



Winter 2025
Issue #2

Notes

NOTES FROM THE PRESIDENT

Dear Friends of Music,

We have had so many wonderful concerts already this year! Thank you so much to the students, parents, community members, and dedicated teachers who have made these events possible. Whether it was watching elementary students sing or play instruments for the first time on the high school stage or listening to high school seniors play in select ensembles, each performance served as a reminder of the importance of music education in our schools. And it wasn't just at the concerts... you may have seen our students and their teachers perform at the Town of Niskayuna's Veterans Day and/or Tree Lighting Ceremonies, caroling through the streets of Old Niskayuna, participating in county and statewide music festivals, visiting senior centers, or even playing a professional gig! In December, high school students visited the middle schools to perform for students, and then 8th grade band and chorus students came over to the high school for combined rehearsals with the HS band and chorus. The sense of community and the seemingly endless opportunities that our music program provides for our students is truly amazing.

Because of our community, Friends of Music has been able to continue to support music education in our district. We are extremely grateful for our members and corporate sponsors. With your support, we have been able to assist our musicians on their journeys to Area All-State, All-State, Suburban Council Music Festival, and have continued to honor enrichment grants for our district. In March, Friends of Music will host the Band Festival at Proctors. This will be an incredible evening uniting band students in grades 6-12.

Thank you to everyone who participated in our annual pie sale. It was so nice to see everyone who came out to support FOM and take home some delicious desserts. Thank you to the high school students who went door to door collecting donations for Caroling for Cash. Special thanks to Union Cafe for inviting us in out of the rain and making it such a special night! And thank you to everyone who has ordered FOM apparel, which is still available for purchase through our website in case you haven't ordered yet!

Be sure to save the date for our high school musical, *Sunset Boulevard*. Shows will be Thursday, February 27 at 7:30 pm, Friday, February 28 at 7:30 pm and Saturday, March 1 at 2:00 pm and 7:30 pm. Tickets can be purchased at Cur8.com (search Niskayuna). The students are so excited, and you won't want to miss it!

As March is Music in our Schools Month, we have a few fundraising events we are happy to announce. On Monday, March 3, from 4-8 PM, FOM will be hosting a night at Chipotle on Balltown Road. During the week of March 17-23, Kazami on Union Street will be donating a portion of the proceeds from all orders to FOM, and from March 24-30, Wasabi Asian Bistro will do the same! Take a night off from cooking and help support FOM! Watch for flyers on our social media pages and website for these events.

If you are interested in becoming more involved with Friends of Music, please consider attending one of our monthly meetings. We are currently seeking an editor to edit our newsletter, *Notes*, which is published three times a year. For more information, please email us at niskayunafom@gmail.com and follow us on Facebook (@niskyfom) or Instagram (niskyfriendsofmusic).

Warmest regards,

~Jillian Fountain

FROM THE DIRECTOR'S DESK

Welcome to Our Second Concert Series!

Concerts and music events are in full swing and we're glad you're here to join us!

Andrew Lloyd Webber's SUNSET BOULEVARD

Performances are scheduled for February 27 – March 1. We are happy to present four shows to the public. Tickets are on sale and can be reserved at **Cur8.com**.

District Band Festival

Our annual festival is back at Proctors Theatre! We are happy to present our 6th - 12th graders in a special concert on Wednesday, March 12 at 7:00p featuring guest conductor David Blumenthal, teacher at the LaGuardia High School of Music & Art and Performing Arts in New York City.

NYSSMA

The piano festival is scheduled for March 14-15 at SUNY Schenectady. (*Registrations are closed.*) The annual Solo/Ensemble festival will be held at Ravena CSD on **April 4-5** and Jazz festival at Queensbury HS on **May 16-17**. (*Registration is now open.*)

Suburban Council Music Festival

Congratulations to the following students who rehearsed and presented a concert at Burnt Hills-Ballston Lake High School on Saturday, January 25.

HS Chorus

Natalie Dinneen, Gabriella Fountain, Anna Geveci, Maryn Gleason, Samuel Meyer-Veen, Priscayah Singh, Siya Tripathi

HS Jazz

Evan Frenyea, Nicolas Marin, Noah Martinez, Nathan Yan

MS Band

Theodore Aimi, Thomas Calder, Charles Fisk, Shambhavi Gupta, Celeste Joo-Schwaber

MS Orchestra

Claire Chen, Rohith Kulkarni, Audrey Qi, Elise Shaw, Elie Shin, Alicia Sole-Nusimovich, Rhea Utturkar

Schenectady County Music Festival

Congratulations to the following students who rehearsed and presented a concert at Mohonasen High School on Saturday, February 1.

FROM THE DIRECTOR'S DESK

MS Chorus

Evan Buma, Vincent Connell, Zoey Fohitung, Celeste Joo-Schwaber, Kayla Ju, John Judski, Lily Lean, Tarynn Schleicher, Emma Wildermuth

HS Band

Luca Borboa, Addison Elsbree, Evan Frenyea, Simon Harvey, Cyrus Joo-Schwaber, Caitlin Li, Walter MacDonald, Nicolas Marin, Noah Martinez, Lincoln Merrill, Andrew Watkins

HS Orchestra

Nathaniel Allen, Ryan Martin, Sahana Sathish

~Eric Hughes



MAKE A LASTING LEGACY



The Name-A-Chair Project

In order to ensure the future success of the Niskayuna Performing Arts Programs, the community members, parents and businesses are invited to contribute to the Name-A-Chair Project. The names of those making a pledge will be engraved on the arms of the new auditorium seats.

Our Goal

We'd like to kick-off our campaign with 100 seats engraved! Contributions will support improvements in the auditorium to enhance the acoustics on stage, sound technology, and lighting for the audience.

They also make great graduation gifts or to recognize a special musician in your life.

What is the Cost?

Each plate is \$150 for individuals and families or \$250 for businesses. We are a 501(c)3 organization and your employer may match your contribution.

Name _____

Address _____

Phone _____

Please check one:

- Individual/Family: \$150 per chair
- Business: \$250 per chair
- My contribution can be matched by my employer _____.

Please send this form with your check (made payable to Niskayuna Friends of Music) with "Name-A-Chair Project" written in the memo section to: Niskayuna Friends of Music, Niskayuna High School, 1626 Balltown Road, Niskayuna, NY 12309

Line 1:

Line 2:

There are 44 characters including letters, spaces and punctuation available per plate, divided into two 22-character rows. No messages please - only names of individuals or businesses will be engraved.

Engraving can include graduation dates, such as "Mary Smith, 1999".

Please return by 5/30/2025.

SPOTLIGHT NEWS

Friends of Music interviews Ralph Hays, 6th Grade Choir & General Music Teacher at Iroquois Middle School



Where did you grow up?

I grew up in Wooster, Ohio and spent summers in Vero Beach, Florida with my grandparents and extended family.

How were you involved in music growing up?

I started school saxophone lessons in 4th grade and my family would sing from the Readers Digest piano/vocal anthologies on Friday nights. I was in band, marching band, and stage band throughout junior high and high school, and was also involved in musical theater as a young adult. My best roles were Friedrich von Trapp in THE SOUND OF MUSIC and Action in two productions of WEST SIDE STORY.

Where did you go to college?

I got my Bachelor's Degree in Music from the University of Miami where John Kinyon and Alfred Reed were my professors and academic advisors. I received my Master's in Music Composition from Kent State University.

Do you have any favorite extracurricular activities that you want to share?

I play oboe and English horn, bass clarinet, and saxophone in the Music Company Orchestra and am principal saxophonist in the Lake George Community Band. I'm invited every summer to perform with the World Adult Wind orchestra at the Mid Europe Music Festival in Schladming, Austria. This summer I've been invited to compose and premier a piece at the Vienna Contemporary Music Festival. I also arrange and perform at my church most Sundays.

What are your current responsibilities with Niskayuna?

I lead the Iroquois 6th Grade Chorus and teach General Music 6, 7, and 8.

What are your goals?

I strive to continue improving my teaching and performing skills. I hope to one day make a name for myself as a composer and arranger. I have received a number of awards for my composition including a co-nomination for the 2023 Pulitzer Prize in Music Composition.

What are your favorite things to do outside of school?

I enjoy making costumes and am an avid DC, STAR TREK, and original STAR WARS nerd. I enjoy world traveling and the occasional mountain hike.

Do you have any advice to students studying music now?

Put down the devices and fully engage ... whether as a student, performer, or listener.

Do you have any advice to students who want to pursue music as their career?

Do it only if you simply cannot do anything else.

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL NOTES

Birchwood Elementary News

The Birchwood Beagles love to make music! Our 4th graders were eager to join the instrumental program as new members of the orchestra. They love attending their lessons with Mrs. Hartman and have enjoyed preparing for their first concert. Our 5th graders have been just as excited about making their instrumental debut in the band! Our students in 1-3 have greatly enjoyed singing, dancing, creating, exploring, and playing instruments in music class again. 1st Grade performed at their annual Thanksgiving Celebration in November, and 2nd Grade rocked the house at their *Gingerbread Rock!* show in December. 3rd Grade started the recorder this month and they are PUMPED! Our Kindergarten students are having so much fun in their first year of music class too. They *love* to dance (especially when playing *Freeze Dance!*). We're looking forward to making more memories throughout the rest of the year!

~Rebecca Farrell

Hillside Elementary News

Students are engaging in a variety of musical activities at Hillside Elementary School!

Students are continuing to learn several songs for their monthly *Hello, Hillside!* celebrations and are preparing the tune, *Circle of Light*, for their February *Hello, Hillside!* celebration.

Kindergarten and 1st graders continue to sing and dance to a wide variety of songs, while exploring different sounds.

2nd graders explored *Peter and the Wolf*, learning about the instruments of the orchestra. They'll soon begin preparing for their March musical, *Sing Me a Story*.

3rd graders will be learning how to play the recorder. We are so excited!

4th and 5th graders recently spent time performing African rhythms on the djembe drums. We had so much fun!

The halls are alive with the sound of music! We are grateful for the opportunity to make music.

Many thanks to the Niskayuna Friends of Music for continuing to support our young musicians. We appreciate all you do for us!

~Sarah Sanson



ELEMENTARY SCHOOL NOTES

Craig Elementary News

Craig students are keeping very busy this winter with so many things to learn and do in music! Kindergarteners have been learning about opposites; fast and slow, sound and silence and this month long and short. They've also had fun experimenting these sounds on classroom instruments!

1st graders have had a great time creating their own lyrics to winter songs including *That time of Year* and *Aiken Drum*.

2nd graders have been learning about the orchestra, the science of soundwaves in the instruments and enjoyed their first 4th & 5th grade concert performance. They really demonstrated amazing audience manners!

3rd graders have had a fantastic time learning about music from around the world, and preparing to begin their recorders! They did a nice job demonstrating audience manners as they also enjoyed the 4th and 5th grade concert assembly.

4th and 5th graders have been working so hard this winter as well! In addition to preparing for their Winter Concert, they've been learning to play world drums while polishing their music skills. Phenomenal job in the concert!



~Marilyn Brown

THANK YOU, NISKAYUNA

Thank you, Niskayuna, for supporting the 2024 Pie and Tea Bread sale and making it a success! We are also grateful to Mourningkill Farms Bakery for their partnership, and to Niskayuna High School for approving our use of the Old Caf kitchen for delivery day. Manager Robert Depot and his team generously prepared and shared cooler space, making pick-up easy for everyone. The event could not have happened without many wonderful volunteers: Nancy Gort, Carey Merrill, Jillian Fountain, Gregory Gort, Greta Merrill, Elise Corbin, Tamara Gevici, Bridget Kelly Stein, and Veronica Stein: thank you all for helping unload, sort, and deliver hundreds of pies and tea breads! We look forward to next year's sale! It truly is the sweetest fundraiser, so if you are interested in helping plan next year's pie sale, please reach out to Nancy Gort and Carey Merrill at NiskyFOMPies@gmail.com.

HIGH SCHOOL NOTES

Choral Corner

It's been a very busy few months in the choral program as we have had a plethora of performances in December, An Evening in History in January, and then another concert series starting in February!



On February 6, you will hear a medley of *The Impossible Dream/I Dreamed A Dream (Man of La Mancha/Les Misérables)* arranged by Niskayuna resident and class of 1967 graduate Phyllis Pulver. Ms. Pulver came into Choir and Concert Chorale to coach the students and these two groups will collaborate in presenting this piece. Thank you to the Niskayuna Friends of Music for helping to fund this project and helping us highlight and feature a local composer.

Phyllis is a hometown gal currently residing in Rexford. Musical talent emerged early playing violin at age 7 and performing on Proctors Theatre stage at 8 as the guest soloist of the Schenectady Symphony Orchestra. By the time she graduated from Niskayuna in 1967, she was concertmaster of the high school orchestra. Though she pursued a career in financial planning after college, her passion for music found many outlets. She continued her love of guitar and piano, composing dozens of songs for each. When her interests broadened to leading choral groups, she directed the Unity Church in Albany choir for seven years (resulting in two concerts and CDs from each) and in 2000, started a community singing group in her home called Friends In Harmony which she led for 20 years. In 1990, Phyllis produced and recorded an album of original music, *Positively ME!* (Her songs and videos can be accessed through YouTube and her website, phyllispulver.com). Several of her songs have been arranged as choral pieces, performed locally by the Festival Celebration Choir and Capital Community Voices, both under the direction of Julie Panke.

HS choral students are preparing for the NYSSMA Solo Festival which we will be attending at Ravena-Coeymans-Selkirk High School on April 4th and 5th. Students will be studying works in a variety of languages to present to judges from all over the state. During the month of March, there will be weekly timeslots available for students to receive extra help and coaching. There will be an opportunity to sing for peers in their large ensemble classes for feedback and to help shake any nervousness in anticipation of the performance.



Congratulations to the following students who were accepted into the Suburban Council Mixed Chorus: **Natalie Dineen, Gabriella Fountain, Anna Geveci, Maryn Gleason, Samuel Meyer-Veen, Priscayah Singh, and Siya Tripathi**. Students went to Burnt Hills-Ballston Lake HS where they worked with guest conductor Dr. Tim Reno of Siena College during the weekend of January 24th-25th.

Congratulations to **Sophia Connell, Anna Geveci, Lily Graham, Bradley Heller, Alex LaFargue, and Aidan Page** who were accepted into the Albany Pro Musica High School Choral Festival at Russell Sage College and Troy Savings Bank Music Hall on February 1st. Students worked with guest conductor Elizabeth Eschen Cacciola of Harvard University. In addition, **Sophia**

HIGH SCHOOL NOTES

Connell, Lily Graham, Alex LaFargue, and Aidan Page were accepted into the prestigious honor choir for this event, which also includes a special invitation to join the Pro Musica International Choral Festival at the University of Albany in July.

Congratulations to **Lily Graham** on the incredible honor of being accepted into the NAFME All-Eastern Mixed Chorus. Over 2000 students applied from 11 states to be part of this experience. Lily will spend the last weekend in April at the Connecticut Convention Center in Hartford with a rigorous schedule of rehearsals and final concert.



An Evening in History



Area All-State Participants

Outside Performances:

- **Studio Singers and Bel Canto Voices** raised over **\$2200** (WOW!!!!) during their [very cold and rainy] Caroling for CA\$H fundraiser on December 9! Thank you to the parents/guardians who helped transport students as well as Jessica Hollenback at Union Café for providing cookies and hot cocoa. We also thank Mrs. Fountain (FOM president) and Mrs. Connell (FOM treasurer) for their time and effort in organizing this fundraiser. Finally, thank you to FOM for providing pizza to the students who volunteered.
- 80+ **High School Choral** students (WOW, 2/3 of the students enrolled in our HS choral program) joined together in song at Niskayuna Town Hall's Annual Tree Lighting Ceremony on December 6th. They enjoyed candy canes and hot chocolate after a wonderfully attended community performance on a night of very cold weather (worth extra credit or a makeup voice lesson for Q2)!
- **Studio Singers** will be performing at Kingsway Village Apartments on Monday, March 24. Students will give a concert for the residents, then join in a sing-a-long of familiar tunes. Students can earn volunteer hours for this activity.
- **Studio Singers** will once again be performing at Niska Day on Saturday, May 19. They will sing their way through the parade on a float and help kickoff the event at the Entertainment Tent on the Craig School grounds at noon.

We look forward to seeing you when spring has sprung!

C. M. Pizzino - Catalano

~Christina Pizzino-Catalano

HIGH SCHOOL NOTES

Concert Band News

The HS Concert Band is excited to perform at our District Band Festival at Proctors Theater in March! The band will be performing a diverse program: *Origin* by Cait Nishimura, *Shenandoah* set by Omar Thomas, and *Salt March* by Aakash Mittal.



Cait Nishimura



Aakash Mittal



Omar Thomas



In addition to welcoming in our Guest Conductor, Dave Blumenthal - Band Director at LaGuardia High School of Music, Art, and Performing Arts in New York City - for a week in March, we also have the opportunity in February to work with one of our composers. Aakash Mittal will be visiting campus on February 12th to work with Concert Band Students on his piece *Salt March* - a piece which explores the concept of the historical march as a nonviolent protest. Aakash will be spending the day at Niskayuna High School as part of a cross-departmental collaboration with the Social Studies department. He will also be meeting with choir and band students in a participatory workshop of *Konnakol and Raga*, exploring and performing traditional Indian rhythmic singing, as well as presenting a session with all Global 10 students on the Salt March movement from a historical standpoint. The visit is made possible by generous funds from the Niskayuna Friends of Music, The High School PTO, the Social Studies Department, Mr. Rickert and the Tri-City India Association including a generous donation from the Muralimanohar family.



We will also be visited in March by a trombone duo from New York City. Haim Avitsur (Hartt School of Music) and Andrea Neumann (internationally known freelance trombonist) will be performing and working with students from Niskayuna in addition to SUNY Schenectady, Shenendehowa, and Burnt Hills. This visit was made possible by enrichment grants from the Niskayuna Friends of Music as well as the other schools involved.

Congratulations to the Concert Band students **Luca Borboa** and **Caitlin Li** for being selected to perform at the Schenectady County Music Festival. These students were selected to the All-County Band from students across all Schenectady County Schools as well as Voorheesville.

HIGH SCHOOL NOTES

Jazz Band News

The High School Jazz Band and Jazz Ensemble present concerts in February this year which include well-known standards *Bye Bye Blackbird*, *Killer Joe*, *Kidney Stew Blues*, *Goodbye Pork Pie Hat* and *Jordu*. Additionally, the Jazz Ensemble will be performing *Meetin' and Greetin'* by local saxophonist and composer Keith Pray. Keith was kind enough last year to rearrange his composition for us to be accessible for High School Students.



We also look forward to our annual Jazz Festival in April. Our guest artist, Dominic Fallacaro is a Grammy Award winning producer and musician based in Brooklyn, NY as well as a Niskayuna Graduate, member of the school Hall of Fame, and Nisky Jazz Ensemble Alum. He is currently the Musical Director, and provided additional orchestrations for the Broadway Musical *Juliet* and has composed original music for the film *Shortwave*, which has since gone on to win multiple film festival awards. Additional film credits include *In the Heights*, and *Tick Tick Boom*. Dominic has appeared at almost any and every venue on the New York City scene, and has toured across the United States and abroad. We are incredibly thrilled to welcome Dominic back to NHS for a week in April!

In its pilot year of the Niskayuna Jazz Combo Club, the members are getting a taste of what it is like to be real gigging musicians. This student led and rehearsed group has performed at the Broken Inn and An Evening in History so far this year. On February 3rd, the students will travel to the State Capital and perform at the NYS Museum at NYSUT's Legislative Reception. Students will perform for many of NY State Legislatures and possibly the Governor.



Suburban Council Honor Jazz Ensemble

Congratulations to **Evan Frenyee**, **Nick Marin**, **Noah Martinez** and **Nathan Yan** for being selected into the Suburban Council Honor Jazz Ensemble in January. Congratulations also to **Nathan Yan** for being selected into the New York State Band Directors Association Honor Jazz Ensemble in March.



Band Students at All County



Jazz Combo Club

~Philip Pandori

HIGH SCHOOL NOTES

Orchestra News

On Saturday, November 23rd, 2024, four members of the Niskayuna High Symphony Orchestra took part in a String Quartet Masterclass at the Troy Savings Bank Music Hall. **Sean Calhoun, Monica Amirbekian, Isabelle Mok, and Mai-Ly Tran** performed the last movement of Mozart's *Dissonance Quartet* for an audience and the Renaissance Quartet. The members of the Renaissance Quartet coached the students in the finer points of quartet playing, such as close listening to each other, phrasing tips, and understanding how the acoustics of a performance space call for modifications in playing. It was a very exciting opportunity for new musical experiences and growth, and everyone played remarkably well! It was the result of many after school rehearsals and lots of hard work. Congratulations!



The Renaissance Quartet

~Brian Mooney

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Congratulations to the following Niskayuna Students who were selected to join the Empire State Youth Orchestra (we inadvertently missed you in the Fall issue)

Kehan Bao

Ruchir Bollapragada

Ellie Shaw

Audrey Shin

Elie Shin

Repertory Orchestra

Repertory Orchestra

Concertino Strings

Repertory Orchestra

Symphony Orchestra

Violin

Violin

Cello

Violin

Cello

GE Foundation Matching Gifts Program

FOM has joined the list of charitable institutions that are supported by the GE Foundation Matching Gifts Program. Through this program, individual contributions of \$25 or more from employees and/or retirees are matched dollar for dollar. Eligible gifts may be registered online on our *membership page* or by phone at 1-800-305-0669.

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For online orders to count towards the fundraiser, they must be placed for pickup only from the restaurant location of, and during the hours of, the fundraiser. Delivery orders and gift cards do not qualify. \$150 minimum event sales required to receive any donation.



COMMUNITY SPONSORS INFO



Niskayuna Friends of Music: *Community Sponsorship*

Composer: \$500 donation or more

- Permanent “**Name-a-Chair**” plate in the Niskayuna High School Auditorium
- Top business listing in all concert programs
- *Full-page* ad in “**Notes**” newsletters (*Fall, Winter, Spring*)
- Thank-you announcement during concerts and performances
- Premium, full-year advertising placement for your logo on our website (niskyfom.org)
- Friends of Music window cling

Music Director: \$250 donation or more

- Listing in all concert programs
- *Half-page* size ad in “**Notes**” newsletters (*Fall, Winter, Spring*)
- Thank-you announcements during concerts and performances
- Full-year advertising placement for your logo on our website (niskyfom.org)
- Friends of Music window cling

Concertmaster: \$75 donation or more

- Listing in all concert programs
- *Business card-* sized ad in “**Notes**” newsletters (*Fall, Winter, Spring*)
- Full-year advertising placement for your logo on our website (niskyfom.org)
- Friends of Music window cling

NOTIFY US AS SOON AS POSSIBLE if you are becoming/renewing your sponsorship, so your logo is included on our website and in all publications. Donations to Niskayuna Friends of Music are tax-deductible to your business. Email any questions to: Sarah Bilofsky at: niskyfomcorpsponsor@gmail.com.

Two ways to submit your Sponsorship Payment:

1. **Online:** Visit www.niskyfom.org and complete the online sponsorship form, upload your logo or business card through the website and make full credit card payment using PayPal.
2. **Check:** Email Sarah Bilofsky at: niskyfomcorpsponsor@gmail.com with your sponsorship level and include a digital logo or scanned business card. Then, mail your check to:

Niskayuna Friends of Music Attn: *Community Sponsorships*, District Music Office, 1626 Balltown Road, Niskayuna, NY 12309

Please include both color and black and white versions of your logo or business card, if possible. This allows us to fully optimize your logo for both online and print publication. Thank you!