

Joy of Music's 30th JOMPATION goes online to raise money for its financial aid program

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Joy of Music Program co-founders Wendy, left, and Rich Ardizzone with JOMP's Program Director Caroline Reiner-Williams. Joy of Music's 30th Annual JOMPATION will be held remotely on Feb. 20. T&G Staff/Christine Peterson

WORCESTER — Saturday, Feb. 20 will see the 30th JOMPATION and, safe to say, one like no other.

But while the event will be online for the first time, the cause and spirit is still the same as Joy of Music students put on a music performance marathon to raise money for the nonprofit community music school's financial aid program.

"Moving forward with JOMPATION is a way we can help students and faculty continue to feel a sense of connection beyond their private lessons," said Wendy Ardizzone, who founded Joy of Music in 1986 and is its director.

"JOMPATION is an important way to bring the JOMP community together again," said her husband, Richard Ardizzone, Joy of Music associate director.

Joy of Music, or JOMP as it is popularly known, stopped in-person classes at its home at 1 Gorham St. last March and went online.

"I think it really fostered a love of performing for me. Such a warm event."

CAROLINE REINER-WILLIAMS

Tasked with managing JOMPATHON for the first time is Joy of Music's new program director, Caroline Reiner-Williams, who took the position in November.

"Virtual uncharted waters," she said of the first virtual JOMPATHON. Still, "having already switched to virtual teaching, I feel a little better."

Reiner-Williams has also taught (cello and chamber music) at the school since 2009. "We have a little bit more advanced notice than we did in March. We all learned so much about Zoom. We really branched out as music teachers."

And beyond being program director and a music teacher at Joy of Music, Reiner-Williams is a former student. So she knows about the spirit of JOMPATHON, having participated in quite a few from the ages of 6 to 19. Her children, Alex, 10 (jazz piano), and Sophia, 7 (cello), will be taking part in this year's JOMPATHON.

"I definitely have many, many vivid memories of JOMPATHON — being nervous waiting to go on stage, such an energy all day. Family and friends waiting to support. I think it really fostered a love of performing for me. Such a warm event," Reiner-Williams said.

Usually JOMPATHON made for a teeming beehive of activity as students performed at 1 Gorham St. (and earlier during Joy of Music's time at First Unitarian Church of Worcester, 90 Main St.) as friends and family came to watch.



Mitsuki Kimpara takes a bow after performing during the 28th Annual JOMPATHON at Joy of Music in 2019. T&G File/Ashley Green.

This year people can register to watch JOMPATHON via Zoom on Joy of Music's Facebook page, which will likely be getting plenty of clicks.

"Zoom students will be seeing the faces of their families be visible on the screen. That's one of the things I'm hoping to maintain, despite the virtual format," Reiner-Williams said.

Joy of Music students are submitting recorded video performances for JOMPATHON on which most will have worked on with their music teachers. As of last Wednesday morning, 177 videos had been submitted. A couple of days earlier, when the number was 150, that was already more than Joy of Music had hoped for, Wendy Ardizzone said.

"Seeing the videos coming in has been heartening," said Reiner-Williams. "I know the students have been working hard and the faculty. As a parent it's been nice to have this as a goal ... We've had online chamber projects. It gives the community a taste of what students have been doing to collaborate with each other."



From left, sisters Miya Cohen, Thalia Cohen and Taeva Cohen, of Hubbardston, wait to perform in 2012.
T&G File/Tom Rettig

For as long as Reiner-Williams can remember, JOMPATHON has run from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m., and that will be the case Feb. 20. "So we'll be sticking to that tradition," she said.

Each hour a new set of student videos will go online. An "alumni hour" at noon will feature Joy of Music's alumni, including professional musicians performing and talking about what JOMP meant to

them. Participants will include Paul Wright, a cellist and singer with Tall Heights, and Andy Licht, violinist with Fayetteville (NC) Symphony and Duo Licht.

Alumni and faculty can also be seen performing throughout the day.

"I am thrilled that we have added an alumni component!" said Wendy Ardizzone. "One of the silver linings to a virtual event is for alumni from as far away as Missouri, North Carolina, Florida, New Jersey, New York and Maine to be able to participate. They will be sharing how music continues to influence their lives, particularly during the pandemic, as well as offering a few words of encouragement to JOMP's current students."



Lucas Apostoleris of Princeton plays some Bach on his classical guitar in 2011. T&G File/Paul Kapteyn



Wendy Ardizzone of the Joy of Music Program provides piano accompaniment to Wilfred Hsei of Northboro in 2006. T&G File/Paul Kapteyn

Wendy Ardizzone was the piano accompanist for many of the students when JOMPATHON was live, in-person. This year she'll perform solo.

"It's wonderful that she can be musically participating this way as well," Reiner-Williams said.

Reiner-Williams will be joining Richard Ardizzone, who teaches trombone at the school, in narrating the event.

On Joy of Music's Facebook page, there is not only a link to Zoom but also one to making a donation.

JOMP was founded in 1986 as a program of music and movement classes for preschoolers and has grown into a regional school serving children, teens and adults of all levels of musical development. The school has grown from its initial enrollment of 12 to over 500 students with a faculty of over 40 musicians. After many years at First Unitarian Church, a fire there in 2000 led to some relocation for the school. After a capital campaign it moved into its own facilities at 1 Gorham St. in 2002. The Joseph & Jordan Shapiro Concert Hall was dedicated in 2016.

Meanwhile, "Upon attaining nonprofit status in 1989, we established our Financial Aid Program, which is at the heart of our mission 'to enrich lives and foster community through accessible music education and performance.'" Wendy Ardizzone said. "Generous support of this program has made it possible for us to build the richly diverse musical community we all cherish and celebrate."

The first JOMPATHON held in January 1992, at First Unitarian Church, ran for six hours with 90 participants and raised \$1,800 toward a \$7,000 total of financial aid raised and awarded in 1991-1992, Wendy Ardizzone said.

The 29th JOMPATHON held in January 2020 at JOMP's Shapiro Concert Hall at Gorham St. ran for 12½ hours with over 200 participants and raised \$10,200 toward \$156,000 total financial aid raised and awarded in 2019-2020 to 108 students, she said.

"(The) goal for our 30th annual JOMPATHON is \$30,000 towards our goal of raising \$200,000 in 2020-2021 in response to the increased need for assistance brought about by the pandemic," Wendy Ardizzone said.



Lucy Walz, who was 5 in 2014, takes in the applause following her performance of "Oh Susanna" on a clarion. T&G File/John Ferrarone

"We decided to make it a very ambitious goal," said Reiner-Williams. A typical JOMPATHON goal was around \$10,000, but this year Joy of Music has tripled the amount, she noted. "We're really aiming high, there's such a need right now."

"I was a beneficiary of that," said Justin Duffy of Joy of Music's financial aid. Now he is a board member and parent of a child taking classes at the music school.

Duffy was a student at Joy of Music from the early 1990s up until 2001. He works for startSOLE, an educational nonprofit.

He also has fond memories of the JOMPATHON events he took part in.

"I loved it," Duffy said. "The school was still at (First) Unitarian. It was always a very cozy place. There was sense of community. Rich and Wendy really care about the community."

Duffy started with the piano but switched over to the trumpet later. "It was an opportunity that opened a lot of doors for me," he said. He toured as a trumpet player in an orchestra to Eastern Europe. Music is still part of his life even though he doesn't now perform publicly. JOMP is still part of his life as well.

"It's exciting to be a board member and steward this into the future," he said.

The pandemic has caused obvious challenges.

"Rich and Wendy (Ardizzone) have kept a really clear vision," Duffy said. "I've been really impressed how strong JOMPS's position has been through the pandemic."

"Joy of Music is moving forward through the pandemic thanks to the amazing teamwork of our staff, the dedication of our board, the creativity and devotion of our faculty, the adventurous spirit of our students, an SBA-PPP loan and Worcester Together COVID-19 Recovery grant, the phenomenal support of individual donors and foundations and the timeless power of music itself," Wendy Ardizzone said...

"Many of us feel grief at losing the daily vitality and inspiration of the in-person connections that have defined the JOMP community for over three decades ...

"One of the things we are giving priority to during the time we are not able to be together in person is doing everything we can to maintain the spirit of the JOMP community. When we made the painful but wise decision to continue teaching online this fall, holding our 30th Annual JOMPATHON virtually rose to the top of the list. Teachers are doing an amazing job keeping their students engaged and nurturing those relationships," Wendy Ardizzone said.

Along with that, "Early donations from individuals to our Staff Capacity Building project made it possible for us to take the first step of adding an additional staff person to our administrative team."

Wendy Ardizzone said Joy of Music "couldn't be happier" with Reiner-Williams as program director. "She personifies the spirit of JOMP. She is managing the process of creating the virtual version of JOMPATHON with the understanding of the technology needed."

Taking on the program director role, "It's been great. It's been very intense, which I really like," Reiner-Williams said.

"I hope I can give back to the school because they gave so much to me. 'The Joy of Music' is very apt. I was always joyful to be here as a kid, as a student."