

Michael Manzella Award 2026



Each year at Yale graduation, the Michael Manzella Award is presented to a senior who, "through the qualities of kindness, dedication and courage, most inspired his/her classmates." Presenting the 2026 award to Genevieve Christina Kim (center) are Joan and Frank Manzella, joined by Michal Beth Dinkler and Sarah Mahurin of Yale's Timothy Dwight College.

MMF & Music at "the Game"



Frank, Tim and Carol Ann Manzella celebrate with 2025 MMF Fellow Tabatha Mireya Stewart



On November 22nd, 2025, MMF co-hosted a tailgate with Michael's former a cappella group, The Society of Orpheus and Bacchus, before the historic Yale-Harvard football game in New Haven, CT. Revelers from far and wide gathered around to enjoy the group's singing, including a touching rendition of "Georgia on my Mind" that Michael arranged when he was music director of the group in the 1990s.

FROM THE CHAIRMAN

Fellow MMF Supporters,

We are thrilled to share with you one of the greatest giving opportunities in MMF's history.

Our longtime friend **Sonny Kalsi**, who knew Michael well, has made a **six-figure commitment** to MMF in Michael's honor. Sonny's friendship with the Manzella family has endured for more than four decades, and his generosity is a deeply meaningful tribute to Michael. MMF will use Sonny's gift to permanently endow one Summer Fellowship so, **in perpetuity**, one student each summer will have the opportunity to pursue a meaningful project in Michael's memory — allowing his spirit to touch generations of young people.

Sonny has also generously offered to **match additional donations to MMF, dollar-for-dollar, up to \$50,000**. We hope you will consider joining him in supporting the Foundation and helping us build on this wonderful new chapter!

This matching gift opportunity comes during a particularly dynamic time in MMF's history. This year, six exceptional Yale undergraduates received MMF Summer Fellowships, pursuing projects ranging from cancer research and music to theater, education and youth development. Their diverse experiences reflect the spirit of the program: **giving talented young people the opportunity to pursue meaningful work, develop their talents and make a difference**. Over 32 years, through the generosity of our community of dedicated donors, MMF has been able to fund the incredible work of 138 Summer Fellows.

At the heart of all that we do is the desire to **keep Michael's spirit alive — his curiosity, creativity, kindness, love of music and learning, and remarkable courage**. Every Fellowship, grant and initiative gives us another opportunity to carry those qualities forward and to make a positive difference in the lives of others.

On behalf of the MMF Board, thank you for your friendship, generosity and belief in our mission. We are incredibly proud of what this community has built together, and grateful that Michael's spirit continues to inspire it.

With heartfelt gratitude,

Frank J. Manzella

Frank J. Manzella
Chairman

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With \$25,000 in Fellowship funding, six undergraduate students advanced MMF's mission around the world

Through our signature Summer Fellowship program, MMF invested \$25,000 in the work of six Yale undergraduate students whose projects will have lasting impact. Learn about them in their own words:



Abigail Murphy
Internship with the
Cape Cod Theatre
Project

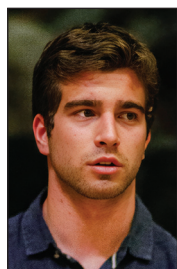
Every summer, over the course of a four-week period, the Cape Cod Theatre Project (CCTP) brings four new playwrights to the Cape to develop their work. It was wonderful to see the breadth of approaches from each creative team. As the staff for the program, each week the interns would create programs, advertise, work the box office, and aid the creative team in their transition to Cape Cod. In addition to the rigor of staffing the July season, the interns also developed their own original work which we produced and performed at a showcase the final week of the summer. **I wrote a one woman show titled, "bleh he he". I had never in my life considered writing a one woman show, but the CCTP let me explore this new medium.** The greatest gift of the program was talking with industry professionals. As a rising senior at Yale, I am crafting my approach to the job market after Yale. The equity actors, directors, and playwrights I met at the program were knowledgeable, and eager to offer advice and guidance on the future.



Jacob Leshnower
Participating in the
Eastern Festival of
Music, a five-week
orchestral institute

This summer at the Eastern Festival of Music (EFM) in Greensboro, North Carolina, was a **profoundly transformative period for my artistic growth.** Immersed in a rigorous five-week schedule of daily rehearsals, sectionals, and public performances, I had

the privilege of tackling major orchestral repertoire under the guidance of renowned conductor Gerard Schwarz and alongside a dedicated community of musicians from across the world. My summer at EFM was particularly successful because I was selected as a winner of the Concerto Competition. I later found out that I was selected by a unanimous vote of the judges, including Maestro Schwarz, who called my playing "phenomenal." I was also fortunate to be the sole winner of the percussion mock audition — a multi-round blind audition that simulated the feeling of a professional orchestra audition. **A valuable lesson I learned from these two major wins is to step outside my comfort zone, not to jump to conclusions, and to be optimistic.** Taken together, these experiences not only prepared me thoroughly for graduate school audition season but also gave me a welcome confidence boost. I am incredibly grateful to the Manzella Fellowship for making this wonderfully enriching experience possible.



Yiannis Scotiniadis
Cancer Research in the
Isaacs Lab at Yale

My primary project this summer concerned the **design and analysis of CRISPR/CRISPRi Cas9/dCas9 proteins that can be switched on or off by allosteric activation.** Over the course of this summer, I characterized the genome engineering and inhibitory capabilities of three Cas9 and fifty-five dCas9 CRISPR/CRISPRi variants, and identified six successful constructs that demonstrate biologically orthogonal gene disruption and inhibition. My next steps now focus on directly demonstrating the ability of these successful constructs to kill cancer cells in vitro, while leaving uninduced cells alive and healthy. This summer was, of course, not without setbacks. **Persevering in troubleshooting**

a difficult experiment, and finally seeing **success as a result of this persistence is an inalienable experience to all scientists.** Additionally, a separate project I began this summer was the **repair and upgrading of a central piece of lab instrumentation** that has been in disuse for many years. This allowed me to use some of my background as a Physicist/engineer! I wrote custom code and interviewed lab members over many iterations to understand what new and expanded capabilities they wanted this machine to have, such that they could extract the most utility out of it as possible.

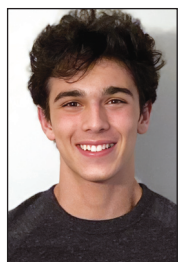


Justin Wang
Attending the
European American
Musical Alliance
conducting program

With the help of the MMF, I spent weeks this summer in Paris with the European American Musical Alliance (EAMA), studying classical conducting under Professor Mark Shapiro. Being able to work on masterpieces like Brahms' *Symphony No 2* and Debussy's *La Mer* at the podium allowed me to vividly hear the different colors of the orchestration, and subsequently taught me how to bring them out as much as possible. **It was evident that every single gesture I made as a conductor had substantial influence on the interpretation that the orchestra would deliver.** Moreover, I took modules in counterpoint, keyboard harmony, and analysis, which taught me respectively how to construct different musical voices, hear them simultaneously, and what these voices meant in the grander scheme of creating 'music'. Most importantly, I was able to experience all of this surrounded by talented and passionate musicians from all over the world. **This opportunity to develop myself holistically as a conductor, and to meet so many other brilliant**

MANZELLA SUMMER FELLOWS

musicians, has been invaluable in launching my journey as a conductor. I am excited to imminently put these new skills into practice as I embark on a gap year as Music Director of the Yale Whiffenpoofs!



Jaden Nicita
Bringing an original one-act play to the Edinburgh Festival Fringe

This summer, I brought my original one-act play, *Lineage* to the Edinburgh Festival Fringe. Watching the show move from a script into a living performance with audiences every night was one of the most rewarding experiences of my artistic life. **The Fringe taught me that artists cannot simply wait for opportunities to appear; they have to actively share their work with the world and invite people into the conversation.** We received many wonderful audience responses and reviews, including from the founder of Blooloop, one of the largest immersive entertainment companies in the world, who wrote: "I saw 29 shows this year, and

this was the best." While the piece began from my own experiences, it was created for people who have lived through addiction, family instability, or the complicated process of loving someone through those struggles. Seeing that it found that audience was the most rewarding part of the entire journey. Our next step is to continue developing *Lineage* through a Yale production. **This experience has expanded my understanding of what it means to create theater and has left me eager to continue building work that connects with people beyond the walls of a single performance space.**



Christian Baca
Running a youth-centered educational program to cultivate critical civic skills, historical awareness, and leadership among young people in El Salvador.

This project sought to strengthen the community-organizing and educational capacities of Salvadoran youth through two complementary initiatives: (A) revitalizing popular-education

methodology within a community-based language school, and (B) piloting capacity-building workshops for youth organizers. This work was carried out in partnership with the Centro de Intercambio y Solidaridad (CIS), an organization committed to advancing the political empowerment of communities. At the center of this project are the young people who will grow up knowing no political horizon beyond the authoritarian reach of President Nayib Bukele's government. The first project's major components included 1) **creating an English School library** and 2) **redesigning teacher training to include a socio-historical immersion program with community partners.** The second project worked with youth who are developing social-justice projects that respond to local needs, including environmental-advocacy initiatives and academic-enrichment programs. **This opportunity reaffirmed the importance of collective hope.** It also deepened my understanding that unequal access to opportunity should compel us to respond more sympathetically to the suffering of others—especially when people have been stripped not only of material resources, but also of the language, memory, and collective capacity needed to articulate their experiences and demands.

GRANTMAKING 2026

MMF Supports Partner Organizations Dedicated to Serving Others

DreamYard

www.dreamyardprep.com

MMF granted \$7000 to DreamYard, serving the Bronx, NY, through multiple programs including DreamYard Prep. With a mission to cultivate Scholarship, Artistry, and Character within its students, DreamYard Prep provides a rigorous arts-integrated curriculum that emphasizes problem solving and critical thinking while deepening students' understanding of all subject areas.



www.friendsofkaren.org

Friends of Karen serves families with a child who has been diagnosed with and is actively in treatment for cancer or another life-threatening illness. MMF's grant of \$7000 helps Friends of Karen provide supportive services and financial assistance for affected children, their siblings, and parents, at no cost to the families.



www.hearyoursong.org

Hear Your Song serves to amplify and empower children and teens through the process of music making.

Whether they want to write, sing, or produce the music themselves, HYS has helped its students to be creative and not let their illnesses define who they can be. To make it accessible to all, HYS makes all of their programming free of charge. MMF is proud to once again support HYS with a \$6000 grant.





OUR MISSION



Michael Manzella
(1971 - 1993)

Michael Manzella, a gifted scholar, musician and athlete, succumbed to a two-year battle with cancer in 1993 at the age of 21. He left behind a legacy of music, love and inspirational courage. This Foundation was conceived to honor that legacy.

The Michael Manzella Foundation is a not-for-profit corporation dedicated to activities in education, children's causes, cancer research and the arts. We support those individuals and institutions that demonstrate the leadership and potential to make significant contributions in these areas. These goals are consistent with the struggles and achievements of Michael's life.

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