



March 7, 2023

Delegate Ben Barnes, Chair
Appropriations Committee
Maryland General Assembly
Room 121, House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Chairman Barnes and Members of the Committee:

On behalf of Mountainside Baroque, Allegany County's early music ensemble, I am writing in support of House Bill 1226, to establish a non-profit sustainability fund.

The Mission of Mountainside Baroque is to provide Allegany County with an additional layer of cultural enrichment in the form of a professional chamber music series focusing on music written before 1800. Performing these works in an accessible, yet historically informed style, allows our collective to present music to audiences with a renewed excitement and relevance to modern culture.

As always, and in order to maintain the highest possible standards, sustained annual funding from multiple public and private sector sources is crucial to the expansion and continuation of our organization's offerings. In addition to the traditional sources of funding (MSAC, Allegany Arts Council, City of Cumberland, etc.) we have sought out project grants from Maryland Humanities and Canal Place Heritage Area, as well as a new partnership with other local organizations including Allegany College and Cumberland Theatre to name just a few. We are doing our best to work together and be frugal and efficient with our public funding, making sure that building our community is always the top priority for our organization.

Through continuing to make new connections, we intend to expand our individual and corporate donations, which continue to make up at least one third of our annual income. Still, on the heels of a costly hit to economic growth from the ongoing pandemic, we see the need for expanded funding as programming expenses increase, and individual donations and support have decreased. HB 1226 would provide us the ability to continue to drive tourism and growth in our region through the arts, and on occasion, allow us to make up for revenue shortfalls that will prevent a reduction in programming – a very real possibility in the coming years. Perhaps a snapshot of how our income is used will provide additional context to the role that we play in our rural, mountain community.

As our last year's season title suggests, 2021-2022 was indeed "A Joyous Reunion." We mounted a full slate of programs from October to May, featuring two massive concerts with large chorus, vocal soloists, and orchestra that were originally planned as highlight concerts for our festival weekend: A grand 17th Century Vespers Service akin to those from the famed St. Mark's Basilica (Venice) in October, and cantatas and elaborate dance suites of J.S. Bach – the largest ensemble amassed in our 11-year history! We were also able to return to some of our beloved traditions, namely our annual Festival of Lessons & Carols, which was attended and enjoyed by a record crowd.

While the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic presented continued challenges including the reluctance of many to reengage in public life, we were able to adapt and maximize both our musical output and return. One example of this was to use a festival-type model: add Saturday evening “chamber” concerts, featuring smaller ensembles and contrasting music to Sunday’s “main” concert. The added value (and modest ticket prices) of these additional concerts entice out of town concertgoers to stay the night in Cumberland. A recent survey of our audiences showed that over the course of our season, we had nearly 250 visitors from more than 50 miles away, and nearly 100 visitors from over 100 miles away. Using the city’s funding, and by eliminating a concert weekend from our normal model, allowed us to present more concerts at less of a cost.

Our 2022-23 Season, *Chapels & Courts*, sees a return to the success of last season’s model, while restoring our typical 5 weekend series. Our season’s bookend concerts, Gems from Baroque Dresden (September) and Hark How the Songsters (April), also feature a contrasting Saturday chamber option; a tour “around the horn” and bawdy bar room “catches” which can’t be sung in any church – a continued effort to extend our programming to different venues and expand our audiences. Our new season will also see the return of our weeklong Mountainside Baroque Academy in June and will be jumpstarted by our Mountainside in the Schools program, providing one-on-one sample instruction for talented student musicians, and allowing them to preview the academy week.

All of these efforts center around our campaign to “Make a week(end) out of it” and promote tourism and investment in Allegany County’s economy. We maintain our commitment to emphasizing the livable and historic nature of our city and continue to foster budding relationships with our partner arts organizations so that our funding goes further. Our rich and varied way of life is something we all treasure and know the prospect of that will be appealing to those who come for a weekend, or a lifetime.

For the record, I would be glad to testify before the committee in person at any point in the future, should you think it helpful in considering this type of funding.

Thanking you, in advance, for your time and careful consideration of this testimony.

Very Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "R. Mullaney", with a large, sweeping flourish extending to the right.

Dr. Ryan M. Mullaney
Co-founder/Co-director – Mountainside Baroque