The six-day Gateways Music Festival held August 8-13, 2017 was the best since the founding of Gateways in 1993, both in terms of participating musicians of African descent totaling 163 (including 120 professional and 43 youth), and the size of the combined audience who witnessed the more than 50 solo, chamber music and orchestra performances (6,500 people, the largest ever).

The Gateways Music Festival connects and supports professional classical musicians of African descent and enlightens and inspires communities through the power of performance. Participating musicians came from major American symphony orchestras, college and university music school faculties, and were renowned freelance artists.

Audience attendance at the 2017 full orchestra concert was approximately 1500, the largest ever. Performances took place throughout Rochester in concert halls, houses of worship, libraries, community centers, retirement communities and private homes.

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School-age musicians, with teacher approval and parent permission, were invited to play with professional musicians during the Gateways Music Festival. While no audition was mandated for participation in the program, a teacher recommendation was required. The program was free of charge and opened to all standard orchestral instruments for a maximum number of 50 program participants.

On Thursday, August 10 and Friday, August 11, the young musicians sharpened their skills in large ensemble and sectional rehearsals with Charles Dickerson, conductor of the Inner City Youth Orchestra of Los Angeles. Then on Friday afternoon from 2:00-3:30 PM the students presented a “Side by Side” performance with the Gateways Orchestra at Kodak Hall in the Eastman Theatre, followed by a half-hour Q&A with the Gateways musicians.

The repertoire for the side-by-side performance included:

2. Ludwig van Beethoven: *Symphony No. 9 – Finale* (Arranged by Vernon Leidig)

Additional photos and other information about the Gateways Music Festival can be found at www.gatewaysmusicfestival.org.

Young Musicians Institute, *side-by-side performance* - J. Adam Fenster photos
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Highlights of the 2017 Festival featured music written by Joseph Bologne, the Le Chevalier de St. Georges, a composer of African descent from 18th century Paris, all the way to Jessie Montgomery, a rising star from New York City whose music is taking the world by storm.

A pre-concert lecture by University of Rochester’s Paul Burgett, an authority on the music of African Americans, was enthusiastically received.

The final concert featured the full Gateways Orchestra, conducted by Michael Morgan, performing Rachmaninoff’s Second Piano Concerto with brilliant Canadian pianist Stewart Goodyear; Brahms’ Second Symphony; and Rochester native Adolphus Hailstork’s An American Port of Call.

The survey of responses from the musicians was the most passionate ever and included expressions like these:

“What a blessing! I’ve been waiting for this experience all my life and finally I’m WOKE!”

“My heart and spirit needed this!”

“Gateways means so much more to me than anything I’ve ever been a part of.”

“The week for me was an emotional rollercoaster which left me both exhausted and inspired.”

“The sense of family makes Gateways an extraordinary festival.”

“It boosted my self-confidence as both a person and a musician.”

Volunteer-led and operated during much of its existence, Gateways added its first paid staff position in July 2016 with the appointment of Lee Koonce as its president and artistic director and senior adviser to the dean of the Eastman School of Music.

The success of the 2017 festival was followed by a major, year-ending event – the public announcement that the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation has awarded the Gateways Music Festival in association with the Eastman School of Music a $300,000 grant to support the addition of other staff positions.

This year, 2018, we celebrate an historic milestone— the 25th anniversary of the Gateways Music Festival. The next Gateways Music Festival scheduled for August 6-11, 2019 will continue this unique contribution to music in America.