must continue to familiarize ourselves with virtual learning tools, even if it’s uncomfortable at first.

OPPORTUNITY

This year, we were given the opportunity to construct an original composition with Third Coast Percussion, perform with Civic Orchestra, create a school-wide Virtual Showcase together, and so much more. Opportunities like this remind us that we need to soak up each moment, add each lesson we learn to our toolkit, and fully immerse ourselves.