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## A Whole New Kind of Fight Song

Singer Haley Tyrrell puts music to work for healing and encouragement

MAY 6, 2021 BY LYNN ADAMS WILKINS

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UM senior Haley Tyrrell (center) participates in the annual RebelTHON fundraiser for Children's of Mississippi with fellow members of Pi Beta Phi sorority. Tyrrell was a team captain for RebelTHON. Submitted photo

OXFORD, Miss. – Sometimes, the most rewarding journeys can't be planned; instead, they take direction from opportunities and experiences that come up along the way. So it has been for senior Haley Tyrrell, whose journey began in Ridgewood, New Jersey, where she grew up, and took her through a battle with cancer before leading her to music and to the [University of Mississippi](#).

At Ole Miss, Tyrrell's opportunities expanded to match her boundless spirit.

From solo recitals to choral performances to her work with Pi Beta Phi and the [Living Music Resource](#), Tyrrell has used each experience to end up right where she wants to be: teaching in the classroom with a brand-new project, the [Fight Song Project](#), that uses music to connect students who are isolated – by hospital stays, as she once was, or even by COVID, as everyone has been.

Tyrrell said she created the Fight Song Project to help people connect and stay strong by writing their own fight songs.

"Fight can mean many things," she said. "We all have obstacles we need to battle, things we need to overcome."

A fight song expresses those battles and energizes the singer to keep going.

"I am a cancer survivor and an amputee," said Tyrrell, whose experience taught her a lot about staying strong. "I lost my leg to cancer in 2009, and music played a huge role in my recovery."

A serious athlete as a child, Tyrrell discovered she had bone cancer when a broken leg took her to the hospital. The hospital ward was a pretty lonely place, she learned, but music was always an escape. Afterward, she got involved with theater and discovered a love for music and for performing.

"That's why I'm a music education major today," she said.

Tyrrell piloted the Fight Song Project this spring; children met via Zoom to express themselves and socialize with others in a nurturing and creative environment. They worked together with Tyrrell to develop content, write lyrics, compose music and record it.

"All the lyrics came from poems that they wrote," Tyrrell said. The resulting song celebrated the love and

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OXFORD, Miss. – The University of Mississippi is asking the community to help spread a little joy this holiday season by donating to the 25th annual Books and Bears program. Donations such as toys, books, dolls, bicycles and other children's play items are being accepted through Dec. 14. All donations will be collected and sorted

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### Mississippi Excellence in Coaching Fellowship Aims to Build Leaders

OXFORD, Miss. – Twenty-five inaugural recipients of the Mississippi Excellence in Coaching Fellowship – a program hosted by the University of Mississippi School of Education in partnership with the Mississippi Association of Coaches and the Mississippi High School Activities Association – are expected to increase their impact on student-athletes and their communities. The coaching fellowship

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support the students get from their families.



**Haley Tyrrell launched the Fight Song Project, which uses music to connect students who are isolated, in the Oxford and Lafayette County school districts. The project helps participants stay strong by writing their own fight songs. Submitted photo**

"Now they have a song they can return to, to empower them to get through whatever they're dealing with in their own lives."

The idea for the project crystallized when Tyrrell learned about Carnegie Hall's Lullaby Project, a songwriting initiative that pairs pregnant women and new parents in correctional facilities, foster care and homeless shelters with professional artists to write and sing personal lullabies for their babies.

"That was a huge inspiration for me," she said. "I thought how helpful it would have been for me to be able to express myself through music during my experience with cancer."

"This process of expression is great for kids because they are dealing with so much. Through the Fight Song Project, they get to take control and create their own song."

As a student, Tyrrell worked as an undergraduate assistant for the Living Music Resource, which connects students to real-world experience in music professions and arts-based community service. She learned about the Lullaby Project when LMR participated in the 2018 International Teaching Artist Collaborative Conference hosted

by Carnegie Hall, Lincoln Center and Dreamyard.

"Through LMR, I was also able to gain professional experience in the music industry, collaborate with my peers and take ownership for projects I was a part of," she said. "One highlight was being the student director of LMR's first-ever cabaret competition. I coordinated auditions, selected acts, created a program and arranged rehearsals for performers."

Being part of the cabaret competition gave Tyrrell skills she needed to start the Fight Song Project and the confidence to know she could do it. She was supported by her voice professor, Nancy Maria Balach and assisted by LMR colleague Alexis Rose and UM music alumnae Hannah Gadd Ardrey.

"Students absolutely loved participating in the Fight Song Project," said Ardrey, choral director at Lafayette High School. "They enjoyed working with Haley because she was funny and personable. She made the project easy to understand and a fun process."

In the future, Tyrrell sees herself teaching music and continuing to develop the Fight Song Project, eventually taking it to pediatric hospitals, where she has been volunteering on and off since she was a patient herself. After graduation, she'll start working right away in New York City, teaching with Teach for America and attending graduate school.

"In creating the Fight Song Project, Haley drew on her personal background, her music education training and career development opportunities to create something unique," said Balach, professor of **music** and artistic director of LMR. "She even successfully adapted her idea to a virtual format due to the pandemic. Her ability to connect with people helped build trust with her Fight Song students."

"Haley is an inspiration because she embodies how you define who and what you want to be, and she demonstrates that in all areas of her life."

Thomas Ardrey, choral director at Oxford High School, agrees. Tyrrell did student teaching in his classroom during the spring 2021 semester.

"Haley's vibrant, outgoing personality allowed her to quickly build a relationship with our students," he said. "I know that with her personality and high level of musicianship, she will become a valued member of our profession."

Student teaching provided valuable experience and feedback, Tyrrell said.

"The students are so excited to learn and make music," she said. "Everyone welcomed me with open arms, and I am definitely going to miss them when I graduate."

While a music student at Ole Miss, Tyrrell's singing talents landed her in the **UM Concert Singers**, which was a treasured part of her student experience. She particularly credits director Donald Trott with helping her improve her performance.

With a college career full of rehearsals, performances, music classes, studio lessons, recitals, special

"James Meredith: Breaking the Barrier," a collection of essays edited by UM professor of journalism Kathleen Wickham, honors this historic milestone with

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**Music major Haley Tyrrell (right) celebrates completing her senior recital with Nancy Maria Balach, her voice professor. Submitted photo**

projects in music through LMR and, in the spring of 2021, student teaching, Tyrrell still had energy to spread across campus.



**Haley Tyrrell, chapter president of Pi Beta Phi sorority, celebrates bid day. Submitted photo**

She served as a team captain for RebelTHON, a College of Liberal Arts Student Council member and an active member of both Lambda Sigma and Order of Omega honor societies and the American Choral Directors Association.

"As part of my Miss Ole Miss campaign, I hosted Ole Miss's first-ever 'Gold Out,' where I encouraged the student body to 'Go Gold' in order to raise money and awareness for pediatric cancer research," Tyrrell said.

"All of these organizations and experiences enriched my college career, but the most memorable and impactful experience was serving as chapter president of Pi Beta Phi fraternity for women."

As president, Tyrrell met the responsibility of leading 400 women, ensuring positive and productive chapter life, and overseeing all aspects of the chapter.

"Leading through the uncertainties of the pandemic taught me important communication, problem-solving and team-leading skills," she said.

"From implementing COVID-19 protocols to coordinating socially distanced and virtual events, my term was not what I expected, but I learned more about myself and grew more than I had in my entire college career. I wouldn't change it for the world and would do it over again in a heartbeat."

Tyrrell's strength comes from seeing the possibilities instead of being discouraged by the challenges – whether she's leading her sorority through a pandemic, excelling academically, musically and in her student teaching experience, or creating the Fight Song Project to connect and encourage people through music.

Because when it comes to facing life's battles, Haley Tyrrell wrote the fight song.

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