Notes

FALL ISSUE 2026

Notes from the President

Dear Friends of Music,

Welcome back and welcome to our first concert series of the year! The Niskayuna Music Department provides endless opportunities for our students to play, perform, participate, and share their love of music, and Friends of Music strives to support our teachers and students in accomplishing their goals. This summer, through your generosity as Friends of Music members, we were able to sponsor our annual Summer Sonata with over 50 students in grades 6-8 attending the program. In September, we were excited to learn that three of our high school musicians were accepted into All-State, two were accepted as alternates, and fifteen were selected for Area All-State. And in case you haven't heard, we are thrilled to share that this year's high school musical production will be *Chess*! FOM is also happy to welcome Cristopher Creviston, the guest soloist at our first concert. He is the saxophone professor from Arizona State University and FOM supported his performance and the piece he is premiering with Symphonic Band through an enrichment grant!

We could not do our work without your help. Please consider becoming a friend of music or supporting our organization through a corporate membership by visiting www.niskyfom.org or stopping by the FOM table at any of the concerts. On Monday, November 23rd, FOM will be holding a fundraiser at Chipotle, and as the holiday season approaches, be on the lookout for our Bel Canto Voices and Studio Singers caroling through the streets of old Niskayuna!

We are also excited to offer our annual apparel sale. Friends of Music merchandise makes an amazing holiday or birthday gift for the musicians you love. Visit our website, www.niskyfom.org, for information on how to order. If you are interested in becoming more involved with Friends of Music, please consider attending one of our monthly meetings. We are currently seeking volunteers for the 2026-2027 school 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 the 2026-2027 school year! The music department faculty is thrilled to welcome students back into our classrooms and ensembles!

Thank you to the Friends of Music for all that you do for our students. Our first concert this year features Arizona State University saxophone professor Christopher Creviston. He'll perform with Symphonic Band in the premiere of a concerto by composer Mischa Zupko. Niskayuna Friends of Music helped to underwrite this special project. What a great way to start making music this year!

NEW YORK STATE SCHOOL MUSIC ASSOCIATION

5 students were selected as participants or alternates for this year's All-State Conference to be held in Rochester. Congratulations on this honor!

Maryn Gleason, alto, Treble Chorus
Cyrus Joo-Schwaber, French Horn, Symphonic Band
Brendan Yan, Cello, String Orchestra

Walter MacDonald, alternate, Jazz Tenor Saxophone
Max Zheng, alternate, Mallet Percussion
Max Zheng, alternate, Snare Drum

15 students were selected as participants for this year's Area All-State Festival to be held at Proctors Theatre. Congratulations!

Mixed Chorus
Zoey Fohtung (alto)
Gabriella Fountain (soprano)
Maryn Gleason (alto)
Sienna Taddeo (alto)
Siya Tripathi (alto)
Emma Wildermuth (soprano)

Jazz Ensemble
Walter MacDonald (tenor sax)

Symphonic Band
Celeste Joo-Schwaber (bass clarinet)
Cyrus Joo-Schwaber (French Horn)
Samantha Lazarus (trombone)
Caitlin Li (trombone)

Symphony Orchestra
Jeremy Cuevas (violin)
Nicholas Lessard (cello)
Gavaen Sheehan (oboe/English Horn)
Ellie Shin (cello)

NEW MUSIC FACULTY

Two teachers are filling in for the rest of the school year. Please welcome back **Christopher Lee** (B.M. Music Education, SUNY Potsdam) as he continues his assignment teaching strings at Birchwood, Hillside and Rosendale schools. And say hello to **Jill Wheat** (B.S. Performing Arts, Emerson College). She'll teach general music and chorus at Van Antwerp for the remainder of the school year. Thank you both!

HIGH SCHOOL MUSICAL

We're proud to announce our upcoming production of *CHESS*, February 25 – 27, 2027. Auditions take place in November, and ticket sales begin in January. Stay tuned for more information throughout the school year.



February 25-27, 2027

DISTRICT CHORAL FESTIVAL

We're excited to present two evenings of concerts at the high school for our festival involving students in grades 5-12 on April 7 & 8! Students will work with Dr. P. Wesley Roy, a professor at The Crane School of Music, SUNY Potsdam. Look for more details this winter.

Making a Lasting Legacy

Niskayuna Friends of Music
Name-a-Chair Project

In order to ensure the future success of Niskayuna Performing Arts programs, community members, parents, and businesses are invited to contribute to the Name-a-Chair Project. Your donation will be recognized with a personalized brass plate on a chair arm in the high school auditorium. The inscriptions are enduring symbols of the breadth of our community.

Our Goal

Contributions will support improvements in the auditorium to enhance the acoustics on stage, sound technology, and lighting for the audience. They are a great way to recognize a special musician or teacher in your life, and they make great graduation gifts.

What Is the Cost?

Each plate is $150 for individuals and families, or $250 for businesses. This donation may be tax deductible as we are a 501(c)3 organization.

Please use the form on the next page or visit https://niskyfom.org/name-a-chair-project/ to order an engraved plate. For more information, email niskyfriendsofmusicsecretary@gmail.com or call the District Music Office at (518) 382-2511, Ext. 21710

Name-a-Chair Order Form

Name_____
Address_____
Phone/e-mail_____

Please check one:

- □ Individual/Family: $150 per chair
- □ Business: $250 per chair

Please send this form with your check 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. Engraving can include graduation dates, such as "Mary Smith, 1999." There are examples in the auditorium.

DUE MAY 2026

Elementary Bands Begin Lessons

Our Fifth Grade Band students are off to a wonderful start this year!
Dr. Timothy Solinger is the Fifth Grade Band teacher at Glencliff and Craig Elementary Schools. Mrs. Kokernak teaches the bands at Birchwood and Rosendale and Mr. Fisk is the Band teacher at Hillside.

Our 5th Grade Bands are learning from the Breeze-Easy Book 1 and our lesson books are fully provided by the school district - thank you Niskayuna!

We are excited to watch this new class of band students learn the steps to playing an instrument. A big thank you goes out to the parents of this group for their assistance with practicing and their overall help with getting this program off and running! Success on an instrument begins at home! We look forward to our first concerts in January!

Mr. David Fisk, Hillside Band
Mrs. Susan Kokernak, Birchwood and Rosendale Bands
Dr. Timothy Solinger, Craig and Glencliff Bands

News From Hillside Elementary

The hallways of Hillside Elementary are filled with the sounds of music! Students kicked off the school year by singing our school song, "Hillside Pride," at their first *Hello, Hillside!* assembly. We look forward to hearing our students share their musical talents at monthly assemblies throughout the year!

Our kindergarten musicians are busy singing, dancing, and moving to a variety of songs. One of our favorites is "Wake Up, You Sleepyhead!" Our music classes are filled with smiles, laughter, and opportunities to explore music together. Kindergarten students are also discovering percussion instruments, including shakers and drums.

Several grade levels celebrated Hispanic Heritage Month through music and movement! Students explored songs and dances inspired by the rich musical traditions of Hispanic and Latin American cultures.

Our fifth graders are exploring the music of Latin America, listening to a variety of styles, including reggaeton and salsa. They are also learning about instruments such as conga drums, timbales, and maracas while discovering the unique sounds and rhythms of Latin American music.

Our fourth and fifth graders are enjoying the opportunity to perform together as a chorus! Students are working hard to develop their singing skills, build confidence, and prepare for our upcoming winter and spring concerts. We can't wait to share their musical accomplishments with our school community!

A special thank-you to the **Niskayuna Friends of Music** for providing materials that enrich our music instruction and support our young musicians. We are grateful for their continued generosity and commitment to music education.

Middle School Notes

Save the date for Iroquois Middle School Drama Club's production of *The Little Mermaid JR.* this year! 7th and 8th grade students interested in auditioning or being a part of behind the scenes crews (lighting, sound, backstage, scenery art, etc.) should check the Iroquois announcements for information. Auditions will occur in November and rehearsals will begin in December. Join us "under the sea" for this fabulous production!

Show Dates:
Friday March 19th, 2027 at 7 PM
Saturday March 20th, 2027 at 2 PM



All-County

Chorus students in grades 7 and 8 were invited to sign up for the Schenectady All-County 2027 Music Festival, scheduled for January 29th & 30th! A select few are selected each school around the county to make up a new choir led by a guest conductor and put together a concert program. Students that are interested in learning more about this opportunity should have received a form in choir or on Google Classroom. We look forward to sharing out the results of this concert in a future issue of Notes!

Select Ensembles

Our select ensembles, Jazz Band, Chamber Strings and Mezzo Voce have concluded auditions and have started rehearsals before school. As our numbers in Band, Orchestra and Choir continue to grow, so do the pool of students that try out - and they did not disappoint! We're very excited for another year of leading these dedicated musicians in some challenging music and are looking forward to sharing their talents with you all in concert later this year!

-Mr. Fisk, Ms. Jantson, Mrs. Kokernak, Mr. Lee, Mrs. McClenon, Mr. McCann-Loomis

Choral Corner

Welcome back to everyone and anyone who loves singing! We are enjoying a rigorous daily routine of working on repertoire for the fall concerts, developing our vocal technique, and growing as musicians *and* human beings.

Choral Uniforms

Students in A-Choired Taste, Choir, and Concert Chorale will be following the Niskayuna HS Concert Attire Policy, where students dress in professional concert black attire (sent home via Parent Square and included in the course syllabus).

Studio Singers and Bel Canto Voices members received their uniform order sheets (black glitter dresses/vests for Studio Singers and claret satin dresses/vests for Bel Canto Voices) in September and everyone should have a dress or vest for the first concert. Please note that the previous fabric for the Studio dresses and vests has been discontinued and we are still ordering from the same company but you will see variations in this outfit. There is no need for students who have the previously used outfit to buy a new one.

CONGRATULATIONS!

~Congratulations to Maryn Gleason who has been selected for this year's All-State Treble Chorus. Students will attend the NYSSMA Winter Conference in Rochester during the first weekend of December for the second time, as she was selected for the Mixed Chorus last year!

~Congratulations to Sami Lazarus who has been selected for this year's NYSSMA Songwriters Showcase. Sami will present her original composition "Status Quo" (check it out on YouTube, Apple Music and Spotify) and have the opportunity to attend a songwriting workshop. Evelia Echandy was also named as an honorable mention for her original song "I Try"!

~Congratulations to Zoey Fohtung, Gabriella Fountain, Maryn Gleason, Sienna Taddeo, Siya Tripathi, and Emma Wildermuth who have been accepted to the Area All-State Chorus. Students will perform at Proctors Theatre on November 6 and 7 under the direction of Dr. Meagan Dissinger, Assistant Professor and Coordinator of Music Education at Hofstra University.

~Congratulations to the following students who have been accepted into the Melodies of Christmas Chorale and will perform at Proctors Theatre stage in December with the Empire State Youth Orchestra: Maryn Gleason, Alana Kearney, Sami Lazarus, Nicholas Lessard, Caitlin Li, Sofia Palacios-Harris, Celeste Radez, Corinna Reynolds, Siya Tripathi, and DeAngelo Wimberly. All ten students who auditioned from Niskayuna were accepted!
"*The Melodies Chorale is featured alongside ESYO Symphony Orchestra in Melodies of Christmas, CBS's popular holiday concert that has raised more than $8 million for The Melodies Center for Childhood Cancers & Blood Disorders at Albany Medical Center."*

December 17-20, 2026 – Proctor's Theater

Special Student Opportunities and Achievements

~Elin Forde sang the National Anthem at the July 4th celebration at the American Legion.

~Maryn Gleason sang "America the Beautiful at the July 4th reading of the Declaration of Independence at Schenectady City Hall

Students singing the National Anthem at Sporting Events:
~Girls Varsity Field Hockey Senior Night - Maryn Gleason and Sienna Taddeo

~Boys Varsity Football Homecoming Game - Gabriella Fountain

~Boys Varsity Football on October 2nd - Satya Chaudahari, Gabriella Fountain, Zoey Fohtung, Aidan Hull, Alana Kearney, Opal Keck, Sami Lazarus, Sofia Palacios-Harris, Corinna Reynolds, Raury Richardson, Sienna Taddeo, Emma Wildermuth, and DeAngelo Wimberly (check out the *@sing4ursupprr* instagram for a video)

~Concert Chorale sang the National Anthem and ALL HS choral students sang the Alma Mater at the HS Pep Rally on October 16.



Outside Performances

- Studio Singers attended the SUNY Schenectady Choral Workshop on Friday, October 23 where they participated in workshops with the college faculty and performed some of their October concert repertoire for feedback and coaching from Dr. Jo-Michael Scheibe (Director of Choral Activities at Mt. San Antonio College, CA). Students also enjoyed a pizza luncheon that was provided by the culinary arts students at SUNY Schenectady. Thank you to the Niskayuna Friends of Music who sponsored the registration fee.

- Bel Canto Voices and Studio Singers will be performing at the Niskayuna Town Hall for the Veteran's Day Ceremony on Wednesday, November 12 at 9:15 am. Parents/guardians and community members are welcome to attend. As this is scheduled during the time that A-Choired Taste has their regularly scheduled class, student volunteers will be reading poems at the event. The ceremony may be held outdoors, so please dress accordingly.

- Bel Canto Voices will be heading to WMHT Studios in Troy to record three songs for "Music for the Holidays" to be broadcast on WMHT in December. Thank you to the Niskayuna Friends of Music for providing the funding for a professional harpist to join us for one of the repertoire selections, an experience that we will never forget.

- FOM'S ANNUAL CAROLING FOR CA$H FUNDRAISER continues this year! Please mark your calendar for **Monday, December 7** as members of ***Studio Singers*** and ***Bel Canto Voices*** will stroll through Old Niskayuna in Victorian costumes while singing carols and collecting funds for FOM. The fundraiser will culminate with a group performance at Union Café, 1725 Union St., at 7:00 pm. This year, 60% of the proceeds will help offset the cost of Bel Canto Voices' participation in the Valley A Cappella Cup in Springfield, Massachusetts on May 1.

Parents/guardians who would be willing to chaperone by providing a vehicle for students to stay warm in will hear from Mrs. Catalano in late November (timeslots range from 4:45-7:45 p.m.). Anyone who would be willing to donate or sew/make an article of clothing for the event would be welcome to do so (we are especially in need of cloaks)! **Mrs. Catalano is also in need of parents/guardians/students who would be willing to help with publicity for this event.

- ***ALL H.S. CHORAL SINGERS*** have been invited to share their voices on **Thursday, December 3 at 5:00 p.m.** at the Niskayuna Town Hall for the annual Tree Lighting Ceremony. Candy canes and hot chocolate will be served and this will be an extra credit/makeup opportunity! 7th and 8th grade chorus students at Iroquois are invited to join with us.

- ***A-Choired Taste*** will be singing at the Niskayuna Community Center on Tuesday, December 8 at 11:00 am (snow date: Thursday, December 10). Students will present a concert and join the members in a holiday sing-a-long. It has been a long tradition that this group also walks to the Dollar Tree and wraps small gifts to the senior citizens in attendance.

- ***Concert Chorale, Bel Canto Voices,*** and ***Studio Singers*** **(**along with other instrumental groups) will perform at the annual winter assembly scheduled for **Thursday, December 17** at **2:00 pm** (snow date: Friday, December 18). Any family members or friends who would like to attend are encouraged to arrive a few minutes early to sign in at the front desk. Please bring your license to present to our campus security team.

AN EVENING IN HISTORY is set for Monday, January 11 at 7:00 pm (note that the time is earlier than HS concerts)! This year the social studies and music departments will come together to commemorate 1977.

Thank you for your support of our school music program. This is going to be a spectacular year!

~Christina Pizzino-Catalano

Choral Students Who Participated in Summer Arts Programs

Natalie Decristofaro - Voice lessons
Evelia Echandy - Junior production manager at Carpe Diem Theater Camp, performed in NYC for a Carpe Diem showcase ("You Matter To Me" from *Waitress* and "Never Shut Up Again" from *Heathers*
Lola Echandy - *Once Upon a Mattress* at Carpe Diem Theater, *A Chorus Line* at Kennedy Talent
Zoey Fohtung - Kaatsbaan Cultural Center Dance Intensive, violin lessons



Elin Forde - Young Lucy in *Sweeney Todd* at Proctors Broadway Camp, performed the National Anthem for the American Legion July 4th Celebration
Gabby Fountain - Ithaca College Musical Theater Intensive, Royal Dance Nationals, Dance Dimensions Summer Intensive, voice and acting lessons

Scarlett Gandolfo - Choreographed and performed with Upstate Youth Choreographers Showcase, choreographed for Drama Kids

Aidan Hull - *Heathers* (New World Stages NYC), Kennedy Talent Broadway After Dark Cabaret (Kennedy Talent Management*)*, *Hunchback of Notre Dame* Rehearsals (SLOC), auditioned for *Dear Evan Hansen* (Kennedy Talent Management), vocal lessons
Claire Hull - Elite Dance Challenge Nationals, July and August Dance Intensives at Dance Me, CLI Conservatory, *Hunchback Of Notre Dame* (SLOC), saw *Heathers* (New World Stages NYC)

Molly Hull - July and August dance intensives at CDAI
International Take Two and Encore Summer Camp
Maryn Gleason - Sang "America the Beautiful" at the July 4th ceremony at Schenectady City Hall, performed with Capital Cantare at RPI (All-State singers and college music majors)
Teddy Gibbons - Voice lessons

Arya Jakubowski - SUNY Schenectady Summer Theater Program (*Suessical*), Kennedy Talent Broadway After Dark, *A Chorus Line* at Kennedy Talent, saw *Moulin Rouge!* At Proctors, beginner/advanced tap at Proctors.

Celeste Joo-Schwaber - Bristol Hills Music Camp, New England Music Camp, voice lessons
Alana Kearney- Rehearsals for *Beetlejuice The Musical* at Debuts Theater Co.
Opal Keck - Summer Tour to Atlanta with the Charlotte Choir School, Royal School of Church Music D.C Choral Residency
Sami Lazarus- Bristol Hills Music Camp
Nicholas Lessard - Bristol Hills Music Camp
Olivia Lessard - *MEAN GIRLS* with Drama Kids International (Dawn Schweitzer and Dance Captain)
Caitlin Li - Bristol Hills Music Camp, SUNY Schenectady Trombone Institute and Brass Ensemble
Avery Orsini - Voice lessons at Scotia Music Center, Camp Fowler Bible scripts compositions and talent show (Java Jam)
Ada Ryan - Dance Nationals at Royal Dance Competition in NJ, Dance Intensives at Dance Dimensions
Kiana Sheffield - July & August Dance Intensives and taught classes at CDAI, Hall of Fame Dance Nationals in Virginia Beach

Silvia Lunetta- Performed the National Anthem at a camp lacrosse game, voice lessons
Walter MacDonald - Skidmore Jazz Institute, Bristol Hills Music Camp
Joey Marinucci - Yertle the Turtle in *Seussical* at Debuts Theater Company
Lucia Mastracchio - *Mean Girls* at Shen Summer Adventures Theater Camp
Anna Milone - Drama Kids International Summer Program (*Mean Girls the Musical*)
Afnan Mohamed - attended a concert in Boston and practiced voice online
Kai Moore - Bristol Hills Music Camp, voice and piano lessons at Modern Day Music
Ava Silvia- *13* the musical and dance lessons at Park Playhouse, voice lessons, Zoey Murphy in *Dear Evan Hansen* (Kennedy Talent), saw *Lost Boys* on Broadway.
Lilla Steller - Nationals Dance Competition at Elite Dance Competition in Providence, NJ, July Dance Intensive and lessons at Dance Me
Talia Steller - Nationals Dance Competition at Elite Dance Competition in Providence, NJ, July Dance Intensive and lessons at Dance Me

Vincent Stevenson – Character drawing camp and stained glass camp
Annamae Tully - performed the National Anthem at X10 Lacrosse Camp at Echo Lake in the Adirondacks

Donovan Weisse - Bristol Hills Music Camp
Emma Wildermuth- 3 week ballet summer intensive at the Rock School in Philadelphia
Sami Zsuzsics - Guitar lessons at Warren Music Academy

High School Band

The High School Concert Band continues to grow each year, and our 70+ students have been working diligently since the beginning of September!

On November 5, the band will perform an exciting and diverse program featuring both new and classic works, including *Canto* by Francis McBeth, *España Cañi*, arranged by Tyler Arcari, and *Byzantine Dances* by Carol Brittin Chambers.

We are also looking forward to collaborating with the 8th Grade Band in February for a mini-Band Festival! Join us on February 4 for an exciting combined thematic program, as well as the premiere of *Awaz* for Wind Ensemble by our old friend and composer Aakash Mittal.

In addition to our final concert on May 27, the Concert Band will perform at the annual Memorial Day Assembly on May 26. We look forward to this special opportunity each year to honor our veterans.

More on *Awaz* for Wind Ensemble…

We would like to thank the Friends of Music for sponsoring our participation in a **BRAND NEW PIECE** written for Concert Band by Aakash Mittal!

The band performed Mittal's *Salt March* at Band Fest two years ago and *3 Songs of Bengal* with guest tabla players last May. We are thrilled to now be part of the consortium funding his newest work, *Awaz*, which will be delivered in June of next year.

We look forward to working on and performing this exciting new piece in February.

Thank you, Friends of Music!



"Awaz is a Hindi-Urdu word that translates to mean "noise, sound, and voice" depending on the context. ***Awaz for Wind Ensemble*** *will explore these three meanings as three movements of music. This piece will incorporate elements of structured musical improvisation. Rather than employing Jazz chord changes, the score will give students specific scales and simple musical "games" that will add color and spontaneity to the piece. The score will come with instructions and a guide for both students and teachers to explore the improvisation elements as an ensemble. I will be drawing from twenty one years of teaching beginning improvisers to create improvisation structures that are accessible to musicians who don't have Jazz training. Awaz for Wind Ensemble will also feature a soprano vocalist providing the opportunity to showcase a vocal student or bring in a special guest." - Mittal*

HS Jazz Band and Jazz Ensemble

The High School Jazz groups are off to a **GREAT** start! Both groups sound fantastic, and we are excited to kick off two of our fall concerts on October 29 and November 5.

This year's repertoire includes many recognizable jazz standards, along with a little popular music. Our younger students are quickly developing their skills and gaining confidence playing in the jazz style. It has been wonderful to hear both ensembles grow as musicians and as a group!

In addition to our two fall concerts, we are looking forward to the annual **Niskayuna Jazz Fest** in April, where we will welcome pianist, composer, author, and educator **Ms. Jen Allen** of Trinity College and Bennington College as our guest artist.

The jazz bands will also perform at our annual **Evening in History** collaboration with the Social Studies Department on January 11, where we will celebrate the music and culture of the **1970s**.

The Jazz Ensemble will continue the tradition of our **Jazz Picnic** this year, performing alongside the Jazz Band AND Studio Singers during lunch mods on June 3. We are excited to bring live jazz into the school day and share our music with the Niskayuna community once again!

Area All State / All State Jazz Ensemble

We are thrilled to congratulate **Celeste Joo-Schwaber** of the Niskayuna Concert Band on being selected for this year's **Area All State Symphonic Band**!

We are ALSO thrilled to congratulate **Walter MacDonald** of the Niskayuna Jazz Ensemble on being selected for this year's **Area All State Jazz Ensemble**! Walter was also selected as an **Alternate for this year's All State Jazz Ensemble**.

We are also proud to recognize Walter for his selection to participate in the Western Connecticut State University (WCSU) Honor Jazz Ensemble, where he will perform alongside talented student musicians under the direction of Grammy Award-winning saxophonist Jimmy Greene. This is an exciting opportunity for Walter to continue developing as a jazz musician, collaborate with outstanding young performers, and learn from one of the leading artists in jazz today.

Congratulations, Walter!

Jen Allen: District Jazz Festival Guest Artist

We are especially excited to welcome **Jen Allen** as our guest artist for this year's District Jazz Festival. A dynamic pianist, composer, author, and educator, Ms. Allen will work with our students and share her expertise, creativity, and passion for jazz throughout the festival.

Jen Allen is a dynamic pianist, composer, author, and educator, captivating audiences worldwide with her artistry and creative vision. She frequently performs as a leader or collaborator in venues across New York, the Northeast U.S., and internationally, including appearances at the Litchfield Jazz Festival, Winnipeg Jazz Festival, Greater Hartford Monday Night Jazz Series, and Wexford Performing Arts Centre in Ireland.
Jen has shared the stage with renowned artists such as Don Braden, Jimmy Greene, Freddie Hendrix, Camille Thurman, Nat Reeves, and Sarah Caswell. An active recording artist, her discography includes her debut album *Pieces of Myself*, *Sifting Grace*, her upcoming release *Possibilities*, and collaborative projects like *Raise Up* by Trio 149. She has also contributed to numerous other recordings as a sideman.
Her compositional work spans big bands, studio orchestras, string quartets, and small ensembles, earning her a place in the prestigious BMI Jazz Composers Workshop. Notable commissions include her 2018 residency at St. Peter's Church (NYC) Jazz Lauds and her immersive piece *Collective Breath*, which integrates music, visuals, and breathwork to foster connection and reflection.
Jen's educational endeavors are equally impressive. She holds degrees in performance and composition from The Hartt School and UMASS Amherst. Currently, she serves as a Visiting Assistant Professor of Music at Trinity College in Hartford and Visiting Faculty at Bennington College. Jen has also presented masterclasses, clinics, and has been a guest-conductor for numerous universities. She has been a senior teaching artist for Litchfield Performing Arts since 2010.
Jen's accolades include the 2023 Artistic Excellence Award from the Connecticut Artist Fellowship Program and the 2024 Greenstage Artist Award. Jen also co-authored *Sitting In: Jazz Piano* with Noah Baerman, which won Music Inc. Magazine's Editor's Choice Award in 2015. Her
Her innovative and multifaceted contributions to music and education continue to inspire audiences and students alike.





Jazz Combo Club

The **Jazz Combo Club is entering its third year and is bigger than ever!** Students meet both during the school day during free mods and outside of the school day to explore jazz improvisation and develop their skills in a small-group setting.

The group continues to bring jazz into our school and community, performing at a variety of events and venues. Last year, we were thrilled to once again perform at a **NYSUT reception for Governor Kathy Hochul**, along with other community performances.

We look forward to another exciting year of performances at school and throughout the community, including coffee shops, senior living facilities, and other local events. The club is open to students of all abilities who want to explore jazz and grow as improvisers.

New Instruments for the Music Department!

A huge thank you to **Barry Manilow**, everyone at the **Manilow Music Project**, and **Sweetwater Music** for helping us put our Barry Manilow Music Teacher Award toward some incredible new instruments for our students at Niskayuna!

We've welcomed a brand-new set of Musser graduated jazz vibes (with a motor) and a brand-new Ludwig drum kit in gold glitter and brand-new Evans drum heads! Our previous jazz vibes will be heading to Iroquois Middle School to help outfit their amazing new music room, extending the impact of this award to even more students.

We are incredibly grateful for this investment in music education and the opportunities it creates for our students. We can't wait to put these new instruments to work on our upcoming concerts!

Thank you to everyone at the Manilow Music Project and Sweetwater for supporting music teachers and making a real difference in our schools!



Summer Sonata Photo Ops





Bristol Hills Music Camp

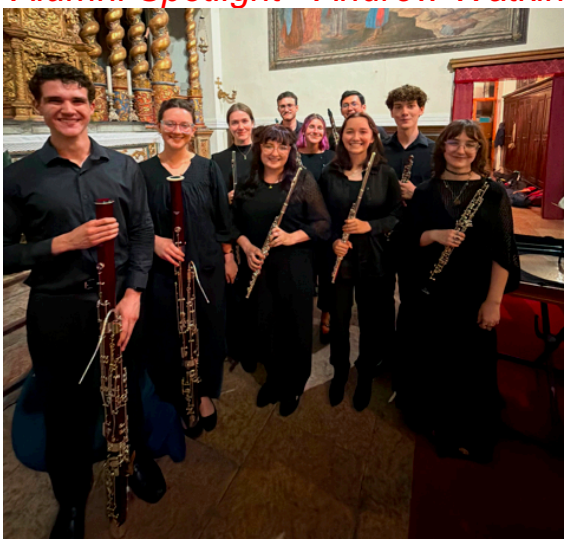


Theo Aimi, Jaelyn Biggar, Maxim Blotnikov, Evan Buma, Thomas Calder, Addison Elsbree, Simon Harvey, Celeste Joo-Schwaber, Cyrus Joo-Schwaber, Elijah Lavender, Sami Lazarus, Nicholas Lessard, Caitlin Li, Walter MacDonald, Ella Miranda, Kai Moore, Pierce Olsen, Matthew Shaw, Ellie Shaw, Donovan Weisse

Capital Region Summer Trombone Institute
Caitlin Li
Benjaman Bratspiss

Skidmore Jazz Institute
Walter MacDonald

Alumni Spotlight - Andrew Watkins (NHS Class of 2025)



Andrew Watkins, Oboist (pictured 2nd from the right) was accepted to and attended the prestigious *Trentino Music Festival* in Northern Italy for a five-week intense orchestral performance program this past summer. Andrew had the opportunity to perform numerous orchestra concerts and operas under the baton of Maestro J. David Jackson from the Metropolitan Opera Orchestra.

2026-2027 Friends of Music Board and Committee

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Hillside Liaison

Lindsey Pepe

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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.

Join us on Facebook @niskyfom & Instagram: niskyfriendsofmusic

www.niskyfom.org

You can also scan the following QR Code as a direct link to joining Friends of Music.

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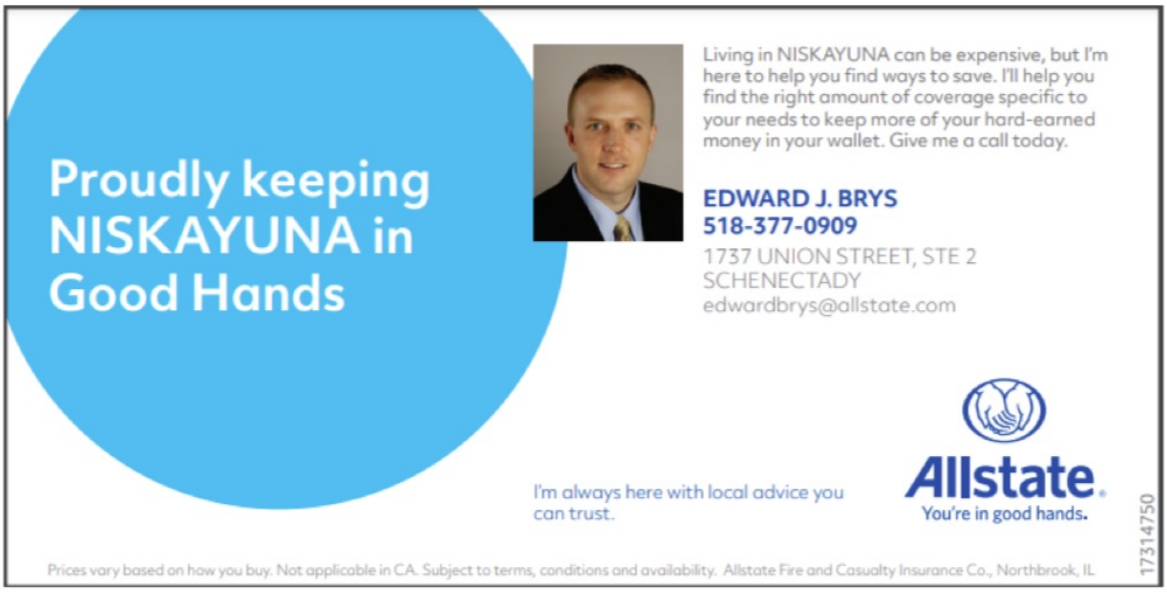

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COMMUNITY SPONSORS INFO

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*)
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- uncements during concerts and performances
- Full-year advertising placement for your logo on our website (niskyfom.org)
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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!

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