

Berkshire Hills Music Academy

Life Skills • Vocation • Music

www.berkshirehills.org

FALL 2017 Newsletter

Ribbon-Cutting Ceremony Marks Opening of Bernon Music Center

Standing in front of the Bernon Music Center, members of the Bernon Family have scissors in hand as they cut the ceremonial green ribbon. Amidst a crowd of donors, students, families, staff, alumni, and members of the community, they usher in a new chapter for BHMA. **The building is a testament to the success of the unique program that was started here seventeen years ago, and a sign of what our future will hold.**



Left to right: Paul, Peter, CB, and Kay Bernon cut the ribbon at the opening of the Bernon Music Center.

The BMC's ribbon cutting in June marked the realization of the long-awaited goal to have a multifunctional music center on BHMA's campus, and the significance of reaching such a milestone was echoed throughout the opening ceremony's speeches. Board Chair Kay Bernon and Massachusetts State Treasurer Deb Goldberg, both Founders of BHMA, moved the audience and reminded us of how the original vision for the school has strengthened over the years. In a tribute to her son CB, Bernon thanked him and those like him for being an inspiration, and stated, **"the building now matches the program we have become."** Goldberg spoke last, describing it as an honor to have been a part of BHMA since the beginning and to see it grow to what it is today.

With the school year underway, students can be found throughout the BMC in classes, ensembles, and lessons. On weekday mornings, sounds of the Troupe rehearsing mix with the aromas of first-years cooking, **symbolizing the functionality of the BMC.** The newest addition to our program, the Vocation Department, has been utilizing the space to prepare students for different types of work.

As Vocational Director Andy Anderson writes, the BMC **"is providing an environment that is conducive to the core education and assessment of our individuals in pre-vocational training."** Students are currently helping to maintain the building, a service Anderson considers both essential and mutually beneficial.

The BMC is also a platform to celebrate the strides our students make. Friday afternoon's Variety Hour now has a new home in the spacious performance hall. At one of the inaugural sessions in the BMC, LIVE member Justin Scott wowed the crowd with his beautiful rendition of the song Hallelujah. Reflecting on his performance in the new venue, he says, "I don't feel as nervous in there as I did in the Great Room...I feel a lot more encouraged." Though Justin spoke about just one particular moment in the BMC, he captured the essence of the new building—a **place that encourages our students to thrive.**

With the doors open to the BMC, we are now in the final stage of our \$3.3 million Capital Campaign, with just \$120,000 left to raise. Donations to the 'Building Our Future' campaign came through pledges, special events, and direct contributions. As Executive Director Michelle Theroux says, "The generosity of our donors is overwhelming and it is quite remarkable that we are so close to our goal." We aim to close the campaign by the end of the calendar year. All of us at BHMA are very excited for the next chapter, and incredibly grateful to all of those who made this vision possible. We hope you will come and experience the wonder of the Bernon Music Center for yourself.



A Message from BHMA

Our 17th year has been filled with remarkable growth and achievement. In June, we had a moving ribbon cutting for the newest addition to our campus, the Bernon Music Center. We want to thank all from near and far—from New York, to Wisconsin, to Los Angeles—who came to celebrate the new building, and all whose contributions over the years have helped us reach this milestone. **Without you, we would not be where we are today. Thank you!**

Music remains the central thread facilitating independence at BHMA, but as our enrollment has grown to nearly sixty individuals, our diversity of offerings has increased as well. With lessons and ensembles remaining at the core of the program, students can now opt to concentrate on video production, DJ skills, art, or dance, among other options.

A key component of our expanded programming is the Vocational Services Department. Formed as part of our management team's restructuring efforts, the new department is working with our individuals to gain employment on and off campus. One vocational initiative that we are particularly excited about is the Ascending Artists Program, allowing students to utilize their creative abilities and make original pieces of art. The program's creation led to a public show and sale at a coffee shop that exhibits works by local artists and college students—just one example of how BHMA has become part of the fabric of the community.

Although we have another \$120,000 to raise for the Capital Campaign, we have confidence that generous individuals will come forward to show belief in our cause and to recognize our life-changing program. **With your help we can complete the vision of building a better future for people with disabilities.**

There are so many worthy causes, and we are very fortunate and grateful for your continued support. With it, we can send the message that people with different abilities can succeed—a message that our Troupe performances have conveyed to over 150,000 people. **Your donation says all people have a gift to share with the world.**

Gratefully,

Kay Bernon

Kay Bernon,
Founder and Board Chair

Michelle Theroux

Michelle Theroux,
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Ascending Artists Program Provides Creative Vocational Option

BHMA has been undeniably vibrant since its founding, and the glow has grown stronger in recent months. Beautifully bright student-made paintings now adorn the walls in each office throughout the building. Filled with everything from dandelions to geometric prints, the works of art offer a welcome dash of color and a reminder of the growth BHMA is experiencing.

The Ascending Artists Program was launched in Spring 2017 and is now part of BHMA's new Vocation Department. The program's mission is "to instill beauty into our community by raising disability awareness, changing perceptions of ability, and supporting our students on their journey toward creative employment." **The art initiative marks the expansion of BHMA's core belief that people with disabilities have unique creative abilities.** Though music remains the connector among our students, there are now additional options for them to pursue meaningful employment.

Karen Morison, a longtime Life Skills Teacher, directs the Ascending Artists Program. As she describes, "students are engaged in every step of the art creation process and are considered working artists." **They build transferable work and social skills every day, learning lessons such as teamwork, time management, and focus.**

The individuals have considerable ownership over their artistic method—setting up and breaking down their workstation, and selecting what colors and materials to use. It is a process of discovery, Morison says, as students are free to experiment with different combinations to see what produces the most aesthetically-pleasing results.

BHMA's working artists have made paintings, prints, and note cards—each an expression of the individual that created it. **The collection of work produced throughout the semester has been sold at an art show, with 100% of the profits going to the students.** After two successful sales, the fall semester's unit has plans for student artwork to be on display and for sale at the South Hadley Library during the month of December. A "Meet the Artists" event will also be held on December 8th to highlight the talented individuals creating art and breaking barriers.

The underlying idea of the Ascending Artists Program is to generate greater opportunities for students to follow their artistic passions, and to get paid for utilizing their creative abilities. The initiative is gaining momentum, as our working artists continue to ascend to new heights with every work of art they create. The scattering of paintings throughout BHMA is just the first sign of the positive and colorful changes that are to come.



Fabulous Fifties

FLASHBACK



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Following the idyllic sunset over nearby Mt. Tom, the presentation piece of the Fabulous Fifties Flashback begins. All eyes are fixed on the screen at the center of the tent, captivated by LIVE member Eman Tuzman-Egan's original video, "Voices of BHMA." With the help of job coach Jacob Burnstein, Eman created the piece as part of his individualized vocational programming and was paid for his work. The video brilliantly compiles different parts of several interviews to show firsthand how students' lives have changed since coming to BHMA. As LIVE member Jeremy says, he now has "a big idea for [his] future." **The video serves as a reminder of what the night is really about: helping to empower people with disabilities.**

Berkshire Hills Music Academy
48 Woodbridge Street
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The Fabulous Fifties Flashback boasted over 150 attendees dressed in style, with poodle skirts, leather jackets, and polka dots galore. Throughout the night, party guests bid on a wide array of donated raffle and auction items, and enjoyed the musical stylings of BHMA's Troupe and DJ Jake Nissen from Beat Train Productions. Top sponsors of the event include The Bernon Family, Michele & Howard Kessler, Carol & Harold Baxter, John Campbell & Susanna Peyton, and the New England Patriots Charitable Foundation. Every attendee went home with a copy of the Troupe's new live CD, recorded at four different disability awareness performances, and interspersed with the Troupe members' inspiring and personal speeches.

Our annual fall gala is a chance to raise needed funds, engage with our extended community, and celebrate BHMA's impact. Proceeds from the event help support and sustain the operation of our growing program. Like Jeremy, we have dreams for our future, and the display of support at the gala reminds us that anything is possible. From everyone at BHMA, thank you!



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