

FRIENDS MUSIC CAMP: A MUSICAL MINISTRY

Lianna Patch

Held annually at Olney Friends School in Barnesville, Ohio, Friends Music Camp, or FMC, is a transformative experience. Whether you're fortunate enough to go as a camper (thanks, Mom and Dad!) or you join the staff later on, this special one month spent in the rural Ohio countryside will change you in ways you hardly expected.

Like many new experiences, camp begins with introductions. Old campers hug and catch up on the past year, while new campers are welcomed with open arms. While the kids settle into the dormitories, staff members meet and lay out expectations, hopes and responsibilities for the coming four weeks.

Music, Everywhere

By the second day of camp, Olney feels like home. Campers interact in a variety of ways, from enjoying home-cooked meals in the dining hall to playing together in band, jazz band, or orchestra. Staff instructors work with kids of all skill levels, giving them one-on-one attention to both boost confidence and improve musicality. Campers can also work together in smaller groups, learning to listen to themselves and each other. All over campus, the sounds of music are constantly present, from the muted twangs of a beginning guitar player to the virtuoso stylings of a staff trombonist. Practice rooms are everywhere—dorm rooms, stairwells, building porches—even impromptu lawn duets are common. Whether playing music or simply playing, campers begin to form lifelong friendships.

Four weeks may seem like a long time to new campers, but veterans can tell you how it flies by. Knowing this, campers get off to a quick start, playing their first concert of camp to Olney's neighbors at the Walton Retirement Home, a senior citizen residence. Community concerts are scheduled at least once a week, with campers and their instruments traveling throughout Barnesville and the surrounding community.

Times of Reflection

An integral part of Friends Music Camp is its spiritual element. Founded by lifelong Quaker Peg Champney with Jean Putnam, camp incorporates the gentle spiritual practices of Friends into everyday life. Each morning, campers and staff gather for collection, centering themselves for the busy day ahead. At night, evening collection begins with a group song, and ten or fifteen minutes of reflective silence prepares both campers and staff for a restful night's sleep.

On Sundays, campers take a short walk to the historic Stillwater Meetinghouse, and spend an hour participating in a traditional Quaker meeting experience. Campers and staff are encouraged to share their thoughts with the community during these times, and often do.

Camp is filled with emotional experiences both joyous and bittersweet. A rousing campus-wide game of Capture the Flag or a delicious Feast often take counterpoint to the sad moments of saying farewell to two-week campers. Because camp is such a wonderful and intense experience, these moments of reflection are pivotal to processing everything that can happen in a single day at FMC.

A Month to Remember

The end of camp is a difficult time for all FMCers. Campers form incredible bonds over the course of the month, leading to tearful goodbyes as they depart for their homes all over the US and the world. But camp friendships, once formed, can never truly die; this is the most special part of camp.

For more information on FMC, please visit: <http://www.friendsmusiccamp.org>.