

WASHINGTON COUNTY JOURNAL.

Greenwich Journal

SALEM PRESS

FORT EDWARD

HISTORIC UPSTATE NY

By Annie Miller

Special to Journal & Press

JOURNAL & PRESS JUN 21, 2026

Musical Magic for 40 Years

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When I tell my friends who live in places that are considered more sophisticated than Washington County that I can drive 15 minutes from Greenwich to experience world-class chamber music, they don't really believe me. When they humor me and come to Hubbard Hall in Cambridge, they are frequently stunned. Pretty often, a few minutes into the first piece, they are sneakily checking the program and seeing that the people sitting ten feet in front of them, making incredible music do, in fact, have impressive international careers. It happens nearly every time.

It's not absolutely every time because, sometimes, the players are right at the beginning of their careers; performing after a week-long intensive seminar. I have to admit that these emerging artists are some of my favorites. The buzz of youthful energy is in the air and the quality of the performances ranges from good to astonishing. Two weeks after the most recent concert, I am still thinking about one particular piece: The violinist had just finished her first year of college. She couldn't have weighed ninety pounds soaking wet. A small person standing there with a small

instrument. But when she started to play, she filled the whole hall. She filled it with sound and emotion. She filled it with powerful, skillful beauty. In a community theater in a one stoplight village, a young musician blew her audience away. I hope that, like many seminar participants who have come before her, we will see her again as she progresses in her career.

It's also not absolutely every time because, sometimes, we're at an open rehearsal at the Brown Farm in Salem. One of the unusual things about most Music From Salem performances is that the artists have been living together at the farm for several days; rehearsing, relaxing, eating meals and getting to know each other. Most of us have some sort of music-making experience, even if only those elementary school recorders, but sitting in as they work through a piece is an amazing peek into the minds of experts, of artists. You'd think it would be intimidating and confusing, but the vibe is so relaxed and the musicians so welcoming that we regular humans can fit right in. It's one of the few cases where seeing how the sausage is made adds to the enjoyment. The camaraderie the musicians, many of whom haven't worked together before, develop at the farm shows in the smoothness of their final performances and visible enjoyment in playing together.

For us small-town music lovers, Music From Salem is an absolute gift. For our, sometimes smug ,big-town friends, it is a delightful surprise. For anyone who isn't sure about classical music, the

casual atmosphere, affordable tickets and concert programs that may include anything from familiar tunes to challenging experiments are a great opportunity to try something new.

For the last four decades, Music From Salem has been bringing world-class chamber music to our little corner of the world. In this anniversary year, we hope to see you in the audience.

The next open rehearsal at Brown Farm will be on July 9th at 4pm. The Hubbard Hall Concert will be on Sunday, July 12th at 4pm. For more about MFS, programs, directions, tickets etc., please go to our website www.musicfromsalem.org.