

# WYO MUSICAL MEMORIES. . . .

## THEN AND NOW

### 1995 — 2022

*By Donna Herman, WYO Board Member*

Fulfilling a strong desire to provide orchestral music opportunities for children, the Williamsburg Youth Orchestra (WYO) was organized in the fall of 1995 through the collaboration of Nancy Canning and Elnore Andersen, one of five founding members of the Williamsburg Symphonia (WS), now Williamsburg Symphony Orchestra (WSO). Composed of 39 elementary and high school students, weekly two-hour rehearsals were held at Matthew Whaley School where WYO performed its first concert on January 26, 1996, under the baton of Fran Goldman, WS musician. Support from the families, area schools, community and WS were in Nancy's words, "wonderful."

In March of 1996, 13 WYO students participated in the WS Youth Concerts, performing Dvorak's *Slavonic Dance No.6* for more than 2,000 children at Phi Beta Kappa Memorial Hall, under the baton of Ruben Vatanyan. In 1998, Reed Perkins, faculty member of the College of William and Mary, was named Music Director, followed by Davidson Burgess in 1999. Mr. Burgess teamed with Jennifer Cave, Conductor of the Junior Strings Program and her successor, Deanne Kringle in 2000. Financial support then known as "Friends and Fairy Godmothers" was introduced. The first Jr. Strings Camp Concert was held on June 3, 2000, directed by Deanna Kringle. 2001 saw the start of WYO's website. Jeffrey Phelps was named Music Director in 2002; WYO joined the Peninsula Youth Orchestra to perform at Ferguson Center for the Performing Arts on Feb 28, 2005, under the batons of Sarah Glosson (WYO) and Dianne Chapman (PYO). Karey Sitzler, newly hired Conductor of the Strings and Symphony String Orchestras, and Mr. Phelps took the students on their first field trips to Philadelphia; and NYC's Carnegie Hall. In 2006, the first WYO Concerto Competition was held, and the Botetourt Singers, of the College of W & M, performed with the orchestra during its Winter

Concert on Feb 19<sup>th</sup>. To mark WYO's 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary in 2006, Ruth Griffieon designed the original logo (edited for the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary year). VSO performed with WYO in their first Side-by-Side Concert in January of 2008 at Ferguson Center. From 2008 to 2011, Akiko Fujimoto served as Music Conductor, followed by Dr. Evan Feldman, 2011 to 2012; and Dr. Paul Bhasin, 2012 to 2016, all College of W & M faculty members. By 2016, three levels of orchestra strings were available to students. Later that year, the WSA (WYO Student Ambassador) program began, allowing students to represent, serve and become more engaged with WYO. In 2017, Dr. David Grandis became Music and Symphony Conductor; Amy Davis was named Conductor of the Strings Orchestras. The Jr. Winds and Brass Ensemble, for 6<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> graders of all levels, begun in 2018, is now directed by Jordan Stehle. The second Side-by-Side Concert, with WSO, was held on April 29<sup>th</sup> at Jamestown High School. Rebecca Nixon was named Strings Orchestra Director in 2019, joining Dr. Grandis; Jordan Stehle; Tanya Song, Executive Director; dedicated coaches; the Board of Directors and many parent volunteers in growing WYO to its current size of 75 members. Summer Chamber Music Camps, led by dedicated WSO musicians and coaches, continue to be held annually, providing more opportunities for many ensembles of all levels to learn and perform. Very generous donors and substantial grants from Associated Chamber Music Players, Charles S. and Millicent Brown Foundation, National Endowment for the Arts, VA Commission for the Arts, York County Arts Commission, Williamsburg Area Arts Commission and Williamsburg Community Foundation plus others have assured WYO's continual growth.

WYO is an important part of WSO's music education outreach and has enjoyed a close and supportive relationship since 1995. From its first concert on Jan 26, 1996, over 2,000 students have experienced "orchestral performance" through 110 concerts, summer camps, masterworks classes and virtual workshops with WSO musicians during the pandemic challenges. The WYO is very appreciative of and grateful to the Williamsburg Symphony Orchestra for their assistance and encouragement throughout the past 25 years and looks forward to many more years of working together to increase the appreciation and performance of orchestra music throughout the greater Williamsburg community.