



BHMA

25TH ANNIVERSARY

CELEBRATING 25 YEARS OF ILLUMINATION AT THE FOUNDERS' GALA

On October 18th, Berkshire Hills Music Academy held a radiant celebration of its 25th anniversary at the iconic Boston Harbor Hotel. The Founders' Gala, co-chaired by founders Kay Bernon and Veronica Heath, was an incredible opportunity to honor our journey, celebrate our accomplishments, and express gratitude to those who made it possible.

The event was an elegant affair, with the Bernon Family graciously sponsoring the evening's performance by Broadway legend Bernadette Peters and designing the luminous decor. The evening commenced with a heartfelt welcome by Liz Brunner, followed by a message of thanks from CEO Michelle Theroux, a video tribute to the founders (pictured below), and recognition of their invaluable contributions.

Our gala highlighted the remarkable growth and impact of BHMA over the last 25 years. From our beginnings as a vision to create an ability-first music school for young adults with developmental and intellectual disabilities, BHMA has blossomed into a vibrant community. Today, it is a beacon of possibility that nurtures creativity, fosters friendships, and helps individuals reach their fullest potential. The event also featured a participant testimonial, showcasing the transformative impact of BHMA on our participants' lives, followed by an unforgettable performance by Bernadette Peters and a VIP reception to close the evening.

We are especially thankful to our Founders and all who had the courage to dream and lay the foundation for BHMA. Their dedication has illuminated the path for hundreds of participants, allowing them to build skills, confidence, and independence.

The evening's festivities also included the M. Flynn Jewelry Reveal, dinner, dancing, and performances by BHMA alums and current participants. It was an evening of joy, reflection, and celebration—fitting for the incredible milestone of 25 years.

As we look to the future, we are filled with hope and excitement for what lies ahead. To all our supporters, families, students, and staff—thank you for being part of this journey and for lighting the way for the next 25 years.





SHINE DAZZLES AT JACOB'S PILLOW

Jacob's Pillow, a historic institution of dance, has shaped the world of performance for nearly 100 years. Drawing dance companies from across the globe, its summer-long festival celebrates diverse styles and cultures of dance.

This past August, BHMA's SHINE dance group was one of just three groups selected to perform at the Community Day festival on the iconic outdoor Henry J. Leir stage. SHINE's inclusion at Jacob's Pillow represents an important shift toward greater visibility and recognition of dancers with disabilities, showcasing their skill and artistry alongside other professional companies.

To prepare for their performance and immerse themselves in the rich history of Jacob's Pillow, the SHINE dancers took a field trip to the campus. There, they participated in a West African Dance class, explored the Pillow's archives, and learned about the history of dance through books, videos, and photographs. Students watched past Community Day performances and were thrilled to know that their own dances would soon be part of the archives. The trip included a tour of the outdoor stage where they would perform and a visit to the famous rock for which Jacob's Pillow is named—joining the tradition honored by every dancer who has graced the Pillow.

The experience left a lasting impression on SHINE, from taking a new dance class with live drumming to discovering the history of dance. They particularly enjoyed sharing the backstage area with fellow performers and watching the livestream of various dance styles together during the backstage dance party.

Jacob's Pillow's community engagement team noted SHINE's curiosity, enthusiasm, and keen interest in the world of dance.

While SHINE's next major performance is at First Night in Northampton on New Years Eve at the Academy of Music, their energy and passion will carry them well into the coming year. Keep an eye out for their future performances in 2025!

BHMA MAKERS SHOWCASING OUR CREATIVE COMMUNITY

This summer, we proudly launched BHMA Makers, a webstore dedicated to selling handmade creations crafted by participants in our vocational art program. "We are incredibly fortunate to have a supportive community of parents, caregivers, teachers, board members, and families who have championed this venture from the start—through purchases, donations, event attendance, and heartfelt advocacy," says art teacher Hanan Khan. "Now, it's time to share these works with a broader audience." A percentage of every sale goes directly back to the artists, supporting their efforts and rewarding their creativity.

Seven years ago, visual art was introduced as both a vocational tool and an educational method, offering a creative outlet outside the performative aspects of music. As the program has flourished, we remain committed to using art as a means of teaching life skills and fostering community.

We invite you to explore the current collection at www.bhmamakers.com, where new products will be added seasonally. Be sure to check back often to see what's new!

INTRODUCING THE SERVICE-LEARNING PROJECT

Several of our LIVE members have collaborated to create a new class focused on researching community needs and providing service to both the BHMA and larger local communities. The class, called the Service-Learning Project, meets four mornings a week under the leadership of Life Skills staff member Rachelle Stevens.

At the start of summer, the groups chose to explore local recreation areas—trails and walking paths—where they documented plants, animals, and trail accessibility. Participant Ethan Gagnon shared, “There are a lot of trails and so much to listen to. We looked for accessible trails for the visually impaired. Getting out into the community is my favorite part.”

Back in the classroom, the groups used their notes and photos to create trail guides using Canva, an online design tool. Once completed, these guides will be available in binders for everyone at BHMA to access.

Some participants became particularly interested in the plants and flowers they encountered, leading them to research native versus non-native species and the importance of pollinator plants. These groups cleared garden boxes on campus and planted seeds for a pollinator garden with local plants like sunflowers, lupines, and foxglove beardtongue. The participants gained knowledge about the environment and took pride in contributing to its preservation.

The Service-Learning Project class engages individuals with both learning and service, fostering teamwork and community involvement. As Courtney Beech put it, “Teamwork makes the dream work! We’ve been helping each other, taking turns, and working together.”

The groups have been brainstorming new projects for the upcoming seasons. They’ve decided to tackle food insecurity and are in the process of planning a food drive for the local South Hadley food pantry. Stay tuned for updates on the incredible work these teams are doing!



FARM TO TABLE: FRESH, LOCAL, AND GROWN AT BHMA

Living in the Pioneer Valley offers many benefits, especially when it comes to the food we eat. One of the biggest perks is the abundance of fresh, local produce, and BHMA takes full advantage of this. Our Dining Service Director, Ralph Robitaille, is in regular contact with local farms to source the freshest vegetables available each week. “It’s exciting when our participants see me unloading my car with local butternut squash, world-famous Hadley asparagus, strawberries, or whatever happens to be in season,” says Ralph. “They recognize the produce boxes and get excited, knowing they’ll be enjoying it in their meals within hours. Plus, the farm stand staff are grateful that their products are being used at a local program like BHMA. It’s a win-win for everyone.”

But it doesn’t get more local than our very own backyard garden. BHMA’s Vocational Program maintains a beautiful garden just steps away from our building. Led by Andy Anderson and his team, participants learn the entire process—from selecting seedlings and planting to harvesting produce and flowers. Throughout the week, the class checks in on the garden, taking care of tasks like weeding, pruning, and picking vegetables when they’re ready. It’s always an exciting time when they return with a bounty of cucumbers, tomatoes, radishes, and even watermelons! These freshly harvested goodies are then cleaned and served at the salad bar or used in cooking classes.

Winter may be on the horizon, but be sure to look out for more fresh produce grown by our participants next summer!



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BHMA

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A SILVER CELEBRATION: 25TH ANNIVERSARY GALA

“Do you remember the 21st night of September?” We sure will—because on that night, we celebrated Berkshire Hills Music Academy’s much-anticipated 25th Anniversary Silver Gala! The glamorous evening marked a brilliant milestone of 25 years filled with community, music, and unforgettable memories. The silver-themed event was a dazzling showcase of talent, energy, and joy as attendees joined in the festivities, making this celebration one to remember.

The night began with The Capabilities performing the first few songs on stage, including “Light of a Clear Blue Morning” and “Blinding Lights,” setting the tone for an evening of energetic performances. The energy continued to rise as the SHINE dancers joined The Capabilities on stage, and the busy dance floor was full of movement and joy as the performers continued with songs like “Firework,” “Uptown Funk,” “September,” and “Celebration.” The gala closed with the powerful “Dancing in the Street” and “Valerie,” before the DJ took over, keeping the energy alive well into the night.

BHMA CEO Michelle Theroux shared in her welcome speech, “The past 25 years have been an incredible journey. Tonight, we celebrate not only the history of BHMA but the beautiful community that has grown around our mission. This evening represents our shared dedication to uplifting each other through music and connection.”

Our heartfelt thanks go to our gala committee co-chairs Mary Richardson and Lori Swartz, along with our dedicated planning committee members Patti Connor, Mona Jomaa, Karen Phillips, and Mary Tierney, whose commitment and hard work made this memorable event possible.

We are deeply grateful to our donors and community partners, whose unwavering support has been instrumental in our success over the years. A special thank you to our top sponsors: Susanna Peyton & John Campbell, Frank & Patti Connor, and Kay & Peter Bernon. Your generosity allows BHMA to continue providing skill-building opportunities in a supportive, music-filled environment for our participants.

This gala was more than a celebration; it was a tribute to our shared history and the bright future ahead for BHMA. To quote from “Firework”: “You just gotta ignite the light and let it shine.” Together, we will continue to shine and uplift each other, ensuring BHMA thrives for many more years to come.

We look forward to the next chapter in our journey, filled with music, joy, and togetherness. Thank you for making this 25th anniversary such a silver shining night to remember!

