This past month, four of our brothers (Hunter Odom, Ian Labreck, Robert Chambers, and Hunter Hulsey) had the pleasure of attending the Phi Mu Alpha National Convention in New Orleans. They had an incredible time, and we as a chapter wanted to communicate with you and share some insight into their experiences. I hope you enjoy what they have to say, and I look forward myself to hearing the insights they gained during the convention!

Warren Lawson
Alumni Relations Officer
Phi Mu Alpha, Epsilon Lambda
Brothers,

I write this letter in a sense of awe and gratitude following my experiences at the 2015 Phi Mu Alpha Sinfonia National Convention in New Orleans. The days I spent in the Crescent City with Robert Chambers, Hunter Hulsey, and Ian Labreck were filled with fellowship between brothers, discussions on Sinfonia’s founders’ vision for our fraternity, incredible musical experiences, and much more. Not only did our fraternity reflect on and honor our history this weekend, but we made history as well.

The 2015 convention was based on the theme “Sing as One,” and aimed to push brothers in Phi Mu Alpha to realize their potential when they work together to fulfill the Object in our Chapters, Provinces, and at a national level. The Epsilon Lambda brothers who attended spent much of the week talking about our chapter at UGA, and forming aspirations for the coming year. I am personally extremely excited about getting to work in August!

What would a Sinfonia National Convention be without incredible music? Over the course of the convention, the fraternity put on three separate concerts for the attendees and the people of New Orleans. On Thursday evening, the 800+ brothers in attendance gathered in the St. Louis Cathedral in Jackson Square to take in a concert put on by the Sinfonia Orchestra, conducted by Robert Hasty, Iota, and the Men of Song Chorus, conducted by Brother Brian Stratton, Delta Omega / Alpha Alpha. The concert was attended by not only the brothers at convention, but also many New Orleans citizens and tourists. The concert was truly an event to remember, showcasing the talents of our great organization in one of the oldest cathedrals in America and the most recognizable building in the Crescent City.
On Friday evening, the 1898 Jazz Orchestra put on an absolutely spectacular show as well. This ensemble was directed by Gordon Goodwin, founder of The Big Phat Band, and included a guest performance by Wayne Bergeron, one of the most in-demand trumpet players in the world. Known for his unmatched upper register, Wayne wowed the audience, putting on a show that no brother in attendance will ever forget. Not only did Gordon and Wayne put on a great performance, but they were also initiated into the Alpha Alpha chapter of Phi Mu Alpha on Saturday!

Also on Saturday, the Sinfonia Winds presented the final concert of the Convention. This ensemble, led by Brother David Holsinger, presented a performance of "The Sinfonians" (Clifton Williams), which included all brothers in attendance rising to join in the singing of "Men of Song" to add to the piece.

Along with these musical performances, the triennial National Convention also included the meeting of our fraternity's National Assembly. Legislative sessions occurred daily, with delegates meeting to discuss our National Constitution and Bylaws and preparing for national officer elections. On Saturday, Mark Lichtenberg was unanimously elected as Sinfonia's National President. Furthermore, in a historic first for Epsilon Lambda, Matt Koperniak, our sitting Province Governor, was elected as a Committee-Man At-Large! This marks the first time that a brother of our chapter has been elected to the National Executive Committee. Be sure to congratulate Matt on this exciting accomplishment! We're excited to see him use the position to positively impact the fraternity over the next six years!

Another major highlight of the Convention came late on Friday evening. After a night out enjoying New Orleans on Thursday, the majority of brothers at the Convention were not awake early Friday morning to receive the email announcing that John Mongiovi would be giving his famous ritual talk at 9:00am. Once John realized this, he offered to do a second session that evening after the jazz concert, beginning around 10:00pm. After the performance, we returned to the hotel to find a meeting room full of brothers eager to learn more about our fraternity. In a city with one of the most famous nightlife scenes in the country, it was impressive to see so many brothers there to discuss the principles and mysticism of our fraternity and the vision of our founders. I was extremely proud to be a brother of Phi Mu Alpha that night, because I don't think many other fraternities would have shown that kind of commitment to the beliefs and stories of their organization.
One of the most exciting developments during convention involved the national fraternity's partnership with GINsystems. GINsystems is a web hosting and organization management platform for Greek organizations. Through the partnership, chapters are being provided with text-based website management and chapter management software. The management software will include tools for scheduling, communication through text and e-mail, and voting, among others, with new capabilities being added constantly. Personally, I am very excited about the benefits of this system for our chapter.

But wait, there's more! One of the most exciting capabilities of the system is the ability for chapter alumni to create accounts in order to remain informed, engaged, and active with their initiating chapter and local alumni association. Alumni brothers will be able to view announcements and events, allowing them to be aware of what our chapter is doing, along with the dates and times of events. Hopefully, this tool will help alumni to find opportunities to return to a chapter event periodically. As an executive team that is already working to improve our correspondence with our alumni, this feature is extremely helpful.

The final thing that I wish to share with you involves our new National President. On Sunday morning, Mark Lichtenberg was sworn in as Sinfonia's 36th National President. The moment he was sworn in, Mark called to the stage his best friend, outgoing National President John Mongiovi. Next came an emotional event, as he and Executive Director and Brother Ed Clint discussed John's contributions to our fraternity as President over the past 6 years and in other capacities in the years before. When John first became involved in Sinfonia, the fraternity had lost its way in many respects. Our ritual and values had strayed from the original intentions of the founders, and the fraternity was showing it in numbers, finances, and future growth prospects. As John became more involved, he focused on learning more about the ritual and sharing that with the brothers of the organization. He traveled all around the country, learning more about our original founder, the initiation ritual, and the symbols of Sinfonia. By getting back to the real values that led to the founding of this great organization, John helped to bring Phi Mu Alpha into its current era of growth and prosperity. Citing these facts, former National President Richard Crosby ended his remarks with three words for John: "You saved us."
After the tribute to John, Mark Lichtenberg took the stage to make his first address as Sinfonia's National President. While I won't try to do his remarks justice here, I will do my best to get a video out to all of you of the final speech went it becomes available. Mark spoke about the potential for our fraternity to truly change the world through music. One of the goals of our fraternity to bring the world to harmony, and though that sounds like an impossible task, changing one person's day for the better is a good start. Our chapters have the ability to do great things for the communities that they are apart of, and our chapter hopes to do just that this year. It all comes back to remembering who you are, who we are, as brothers of Phi Mu Alpha.

As his remarks came to a close, Mark asked all the brothers in attendance to take out their phones, take a picture, and post it to the internet with the tag "I am Sinfonia." With this gesture, we reminded ourselves who we are, what we stand for, and, most importantly, what we can do together if we Sing as One.

As our chapter strives to Sing as One in the coming year, we invite you to partner with us as we work to continue improving our chapter at UGA. Keep in touch! Come to a chapter meeting! Make sure you sign up for the GinSystem when it becomes available! We will be doing our best this year to create opportunities for our alumni to be more involved with the chapter, but you are welcome at any event that we schedule. The phrases “Once a Sinfonian, Always a Sinfonian” and “Once a Dawg, always a Dawg” truly go hand in hand. I hope that when you reflect on your time at the University of Georgia, your experiences as a collegiate brother of Epsilon Lambda stand out in your fondest of memories. However, I also hope that you can continue making memories as a brother of our chapter through your involvement in the coming year.

Once, Always, and how wonderfully sweet it is.

Hunter Odom
President
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My first national event (if you don't count work weekend in the same year) was Sinfonia's 54th National Convention in Orlando in 2012. I had just been initiated, and I believe the timing was perfect. The chapter had a good representation, and I think the weekend inspired me to dive deeper into our fraternity than I ever would have thought; I know that I would not have gotten what I have out of Phi Mu Alpha had I not gone to that first convention.

Not many brothers have the fortunate circumstance of being able to bookend their college careers with a coinciding triennium, and for that fact I am incredibly thankful. I found the opportunity to go to national convention under these circumstances all too good to pass up, even knowing the looming entrance to the workforce as a UGA alumnus was at hand. I can say for a fact that I would rather have had no other end to my last Athens summer than to spend that weekend in New Orleans.

Developing a higher devotion to our spiritual ideals and further developing our concept of brotherhood can be done in no better place than in the company of our brotherhood; the feeling is amplified greatly when I'm the company of hundreds. I am incredibly thankful for the opportunity to experience such an event, and I couldn't have done it without the help of Epsilon Lambda. For the person I am today, I have you brothers to thank.

Always onward and ever upward,

Ian Labreck
University of Georgia
BM Music Education
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Going into National Convention, I wasn't quite sure what to expect, so I decided to treat it as if it were an elongated Province Workshop. This expectation was blown away. World class musicians such as Brother Ellis Marsalis, (newly initiated) Wayne Bergeron, and Gordon Goodwin graced us with performances. Collegiate and alumni brothers, not so different from us, participated in the Sinfonian choir and gave a tear-jerking performance inside of the esteemed chapel building in downtown New Orleans. It was enlightening to interact with a very wide-ranging variety of Sinfonians from all across the United States. I met men from California who were no different than we are, and I met Sinfonians from bordering states who couldn’t be more different. I had the pleasure of experiencing the city (and outright debauchery) of New Orleans with 3 close friends, my brothers.

The final night, ritual, and closing ceremony were the most impactful parts of the convention. John Mongiovi gave his last discussion on the history of our fraternity and its symbols as National President. I will never forget his 2 a.m. discussion of his journey to research and revamp our ritual and ideals. I will never forget his personal, impassioned performance in our ritual. I will never forget his departure, met with many standing ovations and three immortalizing words from his mentor, "You saved us.” John Mongiovi led us out of the “dark ages” of our fraternity into a time of prosperity where we are now the 3rd largest national fraternity in America, with over 120,000 members, and he has forever left his mark on my idea of a true Sinfonian. His successor and best friend, Mark Lichtenberg, ended the convention with a rallying cry to all Sinfonians to cease uttering empty words. He called upon us to act, to be men, to be musicians, and to be brothers. “We Are Sinfonia”, he said.

I walked away from this experience with renewed vigor. I have finally seen what Phi Mu Alpha Sinfonia can accomplish on a national scale, and I have finally seen what a true idealist, leader, and brother can do for this fraternity.

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Robert Chambers
Vice President
Phi Mu Alpha Sinfonia, Epsilon Lambda
I attended Leadership Institute in the summer of 2013, my first national Phi Mu Alpha event after being brought into the brotherhood earlier that year. It was a terrific experience, but it only provided a small taste of what a national gathering of Sinfonians could be. The 2015 National Convention was certainly one of my most memorable experiences in the fraternity to date.

The gathering of like-minded individuals from all different backgrounds, states, schools, and (unfortunately) football alliances, was an enriching experience. From making music through familiar red book songs with hundreds of other Sinfonians to enjoying top-notch choir and jazz band performances, the convention theme “Sing as One” was prevalent through the medium of music. This much I expected; after all, we are a music fraternity.

However, what I wasn’t expecting was the spiritual recharge. From deep lectures about our ritual to conversations of the intent and ideals of our founders, I greatly furthered my understanding of the history and depth of our brotherhood. This impressed me most: learning that brothers who came long before me struggled and battled to save our order and revive it towards what it is today.

On the final day of the convention, former National President Richard Crosby turned to newly former National President John Mongiovi and said three words I will never forget: “You saved us”. The unceasing search for deeper understanding of our ritualistic rites, the constant search for lost memorabilia and knowledge of our fraternity’s past, and, in the case of former National President T. Jervis Underwood, the willingness to mortgage his house twice to save the day-to-day budget of our national office, all remind me of one of our order’s most important and underspoken phrases: “Work for Sinfonia, and Sinfonia will work for you”.

I feel reinvigorated to work for the betterment of my chapter and my national fraternity, and I attest that to my experience at the 2015 Phi Mu Alpha Sinfonia Fraternity of America’s National Convention, Sing as One.

Hunter Hulsey
Music Chair
Phi Mu Alpha Sinfonia, Epsilon Lambda
CHECK OUT OUR NEW WEBSITE!

uga.sinfonia.org

This improved site will be regularly updated with chapter information and events.

In the coming weeks, we will release information for alumni brothers to create accounts in the GINsystem, our new chapter management software. Please be patient with us and the national organization, as technical difficulties regarding login information are being dealt with.

We’re excited to use these new mediums to keep our alumni and other supporters aware of our chapter’s progress!