

## Dear Friends of the Youth Symphony and Classical Orchestra,

Serving as the Music Director of the Grand Rapids Youth Symphony and Classical Orchestra over the past three years has been one of the greatest honors and joys of my life. These seasons together have been filled with music, discovery, and a profound sense of shared purpose. I have had the privilege of working with some of the brightest young minds and most passionate souls of our time.

Together, we have brought to life some of the most formidable and thrilling works in the orchestral canon—Stravinsky's *Firebird*, Holst's *The Planets*, Sibelius' First Symphony, Mendelssohn's *Reformation* Symphony, and so many more. Each performance was not just a concert, but a journey of heart and spirit. One of the proudest moments of our time together was the side-by-side subscription concert with the Grand Rapids Symphony—a historic collaboration that had not occurred in over a decade.

What we have accomplished as an organization fills me with immense pride, but what moves me even more deeply is the growth, dedication, and brilliance of each individual musician. You have inspired me, challenged me, and reminded me why we make music in the first place: to express what words cannot, to connect, and to serve something greater than ourselves.

I have always encouraged our musicians to follow their artistic dreams courageously—and now, I find myself doing the same. Beginning this September, I will be joining the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra as their new Assistant Conductor. While this is an exciting new chapter for me, it is not easy to say goodbye. Grand Rapids has become a home to my heart, and I will carry with me the lessons, memories, and spirit of this extraordinary community.

I leave, however, with full confidence in the future. I am thrilled that Dr. Joel Schut will be taking the baton as the next Music Director. Joel has long been a source of inspiration to me. Each year, I invited him to rehearse with the youth symphony, and the students' glowing responses spoke volumes. His deep roots in this organization—as a violinist who once played in this very orchestra—and his unwavering commitment to musical excellence make him the perfect person to lead this ensemble into its next chapter. With Joel at the helm of the Youth Symphony and Kristen Shoup continuing her extraordinary leadership of the Classical Orchestra, I have no doubt that this organization will flourish in the years ahead.

Thank you for the music, the memories, and the magic. I am forever grateful.

With all my heart,



**Duo Shen**

Music Director

Grand Rapids Youth Symphony & Classical Orchestra