



PO Box 220 • Shepherdstown, WV 25443 • www.friendswv.org

President's Report on FY2025-26
Annual Meeting
July 14, 2026

Friends of Music's 26th season was a success by every measure. We advanced our mission of promoting musical excellence in the Eastern Panhandle of West Virginia by sponsoring three concerts (six performances) by Two Rivers Chamber Orchestra, an evening concert by Two Rivers String Quintet, and a matinee performance by Music of the Regiment in honor of America 250. The concerts occurred as planned:

- Sept. 27 & 28, 2025 – Two Rivers Chamber Orchestra "Beethoven for the Birders"
- Nov. 15, 2025 – Two Rivers Cello Quintet "Double Down"
- March 28 & 29, 2026 – Two Rivers Chamber Orchestra with Junhong Kuang "Guitar Mania"
- April 18, 2026 – Music of the Regiment "Equal to any Band in this Country"
- May 30 & 31, 2026 – Two Rivers Chamber Orchestra "Doubles, Anyone?"

Orchestra concert attendance averaged 178 patrons over 2 performances, while single performances by the cello quintet and Music of the Regiment drew 153 and 110 people, respectively. Overall attendance in FY26 exceeded that of FY25 by nearly 9%, in part because all this season's concerts were held in Shepherdstown; the September concert was a collaboration with Potomac Valley Audubon Society (PVAS); and the May concert was attended by string students of cellist Alyssa Moquin. No doubt, the strong turnout was also influenced by the high level of creative programming, guest soloist Junhong Kuang on classical guitar, and efforts to avoid scheduling conflicts with other groups' activities.

Established in 2007, Two Rivers Chamber Orchestra maintains a deep roster of professional musicians from this region. In the 2025-26 season, the time and effort these local artists devote to their work was evident in the deeply resonant quality of their music and the complexity of their repertoire. Audience members' comments on post-concert surveys included these: "the entire performance was riveting;" "Jed and the musicians were fantastic!" and "incredible!" More than 90% of respondents consistently rated the concerts as "outstanding."

The education component of Friends of Music's mission also occurred as planned in FY26. Mini-grants totaling \$7,000 were provided to 16 public schools (8 in Jefferson County and 8 in Berkeley County). Most of the proposals were fully funded, rather than partially funded, thanks to the Board's decision to divert funds from student graduation scholarships to mini-grants, where the impact would be greater and more long-lasting. The Scott Beard Student Internship was awarded to Lillian Wilkins, a music major at Shepherd University, who earned a \$1,000 stipend for helping in our office and at our performances.

Operationally, Friends of Music had sound finances. Income was over budget by nearly +7.9% (\$156,886 actual vs. \$145,350 budget). Expenses were also over, but to a lesser extent at +4.6% (\$144,308 actual vs. \$137,919 budget). The net gain of about \$11,500 includes \$7,500 from restricted grants that are designated for education uses in FY27. In years when there is a small surplus, Friends of Music aims to build its modest reserve account, with the goal of having one year's worth of operating funds on hand for emergencies like pandemics or economic crises. On this objective, we are roughly halfway to the goal.

Sources of income this year were: 27% individual contributions, 11% memberships, 9% ticket sales, 9% advertisements and sponsorships, 14% government grants, 24% private foundations, 4% events, and 2% interest. There were 110 members this year, up from 105 members last year. Ticket prices were kept steady. Our annual matching campaign was held during the month of February instead of at year-end, with good results. Major grants were received from the WV Department of Tourism and the National Endowment for the Arts; Detlev and Mary Ellen Preissler Fund; Nora Roberts Foundation; Ecolab; and Marion Park Lewis Foundation. Two unanticipated sources of funding were Shepherdstown Street Fest and America 250.

Major expense categories were: 60% musician contracts, 3% concert expenses, 11% marketing, 5% education, 1% fundraising events, 8% administration, and 12% payroll. Expenses are fairly predictable from one year to the next, and costs are kept low and carefully monitored. A two-month staff vacancy during the summer of 2025 allowed for significant savings on salaries. Unbudgeted expenses included the purchase of database software and a well-deserved bonus for the Music Director.

Consistent leadership was in place throughout the year. Immediate Past President Judy Jones continued involvement on the Executive Committee, providing guidance, historical context, and critical networking. Treasurer Barbara Zingg handled the monthly accounting, adding another year of tenure to her many years of service. Jed Gaylin marked his 14th year with Friends of Music, upholding the creative process as Music Director.

Fittingly, Jed Gaylin received a prestigious honor in January 2026 – recognition on Musical America's "Top 30 Professionals" list, for going above and beyond to keep the arts thriving. His imaginative programming and skillful conducting once again garnered high praise and standing ovations from our patrons. Jed's connections facilitated Junhong Kuang's guest appearance on classical guitar in March 2026, and two commissions – one for composer Matthew Kimbley from the J. Kimo Williams 2026 Music Commissioning Initiative for a world premier in October 2026, and one as part of a consortium sponsoring composer Eric Nathan to create a work featuring violinist Stefan Jackiw to be performed two or three seasons from now.

Board Member Ann Henriksson chaired the Education Committee, which met regularly to refine its processes, build connections with public school teachers, and issue mini-grants. Photos of students with the newly purchased items were distributed to the press and published on social media, helping to illustrate Friends of Music's community involvement. The Committee also laid the groundwork for timing its FY27 grant cycle with the school year, henceforth issuing awards in the fall rather than in the spring.

Board Member Elisabeth Staro led the efforts to raise funds from advertisements and events. Income from concert program ads topped 140% of the goal! Consistent with past years, Puzzle Mania proved to be a fun, smooth event with 47 teams participating.

A tremendous loss for the organization occurred with the passing of colleague and friend, Peter Smith. Peter championed Friends of Music for more than a decade, handling nearly all the publicity and concert program responsibilities. With profound foresight, he left us with templates, planning calendars, and press contacts, which proved essential as we endeavored to continue his work as seamlessly as possible. To commemorate Peter, the Board voted to purchase an Adirondack chair for “Peter’s Porch” at PVAS’s Eidolon Sanctuary.

Staff Administrator Sherry Sykes retired in June 2026 and joined the Board as a volunteer. The Administrator position was vacant during the summer, and Board members pitched in to cover routine administrative tasks. In early September, Lauren Frick was hired for the 20 hour/week position. With a strong background in music and administration, and familiarity with the area from having attended Shepherd University, Lauren arrived well prepared for the tasks at hand.

As Administrator, Lauren assumed responsibility for concert management, office routines, and oversight of the student intern (Lillian Wilkins). Lauren was instrumental in helping Friends of Music select and adopt the Contact Resource Management (CRM) software, Bloomerang. The new database replaces Excel spreadsheets, is vastly more powerful, and will integrate with financial transactions made through our website beginning in July 2026.

For me, serving as President in FY26 was a privilege and a pleasure. I remain sincerely grateful for the opportunity to work with such a thoughtful, committed, collegial group of Board members. Regular conversations with Jed Gaylin kept us in sync during the year, as we promptly responded to programmatic needs and new opportunities with utmost professionalism. Partnership with Lauren Frick was also critical, as we both moved along learning curves in our new roles. My sincere thanks to everyone at Friends of Music for your participation and guidance this year.

The 2025-26 season closes with accolades for a job well done, and the 2026-27 season ensues from a strong starting point. Our organizational vision is unfolding – to have an increasingly connected community where residents’ lives are enriched by chamber music and related initiatives, where area musicians are cherished and well-compensated, and where our activities strengthen the regional economy.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Heidi Johnston". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned below the word "Respectfully,".

Heidi Johnston
President