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Arts

Arts in progress: IMA chosen as ‘cultural hub’ for pilot WPA-inspired program for artists

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The Institute for the Musical Arts (IMA) in Goshen was recently chosen as one of six cultural hubs in western Massachusetts in a pilot program called Artists at Work (AAW), which is inspired by the Great Depression-era Works Progress Administration to give artists resources to produce new art in the midst of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

Ann Hackler, executive director of IMA, said the nonprofit institute focuses on teaching, performing and recording music to women and girls as well as providing a sense of how the music business works. IMA was co-founded by Hackler and June Millington, former guitarist/frontwoman of the 1970s pioneering all-female rock band Fanny.

AAW is a national initiative that was created by the FreshGrass Foundation in collaboration with THE OFFICE performing arts + film, an independent curator and production outlet based in New York and London. IMA was selected for the pilot program based on input from several of the musical institute’s alumni, Hackler said.

“They selected us because we’re grassroots, and we’re small and we’re community-based,” she said. “We work with women, and we’re multicultural. We have been from the beginning.”

The pilot program also features different artistic mediums across a wide range of venues and organizations such as performing arts theater Jacob’s Pillow in Becket, contemporary visual art museum MASS MoCA in North Adams, Images Cinema in Williamstown, novelist Edith Wharton’s home-turned-museum The Mount in Lenox and Hancock Shaker Village in Pittsfield, according to a press release from AAW.

For IMA's contribution to the project, former student and now current summer faculty member Naia Kete will create a six-song extended play recording that tells the real stories of trauma and healing via a collaboration with youth educators from the Holyoke-based Alianza Project, a community trauma healing and youth leadership organization.

Hackler and Millington founded IMA in 1986, and now "we're prepping the next generation so that we can hand it off," Hackler said. "Naia was one of our very first students. She recorded her first album here. She's one of the first alumni to then teach in our summer programs. This is helping us even more be able to support her in ways that will eventually come back around and support IMA as an institution."



Kete is a multi-instrumentalist, singer and songwriter who performs under her own name as well as with urban reggae band SayReal. She plans on creating a series of monthly mini documentaries for the EP via research and interviews before writing and recording the songs at IMA.

She has spoken to several of the young adults whose personal stories she will share in song form, which include trauma such as bullying in school, sexual violence and racism.

"Just being able to base a song off an individual's story and actually know that individual carries a weight," Kete said, "to have it be based on something that's so vulnerable feels like an immense responsibility. I say that with the utmost respect for the challenge and the work. It feels very inspiring."

Kete said she finds it "incredibly moving and humbling" to be a part of the pilot program.

"It's an artist's dream to be employed and paid for doing the art that you love to do, that you really believe in, and also working with organizations that are doing really incredible work for their communities," she said.

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