

# Marissa Rollins: A GYO Success Story



## **Where are you from, Marissa?**

I was born and raised in Vero Beach, FL, but currently reside in Tampa, FL.

## **At what age did you start playing?**

I began studying violin when I was about 12 years old (I was in sixth grade).

## **When did your relationship start with the GYO?**

It's a peculiar story. I was shopping with my mother in Publix when a woman (whom I came to know as Mrs. Crystal) came to us and asked if I wanted to join her orchestra. At the time, I was also about to start orchestra in middle school so I wanted extra time on the violin. And that's how it all started.

## **Do you have any favorite memories?**

Of course! I fondly remember when GYO hosted a summer camp. It wasn't very long, but they brought in instructors, parents prepared yummy lunches, and afterwards we would hang out by the pool and just be kids. Another great experience was seeing a professional violinist for the first time. I wish I could tell you what she played, but I do remember the way she played with confidence in her beautiful red gown. This last memory isn't about one particular moment. I loved when we as students put together music lists and made our own musical decisions for performances. We would often follow performances with a meal out together which was fun beyond belief.

### **What did you think of the performances you took part in?**

I didn't know it then, but the way the organization sets up performances for students closely mirrors that of the real world. After leaving the orchestra, I knew how to present myself as a musician and what equipment should always be on hand. I also appreciated the variety of venues that we would perform in. From beach resorts to soup kitchens and many places in between. It was instilled in us that no matter the venue you dress appropriately, come early and ready to play.

### **Did you ever take any trips with the GYO?**

I took a several of trips with the orchestra. The one that sticks out most in my memory was playing a program in Melbourne for Congressmen Bill Posey. It was quite a delightful experience.

### **Did you attend the Mike Block String Camp?**

I did indeed.

### **How was that experience and how did it help you?**

I went to Mike Block String Camp four separate years. It was and still is a truly inspiring experience. From my younger perspective, the whole concept of playing all of these different styles of tunes sounded "cool" and was very welcoming. Now, from an educator perspective, I have immense respect and adoration for what this program is trying to do. Exposing students and communities to diverse styles of music, giving students the opportunity to really take ownership over their music-making- it's just fantastic. It opened my mind to all the possibilities that the violin could capture.

### **Was any teacher particularly helpful to you?**

In terms of Mike Block String Camp, I found that all the instructors have something unique to share with students. Many came from an assortment of backgrounds, so it was always intriguing to be under their musical direction. In terms of the Gifford Youth Orchestra, there were many teachers who helped me along the way. During my time there, I was under the tutelage of Sukesha Crosdale, Jeni Goldsmith, Joan Haar, Linda Spiwak and a few others. There were two I found especially helpful. Mrs. Joan Haar continues to provide me with great encouragement and Mrs. Linda Spiwak provided me with superb musical knowledge and violin pedagogy. Overall, the knowledge and support of my middle and high school orchestra director, Matt Stott, has had an enormous impact on me, particularly with my pursuits in music education. The experiences that I had with Mr. Stott at Gifford Middle School (and subsequently

Vero Beach High School) and the Gifford Youth Orchestra worked together to give me a well-rounded and enjoyable musical adolescence.

**How did your parents feel about the fact that you were in the GYO?**

I am quite blessed to have parents who were very supportive of my musical pursuits.

**Do you still have friends from your time with the GYO?**

Indeed so. As we are all heading in different directions, we don't converse regularly, but we made sure to stay in contact with one another.

**What makes you want to come back during the summers when you could be doing so many other things?**

As a music educator in the making, I consider the opportunity to gain experience teaching (where my musical journey first began!) an honor and a pleasure.

**Where are you going to school now and what are you majoring in?**

I am currently a junior at the University of South Florida. I am pursuing a Bachelor's of Science in Music Education.

**Why did you choose that school?**

There were several factors to consider. My high school orchestra director provided me with a list of schools known for strong music education programs and this was on the list. It also had the most welcoming atmosphere of any music school I had visited and was not too far from home.

**What about your school/major/teachers do you like especially?**

I absolutely love the amount of diversity in the university. In my major, I find comfort in having professors that have your best interest in mind and want to see you do well in life.

**Do you perform in school? Outside school?**

As a music major I perform both in and out of school.

**Did anything in your GYO training help prepare you for college?**

Not explicitly, however, GYO gave me a chance to work on my social and communication skills. As an only child, the orchestra gave me the opportunity to have to work and grow with others.

**When do you expect to graduate?**

I will be graduating in May of 2019.

**What are your hopes/plans for the future?**

I plan to graduate and apply for teaching jobs in Florida. Preferably orchestral, but I am certainly flexible. At an undetermined time, I plan on going to graduate school for Arts Administration and engaging in summer festivals so as to continually grow myself as a musician.