



Founded in 1890 as a non-profit theater (Claudia L'Engle Adams). Now a community driven arts organization with outreach programs.

# 127 YEARS OF FRIDAYS

## Catch a show at Friday Musicale

By Jim Alabiso | Photography by Bob Mack and courtesy of Friday Musicale

In 1890, Friday Musicale founder Claudia L'Engle Adams started a club in her house on Margaret Street with eleven women that played music. According to Jeff Tawney, venue director, the original meeting would take place on Friday afternoons over a spread of tea and sandwiches.

"They had this wonderful idea to extend it to the community. It was called Ladies of Friday Musicale, because all the members had to be ladies. Men were not allowed. This was true for the first thirty-five years until they changed the bylaws," Goetz Neubauer, chairman of the board, says. "And a lady couldn't become a member unless she played an instrument." In 1922, the word "ladies" was removed, and it became Friday Musicale.

The home concerts continued to grow, and in 1929 the president, Mrs. S. Bryan Jennings, suggested at a meeting that they move to a

permanent venue. The women purchased Concordia Hall, gymnasium at 645 Oak Street, for \$5,500 on June 3, 1929, says Dorothy K. Fletcher in her book *Historic Jacksonville Theatre Palaces, Drive-ins and Movie Houses*.

Having run free concerts for 127 years, "Friday Musicale is the oldest operating performance organization in Jacksonville. Our mission is to provide quality concerts to the community. It all started with classical music in 1890. This is still our core program," Neubauer says. Attracting a more diversified audience, Friday

**Right top to bottom:** Members of the board and staff (from left) Sharon School, board secretary, Goetz Neubauer, Board Chair, Naomi Sheridan, Executive Director and Jeff Tawney, Venue Rentals Manager and Event Planner, gather around the Steinway & Sons piano on the stage in the main hall; Throughout the year Friday Musicale offers a variety of free concerts to the public; A photo of the 1958-1959 Friday Musicale Board gathered at the home of Mrs. Raymond King (Eleanor) (seated at center) held in the main hall.

Musicale began adding to their program by starting their season with a jazz concert.

“The second part of the mission is scholarships. To do something for young students,” Neubauer says. One such student is Anthony Anurca, the first Jacksonville Symphony Youth Orchestra member to join the Jacksonville Symphony. Anurca plays bassoon and contra-bassoon. “I received the Friday Musicale scholarship in 1999 and was very fortunate to receive other private scholarships in Jacksonville. I was able to go to school and freely pursue a career in music without the burden of debt,” he says. “I am grateful for the support Friday Musicale gave me and am very happy to have passed the torch to one of my former students, Rachel Lovelace, a current scholarship recipient.”

Disaster struck in 1995, when the original building burned down in an arson fire. “It was terrible. When I got there it was just devastating. It was a hard day. Hard to believe. Never found out who did it, but we survived,” Magdalene McDowell says. McDowell led the charge to secure the funding to rebuild. She started singing as a young girl, became a member of Friday Musicale in the fifties, and then president in 1996. “I loved being part of it,” she says. “We had music. Music was our world. Music is the heart of the soul.”

In 1990, McDowell called the White House and pitched the Friday Musicale Ladies Chorus to sing there for Christmas. “I told them it would be an honor for us to sing at the White House, and they said come on. It was just an impulsive thing. And then, there we were,” singing for First Lady Barbara Bush and President George H. W. Bush, she says.

After over a century of performances, Friday Musicale is a nonprofit that has served as a venue for the performing arts in our community through thick and thin. “Friday Musicale appreciates the support the community provides by renting the historic venue for events,” Naomi Sheridan, executive director, says. It is a gorgeous space to host a show, and rental fees go toward preserving the historic building and supporting the organization’s different programs, such as free concerts and scholarships.

“You’re paying it forward, keeping it in the community,” Tawney says. 🎹



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