Bellingen Youth Orchestra

Secretary's Report AGM October 27th.

It is my pleasure to present the Secretary's Report for the Bellingen Youth Orchestra (BYO) for the 2025–2026 year.

This year has once again demonstrated the strength, commitment and community spirit that underpin BYO. Our organisation continues to provide young musicians with opportunities to develop their musical abilities, build confidence, experience the joy of ensemble playing and form lasting connections through music. None of this would be possible without the dedication of our music teachers, committee members, parent volunteers, families, supporters and, of course, our young musicians.

BYO continues to provide a range of musical pathways for young people in our region. Our programs support musicians at different stages of their development, from their first experiences playing in an ensemble through to the challenges and rewards of advanced orchestral performance. Our latest achievement has seen our hire program extend to Macksville Public School (a low socio-economic primary school in the Nambucca valley), with 6 students now hiring a BYO instrument.

Our String School (BYOSS), with 31 players, and Wind School (BYOWS), with 18 players, remain important foundations for developing musicianship, instrumental technique, confidence and ensemble skills. The collaboration between these programs has continued to strengthen, with students from both schools coming together to perform as the Cygnet Orchestra. These shared experiences help young musicians develop an understanding of the different instrumental sections and the collaborative nature of orchestral music.

Our flagship Bellingen Youth Orchestra currently has 48 players, while Sinfonia, our senior string ensemble, has 12. These ensembles provide opportunities for young musicians to challenge themselves, develop their skills and experience the rewards of performing increasingly demanding repertoire.

Many BYO players also achieve individual success in music beyond the organisation. These achievements reflect not only their talent and dedication but also the opportunities BYO provides through access to quality music education, experienced teachers and ensemble performance.

This year also saw a record-breaking 16 applicants for our Senior Scholarship round, demonstrating the continued demand for these opportunities and the importance of supporting young musicians as they progress in their musical journeys.

The Cygnet Orchestra provides an important bridge for developing players as they prepare to progress into the flagship Bellingen Youth Orchestra. During the year,

opportunities were created for confident readers and developing players to experience BYO rehearsals, supporting their transition towards joining the Orchestra in 2027.

Sinfonia has continued to challenge its musicians through demanding repertoire and the development of both solo and ensemble performance skills. Its work on Vivaldi's four concertos during Term 3 provided an outstanding example of the concentration, discipline and sustained preparation required to achieve musical excellence. The resulting performance demonstrated the remarkable progress that can be achieved through individual commitment and collective effort.

Together, these programs provide a valuable musical pathway for young people in our region and reflect BYO's ongoing commitment to making high-quality music education accessible to our community.

Performance opportunities remain central to the BYO experience. Throughout the year, our ensembles have worked towards concerts that celebrate their achievements while providing meaningful goals for musical development.

Our String School and Wind School concert in August brought students together to perform their own repertoire before combining as the Cygnet Orchestra. These performances demonstrated the benefits of collaboration between the two schools and the growing confidence of our young musicians.

In September, BYO and Sinfonia came together for *An Evening of Two Halves*, showcasing the breadth of repertoire and musical experience within our organisation. The program included works by Mozart, Saint-Saëns and Shostakovich performed by BYO, alongside repertoire by Vivaldi and Tchaikovsky performed by Sinfonia. The concert provided a valuable opportunity to celebrate the achievements of both ensembles and recognise the commitment required to prepare challenging orchestral works.

Beyond our own concert program, BYO continues to value opportunities for broader community participation and cultural exchange. The invitation for Sinfonia to participate in the Taranta Festival was an exciting opportunity to extend our musicians' performance experiences and share their talents with a wider audience. Such invitations reflect the quality, versatility and growing recognition of our musicians.

Our online presence also continues to evolve. Our main Facebook page has grown to 1,278 followers, helping us connect with families, supporters and the wider community. We have also introduced a new feature, *Blast from the Past*, which revisits memorable moments from BYO's history. This initiative is helping to encourage viewer engagement while celebrating the people, performances and experiences that have shaped our organisation. We have also had a very successful subscriber base generated with currently 44 subscribers that receive our newsletters and early event invites.

At the heart of BYO is our commitment to ensuring that young people have access to meaningful musical education and performance opportunities, regardless of their background or financial circumstances.

Our programs provide far more than instrumental tuition. They help young people develop discipline, resilience, teamwork, listening skills and a sense of belonging. Through ensemble playing, students learn to contribute to a shared goal while developing confidence in their own abilities.

Our instrument loan initiatives continue to support participation by helping students access the instruments they need to begin and continue their musical journey. The provision of instruments through school-based music initiatives is an important step towards reaching more young people and reducing barriers to participation. Recognition needs to be given towards Katharine Sutherland, our instrument officer for her tireless dedication in this area and the establishment of a very through music instrument inventory.

Our commitment to inclusion remains fundamental to the organisation. We recognise that access to music can have a profound and lasting impact on young people, and we continue to value opportunities to support students who might otherwise face barriers to participation.

The dedication of our music teachers is central to this work. Their expertise, patience and willingness to guide students at different stages of development ensure that our programs remain both challenging and supportive.

Behind every successful concert and rehearsal is a significant amount of planning, coordination and administration. The BYO committee continues to support the organisation through its governance responsibilities and the practical work required to deliver our programs and events.

Our concerts rely on the collective efforts of committee members and parent volunteers who assist with ticketing, seating, front of house, afternoon tea, canteen operations, staging, lighting, sound, filming, decoration and the many tasks involved in preparing and packing up our venues. These contributions are essential to the professional standard of our events and to the welcoming environment we aim to provide for our families and audiences.

During the year, attention has also been given to organisational sustainability, forward planning and the systems that support our work. Strategic planning and website review activities have helped identify opportunities to strengthen communication, improve the way we engage with families and supporters, and support the continued development of BYO.

The purchase of a new organisational phone will further support our communication, social media and website activities, helping us maintain an effective and sustainable approach to our digital presence.

Grant applications and fundraising efforts remain important to our ability to maintain and develop our programs. These activities help us pursue opportunities to improve music education, support our students and ensure that the organisation can continue to serve the wider community.

The committee also recognises the importance of sound governance, appropriate data management and clear administrative processes as BYO grows. Maintaining these foundations is essential to protecting our community and ensuring the organisation remains sustainable into the future.

Particular attention has been given to reviewing and updating our child protection policies and processes to ensure that our information and procedures remain current. This includes the digital verification and recording of Working with Children Check (WWCC) clearances through the Office of the Children's Guardian. These measures are an important part of our ongoing commitment to providing a safe environment for the children and young people in our care.

A report such as this cannot fully capture the generosity and commitment of the many people who make BYO possible.

I extend my sincere thanks to our committee members for their time, expertise and ongoing commitment to the organisation. Their work often takes place behind the scenes, but it is fundamental to every aspect of BYO's operation.

I would particularly like to thank James and his team at HQB for their incredible support over the past few years. Their guidance has helped BYO strengthen its financial administration and governance, with significant improvements to invoicing, accountability, ACNC documentation and other financial management processes. Their support has helped establish streamlined and efficient systems that will benefit the organisation well into the future. We are extremely grateful for their expertise, generosity and commitment to BYO.

To our music teachers and ensemble leaders, thank you for the care, knowledge and enthusiasm you bring to your work. The progress of our students is a testament to your dedication and the high standards you encourage.

To our parents, carers and volunteers, thank you for the countless hours you contribute throughout the year. From preparing BYO afternoon teas to managing concert logistics, your willingness to help ensures that our young musicians can focus on learning, rehearsing and performing. The generosity of our volunteers is a defining feature of BYO

and an essential part of our success. We continue to acknowledge the success of all our BYO working parties!

We also acknowledge our supporters, donors, sponsors, grant providers, partner schools and the wider community for helping us sustain and grow our programs. Without these partnerships, the BYO would not continue to thrive.

This year has also reminded us of the lasting contribution made by individuals who give so generously to our musical family. We remember Barb Trist with great affection and gratitude for the extraordinary contribution she made to BYO, including the countless afternoon teas that became such a familiar and cherished part of our concert tradition. Her generosity reflects the spirit of community that makes this organisation so special.

Most importantly, congratulations to our young musicians. Your commitment, perseverance and willingness to learn are the reason BYO exists. Every rehearsal, every performance and every new musical challenge contributes to your development, and it is a privilege to see you grow as musicians and as young people.

As we look towards the coming year, our focus remains on strengthening our musical pathways, supporting our teachers and students, expanding access to music education and ensuring the long-term sustainability of the organisation. We are also very fortunate to move forward with a solid team, that continues to build, brick by brick the foundation of a truly special orchestra. This will be celebrated with our 2027 20th anniversary celebrations.

We will continue to build connections between String School, Wind School, Cygnet Orchestra, BYO and Sinfonia, creating opportunities for students to progress, collaborate and experience the rewards of making music together. We will also continue to seek partnerships, funding and community support that enable us to offer meaningful opportunities to more young people.

BYO is much more than an orchestra. It is a community built around a shared belief in the value of music and the opportunities it creates for young people. The achievements of this year belong to everyone who contributes to that vision.

Thank you for your continued support of the Bellingen Youth Orchestra. I look forward to seeing our organisation continue to flourish in the year ahead.

Rainee Herron
Secretary
Bellingen Youth Orchestra