

2026 BYO AGM

The are a great many successes on which to reflect this year. We ended 2025 and moved in 2026 with an incredible concert series across all of our ensembles. Our work continues to reset the bar in areas of performance quality and opportunities for our young players to shine. A foundational objective of the Bellingen Youth Orchestra is to provide quality musical opportunities for regional youth and this year we further developed our work and relationship with the NSW Arts Unit as played in the North Coast Compass Series, laying the foundation work for the creation of the North Coast Festival Orchestra led by our Musical Director, Annie Phelan.

This year also saw the continued growth and consolidation of the BYO Wind School under the leadership of Hazel Buchanan. Their continued collaboration with the BYO String School, led by Jacquie Gill and Lizze Scott, sees these junior ensembles working together more regularly and excelling as the BYO Cygnet Orchestra. We also saw our Senior strings re-emerge in the Sinfonia program, under the banner of Amber Davis. Whilst acknowledging a changing program and some disruption to plans, their most recent Four Seasons Concert was second to none. We recognise and extend an enormous thanks to all of the Directors for their continued planning and dedication to the promotion and success of those ensembles.

In 2026, our scholarship round focussed on opportunities for senior players in Year 8 or above. There was a significant participation rate with an outstanding standard set by all players. We know that these scholarship rounds continue to engage our young people and we also know that they rely on the generosity of a lot of people. This year saw increased community donations allowing us to better recognise and support the enthusiasm and determination of our young players as they work toward their musical goals.

Our connections with community continue to grow, particularly through our socials and newsletter. The establishment of a dedicated subscribers list sees us sharing our achievements with even more of our supporters. These connections with our community and beyond are a significant part of our organisation and, of course, includes the connections with our incredible volunteers. We saw an expansion of that volunteer team, particularly in areas of technical support and all aspects of preparation. We are able to do what we do in support of youth because of that volunteer base and I acknowledge the expertise and generosity of all who support our organisation in so many ways. Connections with our community were a highlight of this year. Our work in Macksville Public School saw us donate instruments to support a new musical program led by a BYO alumna and has resulted in a new cohort of young people take up classical instruments. Much of the work in connecting within community is attributable to our incredible Operations Manager, Rainee Herron, who continues to ensure we share our stories and celebrate the positive achievements of everyone involved. The addition of our ‘Blast for the Past’ social media moments reminds us all of the incredible legacy we continue to grow.

Our work continues to be supported financially through a number of different avenues. We saw our fees rise and to ensure a more sustainable income stream and we were very excited to have secured a second three-year financial agreement with the Lansdowne Foundation. They continue to recognise the value of nurturing the Arts in regional communities and understand the importance of establishing positive creative pathways as a way of supporting youth well-being. This year also saw an increase in the regular donations from our community and beyond; each one a recognition of our work to promote genuine engagement opportunities for success in our youth.

Whilst we celebrate the public performances and achievements of our organisation, we should also recognise the many things that happen behind the scenes. This year, one of those tasks was the finalising of the instrument database and consolidation of the instrument hire scheme. Without quality instruments our orchestra would not exist and the management of our existing inventory with the addition of new instruments has ensured our capacity to sustainably support our growing player base. This is significant undertaking and the work done by Katharine Sutherland in that space is certainly acknowledged!

I would also like to take a moment to acknowledge the wonderful contribution that we've received from James and the HQB accounting team. As our treasurer, James has developed sustainable, transparent, and manageable systems. This year James is stepping down from the BYO Committee but we recognise his generosity in sharing his expertise and guiding us to ensure we not only maintain our financial obligations as a charity, but also continue to support young players on a sustainable basis into the future. Thank you James, for your time, effort and sage advice in your time with us. We are delighted that HQB will continue to be a community supporter and provide financial oversight to our organisation. As we move into 2027 our Treasurer role is being taken up by a new volunteer and member of our Committee, Hannah Carter. We welcome Hannah to the team.

In 2026, our music teachers have continued to generously support and inspire our young players. This work continues to remain, at once, our greatest asset - their inspiration, dedication and expertise is incredible - and also our biggest point of weakness. We continue to struggle to attract enough teachers to support the growing numbers of enthusiastic young people wanting to learn music and join our orchestra. This will remain an ongoing focus for the future strategic direction of the orchestra.

We, of course, have started preparations for our anniversary year in 2027. This will mark a double celebration with the 20th birthday of the Flagship BYO Orchestra and the 10th anniversary of our String School. This work will continue as we work towards a September 2027 community concert in Bellingen.

This year we've also sadly experienced loss. One of our long-term supporters and inspirations, Barb Trist, recently passed away. Her passing reminds us of the extraordinary support we continue to have from so many people right across our community and, just to remind us that our work is about more than just music, I acknowledge the more than 15,000 cupcakes Barb managed to supply over the years to keep our children smiling at each afternoon tea. The relationships and creative rewards live with us all, long after the performance lights fade.

I'd like to finish my report by acknowledging and thanking the BYO Committee for their seemingly endless energy but also for their commitment to supporting young people. In a time when there is so much attention given to what young people in society are failing to achieve, the people who hold up the Bellingen Youth Orchestra continue to tell stories of positive creative musical pathways and the successes of the young! Thank you!

David Neville

President, Bellingen Youth Orchestra