

As a freelance opera singer and bandleader, my performance schedule has been nearly erased over the past year. I was a frequent guest soloist with Baltimore Symphony Orchestra, Concert Artists of Baltimore, The Occasional Symphony, and dozens of local concert series. My band Outcalls kept a very active schedule and counted on local festivals such as Light City, Baltimore Book Festival, Artscape, Summer in the Squares, Baltimore Magazine Music Festival, WTMD's First Thursday Festival, RemFest, and many others for income and visibility. We regularly organized events in collaboration with our Baltimore colleagues at venues such as Ottobar, Motorhouse, Single Carrot Theater, Metro Gallery, Ram's Head Live, Soundstage, Rye Street Tavern, and more. One of our higher-profile and profitable events was scheduled for March 2020 at the Baltimore Museum of Art, but was cancelled due to COVID restrictions. We typically organize 2-3 tours per year which allows us to serve as ambassadors for Baltimore and provides significant artistic and financial growth. COVID halted all of these appearances and activities. I don't know a single freelance artist in Baltimore who hasn't experienced similar hardship and loss of income.

Clearly, the city of Baltimore and state of Maryland believe that the arts should be funded. They have gone to great lengths to ensure that establishments like the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra survive the financial strain caused by this pandemic. I am aware that musicians in the Baltimore Symphony have not missed a single paycheck during any shutdowns due to their eligibility for PPP, as well as continued financial support from Baltimore City, Baltimore County, and the state of Maryland. They are the top-funded arts organization in the state and were just approved for another \$5.5M bailout (Senate Bill 1065). The BSO and other large-endowed arts organizations will insist they serve Baltimore, yet they are often out of touch with the needs of our community. While I believe the success of these large arts organizations is important to Baltimore, I also believe they must be informed, inspired, and in collaboration with a thriving freelance artist community.

Artists deserve to be supported because frankly, we are in the trenches, living and breathing with the city we serve and uplift. Thank you for your time and attention.

Melissa Wimbish

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