

## If Music Be the Food...

Carol Rodland



*Pianist Kurt Galván (left) and tenor Anthony Dean Griffey (right,) following their performance. Image provided courtesy of If Music Be the Food...*

Musicians have always been activists. Utilizing our art as a vehicle for social justice and healing is an essential component of our role as artists in society. Each of us heeds the call differently and the creative possibilities are infinite!

For me, nourishment has always been a central theme. Our bodies need nourishment in the form of food, and our souls need it in the form of music. I have been a supporter of food banks since my childhood, when I was inspired by a dear family friend who ran her local food bank in Pennsylvania. When I moved to Rochester, New York, in 2008 to begin teaching at the Eastman School of Music, I was horrified to learn that fifty percent of

the children in my new city were living in poverty and suffering from food insecurity. I wanted to do something to help besides simply writing a check to my local food bank, so I created a model for a concert series which combines three of my passions: raising awareness and support for the hungry, sharing great music with my neighbors in the community, and teaching students about the importance of community service via their art.

I decided to call the concert series "If Music Be the Food..." The rest of the Shakespeare quote from *Twelfth Night* is of course "If music be the food of love, play on!" It felt like the perfect title for a series with this mission. Music, food, love... it's all there!

We had our first concert in 2009 and have had three concerts annually in Rochester ever since. Two of the concerts take place at St. Paul's Episcopal Church and the third concert at Third Presbyterian Church. Both churches are within walking distance of the Eastman School of Music, so that students can participate easily.



*Robin Scott and Thomas Koichi Rodgers (violins), Abrim Kim (cello), and Melissa Matson and Carol Rodland (violins). Image provided courtesy of If Music Be the Food...*

---

The congregations and staff of these churches are enthusiastic supporters of the "If Music Be the Food..." (IMBTF) mission and their Directors of Music, Robert Poovey and Peter DuBois respectively, are invaluable onsite partners.

"If Music Be the Food..." is a fully volunteer endeavor. All of the musicians donate their services, the venues donate the space and print the programs free of charge, and our Eastman community, students, and local volunteers assist with publicity, stage management, and anything else that needs to happen for each concert. IMBTF is not a 501(c)(3). We do not print tickets and there is no fixed price for admission; rather, the audience is asked to bring non-perishable food items or monetary donations of any amount for Foodlink, our Feeding America Food Hub for Western New York. Any money that is raised at the concerts goes directly to Foodlink, and a Foodlink representative is present to speak with the audience at the opening of each concert.

The only "rules" for IMBTF are that the giving be joyful and that participants share only as they wish to share. While I am the "Founder and Artistic Director," I really consider myself to be a mere facilitator, bringing together volunteers for the cause. I encourage the musicians to make suggestions of pieces they are itching to play and I do my



Image provided courtesy of If Music Be the Food...

best to create programs based on their suggestions and availability. The result is often a joyful potpourri/variety show! Occasionally, I choose a theme, if there is a "holiday" to celebrate, such as a specific composer's birthday (we have celebrated Strauss and Mozart, for example), or an instrument (such as the organ—as when St Paul's Episcopal Church had completed a renovation of their mighty Skinner and we felt it warranted a celebration concert!). Since we are now in our eighth season of concerts, I am frequently fielding requests from colleagues a year ahead of time. I also put out a "call" at the end of the season for the next season's concerts, to see who might be interested in participating, and then I partner people if there are not specific requests. I like to be sure we have Eastman faculty and students, members of the Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra, other local musicians, as well as international guests who are coming through town, performing on the concerts. It is truly a community effort, resulting in performances of the highest caliber with a uniquely joyful musician-audience vibe!

I am thrilled that IMBTF is growing and expanding, as colleagues and former students take the IMBTF concept into their own communities and find ways to help and share that fit their environments, wherever they may be. There are full-fledged IMBTF series now in Tampa, FL, led by cellist Scott Kluksdahl, Tucson, AZ, led by violist Candy Amato, Gettysburg, PA, led by violist Adam Cordle, Baltimore, MD, led by pianist Lior Willinger, and Dickinson, ND, led by soprano Kelsey Rogers, as well as recurring IMBTF-inspired events at Grace Church in New York City, led by organist Patrick Allen and at First Presbyterian Church in Rutherford, New Jersey, led by Peggy Hsiao. Details can be found on our simple shared web page ([www.ifmusicbethethefood.com](http://www.ifmusicbethethefood.com)) and also on our Facebook page. My friend Kim Kashkashian's wonderful organization "Music for Food," founded in 2010, was also inspired by the IMBTF concept, and has a tremendous impact both in Boston, where it is based, and also nationally.

*Carol Rodland enjoys an international career as a concert and recording artist and pedagogue. She has held professorships at the Eastman School of Music, New England Conservatory, the Hochschule für Musik "Hanns Eisler" Berlin, and Arizona State University. In Fall 2017, she will join the faculty of The Juilliard School. She founded "If Music Be the Food..." in 2009.*

*For further information, please visit [www.carolrodland.com](http://www.carolrodland.com) and [www.ifmusicbethethefood.com](http://www.ifmusicbethethefood.com).*