Good Evening everyone and welcome to the 2016 Hartt Gala! I’m Betsy Cooper, Dean of The Hartt School at the University of Hartford. I am so pleased to be with you this evening as we come together to celebrate the achievements of our brilliant students and our outstanding faculty and staff.

This is a night for reveling. And it is also the perfect opportunity to reflect upon the vital importance of the performing arts to our region and nation.

We now live in a world where access to creative expression and rigorous arts education is a matter of socio-economic status. As the income gap widens, we are witnessing a precipitous decline in arts literary, a trend with serious consequences to students’ learning capacities, to their personal fulfillment, and to the cultural and economic vibrancy of our nation’s communities.

It is not an understatement to say that Art saves lives. We know this to be true. Hartt Alumnus, Ryan Speedo Green’s recent biography reminds us that without a pathway to performance and the encouragement of mentors, his life story could have been a tragic one, rather than one where a dream to sing on the stage of the Metropolitan Opera became a reality.

The Arts break down barriers—helping to heal and bolster our communities. The Arts provoke us to think differently, and to feel deeply, paving inroads to tolerance and understanding. The Arts renew, and transform us.

Learning in and through the Arts is essential to the development of an enlightened and engaged citizenry and to a globally competitive workforce.

We have to assure that our students’ creativity, individuality, and confidence are nurtured, and that they possess the kind of critical and imaginative thinking, adaptability, and global perspective that prepares them to thrive in an environment of complexity.

Our faculty is actively engaged in the development of new curricula, professional partnerships, and study abroad opportunities to prepare our students for success and to be leaders in their fields.

We are also working to enrich our communities. This year, the Hartt School Community Division is providing an innovative and unparalleled education in music and dance to more than 2,800 students of all ages, including students with exceptionalities. Hartt collegiate division students engage and enliven our community through their work as student teachers and through outreach activities at Aetna, Hartford Hospital, assisted living residences, libraries, and through our Hartt@Home program, as well as on campus.
One of the hallmarks of the Hartt education is collaborative and interdisciplinary performance opportunities: composers writing for theatre and dance, dancers working in opera productions, musicians playing across multiple genres in a wide array of ensemble types.

This evening gives us the opportunity to enjoy the fruits of those collaborative endeavors and to bask in the achievements and potential of our students. We also take pride in the dedication and expertise of our faculty and staff, whose instruction and mentorship serve as the foundation for excellence. And, we applaud the significant impact on the cultural richness in our state and region made by our alumni, who serve our community in myriad ways.

Most importantly, we have come together tonight to help ensure a vital future for The Hartt School so that we may continue to serve our community in essential and impactful ways. To do so we must build up endowments for student and programmatic support so that the Hartt school can continue to provide sustained financial assistance to talented and aspiring performing artists, educators, scholars, and entrepreneurs, regardless of their economic status.

I thank you for being here tonight to help us in achieving this important goal.