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Mr. Tony Fernandez,  
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Via Facsimile: 1-305-273-0072

Dear Tony:

In our telephone and email conversations prior to the Christmas holiday, you expressed doubt about three issues that cause you some hesitation in accepting the validity of the fact that today's GMYS is descended from the AMYS as described in my paper, *Knowing the Score: The Hidden History of the Greater Miami Youth Symphony*. You stated that your reservations are based on discrepancies in the 1976-1977 program notes and that the dates of LaMonaca's youth orchestra could not have been from 1946 to 1955, because of a 1952 *Miami Daily News* article that describes the "debut" of Caesar LaMonaca's youth symphony. You have also asked that the transition of the AMYS into today's GMYS be more fully delineated.

First, let's examine the dates of LaMonaca's youth orchestra. With regard to the August 1, 1952, unsigned photo essay, "Honest Toil - Youth Symphony in Debut" that appeared in the *Miami Daily News* feature, "Photos of the Day," it is clear that whoever wrote the copy misunderstood that this was the orchestra's season debut rather than its very first concert appearance. LaMonaca's youth orchestra met only in summers under the auspices of the Miami Parks and Recreation Department and gave at least two concerts a season, one at the end of July and one at the end of August. Listed below are my sources, all reliable, for disproving that in 1952, LaMonaca's youth orchestra was new:

- **LaMonaca's own words:**  
"Answering your letter in regards to the Youth Orchestra, I founded it in 1946; it went on for *ten years*, sponsored by the city of Miami, for summer (3 months only), played average of three or four concerts during that time at Bayfront Park Bandshell, but frankly, to me it was a pain in the neck..." (Letter from Caesar LaMonaca, dated August 1, 1966 cited in doctoral dissertation of William J. Dahlenburg, *Music in the Culture of Miami: 1920 - 1966*, available in University of Miami School of Music Library).

"And some of them get so devoted they won't stay away – like that young married couple. We've had some that have been with the orchestra the *entire ten years*." (LaMonaca quoted in unsigned *Miami Herald* article, "In Miami Youth Symphony Young Folks Devote Vacations to Music," August 14, 1955, available from Youth Orchestra file, Florida Collection, Miami-Dade Public Library).

- **Statement of a member of LaMonaca's youth orchestra who participated prior to 1952:**

In a telephone interview with **Constance Weldon** on December 14, 2002, she stated that although she could not remember the exact year she joined LaMonaca's youth orchestra, she played in it while in high school and that she graduated from Miami High in **1949**. She recalled playing concerts in the Bayfront Park Bandshell and that rehearsals were held elsewhere. Ms Weldon is a retired dean of undergraduate studies of the University of Miami School of Music and is also a UM professor of music *emerita*. After high school, she returned each summer as a college student to assist LaMonaca with the youth orchestra as a coach and conductor until 1955. (Note: Ms Weldon is mentioned in the 1955 *Herald* article cited above. She told me that it was she and her then husband who were the young married couple to whom LaMonaca referred). Ms Weldon indicated her willingness to speak with you directly concerning this matter.

- **Two newspaper articles** (copies of which are faxed with this letter):

Excerpted from *Youth Called for Try-Outs in Orchestra*,  
June 28, 1953, *Miami Daily News*:

"The Youth Symphony Orchestra, now in its *seventh season*, will stage two concerts at Bayfront Park Bandshell this summer. The first concert will be held near the end of July and the final concert will be held in August."

Excerpted from *In Miami Youth Symphony Young Folks Devote Vacations to Music*

August 14, 1955, *The Miami Herald* (cited previously):

"...the Miami Youth Orchestra, which will wind up *its 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary season* with its final concert Thursday evening, August 25, in the Bayfront Park Bandshell."

"Dozens of Miami young people have devoted summer vacation after summer vacation to rehearsing and performing with this group, since LaMonaca conceived of the orchestra as a 'keep 'em off the streets device' *10 years ago*."

"We've had some (players) that have been with the orchestra *the entire 10 years*."

In the course of the extensive research I did to determine the dates of LaMonaca's orchestra, I found no references at all to it dated 1952 or discovered any reason why that

year might have been significant. The 1952 *Miami Daily News* article was not in the Miami - Dade Public Library's youth orchestra file and that might be because it is factually incorrect. If LaMonaca had indeed founded his youth orchestra in 1952, then the 1953 *Miami Daily News* article should have announced auditions for its second season and the 1955 *Miami Herald* story should have been about its third anniversary. These two items bear out LaMonaca's *own words* and corroborate Ms Weldon's recollections. Thus the preponderance of the evidence, acceptable by either legal or academic standards, supports the 1946-1955 dates for the existence of Caesar LaMonaca's youth symphony. There is no other available contemporary evidence that affirms 1952 as the orchestra's inaugural season.

Second, let us turn to the discrepancies found in the notes of three youth symphony programs from the 1976-1977 season which you have asked me to address. In the first of these, dated December 18, 1976, according to the program notes the orchestra was then in its eighteenth season and correctly lists Robert Strassburg first among previous conductors. That it was the eighteenth season agrees with the 1958 founding of the AMYS, although the date of Strassburg's tenure given as 1959 - 1961 is slightly in error. According to the second of these programs, dated March 22, 1977, the orchestra is still in its eighteenth season, but in the listing of previous conductors, Caesar LaMonaca's name has been inserted ahead of Strassburg's with the years 1949 - 1954 given as the dates of LaMonaca's purported conductorship. Then in the third program, dated June 12, 1977, the orchestra is suddenly in its 25<sup>th</sup> (italics mine) season, with LaMonaca's dates given as 1952-1954. The dates attributed to LaMonaca are inconsistent in both 1977 programs and the math does not agree with the supposed years of the orchestra's existence. If LaMonaca was being credited being conductor in 1949, then how could the orchestra have been in its eighteenth season in March 1977? How did orchestra somehow age seven years a mere three months later according to the June 1977 program?

Because these aforementioned "alterations" have no basis in fact and I have already proved beyond a reasonable doubt that LaMonaca's and Strassburg's youth orchestras were entirely separate entities with no connection to each other, the appearance of LaMonaca's name in the list of previous conductors on these programs is a misstatement. With the exceptions of the opening sentence in the third program and the listing of previous conductors in the two 1977 programs, the wording of the program notes for all three are otherwise unchanged. Obviously, a deliberate decision was made to attribute the effort of Robert Strassburg to Caesar LaMonaca, but by whom and why? Because of the passage of time, there may be no answers to these questions. The conductor at the time, Robert Bobo passed away more than two years ago. Joyce Wells, then president of the executive board claimed in a telephone conversation on December 15, 2002, that she could not remember why Caesar LaMonaca was suddenly credited with having founded the GMYS that was formerly the AMYS. The program notes are unsigned, but whoever wrote them neglected to alter the dates to agree with the orchestra's years of supposed existence. This is a clue that some manipulation of the truth occurred. As music director and president of the executive board, Dr. Bobo and Mrs. Wells, respectively, should share some responsibility for what was written because the program notes presumably would not have been printed without their approval. Whether their motives were benign or

sinister to have permitted this, I cannot say nor can I venture a guess as to what benefit may have been intended. Whoever did the tampering must have used the previously cited erroneous *Miami Daily News* article as "evidence" that today's GMYS was founded by LaMonaca in 1952, although his orchestra is never referred to in that story as the "Greater Miami Youth Symphony" – it is only called "the Youth Symphony." It is apparent that the distortion of the history of today's GMYS began in 1977 as reflected in the March and June programs. That the "story" has been told and retold time and time again does not make it valid nor does it trump the truth.

Third, you asked for more evidence of transition of the AMYS into today's GMYS. You already have a copy of the November 24, 1972 item from the *Miami Herald* in which it was announced that the AMYS had been renamed the GMYS that I faxed to you on December 19, 2002, with the pages from William Dahlenburg's dissertation. You said that you would like to see programs from 1972 and 1973 that you believe would be necessary to show continuity. To locate programs from more than thirty years ago is a difficult, but not impossible task. Arthur and I are working on locating orchestra members from that period who had the foresight to have saved some programs. To do this will take more time than we feel we have, given Dr. Strassburg's age and the precarious state of his health. While we will continue in our search for these programs, I would respectfully point out that there is sufficient available evidence to prove that today's GMYS is directly descended from the AMYS:

- **The 1976-1977 programs:** The text of the program notes refer to the "various changes of location, *name* (italics mine), administration, and conductors." With the exception of the wrongly included name of Caesar LaMonaca in the two 1977 programs, **all the previous conductors listed were associated with the AMYS.** (Note: The orchestra's name change occurred well before its affiliation with the University of Miami was terminated by budgetary constraints caused by the School of Music's expansion in 1976. The Greater Miami name may have been chosen to reflect the name of Miami's professional symphony, "The Greater Miami Philharmonic." Among the AMYS conductors who were members of the Philharmonic were Philip Fink, Charles Campbell, Willard Ray and Robert Bobo).
- In a June 10, 1977, *Miami News* article "The Youth Symphony Played on her Heartstrings" by Mary Jane Fine that is about Joyce Wells as president (sic) of the "Youth Symphony," Mrs. Wells described the orchestra as having been treated like a "stepchild." The "story" of the orchestra is briefly touched upon...that "ever since the City of Miami Parks Department gave it life in 1952, the non-profit group has been left on the doorstep of numerous parent organizations – *the University of Miami* (italics mine)..." The only youth symphony with which the University of Miami had any relationship was the AMYS, and in relating that to the *Miami News* reporter, Mrs. Wells has, inadvertently perhaps, but nonetheless, provided another example that confirms the transition of the AMYS into today's GMYS.

- In a *Miami Herald* article dated May 14, 1992, by Eva A. Morgan, "Concert to Mark 40 Years of Talent," the writer recounts the "story" of origins of today's GMYS: "The ensemble, originally known as the *All-Miami Youth Symphony* (italics mine), was started by Caesar Lomonica (sic) in 1952." It is interesting that as late as 1992, that the truth about the orchestra's antecedents, however garbled, lingered.
- On the issue of continuity, Mrs. Wells made the claim in our previously referenced telephone conversation, that today's GMYS began with her and that she felt that should be credited as its founder. With all due respect to Mrs. Wells, I am sure that she made many valuable contributions to the orchestra, but she did not start it *ex nihilo*. In the 1977 article cited above, the orchestra clearly was already in existence and she did not say she had founded it. She deserves recognition for registering the orchestra with the state as a non-profit corporation, but it should be noted that the orchestra, from its inception in 1958, was always not-for-profit. Changes in conductors, players and board members, and even of name, are to be expected in an organization of this nature since it involves students and their parents. But a new entity is not created with any of these changes. According to her reasoning, the GMYS would now only be approaching its 26<sup>th</sup> season. Consider that the New York Philharmonic recently celebrated its 160<sup>th</sup> anniversary and it did not start out with that name and has had numerous changes in conductors, administration and players over the years.
- Arthur and I also spoke, separately, with both Mr. and Mrs. Irwin Futerfas, who were board members. Mr. Futerfas succeeded Mrs. Wells as president of the orchestra's board. Neither of the Futerfas could remember how LaMonaca's name came to be included in the list of conductors on the program. Mrs. Futerfas said that board members like her were more concerned with the mechanics of running the orchestra, but suggested that perhaps whoever made that change may have done so in the belief that the LaMonaca name had more "cachet." Both Mrs. Wells and Mr. & Mrs. Futerfas remarked that a lot of their memorabilia, including youth symphony ephemera, had been lost during Hurricane Andrew.

I fully realize that this "story" has been regarded as fact for a long time and that it is difficult to accept that it is untrue, but the reality is that Caesar LaMonaca did not start any orchestra in 1952 and had no involvement with the founding of the AMYS or its successor. To maintain this "story" does not serve LaMonaca's memory well. It is wrong to credit him with something he did not do when his other many contributions to Miami's musical life were of far greater significance.

The tampering with the orchestra's history occurred long before your term as president, so it is not your fault or the executive board's. You and the board, however, now have the opportunity to do the right thing. There is no advantage in perpetuating an incorrect history, but much to be gained in reclaiming the orchestra's rich legacy. Today's GMYS can still make legitimate claim to being the oldest youth symphony in *continuous*

existence in Miami-Dade County and probably as one of the oldest in the Southeast. The fall of 2003 will mark the youth symphony's 45<sup>th</sup> season, a milestone that could be celebrated with a gala "homecoming" concert. Why not invite some of the orchestra's many alumni who have distinguished careers in music to return and perform with the orchestra? (I am sure Arthur would be glad to help you locate them). Such an event would be a wonderful occasion to raise public awareness and funds in the most positive ways. I also suggest that this would be a good time to recognize Dr. Strassburg as founder and to pay tribute to Caesar LaMonaca as well with annual awards established in their names to be presented to outstanding members of the orchestra.

In conclusion, I would like to make it clear that it was not my intention in undertaking to correct the record to cause any embarrassment to today's GMYS or to disparage Caesar LaMonaca. My aim, as a founding member of the AMYS who is profoundly grateful for the experience, was only to restore the youth symphony's rightful history. Whatever may have transpired in the early months of 1977 had no basis in fact and has served only to deny Robert Strassburg his rightful due and the orchestra its true origins. Today's GMYS cannot look to the future with confidence if encumbered by a past that is based on falsehood.

You stated in your email of December 12, 2002, that you agree that the present day GMYS had its roots in the AMYS founded in 1958 by Robert Strassburg. It is my belief that the foregoing is sufficient to resolve any concerns you and the board may have so that proper acknowledgment may be accorded him while he is still living.

Sincerely,

Sharon K. Higgins