



WMTA Newsletter | Feb. 2026

Greetings, WMTA Members!

Happy New Year to our wonderful WMTA music teachers! We hope your holiday break was restful, joyful, and filled with time to recharge as we step into a brand-new year together.

2026 is shaping up to be an especially meaningful year of celebration. It marks the 250th anniversary of the United States, as well as a milestone birthday anniversary for MTNA which makes this a year rich with history, reflection, and inspiration for our music community. It will truly be a special year filled with opportunities to celebrate music, teaching, and connection!



Thank you to President Grace for giving me the opportunity to represent Washington DC at the Leadership Summit in Cincinnati this past fall. I had the privilege of meeting with fellow Eastern Division leaders to brainstorm fun and creative ideas to strengthen our state organization. We are also excited to share that we are currently in the works of planning a WMTA conference toward the end of the year. More details will be coming soon, so please stay tuned and keep an eye out for updates.

Finally, we're happy to announce that WMTA is now on social media! Be sure to follow us on [Instagram](#) and [Facebook](#) to stay connected and receive updates! Check out our events on our website: <https://www.wmta-dc.org/calendar.php>

Rachel Chen, Newsletter Editor



President's Message

Happy New Year of the Fire Horse! Whether celebrating the Gregorian, Lunar or any internationally recognized calendar, I wish the very best for you and your families, friends and colleagues this new year. 2026 will be a significant year in the WMTA calendar. MTNA is celebrating its 150th anniversary and it marks the 250th year, the Semiquincentennial celebration of the founding of our nation. The WMTA Board has been discussing ways in which we can celebrate this milestone with a conference next Fall. We welcome our membership's ideas regarding programming.

First of all, my sincere apologies to you all - your imperfect and delinquent president neglected to submit the 2025-2027 slate of officers for voting in a timely manner. The following officers have been approved by the WMTA Board and are hereby submitted for voting by the WMTA membership.

President: Grace McFarlane
President-Elect: Rachel Chen
Treasurer: Carol Wolfe-Ralph
Recording Secretary: Lori McCarthy
Immediate Past-President: Hedy Bannon

Please be on the lookout for an e-mail with these details and respond accordingly. I am very grateful to Rachel Chen, our patient Newsletter Editor, for her willingness to step in to serve as our President-Elect. We are extremely fortunate to have Rachel's commitment to our organization, her professionalism, expertise and wisdom, and her warm, engaging personality. I hope our membership will feel the same as you get to know her better.

We hope to have record attendance at our Annual General Membership Meeting on April 24, 2026, starting at 10am. After a brief business meeting, Chris Kies is organizing a delightful members' program of 4-hand music, followed by a potluck lunch. *"Each One Reach One"* – This is a wonderful opportunity to bring a friend who might be interested in joining WMTA and to get better acquainted with colleagues. We would love to see more area string, voice, woodwind and brass teachers involved in WMTA. I look forward to seeing you at one of our upcoming events. Please do not hesitate to email me at wmtadc@gmail.com if you have any questions or comments regarding WMTA programs and send in your ideas for our fall conference.



Grace McFarlane, President



Winner of the 2026 WMTA Senior Essay Award Jessica Chen, 17-year-old senior

“I stared out at the audience waiting expectantly before me. I’d seen this scene many times before, but this time, there was one major difference: I was no longer standing alone. I turned to face my chamber group-mates. My eyes met theirs, and I knew just what was going through their minds: excitement, determination, and a hint of anxiety—just like me. In just a few months, chamber music had allowed me to understand them better than I had understood most people in years. I smiled at the violinist and awaited her cue. Then, our story began. As a pianist, though, connection was hard to find. I used to sit



in cramped practice rooms alone with the methodical click of the metronome, hearing muffled laughter and musical cacophony sneak through the thin walls. On stage, a singular harsh light shone on every key and string of the piano, leaving the rest of the world pitch black. I loved the piano, but at the same time, I felt strangely alone. Joining chamber groups completely reversed my understanding of music. At first, I was unsure how to fit in. It was as if the violinist and cellist were dancing a waltz, and I stumbled in at all the wrong moments. “Sorry!” I would call out after every late entry, wrong note, and bland dynamic. One day, our coach raised his hand in defeat less than a page through the piece. His hands waved as though he was trying, desperately, to piece together the shards of our haphazard playing. “Start again,” he said. “But this time, you must live, breathe, and die for each other.” The difference was clear. We lived for each other; we watched each other’s every move, and followed each other’s cues. We breathed for each other; our every phrase rose and fell, like the composed vocals of a singer. We died for each other; we sacrificed our own

concerns in favor of trust for each other, trust that the flow of music would guide us forward. Since that day, I started to listen more closely—not only to the music, but also to other people and myself. During each rehearsal and performance, thinking about this single phrase reminded me of being a better listener and gave me the confidence to express my own thoughts as well. Rather than solely focusing on technique or precision, I focus on the story that we are able to tell together. Now, I also think about what pieces mean to share. At retirement homes and hospitals, I whisper the song of the moon: Debussy’s *Clair de Lune*, a familiar piece yet filled with renewed aspiration. I smile as the audience softly hums along. Each performance is a bridge, a tale of emotions and hope that reaches people no matter how diverse our languages, cultures, and experiences are. Music has become my shared language for connection—not just with musicians, but with any listener. So even in a world without words, I will be its storyteller.”



Modern Piano Music Celebration

hosted by Nancy O'Neill Breth & Laura Marchisotto Bogart

Reported by Nancy O'Neill Breth: "On November 22, 2025, WMTA's Modern Piano Music Celebration filled the music room of St. Columba's church with the sounds of our time, brilliantly performed throughout the day by around 50 pianists, age 7 through adult. Amazingly enough, there were almost as many composers represented as there were performers: 44 men and women, most of whom (23!) are still very much alive and composing.

Styles ranged from minimalism to jazz to ethnic to modern romanticism, to neoclassicism. Composers hailed from Russia, Ukraine, Japan, Taiwan, Georgia, China, Poland, England, Latvia, Canada, France, Turkey, Australia and of course from the United States. I am amazed by this array.



Adjudicators Tzu-yi Chen and Jeffery Beaudry not only wrote thoughtful, focused critiques, but enhanced everybody's experience by closing each session with personal remarks. It was clear how wholeheartedly Tzu-yi and Jeffery entered into the spirit of the day. Their comments were fascinating, wide-ranging, enlightening.



MPMC is a memory-optional event, and more students took advantage of that option this year than in the past. I think that's a healthy trend. As usual we had a large group of non-competitive performers—always a popular part of the event. Lots of family members attended, which added to the excitement. I owe thanks to everyone involved in this event, but especially to my co-chair, Laura Marchisotto Bogart. We've worked together on this and other events for so many years we can practically finish each other's sentences. Laura is the best; I certainly couldn't do it without her.

MPMC also benefits enormously from the support of Trudi and Dominic Benford, whose son Harrison performed in many WMTA events over the years. Harrison's gone on to music conservatory, but his parents still support our organization and come to Modern Piano Music Celebration! Finally, special thanks to our President, Grace, for booking us into St. Columba's. It was a delight to spend the day there.





2025 MTNA Eastern Division Winners

Congratulations to Our MTNA Eastern Division Winners!

We are thrilled to announce that **Evelina Kleczek**, piano student of Martin Labazevitch, has been named Winner of the Eastern Division Senior Performance Competition. Evelina will represent WMTA at the Finals during the MTNA National Conference in Chicago. Congratulations, Evelina! We wish you the very best in your performance at the Finals.

We also proudly recognize **Max Zhang** and **Brandon Zhang**, students of Nancy O'Neill Breth, who were named Alternate Winners in the Eastern Division Piano Duet Competition. Congratulations, Max and Brandon, on this wonderful achievement! If you are planning to attend this year's MTNA National Conference, please consider attending the Senior Piano Performance Finals to support Evelina at the competition. **Congratulations to all the teachers and participants for their hard work! We are so proud of you!**



Reminder: Eastern Division Director-Elect Voting Now Open
Voting is now open for the Eastern Division Director-Elect for the 2026–2028 biennium.
All WMTA members should have received voting information. Please take a few moments to review the candidate materials and cast your ballot for the individual you wish to represent you on the national MTNA Board.
We are proud to share that our own Hartman Competition Chair, Junko Takahashi, is among the candidates for this position.



Voting closes on Monday, March 2, 2026, at 3:00 p.m. ET.