



Friends House Letter

Friends House
Seniors Association

June 2023

MUSIC... There are so many ways music can have a part in our lives. Here are some of our most memorable experiences.

I'm No Van Cliburn But That's Okay

by Marcia Posner

How do you get to Carnegie Hall?

"Watch your fingering!" my new piano teacher warned me in a stern voice. I shook my head in disbelief. I was suddenly transported from the age of 59 to the age of 6, when I started lessons on the beautiful Sohmer piano my parents had bought.

Mom was an excellent musician, having played her uncle's violin in high school, which he had brought from Europe. She wanted to learn to play piano but her family could not afford one.

Mom would learn with me. Mom excelled and, before long, she was playing complicated classical pieces. I was still attempting "Myrtle the Turtle," stopping to read aloud the impossible left-hand notes. "Count!" Count what?

Finally, I advanced to "Airy Fairies" and played it at my first (and last) recital in June 1948. The recital room of my 7-year-old's memory seemed enormous but was a small room in the Germantown, Pennsylvania library. It overflowed with the recitalists' proud families; fortunately, Mr. Spaulding, the "Fairies" composer, was not among them! I stumbled through the piece as my parents bravely smiled in the audience.

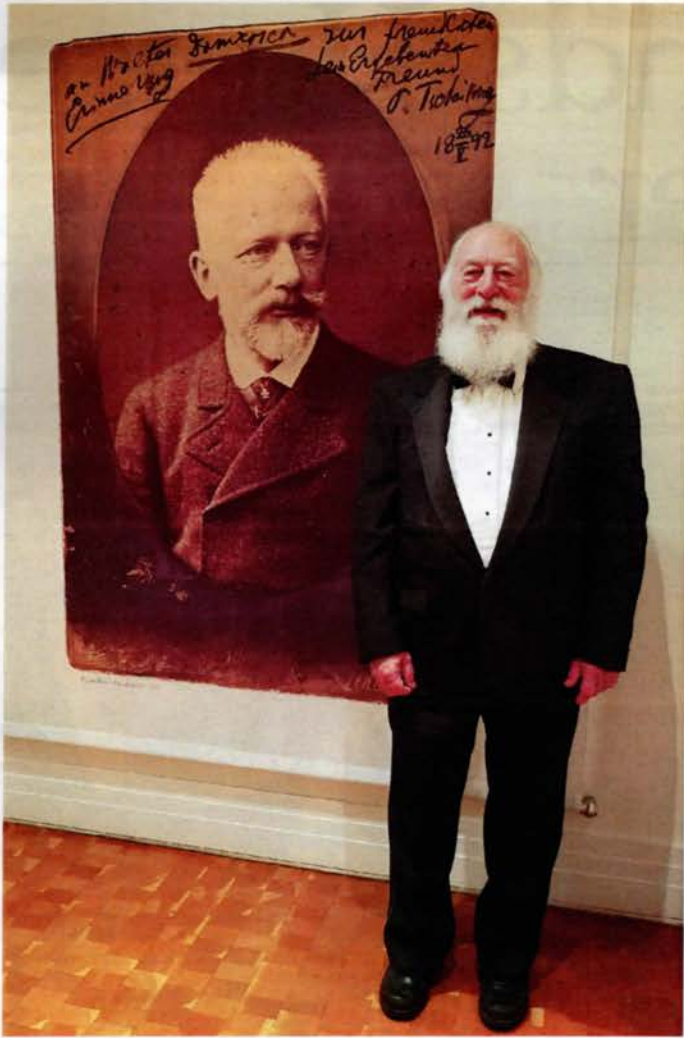


Marcia (about age 7) with her mother

As I struggled through my piano lessons, Mom galloped through each new piece of music perfectly. When Dad's job moved us to Maryland, a friend mentioned Mom's (and my) upcoming piano lessons. Oh no! Before long, I was to meet our mother/daughter teachers: "Children do not practice enough at home." Two 1-hour lessons every week: "Count! Read!"

While listening to a student play Chopin's "Military Polonaise," Dad says, "Someday, you'll do that." Really? I loved the music but I would never be as good as Mom or that student. "No more, please!"

How do you get to Carnegie Hall? With lots of practice! I'm no Van Cliburn so I'll arrive by taxi. That's okay with me.



Music in Our Family

I grew up in Bozeman, Montana, with my three sisters. Both of my parents enjoyed singing and playing the piano. I remember Saturday mornings, listening to the Metropolitan Opera broadcasts on the radio. We kids all started playing the piano at the age of 6. I kept this up until college, when I found that I didn't have the time to practice and do all the other things, like studying.

three sisters added the violin to their music program. I decided on the clarinet.

Between my junior and senior years in high school, a former girlfriend (who had moved to Fargo, North Dakota) invited me to the International Music Camp on the border between North Dakota and Canada. I went back to that camp during the following summer, before starting university. One of my younger sister's boyfriends taught me to play the guitar, which I continue to play to this day.

During my five years at Montana State University, I continued singing. I started taking voice lessons and realized that that was easier for me than playing the piano or clarinet. Because MSU is a state school, in 1963 it required all young men to take at least two years of ROTC. Since I played the clarinet, I figured the easy way to do this was to perform in the Air Force ROTC Band. I returned to MSU three years later and took a course in music theory, sight singing, and opera.

I still sing in the Rockville Chorus and am enjoying the music and the people I sing with.

Friends House Letter

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Nora at the piano in the sunroom

Thanks, Grandma!

by Nora Jones

As a child, I played the piano and sang hymns and other songs with my grandmother, Bessie. That early experience was wonderful and it started me on a lifetime of music. Grandma played piano by ear, both at home and in church. She had a quick wit and could sing and create lyrics to simple tunes — providing much entertainment in our home.

I began taking piano lessons at age 10, playing more and more complicated music — by Bach, Beethoven, Schumann, Mozart, and others — and sang in church choirs. My piano teacher was very strict and motivated us to excel and enter music competitions. She also encouraged me to teach younger students, who came into my home for lessons.

After this inspiring start, I majored in music, sang in and directed choirs in college, and earned a master's degree in the field. I taught music for many years in Montgomery County's elementary schools and frequently accompanied their high school musicals on the piano.

Lately, I have begun playing the fine baby grand piano, two or more times a week, in the sunroom on the third floor of Homes on Quaker Lane — both classical music and popular songs. I appreciate it when residents wave through the hall window, especially when they come inside to listen, sing, or even play along with me!

Multiplication Table

by Bonnie Zimmer

“My arm is tired.” I kept turning the crank on the butter churn. “I’m sure it’s almost done.”

Aunty smoothed my braids back as her eyes twinkled a bit and she nodded. Even for a 5-year-old in rural Appalachia, there were chores to do before being allowed to wander in the field or orchard.

“Yes, see.” She twisted open the top, then scooped the creamy butter out and drained the buttermilk into the cracked blue-and-white pitcher before setting it aside to cool in the icebox.

“Now I have some magic for you to try.” She handed me my little piece of slate and the worn stub of chalk, then drew lines to make squares and started filling them in with numbers.

“This is called multiplication. See if you can figure out the rest of the numbers, then you can go play with the kittens.”

I was a child who loved the symmetry of patterns. It didn’t take long before I had figured out the pattern of the numbers. I looked up at her deeply lined face and shyly whispered, “It’s like the wind blowing through the hay, isn’t it?”

Decades later, I was modeling the flow of nitrogen through an estuary, and I finally had a better word: “Music.”

My In-laws Met on a Piano Bench

by Lydia Stone



Ben and Nancy Stone during their 1936 honeymoon

My husband Ned's parents (Ben and Nancy Stone) were both lifelong musicians — singers, organists, pianists, and piano teachers — and my father-in-law was a composer. In the 1930s, Ben took the only job he could find, as a math teacher at a boys' boarding school. His initial pay was room, board, and laundry.

His musical skill also earned him the privilege of being the pianist for the choir.

In those days (the 1930s), the main way that the students at boys' and girls' boarding schools got together was by throwing joint concerts. At one of these, the boys' choir director called Ben over and showed him a piece of sheet music he wanted played that same evening.

Ben replied, "Arthur, I can't play this; it's for four hands." Arthur, genial but unfazed, called over Nancy, Ben's counterpart pianist from the girls' school. Because the new music piece needed a rehearsal, he insisted that the two of them could rehearse the piece together while everyone else went to dinner.

The rest is history — the pair married in 1936 — Ben continued playing for the school as a church organist and published composer, and Nancy taught lots of piano students. They both raised three children — one was my husband Ned. For the record, none of the children or grandchildren proved to be exceptionally musical!

I remember Ben playing the organ for his beloved wife's memorial service. Even when he was bedridden with dementia, Ben would "conduct" with the wave of his hands when music played in his presence.

My father-in-law Ben is featured in John Updike's story, "The Man Who Became a Soprano," which is based on a series of true events in Ben's life, except that Updike made the character a woman. She (like Ben) was the accompanist for a musical recorder society in Newburyport, Massachusetts, where Ben and Nancy retired.

The Joys of Singing

by Lorne Garrettson

My singing career started at age 9, when I joined a sacred boys choir in my town of Whittier, California. I was a soprano for five years, until my voice changed at age 14. We sang in local churches and at military locations — which were fun (especially for the boys) because military trucks took us to the sites where we were to perform.

I didn't sing again until my last year in college, when my roommate insisted that I join the glee club with him. It was a seminal move for me; I have been singing in choral groups ever since. In medical school, we formed a group of five or six singers and called ourselves the SOBs. (In medicine, that means "short of breath"!)

I married a singer. Beth and I have sung in choruses in Buffalo, Atlanta, and cities in Maryland.

After a hiatus of more than a decade, I needed to get my voice going again, so I joined the Friends House Chorale in 2001.

In 2009, we joined the Rockville Chorus, and I've been with them ever since. One of the highlights are the semi-annual concerts we perform at the F. Scott Fitzgerald auditorium. It is thrilling to sing in a good auditorium with so many wonderful singers and to feel the music as well as hear it. During the Memorial Day Parade, we sing patriotic music that touches the soul. The biggest event was the Chorus's 2010 trip to Germany, where joined with several choruses — 6,000 singers in the stadium! We also visited Pinneberg, our sister city, and sang in some magnificent churches in Hamburg.

I'm told the voice box doesn't age. I'll keep singing as long as I can. The Rockville Chorus permits me to sit down to sing during our concerts along with the other senior singers.

Who Am I?

by Marilyn Briggs

I am a woman who believes in living life to its fullest extent and who has a deep love of music, family, and friends. Music is in my DNA. My grandmothers — on both sides of the family — either sang in the church choir or played the organ and piano in church. It was only natural, then, that my father played the piano and my mother sang to me from the day I was born.

At the age of nine, I was given a 12-bass accordion for my birthday and started taking music lessons. I soon graduated to 120-bass and became a regular on a Saturday morning radio & TV show called "Stellar Stars of Tomorrow." At 14, I joined a Red Cross group and we entertained military personnel at the local military bases and hospitals. I truly loved playing for the troops because they were a most appreciative audience, smiling and clapping loudly.



Marilyn Briggs age 21 entertaining at the Jr. Bar Association

I was exposed to all sorts of music — from classical to country-western to big band to pop tunes and jazz. The show "Hamilton" helped me to appreciate rap music. I love that syncopated beat that one has to feel — it can't be taught. It's the same with Latin music.

Music can bring out all sorts of emotions in me. I cry when I hear a certain song ... I smile with the memories ... I move to the rhythm ... I relax with many of the classics. Music is definitely the international language as well as the soul of the church. I'm inspired by the song, "I Love Life." It starts out, "I love life and I want to live, to drink of life's fullness and take all it can give."



Travels With a Blockflöte Recorder

by Marjorie Bergemann

I was 11 years old during the summer of 1942, enjoying singing, classical music, and piano. My sister and I loved our Girl Scout camp life. One day, I heard an adorable camper play a lovely wooden flute and I discovered the recorder, known as the German Blockflöte. It was enchanting, and I decided to buy one soon.

Money was short in my family, and I needed to wait until I graduated as an R.N. and was earning money. I taught myself to play it, and taught my three young daughters harmony and singing when I played our favorite songs. They sang beautifully.

Our family joke was that, on camping trips, there were no stops for lunch unless they'd sing with me. We sang Celtic, German, Spanish, bluegrass, country, western, early English ... you name it, we sang it all. They studied piano, flute, bassoon, cello, and played the violin given to one of them by their Swiss-German grandma. The children continued music throughout college.

On one vacation to Celle, Germany, I went to the Moeck Instrument Werkes, a maker of fine recorders, and bought a Rosewood sopranino recorder. The salesman, enjoying my limited German skills, had suggested that I try a beautiful sopranino recorder. What first came into my head was "Auf Der Heide," typical for that region. He was happy as I played, and immediately reduced the price. That little recorder has traveled around the world with me, to every continent except one, Antarctica. I still play it, and it's retained its wonderful sound.

By the way, the density of rosewood adds an immense richness to the musical sound. I love this little instrument, although at nearly age 93, I don't seem to have enough wind. That doesn't stop me, though. Maybe I'll take it with me when I leave this world.

"Zevensprong"

by Jim Hersey

Sweet, how children's songs cling to memory. Back in 1968, as a volunteer for the World Council of Churches, I spent the summer working with Down's syndrome children in the Netherlands. The children didn't grasp that I spoke a different language, so they insisted on teaching me the Dutch words of their favorite counting song, "Zevensprong," where we held hands and circled round and round, dropping a knee, an elbow, and finally a head to the ground as we counted from "ein" (one) to "zeven" (seven).

I'd nearly forgotten about this until 50 years later when my partner, Jenepher, moved into a small group home for Alzheimer's patients. It was sad to have Jenepher leave Friends House but her world was growing smaller, and the oldest resident in her new home, Henriette, was very welcoming. Henriette had emigrated to the United States after the war but grew up in the Netherlands and often lapsed back into her childhood Dutch. When I visited, I would find Henriette holding Jenepher's hand, and I watched while she slowly slid a potted rose across the dining room table toward Jenepher to share with her. I wondered what I could do to thank Henriette.

Then it came to me: "Zevensprong," the counting song the Dutch children had taught me all those years ago. So, at a summer party, I took the hands of the visiting grandchildren, and we danced round in a circle in front of Henriette as I sang, "Hap u vel gehoord von den zeven ..."

“Dat is een,” we put in one foot. “Dat is twee,” we put in the other foot. “Dat is drie,” down went one knee to the floor “Dat is ze-e-ven,” down went our heads to touch the floor in the center of the circle.

Henriette joined our singing. We all laughed. Henriette was so delighted, she switched from English to cheerfully chatting away in her childhood Dutch for the next three days.

Name That Tune

by Ann Gerike

I was born into a musical family in 1933, the middle of five children. My father was a Missouri-Synod Lutheran minister, as was his father, and my brother after him. And Lutherans like to sing; it seems to be in the genes.

Every Sunday after church in our Nebraska countryside congregation, we sang around the piano at home — sometimes the more lively hymns, but often the songs of Gilbert and Sullivan. And I formed the habit of listening to “Your Hit Parade” every Saturday evening on our only radio, a console.

I not only kept track of the listings but also wrote down the words of the songs, filling in the blanks on subsequent hearings. Normally a calm, quiet child, I became a tyrant for that hour, demanding silence — and, surprisingly, usually getting it.

Of course, it usually required many hearings for each song. I still have sheets of the old listings, in my childish handwriting, with words misspelled, like “Begin the Beggeen.” It was only later that I learned that there were magazines that published all the lyrics, but then I never would have learned all those words!

The best outcome of that practice, it seems to me now, is that I still have the words to

many of those songs stored in my brain. In the dining room, I may burst into a few lines from a song that are pertinent to the conversation, and usually someone else will join in. Often, when I’m by myself, I will sing the old songs, sometimes in bed. And, of course, I love our periodic Saturday night sing-alongs in the Miller Center.

THE SOUND OF SILENCE

Larghissimo

J.S. Zamecnik



Musical Pleasures

by Patience Schenck



I could read music before I could read words — which is no surprise, given that both my mother and my grandmother were piano teachers. One of my earliest memories is playing a beginner's piano version of "Silent Night" on the radio at the age of 6 and dedicating it to my grandfather, who was in the hospital. Small-town America!

My youngest sister was born two months before I left for college. I took over my mother's piano pupils for the summer. That summer, she bought me two notebooks on music theory. I have loved knowing about things like the "circle of fifths."

As a teenager, I knew all the hit tunes. We were late getting our first TV, so I tried to babysit on Saturday nights so I could watch "Your Hit Parade." I also know the pop music of the '70s, when my kids were young, and I went to a few folk concerts in the '60s. Otherwise, I have usually chosen to listen to Beethoven over rock and roll. I am somewhat embarrassed about my lack of knowledge of popular music.

My mother and I often had difficulty in communicating. But we could always connect over listening to a record or following a score together.

I have sung in a number of choruses through the years, so I was delighted when Angie Frazier came to my door in 2017, when I moved to the D wing at Friends House, and invited me to join the Friends House Chorus. What a privilege it was to sing with such a gifted and professional director!

Before I go to sleep each night, I close my bedroom door and go to YouTube to hear whatever music appeals to me that evening. It is a delightful way to end the day!

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Going to Singers Heaven

by Ollie Moles



Until my voice changed, I could not carry a tune. And was I embarrassed! Gradually, I learned to sing my part against the melody and became a bass.

In eighth grade, I joined the choir of a nearby Episcopal church and sang in their Sunday services through high school. What an education in church music. We also staged "H.M.S. Pinafore"! Later in high school, I sang a minor role in "The Mikado" — I still remember its catchy ditties.

In college, it was the Glee Club and, much later in the 1980s, I sang here in Montgomery County with Masterworks, which became the National Philharmonic Chorale when the Strathmore Music Center opened in 2005. What great acoustics that hall has! At Strathmore, we sang longer classics with an orchestra, and Stan Engebretsen directed us for many years. Some of my favorites were Johannes Brahms' "Requiem," Carl Orff's "Carmina Burana," "The Messiah" by Handel, and "Gloria" by the renowned British composer, John Rutter.

In 2015, the Chorale was invited to join other choristers in New York City for a concert of John Rutter's music, conducted by the composer himself. His "Gloria" and "Requiem" were on the program, but we were to sing his new piece, "Canticles of Creation." About 50 of us were joined by numbers of singers from around the country.

Besides the thrill of singing under John Rutter's direction, an even greater thrill was singing in the Chorale in Carnegie Hall. What a grand place for concerts! I felt like I had come to singers heaven! Over the years, singing has brought me great joy. But of all the many concerts since then, Carnegie Hall was definitely the height of my career.



Angie with Friends House Chorus circa 2014

Making Music

by Angie Frazier

Music, especially singing, has been central to my life. I am a voice teacher, choral director, and soprano soloist. Specializing in singing technique, I have trained choirs ranging in age from primary school children through adults. As a member of the National Association of Teachers of Singing, my students were finalists and runners-up in Mid-Atlantic Regional Student Auditions.

My singing focus was Sacred Solo Repertoire. As an oratorio soloist, I have appeared with various orchestras, including the Phillips Symphony of Bartlesville, Oklahoma, the Pittsburgh Symphony, and the North Carolina Symphony. I sang soprano solos in such works as “The Messiah” by Handel, Bach’s “Magnificat,” Vivaldi’s “Gloria,” Brahms’ “A German Requiem,” and Haydn’s “St. Theresa Mass,” among many others.

For seven years, it was my pleasure to direct the Friends House Chorus, which performed two concerts per year — one in the spring and one at Christmas. What special memories!





Fiction Book Review: “Demon Copperhead”

by 2022 Pulitzer Prize winner Barbara Kingsolver

Reviewed by Kerry Stoltzfus

Award-winning author Barbara Kingsolver’s greatest gift to her readers in this novel is to create real empathy for her characters, especially Demon. We are moved by our encounters with Demon, Maggott, Aunt Jane, and Angus. At the same time, there are plenty of bad actors, perpetrating abuse and oppression.

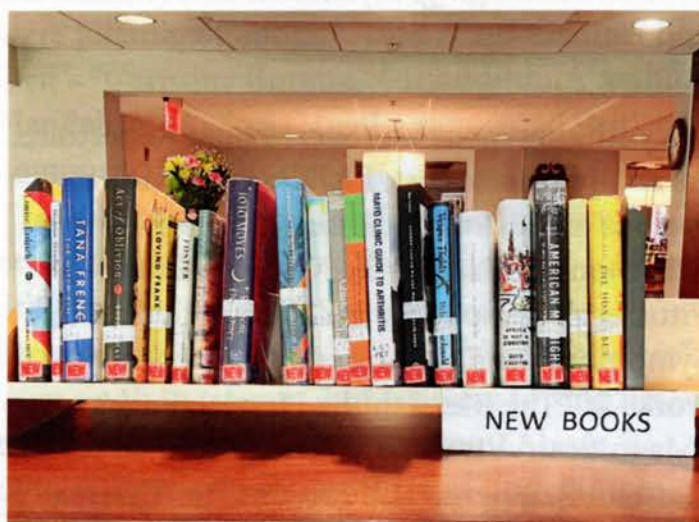
The context is hard-scrabble Appalachia and far removed from most readers’ experiences. Yet, for a time, we can actually enter that world, thanks to the storytelling skill of the main character, Demon Copperhead. We gain a new understanding of the history of poverty in the region, and its causes.

At times, Kingsolver becomes a bit “preachy” as she weaves social commentary into the narrative. If you appreciate the author’s novels, you know she is a champion of socially engaged fiction. Her critique of Big Pharma and their enablers — doctors, pharmacies, and pain clinics — is well deserved. Early in the novel, Demon asks, “What’s an oxy?”

“That November it was still a shiny new thing. OxyContin, God’s gift for the laid-off deep-hole man with his back and neck bones grinding like bags of gravel. For the bent-over lady pulling double shifts at Dollar General with her shot knees and ADHD grandkids to raise by herself. For every football player with this or that torn up, and the whole world riding on his getting back in the game. This was our deliverance.”

Readers may think they are in for a depressing experience. Although the story is often heartbreaking, the resilience and compassion of the characters breaks through and gives us hope. Somehow, Demon even finds humor in his own difficult and tragic circumstances.

Literature often uses a new name to signal a new strength; Jacob was renamed Israel, and Saul became Paul. Demon Copperhead takes on his new name with pride and exclaims, “You can’t deny it’s got power in it.”



New Library Books

by Maris Corbin

Have a look at the books, some purchased and some donated, which are on the New Book Shelf. They are ready to be checked out. Brief descriptions are located right below the shelf.



An Interview with Jason Rosewag, Our Director of Culinary Services

by Lydia Stone

Jason, tell us a little about your background — where you were born and lived, your family, your education and training, perhaps hobbies.

Jason: I was born and raised in Maryland. I grew up with a large extended family; my parents were from a family of five, and my dad was from a family of seven. I went to the University of Delaware but then transferred to Montgomery College to get a degree in Food and Beverage Management. I have been in the culinary industry, doing and learning different things, for over 30 years. My hobbies include home improvement and enjoying a round of golf twice a month with my relatives and friends, or whenever I can.

Tell us how you happened to choose your current profession, or did it choose you?

My profession chose me. I was originally going into Physical Therapy or Sports Medicine, but I got a summer job during college — cooking — and the rest is yet to be told.

Could you say a little bit about the process of planning and creating three meals a day, week after week, for our residents?

Finding balance and variety can be a challenge, but I listen to residents' likes and dislikes. I try to find a happy medium while maintaining somewhat of a nutritional balance of fruits and vegetables and proteins.

Assuming this is not your first job in charge of feeding a population like ours, is there any difference that stands out in particular about working here?

Absolutely. The culinary staff and residents really care about each other, and the community is so welcoming. The culinary staff really embraces what the residents' needs are, and wants to do right by them as much as they can.

Any exciting plans for our future meals?

No, not currently. I just really want to keep on improving on our baseline performance, with skills training and menu adherence, so we can launch new options that are nutritious and attractive in the future.

Anything else you would like to tell our readers?

Yes, I wanted to thank you all for the opportunity to be part of this community. I am grateful for the culinary staff, and all the hard work they are doing to help make the changes that need to be made. That, along with their tireless efforts to make it better for everyone every day.

What is your own favorite meal?

I just can't say I have a lot of favorites. If I had to say, probably anything with pasta!

Music Makers at Friends House



Note images by kjpargeter on Freepik

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Friends House Chorus

Angelene Frazier, Director