



BELLINGEN
YOUTH
ORCHESTRA

2025 BYO AGM

President's Report

2025 has been characterised by the incredible efforts of the broader team of music teachers, volunteers and supporters who have continued to provide a platform for growth and success for young musicians in our community. Across all four ensembles the level of musicianship and collective performance has reached heights not seen since before the COVID period.

2024 finished strongly with a shared Proms concert bringing all ensembles together. What was evident through this program was a culture of learning and aspiration as the younger players of the intermediate ensembles were immersed within and supported by the older and more experienced players.

That culture has been further developed through 2025 with the shared Cygnet Spring Serenade concert and the Rising Stars September concert showcasing and supporting older players from across the instrumental sections. The sense of inspiration and aspiration between peers, a hallmark of the BYO, had been impacted by declining player numbers as a direct result of COVID and to see this return is a testament to the hard work and commitment of the entire BYO team.

The BYO Wind School has continued to grow under the astute directorship of Hazel Buchanan. Hazel, supported by Susan McGowan and Tom Touhy, has grown the ensemble and worked to establish a strong foundational path for wind players. Such is the success of the program that word of mouth is now the main driver for new enrolments.

This year we welcomed back from a period of maternity leave, the incredible musical educator Jacquie Gill. Jacquie, as a founding director of the BYO String School has continued to collaborate with the inspiring Liz Scott in a shared role that has again seen the String School grow. This intermediate school is now well established and provides a clear pathway for young players to grow in confidence and performance skills before transitioning into the flagship orchestra.

2025 has also seen Amber Davis return in the role of Sinfonia director. This program remains a remarkable opportunity to extend our older string players and their work continues to impress new audiences; this year performing at Camp Creative and collaborating with Rosie Stephen and community musicians in the Joni Mitchell concert to high acclaim.

Our flagship orchestra has also continued to reflect the vision and aims of the BYO. Their musical attainment, ensemble playing and mentor support enabled them to again support the NSW Arts unit in the regional Compass concerts across an extended program as well as deliver an exceptional community performance in September. We acknowledge that this year saw the retirement from public performances of our patron David Helfgott. Although this marks a sad milestone in the orchestra's history, David remains as our patron and supporter and we continue to recognise his inspiration and contribution to our organisation, players and the music world more generally. We will continue to look for opportunities to engage with David over the coming years. Annie Phelan, as our leading conductor and Artistic director has again explored new and challenging repertoire in 2025 with the underlying principle of extending young players to allow them to reach new musical heights.

A feature of the year has been the continued growth of the new Cygnet orchestra, a combined intermediate ensemble providing opportunity for players from the two BYO schools to collaborate and perform new repertoire. The success of this collaboration has required extra work and support from a larger team and reflects the sustainable processes now in place across the organisation. As we move into the consolidation phase of these ventures, the strength of the systems and processes across the committees, music teachers and volunteer teams should be recognised. We can reflect proudly on the fact that we are now embedding additional opportunities for young people to join musical pathways in regional NSW whilst ensuring we continue to care for and support our team.

Rainee Herron, our Administration Officer has continued to drive this transformation and refine our systems of communication and record keeping. A priority in 2024/2025 has been the review and update of systems to ensure the wellbeing of players and volunteers with a particular focus on our obligations in areas of child protection. Updated policies and process reflect this effort and our commitment, as an organisation, to ensure young people are safe and well-supported as they strive to develop their creative musical skills as active members of their community. The Committee continues to recognise the significance and value of this position in ensuring the sustainability of the BYO.

In the early months of 2025, BYO was heavily impacted by weather events which significantly impacted rehearsals and performances. This, combined with the additional player and musical teacher commitments of community events such as the Bellingen High School Musical saw a reduction in revenue for the year. Despite this, the Committee has been able to maintain and develop our inventory of instruments. Led by Katharine Sutherland, who has overseen the new instrument hire agreement processes with families, this work particularly demonstrates our continued commitment to new young players as they take up instruments and begin their musical journey. This has been enhanced this year with a very generous donation of instruments from the Scanlon Family.

Reestablishing a healthy financial position will need to be a priority in 2026. We continue to work with James Davis as treasurer and his work has ensured we now have well-established systems and protocols for financial processes. We have had fewer outstanding fees and, moving into the new year, expect that this position will improve further. We continue to rely on the generous support of James and HQB and acknowledge their work in ensuring we meet our financial reporting obligations as a registered charity.

As we strive to maintain our financial security, we acknowledge the ongoing recognition of key supporters in our community and beyond. We extend our thanks to the Lansdowne Foundation, FRRR, Terry and Joanna Walker, Roger Bourke and Ali Brown, Camp Creative, the Scanlon Family and the many anonymous donors whose generosity enables us to support young people on positive creative musical pathways. Whilst the financial support is an essential facet of our success, we are equally dependent on the professional expertise and support we are afforded from our community. We thank Neptune's Guitars, HQB, Jay and the Trees, and the Bellingen Shire Council. Since its inception, the Bellingen Youth Orchestra has been embedded within its community. In 2025 we are able to continue to provide exceptional musical experiences for young people in a nurturing and inspiring environment; we continue to provide mentoring and authentic creative relationships and performance opportunities that rival those of metropolitan areas. This is made possible because of the broader community.

As we reflect on the 2025 year, I again recognise the Bellingen Youth Orchestra Committee. Their expertise, hard work, generosity and collaborative approach is second to none, with each individual contributing their time and skills in an effort to enable young people in our organisation and community shine. The BYO Committee recognises that providing young people with positive and rewarding creative musical pathways enhances social and neurological growth with players developing authentic friendships, musical collaborations, and community connections. Above all, the work and dedication of this committee gives agency to young people to make decisions and contributions that reward both themselves and their broader community.

Thank you,

David Neville

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