INTERVAL

MAY 2026

Develop, promote, and support equitable learning and teaching in

Minnesota

Inside

From the Editor

Notes on Community

Casey Clementson

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Welcome to the May edition of the Interval, MMEA's online magazine.

As I was putting this edition together, I kept thinking about the fabulous community of music educators we have here in Minnesota. Community is built when people gather around a shared purpose. In our case, our shared purpose is both our students and our amity as teachers.

The articles in this issue center around community in a variety of ways. First, read MMEA President-Elect Nicole Thietje's Midwinter Convention Recap in which she summarizes how we came together to create an online convention experience with several schools stepping up to be hosts for concerts, as well as presenters from around the United States volunteering their time to host online sessions.

This Interval celebrates music educators who offered their materials, time, and care so that we can all keep moving forward. Some of the Midwinter Convention presenters submitted materials related to their sessions and presentations to extend the reach to our greater community. You will find these throughout these pages.

For example, Dr. Danni Gilbert brought cooperating teachers together for a panel discussion aimed at encouraging others to become mentors for the next generation of music educators. Dr. Rachel Gordon Mercer describes what happens when middle school music teachers come together to discuss reducing barriers to music participation. And Christopher Fogderud shares his journey to bring a piece of music new life to share with his students and a wider audience.

From region to region and classroom to classroom, each article in this issue adds depth to who we are.

New for May, we have included Region Highlights. I was floored by the number of exciting events that occurred in the Southeast region of Minnesota and encourage you to read about them. If you have something to share about your community, please reach out to your MMEA Region Reps and we will include it in our next issue.

I would be remiss if I didn't acknowledge the community that surrounded this edition with their support. Thank you to this issue's Editorial Team for reviewing article submissions, proofreading, and offering their suggestions for this publication. Thank you also to MMEA staff (Jerri, Lori, Wanda, and Jordan) for all their work behind the scenes to bring this e-zine to you.

Community shouldn't be a closed circle; it's an open invitation. If you have an idea, a lesson, or a manuscript waiting to be shared, there can be a place for it in Interval. In music, we are stronger when more voices join the sound.

I am in awe of this community. You are MMEA. We are MMEA. Have a great summer!

Members of the Editorial Team

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Midwinter Convention 2026 Recap

Due to the excessive ICE presence in Minneapolis in early February, the Midwinter Convention was converted to a virtual event with both synchronous and asynchronous sessions, live streamed and pre-recorded performances, as well as a very limited number of in-person events at locations outside of the Twin Cities Core. This pivot could not have been possible without the hard work and dedication of our wider musical community.

Thank you to Buffalo High School, Prior Lake High School, The University of Minnesota, Southwest High School, Minnetonka High School Art Center, St. Michael-Albertville High School, College of St. Benedict Escher Auditorium, and Monticello High School for offering to host various concerts at the last minute. Also thank you to all of the groups that shared recorded concert links, information about their concerts at their home schools, and live stream links.

MMEA is so very grateful to the Wisconsin Music Educators Association and NAfME for their support and assistance as we made the challenging pivot to a virtual event. Over 150 additional presenters sent emails to MMEA offering their expertise to round out our sessions creating a very robust schedule of choices for Minnesota educators.

- 91 Synchronous sessions -These sessions were recorded and are available for all who registered (except for the Perpich Relicensure sessions).
- 2 Pre-recorded performances or sessions
- 23 Performances in various locations
- 400 plus registered for the synchronous sessions
- 31 Exhibitors had virtual landing pages

While we were unable to gather together this year, we are looking forward to the 2027 Midwinter Convention (February 18-20, 2027). We hope to see you in Minneapolis next year!

Nicole Thietje is currently serving as President Elect of MMEA. She is also Choral Director at New Prague High School, where she directs four curricular choirs, three extracurricular groups, including show choir, and serves as music director for NPHS musical productions. She is a native of Louisiana and has taught Pre-K-12th grade in both Minnesota and Florida. She received an undergraduate degree in Music Teaching/Performance from the University of West Florida, a Masters of Arts in Music Education Choral Concentration from the University of St. Thomas, and is currently working toward a PhD in Music Education at the University of Minnesota.

Minnesota Arts Licensing Update April 2026

by Alina Campana and Max Clark-Vail

Background

In Minnesota, teacher licensing standards, which describe the content-specific knowledge and skills required to become a music licensed teacher in Minnesota, are in Minnesota Rule. To update these standards, the Professional Educator Licensing and Standards Board (PELSB) goes through an official process called *rulemaking.* PELSB, Perpich Center, and the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) are collaboratively working with external partners to prepare for this rulemaking in the arts.

In 2024, PELSB, Perpich, and MDE assembled a steering committee to review structural issues in arts licensure. The steering committee reviewed each arts area and made recommendations to address these issues. Additional input was gathered through the public and an additional music licensure advisory group.

Rulemaking takes several years before any changes become official, and none of the changes impact the license(s) of currently licensed arts teachers.

Recent Developments

Considering all of the input outlined above, PELSB approved drafting recommended standards for licenses in all arts areas, including the following changes:

- Discontinue the PK-12 Vocal and Classroom Music and the PK-12 Instrumental and Classroom Music licenses and replace them with a single PK-12 Music license with specialization embedded in the licensure standards.
- Embed media arts standards in visual arts, creating a PK-12 Visual & Media Arts license.
- Discontinue the combined Dance and Theater license, retaining the Dance license and the Theater license.

Writing Workgroup Application, Closed May 18

In April of 2026, applications for writing workgroups opened for each PK-12 arts license. These workgroups will review and revise the licensure standards for all continuing arts licenses and create standards for any new license. There will be multiple opportunities for the public to provide feedback during this process.

Survey on Current Licensure Standards, Closed May 18

Surveys were sent out to collect feedback on the current teacher licensure standards in the arts. The writing workgroups will review the feedback collected from these surveys. These surveys remained open until May 18th.

PELSB has created an Arts Licensure Rulemaking page where you may find all of the relevant information, including the links for the surveys.

Next Steps

Once the writing workgroups have drafted the arts licensure standards, PELSB will review the drafts and may authorize the rulemaking process. There will be opportunities for public feedback in the drafting process and in the rulemaking process. Rulemaking takes several years before any changes become official, and none of the changes impact the license(s) of currently licensed arts teachers.

For more information, see PELSB's Arts Rulemaking page for previous reports to PELSB on arts licensure and this process, as well as more information about these changes.

Please contact max.clark@pcae.k12.mn.us with any questions.

SERVING AS A COOPERATING TEACHER

Paying it Backward and Forward

Dr. Danni Gilbert is Assistant Professor of Instrumental Music Education at the University of Minnesota–Twin Cities and also teaches online graduate music education courses for Kent State University. Prior to joining UMN, she served as Associate Professor of Practice in Music Education and Coordinator of Music Clinical Experiences at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln, taught at Doane University, Iowa Western Community College, and the College of Saint Mary, and directed elementary and middle school bands for Blair Community Schools. She has performed professionally as a saxophonist with the Omaha Symphony Orchestra since 2009. Dr. Gilbert earned her bachelor's degree in music education from the University of Tennessee–Knoxville and completed her master's degree in saxophone performance and Ph.D. in music education at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln. Dr. Gilbert is the recipient of the 2025 Minnesota Music Educators Association Collegiate Music Educator of the Year Award, the 2023 Hixson-Lied College Distinguished Teaching Award, and the 2020 Nebraska Music Educators Association Outstanding Music Educator Award. An active scholar and presenter, her research focuses on health and wellness in music education, accessibility and equity, and music teacher preparation. Her work appears in leading journals including the Journal of Research in Music Education, Journal of Music Teacher Education, Music Educators Journal, and Update: Applications of Research in Music Education. She is the author of *Music Educators Wanted!* and co-author of *Curious, Collaborative Creativity.* A versatile musician, she frequently performs, adjudicates, and serves as a clinician.

Geared toward current and prospective cooperating teachers as well as university music education students, this article will lead readers through strategies to strengthen partnerships among pre-service educators, in-service educators, schools, and universities. Experienced cooperating teachers will offer advice and words of wisdom based on their experiences. We will explore challenges to a mutually rewarding experience as a cooperating teacher and offer solutions that focus on continuous communication and fostering supportive environments. Serving as a cooperating teacher can honor the mentors who encouraged our growth while helping the next generation of music education colleagues.

The cooperating teachers featured here once stood where you stand now - asking questions and weighing options–and they will share their experiences, advice, and insights. They will reveal what surprised them, what challenges they faced, and what they have learned along the way. The hope is for you to gain practical advice and a clearer sense of whether serving as a cooperating teacher is a right next step for you. And if so, how to approach it with confidence! Below, I present five structured discussion topics posed to a panel of expert cooperating teachers. The following is an edited transcript of our conversation together.

INTRODUCTION TO COOPERATING TEACHERS

Zane Kaiser, Justice Page Middle School (Minneapolis Public Schools): It's my ninth year teaching. I still feel pretty green and pretty fresh in the profession, but I've been fortunate enough to have currently two student teachers, and that'll bring my total up to eight so far. I find that we have student teachers come here because this job has a lot of opportunities for learning and for teaching. I have seven bands and three orchestras and about 450 students. We rock and roll and it's a lot of fun!

Nick Gaudette, Edina High School (Edina Public Schools): I teach 9th through 12th orchestra here. This is my 10th year at Edina and 20th year in classroom education. I've had eight student teachers and I just love the cooperating teacher component. I think co-teaching is a fantastic model; I always say yes when the opportunity presents itself. Students who are going into teaching are bringing this wealth of relevant knowledge, and that passes on to our students that we're teaching. It's a way for me to stay relevant in my own craft by learning from them.

Lori Bernstrom, Skyview Middle School, Oakdale (ISD 622): I'm a band director in my 27th year of teaching, and my fourth consecutive year with student teachers. I just love, love, love the opportunity! It's just a fabulous opportunity to get new fresh ideas. Also, I want to create a better experience than what I had [as a student teacher], and encourage students to be excited to go forward and not be scared.

Tark Katzenmeyer, Stillwater Area High School (Stillwater Area Public Schools): I've been teaching for 24 years, and I think over the course of that time, I have had six student teachers in two different states. I've taught in six different school districts, so I've experienced a lot of different systems. When I've had student teachers in the past, it's been a great experience kind of seeing them blossom in terms of being able to access students at the high school level and be able to connect to what's going on in music education currently. Student teachers also share some of the newer trends or maybe things that they're experiencing from their college classes. They bring that wealth of modern experience to my program wherever it's been.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Katzenmeyer: The most important responsibility of a cooperating teacher is, first of all, supporting the young educator that's coming into the profession so they feel like they have their best opportunity to succeed. We all know that the first couple years of teaching are some of the most sensitive and some of the most difficult. Getting practical experience while having a supportive and nurturing environment is something that's really important as a cooperating teacher. It's also an opportunity for a cooperating teacher to utilize the strengths of that student teacher to benefit the students in that particular music program. It's discovering what the strengths are of that educator, what the potential weaknesses are of that educator, and then finding out how that can best serve the students that they're going to be in front of in the future. In terms of, "How do you balance supporting the student teacher while maintaining your own classroom expectations," I've never found that to be super challenging. It's mainly focusing on the fact that you're both there to do the same thing, which is to focus on the students in the classroom. If I as a cooperating teacher keep my focus on my current students at my school, the student teacher will benefit from that.

Kaiser: For me in the middle school setting, it's really important that our pre-service teachers get the lifestyle in the building. What is it actually like to transition from class to class? What are the extra responsibilities? Today, we had conferences in the morning. Then, I had a budget meeting. After that, we finished grading. We listened to some playing assignments from students, and did all of these extra things. None of it is rehearsal, and these are the topics that just can't simply be covered in the undergrad experience, and that's to be expected. When we allow these student teachers to get a feel for it, I think those first few years are a little less blunt. Then for me, one of the biggest things is to let them see what it's like to be in front of the kids and see what goes well and doesn't go well. I think we hear this a lot, but let them have the wins and also the moments that are more difficult. I never let them fry on their own, but I do let them get uncomfortable and I do let them fight their way out of something. And whenever we do that, we have so much more to talk about after. It's very fun to just get into the nitty-gritty, live the daily experience of this and celebrate the highs and the lows.

Bernstrom: You can't plan everything to turn out right or how you wish things would turn out. We shouldn't need to either, because otherwise we'd be hiding the realistic view of things. All those things are important and they take time. Just being real is worth a lot.

Gaudette: I would add this idea of bringing your own humbleness as well. Make sure that whoever that student teacher might be sees your own personal highs and lows of the job. So being as real as possible when you're explaining that to them. I also think that there's the classroom setting, there's what they've trained to be prepared for, and then the things they are not trained for. Just being the best type of model you can and introducing that person to everybody that you work with, from the front desk to the custodial office. I mean it, we're always modeling. I think that's important. But they really will be watching us.

BUILDING STRONG PARTNERSHIPS, MENTORSHIP, AND PROFESSIONAL GROWTH

Gaudette: The thing that I'm trying to provide to student teachers is giving them as much space as they need to experience the ideas that they have coming in. There's a lot of ways in which we are stuck as veteran teachers–we're so stuck in these ways that we manage classes and classrooms. Student teachers need to have the space to try ideas. Even if you, a veteran teacher, know it's not going to work. You have to watch them process that because that's the only time that's going to be able to be called upon. The trick is how do you show them to tap into the knowledge base that is there? What is the institutional knowledge, but then also incorporating their own ideas? That's really where that idea of innovation comes from in the classroom, being able to balance the institutional knowledge with the new ideas that are relevant.

Katzenmeyer: A strategy I found most effective with student teachers is making time, like over lunch, to ask them how things are going for them and to have that open communication of showing that it's more than observing them in the classroom and going forward from there. Asking them about how the lifestyle of a teacher is connecting with their success in their position as a student teacher. I also recommend doing a lot of video recording because that gives you a chance to go back and revisit moments and talk about, “What did you feel when this happened? Or what did you notice?” You can show what students are doing that they might not notice when they're thinking about their own instructional process. Sometimes you see the kid that's not paying attention or is punching their stand partner and you can point that out. Then you can have that discussion of, “I let this happen because I wanted you to see this on the video,” and go forward from there.

Bernstrom: I thought about one particular student teacher that at first was very shy. I'm pretty much an outgoing person, easy to talk to. I thought, “What am I doing that I cannot connect with this person?” So just having the conversation, “Is it the time of the day? Is it scary where you're at? What can I do to help you?” Coming up with a small step that is going to help them to be comfortable and one thing at a time is okay. Make it a bigger step each time. The time is so limited actually when you think about it that if you frame it, “We have this many times with this many classes,” so you have to make it real, doable steps. Also, the very first time I had a student teacher I was like, “Oh, can I really do this? Am I really a good example? Can I do the best for them, or should they be with somebody else?” Then I thought, everybody's going to offer something different. If you tell yourself no, then when are you going to do it? You get all of these good things that come in with it. I can go weeks and sometimes months without another adult in my room for anything! Having other adults there that have a music education background can give you some conversation and some feedback, too. It's nice to be able to bounce ideas off of somebody who you know will understand. That's been really a great addition.

Kaiser: With my first couple of student teachers I let them choose their pace at the beginning. Then I realized that wasn't great because their time with me is so short. I was like, “Observe this class for a day.” Now I'm like, “First day, you are playing an instrument in the band with them. Here we go!” That's how you're going to get to know them. “What instrument do you play? Okay, great. You're not going to play that one.” That's the first thing we do. It's sixth grade band–you are probably still better at the horn than them. “Let's go. We're doing this!” That takes the training wheels off and all of a sudden, they're so much more willing to try new things, and the kids respect them more because they're right there with them. That is one of the things I recommend, don't give yourself a grace period because there's never the right time to jump off and dive into it. It's always intense. It's always a lot.

CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS

Katzenmeyer: The university is able to prepare students based on what the data says, what the research says, what people who have been in the classroom before that now are professors at the university have experienced. But oftentimes, that wasn't within the last three, four, or five years. It was often a little longer than that. Our job as a supervising teacher is to say, "Yes, all that they taught you in college is great. Here's the gaps that we need to fill in to show you what's actually going on in the school and how you actually survive in this job. Because if you try and go by the books the whole time, there's a significant risk of burnout and frustration and feeling like a failure and all that stuff." And they're not. They're good kids and teachers and musicians that need that opportunity to see, this is the way that I apply those skills that I learned in college to a practical situation.

Gaudette: One of the big challenges is what type of school you're going to teach at and the differences between that. You could have a student teacher that was at a rural middle school and now they're going to go to an urban high school. That's kind of a culture shock that some students aren't expecting, and some of the differences that are present among all the schools. One school might require you to post a lesson plan every single week. Another school might not have that same kind of expectation. Really try to be clear about what type of classroom this student teacher might want to participate in. I've had student teachers that know that they wanted to become the "small town orchestra person" to teach elementary strings all the way up to high school. That's a specific skill set because it's not like trying to be the lead director at a high school that has a feeder program. Trying to identify what's the best thing in my position that will help them achieve their ideal position. If they don't have one, engage in that conversation to see if you can get an idea from them so that they do leave your experience more firmly planted in an idea of what they want to do, where they want to teach, and what levels as well.

Kaiser: The student teachers are always telling me that they wish they could see more people teaching and they wish they knew more about what jobs looked like. We had a whole conversation of like, how do we even apply for jobs? For every student teacher I have, I send them on two field trips. One day, they observe six other teachers in my building, no music––eighth grade world studies, sixth grade science, seventh grade ELA–and they see their students that they've been working with in these very different settings. They see them make sometimes great and sometimes really horrible decisions in their other classes and they learn what these kids are like in different settings and I'm like, "That's teaching!" Then the other day, I send them across the school district to see other music teachers. The student teacher goes to a high school marching band, elementary general music, fifth grade orchestra room, and a high school general music class. That really makes a big difference.

Bernstrom: It's good to be focused and know, "I want to teach high school band when I'm done," and have what you want to do, but also I think it's important to have a little bit of openness as far as, "But it's okay if you don't, or the very first job you might get, you might not really have your choice. And do you want a job or not?" How are student teachers going to be prepared for that if they always shut that out of their mind thinking, "I'm not ever going to teach elementary," or, "I'm not ever going to teach middle school." Then before you know it, there it is. Just being open to lots of different scenarios and situations from everywhere you could possibly teach.

CREATING A POSITIVE ENVIRONMENT

Gaudette: Lifting up your student teacher in front of your students, making that cooperating teacher a hero to your students and pointing out the incredibleness of what they're doing. It enhances that individual, and you've given your students another hero that they can look up to. That's what I like to do and I think it's fun.

Kaiser: The first day I have a student teacher and I know what instrument they play, then next time we have the opportunity for lessons I want them to do a lesson. Immediately that group of kids is like, "Whoa, I have a clarinet player from the university right now!" We had 40, 6th grade clarinets all crossing the break together in a lesson. They were blown away at my student teacher, the flexibility going from A to B natural and explaining how to do it. All of a sudden, now you have 40 cheerleaders. Now when we go back to band rehearsal, all the clarinets are like, "No, don't mess with them. Don't talk right now. This is super important. They totally taught us how to do this thing earlier." It was so cool! Kids, especially middle schoolers, their love language is socializing. They feed off of their connections. If you can lean on that and allow them to connect over the student teachers, it really is exciting.

Katzenmeyer: It's just a matter of openly sharing your joy and also openly sharing your pain points every day as you're teaching, because we all know those of us that have been doing it long enough that there's both every day. I never shy away from being able to express the things I'm frustrated with. I love getting to do what I do every day. The main sense I have when I go home is that this is a joyful thing and I share those moments of joy like, “Man, the group sounded great today! Did you hear those horns?” But I'll also share when, “The district gives us no money to do this. How am I supposed to do this when I have a budget of $1,000 to repair my instruments for an entire year?” Letting them know that there's problems, there's issues, there's things that you have to deal with that frustrate you on a daily basis. It's the joy that helps you to overcome that.

Bernstrom: As far as encouraging reflection and growth, I try to keep a running record of what they started with, what's the first thing they did, what we're adding on to it. Leave a space for, “Yeah, this was great. I wouldn't change a thing,” or, “Oh gosh, I should have done this, this, this, and this.” Then watch those lists change as time goes on. Sometimes being able to look all the way back and see the things that you learned about, that you made changes to, why they're important, and why you made the choices that you did. It’s important to be able to look back at some of those things.

PAYING IT FORWARD

Katzenmeyer: In my own experience as a student teacher, my cooperating teacher was so kind to me, and it made me feel immediately welcome in the profession and it made me feel immediately like people who do this are good people. It made me enjoy spending time around other educators. I got to have discussions that weren't just talking about what was on the rubric or whatever, but like actual real stuff. With that in mind, I try to bring a little bit of that. I want my student teachers to see that this is a great place to be around great people. That was what inspired me to want to give that experience to somebody else, to provide that feeling of warmth and welcoming within the profession.

Gaudette: My experience going in as the cooperating teacher was very different than I think a lot of people because I kind of fell into education and actually backfilled to get my degree. I didn't have a mentor teacher the typical way that somebody would have a mentor teacher. I actually inherited a program that I got to do whatever I want and figure it out however I wanted it to do. I found so much value in that, that I try to always keep that space open for any student teacher. If they have an idea, I'll do everything in my power to see what we can do to make that idea happen. Whether it's playing a drum set on a song, rewriting something, or doing an arrangement, they need space to become who they need to become and who they want to become without being told how to do it all the time.

Bernstrom: It's being able to figure out there's really not a lot of limits to what you can try to do. Change is great! If you do things the same way too often, it gets boring. So making changes that you're excited about and showing them that's something that they can and should do. The day that it's not exciting for you is not going to be exciting for the kids and then we know how that's going to turn out. You have to be excited about it.

Kaiser: It's that inspiration piece of hearing from young people going into this. I learned so much from hearing from these young teachers and I also think it's radically exciting that young people want to be music teachers. The fact that they're showing up and saying, “I choose this.” I mean, it's quite inspirational because everything is telling them not to do this and they're still choosing to do it. I want to honor that and it totally reinvigorates me. I don't even sleep the night before a student teacher arrives because I'm so excited for that first day––it's really quite wonderful!

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MORE KIDS Making More Music

By Dr. Rachel Gorden Mercer

Dr. Rachel Gorden Mercer has spent over two decades teaching, playing, and getting kids excited about music. During that time, she has taught classroom music, directed bands, and started several ukulele clubs (because ukes make people happy) in K-12 schools in Ohio, Washington, and Minnesota. Her goal has always been to find ways for more kids to make more music. Dr. Gorden Mercer has earned a Bachelor's Degree in Music: Theory/Composition from the University of WI-Eau Claire, a Master's Degree in Music Education from Bowling Green State University, and a Doctorate in Educational Leadership from Concordia University, St. Paul. She currently directs the Middle School band, jazz band, ukulele club, and rock band at Boeckman Middle School in Farmington, MN. For the complete dissertation "Instrumental Music Educator Strategies to Reduce or Remove Participation Barriers for Middle School Students," see https://digitalcommons.csp.edu/edd/76/

Across Minnesota, a group of middle school music educators have been quietly solving one of music education's most persistent equity problems—one donated trumpet at a time.

On the first day of school, Michael already knows which students won't be in his band class.

Not because they don't want to be there. Because they can't afford to be.

The clarinet rental is $40 a month. The trumpet, a little more. For families scraping by—and in Michael's school, a significant share are—that's not a small ask. So kids who might have become musicians never get the chance. They take a different elective while their classmates learn to read music. The chance for them to participate shrinks quietly, year after year.

Michael, a middle school instrumental music director in Minnesota, has spent his career refusing to accept that gap as inevitable. When a student needs an instrument and doesn't have one, he finds one. "Anybody who needs it," he says. Full stop.

He's not alone. My dissertation research of ten Minnesota middle school music educators revealed that teachers like Michael have developed a sophisticated, creative, and surprisingly replicable set of strategies for getting more students into music programs—and keeping them there. Their methods range from the practical (community instrument drives, reduced rental fees) to the philosophical (building ensembles that function more like families rather than classrooms). Together, these strategies can be a field guide for directors intent on saving a program that, in many schools, is quietly dying.

A problem hiding in plain sight

School music programs have been shrinking for decades. Budget cuts, schedule crunches, and the relentless pressure to prioritize state-tested subjects have all taken their toll. But the research literature has focused mostly on high school attrition and elementary school access (Draves, 2012; Elpus & Abril, 2019; Freer & Evans, 2018; Kinney, 2019; Miller, 2024; Yoo, 2021). Middle school—grades six through eight—has been largely overlooked.

That's a significant gap, because middle school is where most of the loss of participants happens.

Students who started band or orchestra in fourth or fifth grade hit seventh grade and start asking whether instrumental music is really "their thing." They're joining sports teams, developing friend groups, and figuring out who they are. Music, which once felt like an adventure, can start to feel like an obligation. And for students who never got the chance to start—because of money, because their family moved, because they just weren't ready at age nine—the door to instrumental music can feel permanently closed.

My study, based on focus group interviews with ten experienced music educators in medium to large Minnesota middle schools, set out to understand what the most successful programs are doing differently. What emerged was less a set of isolated tactics than a coherent philosophy: meet students where they are, remove every barrier you can reach, and make the music room somewhere they actually want to be (Gorden Mercer, 2025).

The attic full of clarinets

The most immediate barrier, everyone agreed, is instruments.

"Most barriers to participation can be addressed with increased funding," the study noted—a finding consistent with a generation of prior research. But increased funding, in most school districts, is not coming. Instead, these teachers have gotten resourceful.

Community instrument drives have become a staple strategy. Teachers put out the word—through newsletters, social media, local churches, parent networks—that the program needs instruments. The response, many of them report, is often surprising. Neighborhoods turn out to be full of forgotten guitars and dusty trumpets, sitting in attics and basements for twenty years, waiting for someone to ask. It turns out, community members who didn't know there was a need often want to help once they do.

Benefit concerts serve a dual purpose: they raise money for instruments and equipment, and they show the community exactly what its investment looks like. When parents and neighbors watch actual students perform, they open their wallets. They also start paying attention to what the program needs.

For students who need a school-owned instrument, several teachers have worked with their districts to establish **reduced or waived rental fees** for qualifying families— a quiet negotiation that requires

persistence but rarely makes headlines. Others have brokered deals with instrument repair schools, which need broken instruments to practice on and will sometimes fix them for free or at a discount in exchange.

None of this is glamorous. All of it works.

Too late? The teachers say otherwise.

There's an unspoken rule in many instrumental music programs: if students don't start beginning instrumental music in the first available year, they're behind. And students who are behind don't feel they really belong.

Five of the ten educators in this study have decided to reject that rule entirely.

These middle school directors have opened their doors to students who want to join later than the traditional entry point. They've **created beginner ensembles**—late-start bands, accelerated orchestras, fundamentals classes—open to any middle school student who wants to learn, regardless of prior experience. The formats vary. Some teachers run a separate group that focuses purely on basics until students are ready to join their grade-level ensemble. Others integrate beginners directly into existing groups, pairing them with more experienced peers. A few have built entire accelerated tracks for students who start in sixth grade, instead of when it was first offered in elementary school, and want to catch up by eighth.

The logistics differ. The result is the same: kids who thought the door was closed find it open.

Three teachers have gone further still, launching **non-traditional programs** that don't look anything like the band classes their parents remember. Guitar ensembles. Rock bands. Hip-hop production. These aren't consolation prizes for students who couldn't make the cut in concert band—they're full programs, built around music students know and love.

"A student who grew up listening to hip-hop and suddenly has the chance to learn to produce it in school is a student who shows up," the research observed. The motivational logic is simple. The results, the educators report, are real.

The friendship builder

Here's what none of the policy briefs or budget discussions tend to mention: the most powerful retention tool these teachers have isn't a curriculum or a funding source. It's a feeling.

"Music educators are friendship builders," said Will, one of the study's participants.

He meant it as a description of what good music teachers do. But it's also, the research suggests, the secret to why students stay in programs year after year, even when they could easily opt out—even when the instrument is hard, the schedule is demanding, and a dozen other electives are competing for their attention.

The educators in this study have built rehearsal rooms that function more like communities than classrooms. They know which of their students are in the robotics club. They notice when a kid gets a role in the school play and say something about it. They create opportunities—campfires, field trips, dinners, in-class games—for students to become friends with each other, not just fellow musicians.

Sophia, one participant, went so far as to incorporate art-making into band rehearsals, after noticing that some of her students were drawn to visual art and worried about having to choose between their interests. Three teachers in the study have made formal arrangements to share students with the choir program, so that a student who wants to try choral singing doesn't have to give up their instrument to do it.

This kind of flexibility might seem like a concession. The educators in the study see it as a strategy. Students who are allowed to explore—who are told, in effect, that their curiosity is an asset, not a problem—are students who stay.

The educators frame this in terms of psychological safety: before a student will take the risk of playing a wrong note in front of thirty peers, or performing a solo for the first time, they need to trust that the room won't punish them for it. Building that trust is daily work. It requires teachers to be consistent, warm, and genuinely present. But it pays off in retention numbers that more punitive programs can't match.

The teachers need community, too

One of the study's most striking findings had nothing to do with students. Teachers need teachers.

When the focus groups convened, the ten teachers—many of whom had never met—started exchanging ideas with the urgency of people who'd been starved for exactly this kind of conversation. "I'm going to steal that idea!" one participant, Emma, exclaimed at something a colleague described. The room, by multiple accounts, lit up.

Instrumental music teachers are among the most isolated professionals in public education. In many schools, they're the only people in the building who do what they do. There's no department meeting to attend, no colleague down the hall to ask about a struggling student. Music teachers develop their craft largely alone, through years of trial and error, with no obvious mechanism for sharing what they've learned.

The focus groups accidentally revealed what those teachers had been missing—and what they desperately wanted more of. The study recommends that school administrators and district leaders create formal structures for music educators to meet, observe each other's classrooms, and share strategies across buildings. Professional learning communities for music teachers. Scheduled collaboration time. Mentorship programs for early-career educators.

The investment would be modest. The return, the research suggests, could be significant.

Why this matters

As an educator with 24 years of middle school experience, I have seen the band room become a second home to many students. It's the reason they come to school. It's where they find their friends. It's where they learn to be part of a community. They are learning so much more than how to play an instrument.

That's not a small thing to lose. And in districts where programs are underfunded, understaffed, and undervalued, it gets lost every year—quietly, without fanfare, in the form of a kid who wanted to play and never got the chance.

The educators in this study have spent their careers trying to prevent that. They track down donated instruments. They negotiate reduced fees. They build beginner ensembles. They learn what their students love and create spaces where those students feel, sometimes for the first time, like they genuinely belong somewhere.

Their mission, as they articulate it, is disarmingly simple: more kids making more music.

Getting there, it turns out, requires ingenuity, persistence, warmth, and—above all—the refusal to treat access as someone else's problem.

The door doesn't open itself. But these teachers have been opening it, one student at a time, for years. And they're just getting started.

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MINNESOTA **MODERN** BAND

ACROSS THE CURRICULUM

Music, like culture, is always in flux. For this reason, music education has always been a story of change. In the 1700s, as American churches found themselves with congregations unable to perform the musical demands of a participatory liturgy, itinerant singing masters were hired to teach sight singing and organize weekly singing gatherings (Mark, 2007). This first iteration of an American music education system sought to educate people to perform basic music literacies required by a religious practice. In the early 1800s, as church music in the United States was again undergoing a reform movement away from the popular sacred harp style toward a more Western European aesthetic, new pedagogies developed. Church music reformer Lowell Mason worked closely with the Boston Handel and Haydn Society and aligned his pedagogy to the tastes of Boston's elite classes. Mason's work ultimately led to the first public-funded music education program in 1838 (Broyles, 1992). In the late 1800s, with urban migration decimating rural populations, burgeoning regional orchestras provided a sense of cosmopolitanism outside of metropolitan centers. Will Earhart implemented the first school orchestra program in the small rural community of Richmond, Indiana situated between Dayton, Cincinnati, and Indianapolis.[1] Vincent Bates (2026) suggests that the urbanormativity experienced by today's rural programs may be rooted in these origins. In the United States, adapting music education programming to support emerging social needs, changing musical tastes, and deeper experiences of community have been recurring themes.

[1] It is possible that the first string program may have sounded more like a string band than a string orchestra as it featured violins, guitars, and mandolins (Emery, 2015).

By Aaron Lohmeyer, Eric Songer, and Nicholas Gaudette

Today, music educators continue to seek out new curricular offerings they believe will best serve their communities while maintaining NAfME's long-standing mission to provide music for all. Keyboard and guitar are two areas of classroom-based instrumental instruction demonstrating success in capturing a wider student demographic (Miller, 2024). Music Technology courses promise to address the changing modes of creation and transmission driving much of society's musical production, distribution, and engagement (Webster, 2012). Mariachi and Steel Pan ensembles are growing nationally as ensembles that capture interest in more global music traditions and align with modern immigration patterns (Tucker et al., 2025; Williams, 2008). Finally, Modern Band is emerging as a pedagogical approach that is flexible to student music cultures, responsive to community interests, and aligned with the modes of music creation driving today's music industry (Wish, 2020).

Modern Band takes its curricular cues from the social functions rooted in community-based practices and rationales (i.e., community, discipline, uplift) that led to the rise of the original band education movement. Just as the band education movement responded to music popular in the preceding decades, Modern Band, too, aims to capitalize on music already popular within student experiences of culture. The main difference is simply that Modern Band re-casts the philosophies underlying the band movement's success into contemporary industry- and community-based practices. As a result, Modern Band is stylistically flexible; creates space to learn instruments common in today's popular music; employs multiple modes of representation utilizing written, aural, and digital literacies; and responds to society's ever-changing musical tastes.

The term *Modern Band*

In the late 1800s military bands began to explore different social functions beyond parades and ceremonial functions. Sporting events, community festivals, popular entertainment, and eventually, education, all proved to be purposes for which wind bands proved to be immeasurably valuable for strengthening community through a diverse repertoire spanning both decades and styles (Gailey, 2019). Bands like the famed Sousa Band performed military style marches, transcriptions of European classical music, and operettas. At the time, operettas were the precursor to Broadway popular entertainment and Sousa's arrangements of Gilbert and Sullivan were a key piece of his programming. Following this Golden Era of band as popular entertainment in American society (1880s-1910s), Joshua Gailey (2019) observed that much of this expanded concept of the band tradition was adopted into the band education movement emerging in the 1920s. Gailey wrote:

> It aspired in size, scope, and repertory to the professional bands, performing a calculated mix of popular and orchestral music meant simultaneously to uplift and entertain; it was increasingly called upon to fulfill the civic functions of the bygone town bands, marching in parades and performing at sporting events; and it was designed to discipline children, harnessing its militarism to cultivate good citizens. (p. 7)

The band *education* movement emerged after the military, athletic, and concert bands enjoyed a sustained period of popular success.

Modern Band also aims to capitalize on music interests already popular while meeting contemporary music literacy goals. Listening, reading, speaking, and writing processes are embedded into Modern Band's allowances for emulation, approximation, improvisation, and composition (Powell & Burstein, 2017). Emphasizing this similarity to language acquisition, David Wish, a central figure in Modern Band, named his approach "Music as a Second Language" (Wish et al., 2018). Traditional literacy practices guide Modern Band approaches, albeit with different texts (i.e, reflecting student culture) and different text designs (e.g., video, audio, iconic notation, drum matrix) (Lohmeyer, 2026). In popular music practices, staff notation may be a component of transmission, but it is not the only option for visual representation. While expressions of the pedagogy may vary, Modern Band teachers do seem to agree on core principles of student preference, sustaining student music cultures, improvisation, aural learning, and utilizing multiple modes of representation (Powell & Burstein, 2017).

Modern Band suggests a compelling answer for many of today's students as it aligns popular taste with social functionality while meeting the goals set by our national music standards. The following sections describe three different applications of Modern Band in Minnesota schools. Eric Songer teaches middle school in Chaska; Nicholas Gaudette teaches high school in Minneapolis; Aaron Lohmeyer teaches college in Winona. While united through Modern Band, they also identify as band, orchestra, or elementary general teachers who have added Modern Band to their teaching practice.

Middle School: Programming and Scheduling Options, *Eric Songer (Band)*

Many middle school music programs consist of concert bands, choirs, orchestras and secondary general music courses. There may also be a solo and ensemble component as well as co-curricular jazz, marching, and honor bands. Now there is a growing Modern Band component to middle school offerings like jazz bands many decades ago, it is an additional component to the curriculum that is both giving students currently in music classes a more well-rounded music education and providing a space for students previously not in music ensembles an opportunity to be in a music class that is appealing and relevant to their musical interests.

There are many ways Modern Band may be offered. The first format is after-school. In our school district, Eastern Carver County, most co-curricular activities are run through Community Education. We have started several after school ensembles that fit into the categories of ensembles or survey classes. Ensembles include Garage Band (Rock Band), Country/Bluegrass Ensemble, Pop Ensemble (includes R&B), Latin Pop Band (includes Mariachi, Jazz, rock, hip hop, and pop), and Movie Band. Every band meets once a week after school for a 2-4 month season and does 2-4 shows. Ensembles are open to anyone in grades 6-8 who has experience playing an instrument or singing. Community Education takes care of registration. I set the cost based on ensemble expenses and my own compensation. Community Education provides financial assistance to families that need it and they also help with insurance, paying bills, and promotion.

In our Modern Band classes, students help select the repertoire. I help to make sure different eras and genres are included while also ensuring that the music will help them meet their technical and conceptual understandings. For example, our Garage Band will usually perform a classic rock song from the 1960s/1970s, a pop/rock or metal song from the 1980s, a grunge or punk song from the 1990s, and something from a current artist.

To learn the music, we use tablature, chord/lyric sheets, iconic notations, and audio recordings. Guitar and bass players tend to prefer tablature or chord charts. Keyboard players may choose to read traditional notation or chord charts. Drummers often play by ear but can use a chord chart or lead sheet as a guide or read a traditional notated part like in jazz band. Singers read lead sheets, consult audio recordings, and learn how to sing basic harmony parts. For our band, horn and string parts are traditionally notated. Most of these resources can be found on music sharing websites like Ultimate-guitar.com, songsterr.com, Musescore.com.

While our program is partly after school there are other formats that middle schools might use. During school is also an option. Teachers may choose to use flex or resource time during the school day; include it as a part of the large ensemble curriculum; or as an elective offering or as a part of the curriculum of a general music course. As every school has different scheduling demands and student interests, the flexibility of Modern Band is one of its greatest attributes. At our school, Modern Band has increased interest in our curricular band and many of our students go on to continue to pursue their own musical interests outside of the classroom when they leave the K-12 setting.

High School: Modernizing Your Existing Pre-existing Ensemble, *Nicholas Gaudette (Orchestra)*

As an orchestra director of a program rooted in traditional string education, I have found that opening ensembles to Modern Band instruments can significantly increase engagement from both current and prospective students. The connections we make to community-based music practices extend student learning beyond the school walls. Rather than viewing modernization as a threat to traditional pre-existing high school ensembles, I see it as an expansion of what traditional music education can offer. Even if a district cannot support a full Modern Band curriculum, many ensemble programs may be able to welcome more learners with an extracurricular offering. Whether curricular or extra-curricular, Modern Band has great potential to strengthen existing programming.

In my own program, I have welcomed students playing guitar, bass guitar, pedal harp, piano, keys, and even a dvina. While I may not always be able to offer targeted instruction on each of these instruments, I am able to create parts for each instrument using my understanding of ensemble needs and student abilities. Much of this expanded instrumentation lends itself to supporting the string foundation within the class. In the absence of a large bass section, a single bass guitar player can effectively carry the low end of the ensemble. When a piece calls for rooted harmonic support, like the well-known passacaglia from Pachelbel's Canon in D, the guitar (electric or acoustic) can function as a support instrument like a pre-charted continuo. When a piece demands rhythmic drive, welcoming a drum set player can help anchor the rhythmic center for the entire group, elevating the overall energy and cohesiveness of the performance. These Modern Band adaptations create meaningful learning opportunities for every student in the room by encouraging them to listen more closely, adjust their playing to blend with the instruments around them, and consider their role within new musical styles.

Pedagogically, it is important to establish some foundational norms from the orchestra/string approach. String players require specific pedagogical instruction centered on technique including bow hold, ear training, finger patterns, and cognitive response time, all of which demand focused, sustained attention to detail. The repertoire utilized by many educational orchestra programs has been refined over decades to address these technical needs, and it would be unwise to discard that foundation. At the same time, the music and education landscape has shifted dramatically; student-centered instruction, culturally responsive practices, and community-informed curriculum are all essential to success. These shifts recognize that when students feel seen and belonging is cultivated, retention of knowledge and genuine engagement follow.

The most effective method I have found for modernizing an existing ensemble is through intentional song selection. Take the first movement “Winter” from *Vivaldi's Four Seasons*, a cornerstone of string repertoire. Its chord structure lends itself naturally to scale work, harmonic intonation, and rhythmic precision. By returning the bass line to its original figured bass (separating the bass from the pre-established low string continuo), layering synthesized electronic elements, stripping prescribed publisher dynamics and replacing them with student-driven interpretation and improvisation, and incorporating DAW tools with robust midi textures, you can transform this piece entirely. Students find themselves asking, “Did we just dubstep Vivaldi?” That question is exactly where meaningful learning lives. The bowing technique remains the same; the vehicle simply becomes something new. This is what I call the *Reverse Bridgerton Effect.* Instead of a string quartet giving pop songs a classical makeover, the orchestra instead is flipping the tables sending the iconic classical piece straight to the dance floor!

Ultimately, the goal of “modernization” is not to choose between tradition and innovation. It is to teach all components of music creation simultaneously as a holistic approach that welcomes both the past and the present. Orchestral education has long been embedded in a culture of precision and high expectation, and those standards for many are worth preserving. But we must also make space for student imagination, collaborative community, peer-to-peer support, and the transferable skill of learning how to learn. With the technology tools available today, including AI-assisted composition and public domain arrangements, there is no reason a concert hall piece and a rock venue performance cannot share the same artistic DNA. The historical context and the modern resurrection can absolutely coexist, and that is where today's educational orchestra program has its greatest opportunity.

College: Modern Band as Folk Tradition, *Aaron Lohmeyer (Generalist)*

At my university, our Secondary General Methods students start the semester by examining David Wish’s Music as a Second Language approach (Wish et al., 2018). We have a one-hour lab that allows us to make our own rock band once a week. We use informal learning approaches common to popular musicians by using a mixture of recordings, tabs, iconic notations, and peer collaborations (Green, 2017). We rotate roles of drums, bass, guitar, keys, and vocals. It is messy, though no messier than an elementary Orff classroom where students may be working independently in small groups. Because many of these instruments are electronic, maintaining a reasonable class volume with group work is relatively simple compared to a concert band setting.

Students discover that, not only is this style of learning fun, it is also quite rigorous. The core ensemble configuration is essentially a chamber ensemble, so the students feel social pressure to cover their part well. I also value how naturally singing becomes a part of the process. Vocalizing to share musical ideas becomes a common form of communication. Singing into the mic is fun for some, and for others, it represents a hurdle they are free to jump if they wish. Often students will sing solo in public for the first time through this class.

I also teach a class called Americana Ensemble focusing on the American folk music tradition from the 1800s into the present. We have a mix of fiddles, basses, guitars, mandolins, banjos, piano, and voices. We cover anything from Appalachian fiddle tunes to Taylor Swift. The inspiration for this class came from seeing all the bluegrass festivals in my area, talking to students wanting to play in their church worship band, and learning more about the American music history that has guided today’s music industry. In the class, we learn songs by ear, generate our own arrangements, improvise, use notational modes that mix print with oral traditions (like chord/lyric sheets), and invite student choice into repertoire selection.

As their teacher, I have needed to learn when to stop talking and just trust my students’ determination to set their own path. This more constructivist approach to music can seem messy compared to the more familiar *conducting as teaching paradigm.* However, in this tradition, rehearsal through shared leadership is more the norm. I try to let them decide what the music should become. When I learned to play this music, I was intrinsically motivated. I do not want to steal that away with too many teaching cycles framed by teacher pleasing. Sometimes the most help I can provide is simply knowing the relevant resources available on the web. Sometimes the most motivation I can provide is simply the experience of musical independence.

The biggest personal victories come when I see students in the class playing unassigned music together outside of class. The group I had two years ago in Americana Ensemble actually formed a band that is still together today and plays around the region. Recently, I received the following email from two students in my current Americana class: “Rachel and I got a gig next Friday April 17 from 6-8pm at Blooming Grounds!! You should come!” Teacher wins like this have been well worth the challenge of trying something new.

Conclusion

Viewing the band education movement through the lens of historical context and social functionality, what started in the 1920s may continue to provide a model for success today. The band movement of the 1920s capitalized on the recent popularity of Sousa-style bands, the multiple community-based functions they filled, and the literacies required to engage with the dominant music media of the day. Bands modeled after Sousa's instrumentation, style, and artistic practices continue to provide a great way for students to acquire foundational music literacies, develop critical thinking skills, experience community, and acquire habits that will serve them well in other areas of life. However, Modern Band proposes a new expression of the band movement by using the repertoire, style, and practices predominant in the music industry today that may also meet these goals.

By choosing music familiar to our students' experience in contemporary communities and media, motivation and identity are baked into the curriculum. By providing curricular space for the instruments most purchased today, we prepare new entry points for life-long music making. By choosing methods that utilize a variety of media designs for learning, students discover musical independence through the production and distribution channels assumed by today's media landscape. Modern Band can be a valuable experience to embed into existing curriculum, provide as a single standalone exploratory course, or even function as a curricular centerpiece.

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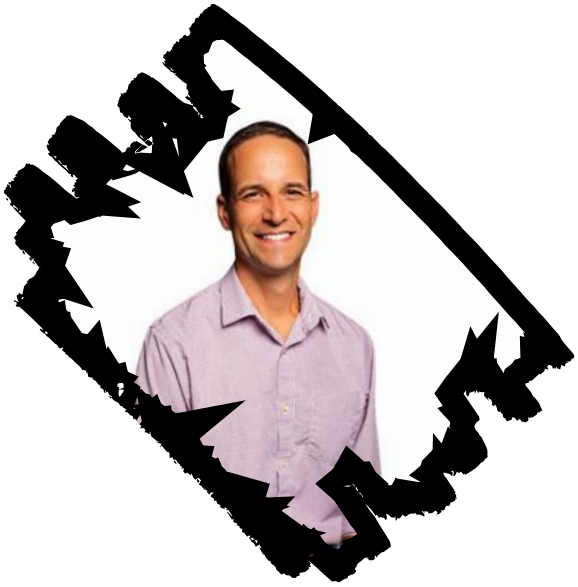

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Eric Songer has been a music educator at Chaska Middle School West since 1997. He has degrees in Music Education from the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire and Curriculum & Instruction from the University of St. Thomas. He has created a program that includes jazz, rock, country, bluegrass, Latin, hip hop, EDM and marching. Mr. Songer teaches privately, composes and arranges music, and performs as a trombonist. Eric has published articles in the *Instrumentalist*, *Teaching Music*, and *Music Educators Journal*, and has recently published the book *Starting A Modern Band Program.* He also writes for Yamaha's online music education blog. He was the recipient of the CMA Music Teacher of Excellence in 2023 and 2025. He is on the board of MMEA and MBDA and serves on the NAfME Innovations Council. His wife Heidi is also a musician and educator and they teach some courses together. They live in Chaska, Minnesota with their kids Caleb and Abby.

Renegade bassist, **Nick Gaudette** is a low-end string slinging legend who seamlessly weaves conservatory-trained precision with unbridled creative chaos. As a pioneer in music education, he has dedicated his career to reimagining how the next generation of musicians are trained. For a decade, he served on the faculty at Saint Paul Conservatory for Performing Artists where he also chaired the instrumental music department, redesigning its curriculum to reflect contemporary pre-conservatory training standards. Building on that foundation, he is now completing his tenth and final year at Edina High School, where he directs four ensembles and has launched a fresh, forward-thinking approach to orchestral education that honors classical tradition while breathing new life into how it is taught and experienced.

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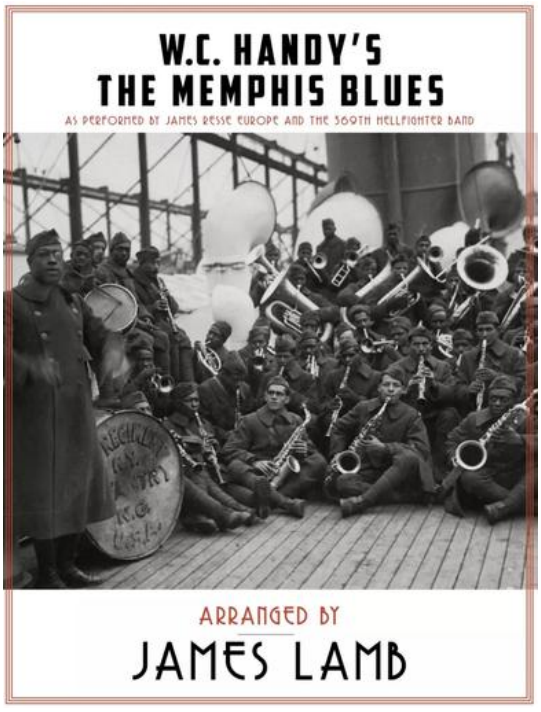
IN SEARCH OF "THE MEMPHIS BLUES"

By Christopher Fogderud

Christopher Fogderud teaches band, jazz band and music theory at Brainerd High School in Brainerd, MN. He is a graduate of Gustavus Adolphus College and the American Band College of Sam Houston State University.

Great music is a powerful agent of change. Unlike most other agents of change, it makes you feel incredible during the process. I vividly remember the feeling I had when I first heard the ghostly sounds of James Reese Europe's 369th Infantry Regiment "Harlem Hellfighters" Band coming through a worn-out iPhone speaker sitting on my desk at Brainerd High School. At first, it was the exhilaration of encountering something so wonderful and vibrant. The intoxicating joy of great music. The urge to shout from the rooftops to anyone who would listen, "Hey everyone! Stop what you are doing...there is something beautiful here!" But then an uneasiness crept in at the edges. "Where has this been all my life?" "I thought I knew band literature...how did I miss this?" "Surely, a work of this quality is known, recognized, cherished?" This was my starting place with the music of James Reese Europe: pure exhilaration, followed by nagging questions.



Fast forward five years to 2026 and the Brainerd High School Wind Symphony and I are polishing up our concert set for our February 12th MMEA performance. The brightest musical gem in our set - none other than a premiere of a transcription of Europe's 1919 recording of W. C. Handy's "The Memphis Blues" by James Lamb. When I received the email announcing the cancellation of the in-person events of the convention, my first thoughts were for my students. How to tell them? What to say? But shortly after, my thoughts went to James Reese Europe. I grieved the opportunity to share his music with my colleagues on a stage like MMEA and to see other band directors join in the same excitement for this incredible music. My greatest aspiration for our performance at MMEA would have been to have everyone talking about James Reese Europe. An article is much less exciting than a musical performance, but it is my hope that if I share my own journey of learning this music, I might inspire you to perform the music of James Reese Europe with your band. And then, someone will hear your performance and feel the need to perform this piece. And so forth until James Reese Europe is mentioned in the same sentence as Sousa, Holst, and Grainger.

In 2021, I was in my 13th year of teaching band at Brainerd High School. In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic and the murder of George Floyd, educators and conductors from all over the country were re-evaluating what and why we do what we do. What music should we teach? Are we programming music with a broad perspective? Challenging yet fruitful conversations were happening everywhere. It was during that summer that I attended a wonderful concert of the Lakes Area Music Festival in which artistic advisor (and self proclaimed "classical agitator") Loki Karuna gave an impassioned speech advocating for broadening the voices that are heard on concert stages. I was greatly moved. I then witnessed orchestras around the country programming music from Black composers that, despite its great quality, were underrepresented in the orchestral canon (e.g., Samuel Coleridge Taylor, Florence Price, Margaret Bonds, etc.). I began to wonder if there were similar composers in the band tradition. I had no idea where to start looking. Little did I know, I wouldn't have to go looking at all. Mr. Europe would find me.

Being the complete documentary nerd that I am, I was in the middle of my usual summer Ken Burns phase. The seasonal pick this year: *Ken Burns Jazz*. I have seen *Ken Burns Jazz* numerous times, but I wasn't prepared for what was about to hit me. There, in the second episode, from minutes 24 to 32, was James Reese Europe. I had watched it many times before, but now with a new perspective. In an absolutely beautiful section of documentary filmmaking, Ken Burns tells the story of the 369th Infantry Regiment nicknamed "The Harlem Hellfighters." He tells of their formation: their heroics on the WWI battlefields of France, their struggles fighting a war abroad and racism at home, and he tells of their incredible regimental band led by James Reese Europe. Throughout the film clip, the primary music is a 1919 recording of the 369th Regimental Band performing Europe's arrangement of W. C. Handy's "The Memphis Blues." The film goes on to say how influential a piece of music it was. How when the band played it in France, the crowds would go wild. French musicians would ask to see the regiment's instruments, convinced that those sounds had to be coming from trick clarinets and trumpets. Burns goes on to conclude that James Reese Europe's unique combination of ragtime and blues was highly influential in the development of jazz in America. Furthermore, the performances in France by the musicians of the 369th Infantry Regimental Band laid the groundwork for the French obsession with American jazz music that reached its peak in the 1920s but continues to this day.

HERE IT WAS! A Black American composer whose music had historical significance and global influence. Most importantly, the music was incredible! It was brimming with joy, peppered with virtuosity, and an inescapable gravitas forged in war and hardship. It's like you can hear the future of American music among the notes of the Hellfighter Band. Because he was a military bandmaster, I thought there would be no need to search for a hidden transcription. I thought his music would be as readily available as his band composer contemporaries: Holst, Sousa, and Grainger. I was energized. I opened up a tab on my browser and I was going to order it right then and there. My students were going to play James Reese Europe's arrangement of "The Memphis Blues." Only, I couldn't find it ..... What?

I can't begin to tell you how shocked I was that I couldn't find a transcription or an arrangement. I couldn't even find a recording other than the 1919 Hellfighter recording. I was completely puzzled, so I put my "Memphis Blues Dream" on pause awaiting further information. What I did find was a wonderful transcription by James Lamb of the "St. Louis Blues" (as performed by Europe's Harlem Hellfighter Band). What a gift! Encountering this music for the first time with my band was a musical experience I will never forget. My students loved it too. How could they not? It's a march that swings; it's a big band tune that marches; it's military precision thrown into a nightclub at 2AM; it's utterly captivating music to play and perform. I was thrilled to begin a journey, but once again I had so many nagging questions. Where was "The Memphis Blues"? Why is it so hard to find? I started to get to work and I started to learn.

I learned of the incredible work of the 369th Experience, which organizes musicians from HBCU colleges and universities to recreate the music of James Reese Europe, right down to the uniforms. I learned of Jason Moran's wonderful work as Artistic Director of the Kennedy Center creating musical meditations on Europe's music. I learned of the 369th Historical Society and the work they do for preservation. I learned of memorials in France honoring the soldiers of the 369th. I learned about the venues in France in which they played. I learned just how world-famous James Reese Europe really was. Just because I didn't know his life and music, didn't mean that nobody did.

Perhaps the most "Aha" moment that I experienced in this process, speaks to that sentiment. It happened during a side-by-side rehearsal of the Concordia Band and the Brainerd Band. They were on tour and graciously offered to spend an afternoon teaching and inspiring me and my students. I had told Dr. Peter Haberman, the conductor of the Concordia Band, about my excitement over "The St. Louis Blues" and he suggested that I lead the combined ensemble in a rehearsal of the piece. After a short introduction, I asked the college musicians in front of me a very simple question: "How many of you have heard of James Reese Europe?". Five hands went up. Only five. But that wasn't the revelation. The revelation was that every person who raised their hand was a person of color. There it was. The incredible contributions of James Reese Europe to American band music, as well as the remarkable heroism of the Harlem Hellfighters, are well known and documented within communities of color. If I would have asked the band if they have heard of John Philip Sousa (James Reese Europe's most famous white band composer contemporary), every hand would have gone up. Some might have even scoffed that the question was beneath them. They would have all heard and played Sousa's music. Yet, just like me at their age, James Reese Europe was unknown to the white students. In 1917, the argument could be made that although Sousa was the most famous American band composer in America, James Reese Europe was the most famous American band composer outside of America. The systemic racism embedded in our band canon is the only reasonable explanation for why someone of Mr. Europe's staggering accomplishments and musical quality is largely unknown to his American band descendants. We need to do better.

Because of this, I was inspired to keep searching for "The Memphis Blues." I reached out to the 369th Historical Society in New York. They were very kind but could not get me any sheet music or musical scores. I reached out to the 369th Experience. They were very generous and even sent me their arrangement. I was excited! I opened up the score and was taken aback. It wasn't what James Reese Europe's band performed. It was an acceptable arrangement and served their purposes for modern performance, but it wasn't what I heard on the recording. It was the melody and chord structure of "The Memphis Blues" by W. C. Handy, but the Hellfighter Band was missing from it. Where were the syncopated 16th notes in the woodwind accompaniment? Where were the boisterous glissandi of polyphonic trombone melodies? Where were the improvised solo breaks, which are some of the earliest in recorded music? The overall exhilaration of Europe's arrangement lies in his special combination of these elements, without which one loses the true essence of his music.

At this point I had been searching for "The Memphis Blues" on and off for about 3 years. I was beginning to run out of steam. I emailed James Lamb, who had done the transcription of "The St. Louis Blues" that I loved so much. I asked him if he knew of any transcriptions of "The Memphis Blues" and if he could point me in the right direction. He responded with, "I don't know of any, but it sounds like a fun project." A few weeks later, I was on a plane about to take 70 band students to New Orleans and I checked my email before I switched my phone to airplane mode. Here was the score to a beautifully edited, masterfully transcribed "The Memphis Blues" as performed by James Reese Europe and the Harlem Hellfighters Band by James Lamb. To this day, every time I think of that moment I want to cry. Preparing that transcription for

performance at MMEA this year was one of the most meaningful experiences of my career. Because of the generosity of James Lamb, everyone now has the opportunity to encounter this masterpiece. Band students everywhere can experience this incredible music, not just as a listener, but as a performer. They can become a part of keeping this music alive. We can start to remember things that shouldn't have been forgotten. We can start to listen with new ears and open hearts. Thank you James Lamb. Thank you James Reese Europe.

2026 Minnesota Teacher of the Year

CELEBRATE DAVID DAVIS WITH MMEA

Our very own, David Davis, was named the 2026 Minnesota Teacher of the Year by Education Minnesota. Selected as the 62nd recipient of the award, he is celebrated for his student-centered curriculum that emphasizes creativity, cultural responsiveness, and student empowerment. Señor Davis is an instrumental and general music teacher at Park Spanish Immersion Elementary in St. Louis Park.

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Guiding Our Young Jazz Musicians to Accessible, Great Jazz Recordings

by Russ Peterson

An accomplished classical/jazz saxophonist, bassoonist, and composer, **Russell Peterson** holds degrees from Youngstown State University (Ohio), Le Conservatoire de Bordeaux (France), and Bowling Green State University (Ohio), where he studied with Dr. James Umble, Donald Byo, Jean-Marie Londeix, Dr. Jeffery Lyman and Dr. John Sampen. Winner of numerous prizes, including the top prize at the International Geneva Saxophone Concours, (Switzerland), and first place winner of the MTNA National Music Competition, Mr. Peterson has soloed with orchestras in the United States as well as Europe, including the Dana Chamber Orchestra, (USA), Concordia Orchestra, (USA), Bowling Green Philharmonic, (USA), L'Orchestra de la Suisse Romande, (Switzerland), Collegium Musicum, Basel (Switzerland), The Fargo-Moorhead Symphony Orchestra, The Contra Costa Chamber Orchestra (USA), The Orchestra Conservatorio Superior De Musica (Spain), The Western New York Chamber Orchestra (USA), and The St. Petersburg Philharmonic, (Russia). He teaches at Concordia College - Moorhead.

I recently returned from Columbus, OH, where five of my saxophone students from Concordia College, Moorhead, and I attended the North American Saxophone Alliance (NASA) national convention at The Ohio State University. We heard many great saxophonists - students and professionals - perform a wide variety of music.

One lecture I attended was given by Andrew Janak from the University of Northern Colorado. Janak focused on Sonny Rollins and his "evolution," from his 1940s bebop recordings as a teenager with Bud Powell, through his work with the Clifford Brown - Max Roach quintet, to perhaps his most highly acclaimed album, 1956's Saxophone Colossus. After a two-year sabbatical, Rollins returned with a series of projects in which his style and approach began to change: blurring forms, playing freer and more "outside," and often performing without a comping instrument such as guitar or piano. A few of these recordings are *The Bridge* (1962), *Our Man in Jazz* (1962) with trumpeter Don Cherry, *Now's the Time* (1964), and *East Broadway Run Down* (1966). The evolution is stunning; the experimental 1964 Rollins sounds very different from his 1940s bebop self. Some of jazz's greats evolved to new sounds, places, and directions.

As a young saxophonist growing up in the 1980s in a Cleveland suburb, my teachers urged me to check out the great jazz saxophone players. Their lists are similar to the ones I give my students today: Charlie Parker, Cannonball Adderley, Sonny Rollins, Sonny Stitt, John Coltrane, Dexter Gordon, Paul Desmond, Stan Getz, and Phil Woods. (More modern players are Michael Brecker, David Sanborn, Eric Marienthal, Ernie Watts, Bob Mintzer, and Bob Berg.)

I made my way to record stores to pick up some vinyl (those were the days...). When I got home, I was shocked and confused by some of these Sonny Rollins recordings. It turned out I had picked some 1960s recordings that my young ears weren't ready for. I turned sour on Rollins because I didn't understand the evolution he was in the middle of at that point in his career. I simply thought everything should sound like Charlie Parker and the early Miles Davis quintet with Coltrane and Cannonball. To hear this "new" (to my uninformed ears) jazz sound was confusing and bewildering. It took several years for me to come back to Rollins and appreciate the depth of his musicianship and his constant journey to become more than he was the last time he picked up his horn. I now have great admiration for artists like Sonny Rollins, Cannonball Adderley, and Miles Davis, who never stopped reaching for the next level and the next sound.

Here is a list for young jazzers to set them up with the sounds that may make more sense to their evolving ears. This is not at all a complete list, nor an "avoid other recordings" list, but a list to get them started. Happy listening!

Miles Davis “Kind of Blue” (The #1 selling jazz record of all time, for good reason)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vDqULFUg6CY

John Coltrane “A Love Supreme” (Read up on the concept of this album, very interesting!)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ll3CMgiUPuU&t=399s

John Coltrane and John Hartman (What most people think is the best Coltrane but maybe wait on “Interstellar Space”)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tUnm-lxHn2A&list=PLfJndz0utgOPQB4-9P-8MoYkOKGae_XQ2

Cannonball Adderley “Live in San Francisco” (His later stuff gets a little strange)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=es8kM8FU6eU&list=PLEyxWPyoryRJQfEbcHCPzVjMOllzBDwIr

Miles Davis “Live at Philharmonic Hall” (The best jazz quintet of all time in some people’s minds!)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mwHwlgBFVmM

Sonny Rollins with Bud Powell (Early Rollins is great!)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=43-FN8Vtbnc&list=PLBJenJIJrq0y97k1bYqouaUtogZAQMgS_

Sonny Rollins “Saxophone Colossus” (Mid-career Rollins is also great!)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1BBcGemV9mY [1]

Herbie Hancock “Maiden Voyage”
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l4WWKnGBWIc

Bill Evans “Portrait in Jazz”
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v5eypUpQc7M

Keith Jarret “Köln Concert” (An all improvised event)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Chnpqca6HDE

Charlie Parker “Bird and Diz” at Carnegie Hall (Two jazz innovators!)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hT3wyNwfN0Q&list=PL7gp579CMkT9GdPwnd35QubHOcn7QLP_f

Herbie Hancock “Head Hunters” (Herbie also went through stages, this is his 1970’s stuff with electric pianos)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3m3qOD-hhrQ&t=107s

Wes Montgomery “The Incredible Wes Montgomery”
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q72GV9cwkr8&list=PLL-NbN8uTOiir3S5NqZM30YtiwR0Pbp0G

Billy Holiday “Lady Sings the Blues”
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KCYCad_Y53U&list=PLL-NbN8uTOijOnUzOLDp8hiwSH9xTR8ex

Art Blakey and the Jazz Messengers “Moanin’ ”
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fsJ3JjpZyoA&list=PLMNMmvIC2uGYzD05aNB5I1E5Omz90fAcr

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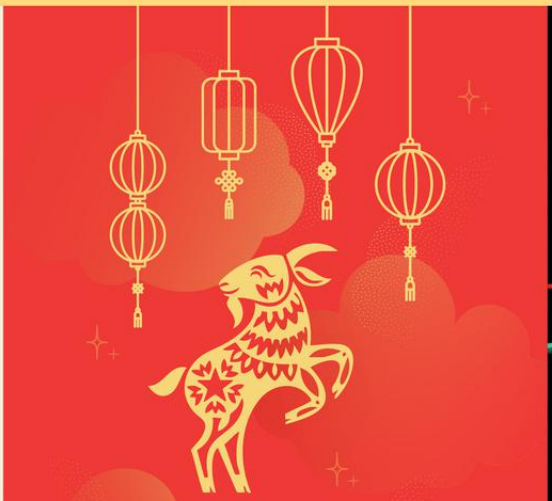

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Engage, Connect, & Express:

Kinesthetic Experiences for P-8 Music

By Dr. David Edmund

This article is a description of session materials and events from MMEA's 2026 virtual conference, which operated with a theme of "Connect, Engage, Act." Engagement and action are connective threads among kinesthetic musical experiences (Juntunen, 2016). In the session, participants moved with selections including classical, rhythm and blues, and global folk music. A primary outcome from the session was for participants to connect through kinesthetic response and idea sharing regarding the ways that such experiences contribute to individuals' understanding of music (Dittus, 2025; Jorgensen, 2008; Juntunen, 2016). Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles involving the multiple means of representation, expression, and engagement form a pertinent link to the 2026 virtual conference theme.

UDL is an educational framework with the goal of creating flexible learning environments that accommodate individual learning differences. While UDL principles are most often associated with teaching students with disabilities, Darrow (2016) encourages its application for all students. The framework is organized into three main principles: 1) Multiple means of engagement (motivation for learning), 2) Multiple means of representation (presenting information in different ways), and 3) Multiple means of action and expression (providing different opportunities for learners to demonstrate understanding). In this session, kinesthetic experiences included locomotor and non-locomotor movements (multiple means of action and expression). Additionally, participants were invited to provide their own ideas for creative movement (multiple means of engagement). The session was adapted for the virtual conference through an increased focus on visual representation, relieving attendees' pressure to participate in the virtual environment.

Dr. David Edmund *is an Associate Professor of Music Education at UMD, where he guides comprehensive music teacher preparation experiences. David served two terms as chair of the MN Society for Music Teacher Education. He is a current consultant for the MN Professional Educator Licensing and Standards Board. His research interests involve kinesthetic musical response and the pedagogy of improvisation. David has presented research in Europe, South America, Southeast Asia, Africa, Canada, and throughout the United States. He remains an active jazz trumpet performer in the northland. Edmund taught general music, choir, and beginning band for ten years in Florida elementary schools. He possesses certifications in Orff Schülwerk and the Kodály approach. David currently lives in Duluth, MN with his wife Jian-Jun and their daughter Isabel. Edmund holds degrees from the University of Florida (B.M.E. & Ph.D.), and the University of North Texas (M.M.E. / jazz emphasis).*

Kinesthetic musical response provides a natural means for conceptual exploration and skill development. Kinesthetic experiences offer space for individual and group expression while deepening students' musical understanding. This article comprises rationales, planning processes, and recommendations for purposeful movement in P-8 general music. Works from diverse composers are emphasized to highlight the potential for sharing a broad range of musical experiences with children in P-8 musical settings. In addition to the cultural diversity represented by the musical selections, inclusion is embodied through principles of Universal Design for Learning.

Engagement

Session attendees engaged actively in purposeful kinesthetic experiences involving a balance between freedom (improvised movement) and structure (choreographed movement). The overt nature of kinesthetic musical response offers opportunities for diagnostic assessment (Juntunen, 2016; Wiggins, 2015; Valerio, 2018) in addition to meaningful engagement with music's expressive domain (Bauer, 2020; Milencovici, 2023). Engagement in dialogue regarding planning for kinesthetic experiences offered an opportunity for meaningful reflection. The UDL principle of multiple means of engagement was addressed directly through the visual, aural, and kinesthetic nature of the shared experiences (Darrow, 2016). For example, participants listened to a piece from the Kenyan artist Ayub Ogada while visualizing and mimicking bodily shapes presented on the screen. We connected more closely with the artist by sharing information about their compositional style and inspiration.

Session Outline

This outline provides a snapshot of session contents and events. For further information, please contact the author by email at dcedmund@d.umn.edu.

1. Ice breaker - shape making with Ayub Ogada's "Kothbiro"
2. Rationales for kinesthetic learning in music
    a. Pathways to stylistic expression
    b. Visual, aural and kinesthetic learning
    c. Conceptual connections: Contour, phrasing, tempo, articulation, dynamics, meter, and form (Juntunen, 2016; Papazachariou-Christoforou, 2022)
    d. Development of aural discrimination skills (Feierabend & Kahan, 2003)
    e. Warmup / prepare students for learning (Papazachariou-Christoforou, 2022)
    f. The overt nature of movement contributes to assessment.
    g. Access: Few resources; students on equal ground (Milencovici, 2023)
    h. Development of musical performance skills
        i. expressive (Papazachaiou-Christoforou, 2022; Milencovici, 2023)
        ii. executive (Campayo-Muñoz, et al, 2022)
        iii. creative (Juntunen, 2016)
    i. Achievement of multiple means of representation, expression, & engagement
3. Model kinesthetic experiences
    a. Ayub Ogada's "Kothbiro"
    b. Primary ages: Kodály's "Viennese Musical Clock"
    c. Intermediate and middle school ages: EWF's "September"
    d. Creative movement with Pat Metheny's "Peace Memory"
4. Wrap-up: Establishing a culture of movement
    a. Planning for kinesthetic experiences
    b. Know yourself as a mover (consider terms other than "dance")
    c. Accommodating students' emotional, social, and physical needs
    d. Review: Principles of UDL
        i. multiple means of representation
        ii. multiple means of action & expression
        iii. multiple means of engagement

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Sing Today, Read Forever!

A Proposal for a Minnesota Musical Fitness Movement

By Ann C. Kay

Ann C. Kay co-founded the Rock 'n' Read Project, dedicated to using singing and basic music skills to develop young brains for reading—with $600,000 from the MN Legislature, it conducted a 5-year project that helped 2500 students make phenomenal gains in reading through singing. Ann is a retired elementary/middle school music teacher, choir director, and instructor of music and classroom teachers. She founded and instructed in the Kodály certification program at the University of St. Thomas.

What if there was something natural that could enable every child's brain for language and literacy before age five? What if babies and children loved it? What if it was free?

Yes, it's singing!

Humans are innately primed for sound and singing. It starts when a five-month-old fetus begins to hear (Partanen et al., 2022). We are one of a few species—cockatoos, parrots, chimpanzees, rats, and sea lions—that can spontaneously keep a steady beat (Ralls, 2025). Babies "warble" sounds before they speak and pay more attention to their mothers when they are sung to rather than spoken to (Tsang et al., 2017). A young brain that hears singing and learns to sing develops early neural encoding of speech (Patel, 2011). This can enable a child to acquire language earlier and be ready to read (Anvari et al., 2022).

Decades ago, Hungarian musician and linguist Zoltán Kodály stated, “Music is a manifestation of the human spirit, similar to language” (1954, p. 205). Kodály’s philosophy led to the creation of an approach that differed from standard music education at the time. He stated, “If one were to attempt to express the essence of this education in one word, it could only be–singing” (1966, p. 206). In the 1950s, the Hungarian national education department compared the academic achievement of primary school students who had received daily Kodály-based music instruction with other students who had twice-weekly standard music classes. According to Hungarian music educator and composer Jenő Ádám, researchers found that the Kodály students who had music every day “excelled in every other subject!” (Adam, n.d./2010, p. 46) The results, along with advocacy from parents, inspired the establishment of 130 music primary schools over the next 20 years.

Neuroscientific research has revealed what Kodály merely intuited—that developing musicality, like developing language, positively affects brain development and is correlated with achievement.[1] Based on the research, this article proposes a bold new goal: *Musical Fitness for Every Child*, and suggests actions music teachers can take to jumpstart a transformation.

It’s All About the Brain

Did you know that 39% of Minnesota fourth graders are unable to read at a basic level (National Assessment of Educational Progress, 2024)? If we could peek into their brains, we would see neurological differences compared to the brains of children that read proficiently. The dilemma is that most of this brain development happens before children enter kindergarten.

Could music-making help these children? Yes! Brain research has revealed that auditory processing is the foundation of language and literacy (Bonacina et al., 2019). Pitch discrimination and matching has been correlated with reading achievement (Lu et al., 2020). One of the more important findings is that children who can pat a steady beat are better readers (Carr et al., 2016). Researchers have found that children who cannot keep a steady beat have a deficit in sound processing that is associated with difficulty in reading (Kraus & Anderson, 2015). The good news is that infants can tell the difference between beat and non-beat, and babies can learn to pat a steady beat (Winkler et al., 2009).

A meta-study of research to date found that

> music training improves auditory processing skills, so the longer the training time, the more these skills are reinforced. Thus, music training is an effective method that can be potentially used in children, both in the development of oral and written communication - to aid in the acquisition of auditory skills - and after acquisition, in order to improve such skills” (Engel et al., 2019, p. 1).

Picture a young child sitting on a stool in a science lab with an electrical neural net on their head. Neurobiologist Dr. Nina Kraus and her team at Northwestern University’s Auditory Neuroscience Laboratory utilize Frequency Following Response (FFR) to analyze how the brain processes sound on a number of different quadrants. These researchers can predict whether a three-year-old will struggle with reading by the way their brain processes sound. The Lab’s website Brainvolts provides a summary of their studies that show correlations with reading achievement.[2]

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[1] Research Bibliography: Effects of Music-Making on Brain Development and Achievement. https://drive.google.com/file/d/1ZdIIT8LwhX9KlELS9gQ2NWUVdwt0LQkf/view

[2] https://brainvolts.northwestern.edu/

Kraus' team has also found that musicians have better auditory brain function, sharper hearing, and superior cognitive abilities than non-musicians. Adults who played an instrument during childhood, even if they stopped playing decades ago, have better hearing and auditory memory than those who never played (Strait & Kraus, 2011).

Based on decades of research, Kraus has called for a large-scale effort to provide more and improved music instruction for every child (Kraus & Chandrasekarn, 2010, 603-604).

Musical Fitness

Unfortunately, most Americans believe the myth that music is a genetic gift or special talent rather than an innate or evolved ability that develops through practice. Given this misperception, most do not purchase music instruction for their children or themselves. A National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) once found that 60% of adults could not sing in tune, 85% could not play an instrument, and 88% could not read music (as cited by Mark, 1986, 341-342). This NAEP, conducted in 1971- 1972, was the only time the government has assessed adults in music. Despite the valiant efforts of musicians, music teachers, and music organizations, public school music education is neither well-funded nor well-valued. Over the past few decades, many music programs have been cut or discontinued. Membership in the largest American music teacher organization, the National Association for Music Education (NAfME), is now less than half of what it was 25 years ago. In 2019, Congress stopped funding the NAEP in music, although it still funds testing of reading, math, and science achievement.

What can be done?

First, we can adopt the goal of Musical Fitness for Every Child. The Oxford English Dictionary defines "fitness" as "the quality of being fitted, qualified, or competent." Musical fitness could be defined as competence in basic skills, such as, patting a steady beat, clapping the rhythm of the words of a song, matching a pitch, and singing in tune. All children, given practice in these skills, could be musically-fit by age five. These skills prepare the brain for higher achievement in both music and reading.

A National Model

In the 1950s, there was another prevailing myth: that exercise was for elite athletes, but not for those who didn't get that gift or talent. Most people did not know that physical fitness and exercise improve health and wellbeing. During this time, orthopedic specialists Dr. Hans Kraus and Dr. Sonja Weber developed a basic assessment of strength and flexibility that they used to assess thousands of American and European children. They found that while most of the European children were fit, only about half of the American children were. This occurred during the Cold War, and leadership was likely concerned that if we went to war, Americans weren't fit to fight. When President Eisenhower heard the results of these assessments, he established the President's Council on Youth Fitness in 1956. President Kennedy changed the title to the President's Council on Physical Fitness so that it included adults. The council launched a public awareness campaign about the importance of physical fitness and created the U.S. Physical Fitness Program. Thousands of elementary students sang along with the song "Chicken Fat" while doing exercises in school gyms, took a test that involved push-ups, pull-ups, sit-ups, standing broad jump, shuttle run, 50-yard dash and softball throw, and those who passed received a certificate. The program is still in use today as part of the President's Council on Sports, Fitness, and Nutrition.

The U.S. Physical Fitness Program ignited a transformation in how Americans viewed exercise - from an activity primarily for athletes to something that could improve every person's health and wellbeing. It is now time to transform Americans' view of music-making - from an activity primarily for trained musicians to a national priority for all children.

A Minnesota Musical Fitness Movement

There is plenty of research to back up a Minnesota Musical Fitness Movement. The Minnesota nonprofit Rock 'n' Read Project is calling for this effort, and has developed many materials that are available on the website **www.rocknreadproject.org**. These include *Research Bibliography: Effects of Music-Making on Brain Development and Achievement*, a Musical Fitness Assessment, videos of children performing basic music skills, Brain Train activities, and a PreK/K curriculum for classroom teachers *A Song A Day: Brain Prep for Pre-Readers* (no music background needed).

Imagine a public awareness campaign, *Sing Today, Read Forever!* that would communicate the research and suggested practices to parents and early childhood educators. Once parents understand the connection between music skills, brain development, and reading, many more of them might sing with their children, practice basic music skills, invest in music lessons, and value, support, and fund music instruction in our schools.

Here are a few actions that music teachers can take to help launch the movement:

1. Advocate for *Musical Fitness for Every Child.*
2. Download the *Research Bibliography: Effects of Music-Making on Brain Development and Achievement* on the Brain Research page on **www.rockreadproject.org.** Communicate the research to classroom teachers.
3. Ask your classroom teachers to "sing their day away" with students and rhythmically chant and sing their directions instead of speaking them.
4. Provide classroom teachers with fun songs for greetings, transitions, and goodbyes, as well as singing games to engage and motivate children.
5. Share the Rock 'n' Read Project website **www.rocknreadproject.org** with parents, early childhood educators, and elementary classroom teachers.

In conclusion, humans make music for a multitude of reasons—it's joyful, motivating, and socializing. And now science has given us another reason: to prepare young brains to be ready to read! Let's address the injustice of illiteracy by helping all Minnesota children become competent in both music and reading. *Sing today, read forever!*

Click here for full list of references.

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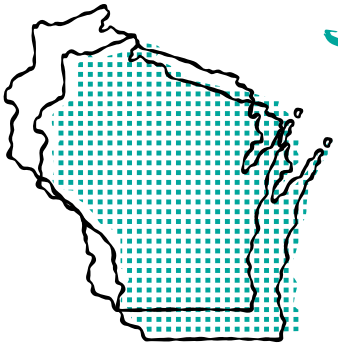
Cultural and Educator Resources of the Re/sound:



Songs of Wisconsin Project

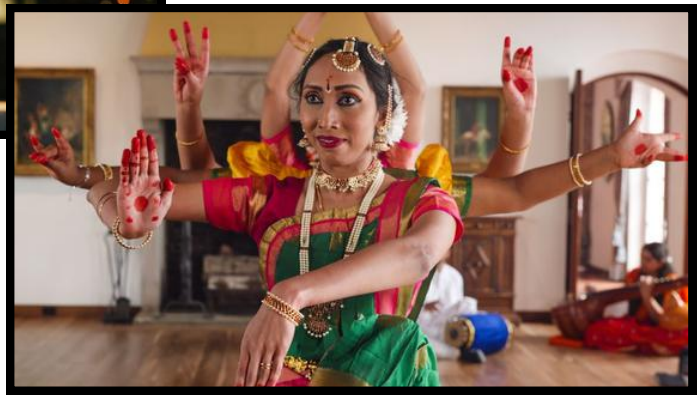
By Darin Menk, Mia Forslund, and Dr. Beatriz Aguilar

Editor's Note: These resources were shared at the 2026 MMEA Convention by Darin Menk, Wisconsin School Music Association; Mia Forslund, PBS Wisconsin Education; and Beatriz Aguilar, PhD, Director of Music Education, University of Wisconsin Stevens Point.

Re/sound: Songs of Wisconsin is a collection of educational media resources for general music programs serving grades 4-8, and is a collaboration with Wisconsin School Music Association (WSMA) and PBS Wisconsin brought to life through the many Wisconsin creators, music educators, artists, authors, and videographers who have participated in this project.

Klassik - Re/sound: Songs of Wisconsin Project

Marcya Daneille - Re/sound: Songs of Wisconsin Project



Lavanyaa Surendar - Re/sound: Songs of Wisconsin Project

Through a state-wide survey and listening sessions with music educators, we learned about the need for current, authentic, culturally diverse resources, as well as support in teaching with and about music from different cultures. These educator-stated needs shaped the direction and goals of the collection including:

- Explore – Explore connections between music, identities, cultures, and emotions.
- Recognize – Recognize shared and unique elements of distinct pieces of music.
- Relate – Relate content to personal experiences by choosing, playing, and sharing music.

These needs are addressed through knowledge, skill, and affective outcomes that attend to each lesson's main theme. The provided strategies are designed to support conceptual understanding, active music-making, and emotional connection - making learning both rigorous and personally meaningful.

This multimedia collection includes video interviews with Wisconsin musicians, performance recordings, audio files, and **educator engagement guides** designed to help activate the media with learners. In addition, a **searchable database** of over 100 additional resources for lesson planning, lesson extension, student research, or educator background are included.

Cultures and genres represented to this point include:

- Black River Revue – freshwater bluegrass
- Klassik (Kellen Abston) – hip hop, jazz, Black American
- Lavanyaa Surendar – Indian Carnatic (Indian Classical), Indian
- Maa Vue – Contemporary music in Hmong language, Hmong
- Marcya Daneille – jazz, blues, spirituals, Black American
- Mariachi Monarcas de Milwaukee – mariachi, Mexican American
- Mashkiiziibii Youth Singers – drumming, drum circle, Native American, First Nations, Bad River Band of Lake Superior Chippewa
- Richard Hildner Armacanqui and Juan Tomás Martínez – Fusion of salsa, bolero, jazz, latin drumming, Latinx
- SistaStrings – rhythm and blues, jazz, classical, gospel, Black American
- Wade Fernandez – blues, rock, jazz, Menominee First Nations

Educators across grade levels and disciplines have found great value in the multitude of lessons and interdisciplinary resources that support the goals, outcomes, strategies, extensions, and standards included in the resource.

Learn more at **https://pbswisconsineducation.org/resound/about/**.

Re/sound: Songs of Wisconsin information provided courtesy of Wisconsin School Music Association and PBS Wisconsin Education.

Darin Menk *serves as the Professional Learning and Events Manager at Wisconsin School Music Association (WSMA). Prior to serving WSMA and their partner associations and foundation, Darin served as general and music educator and church music and worship director involving a variety of youth and adult vocal, instrumental, and handbell choirs. Darin holds degrees in business management, education and a Masters in Music Education degree from UW-Milwaukee.*

Mia Forslund *is an Education Engagement Specialist with PBS Wisconsin Education. In her role, she collaborates with team members, partner organizations, and educators to develop and share educational media resources. She grew up in Wisconsin and loves that she now gets to work on projects that spark curiosity and creativity in classrooms and communities in her home state and beyond and offer opportunities to learn something new every day.*

Dr. Beatriz Aguilar *is the Director of Music Education at the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point, where she teaches courses related to music education and music integration in education. Dr. Aguilar has a bachelor's degree in piano performance from the National Autonomous University of Mexico. She received an MME and a PhD in music education from the University of North Texas. She is certified as Kodály music educator and has a Certificate in Social Innovation and Sustainable Leadership. Dr. Aguilar has presented at various conferences throughout the US, Ecuador, and Mexico, and published the book and companion CD De Tin Marin: Mi canto, mis raices.*

WSMA®

PBS Wisconsin Education

Albert Lea Community Band Invites High Schoolers for 44th Season

The Albert Lea Community Band (ALCB), now entering its **44th** year, invites area high school band students to join its upcoming seasons. Musicians will expand their skills through a mix of popular music and classic wind band repertoire in a relaxed, friendly setting.

Summer Performance Highlights

While the spring rehearsal cycle is currently underway, the community is invited to enjoy the band at several featured summer performances:

- **6/4:** Thursdays on Fountain (5:30 PM)
- **6/5:** Relay For Life (5:20 PM)
- **7/4:** 250th Semiquincentennial Celebration (8:00 PM)

Join Us for the Fall Season

High school students looking to continue their musical journey are encouraged to join us for our Fall Season.

- **Rehearsals:** Weekly on Tuesday evenings, 7:00–8:45 PM.
- **Location:** Southwest Middle School.
- **Schedule:** Late September through mid-November.
- **Fall Concert:** A formal performance will be held in November (Date TBA).

New members will receive detailed schedules and directions via email upon registration.

Get Involved

No audition is required. For more information or to express interest in the fall session, contact Director Frank Whitcomb at **frank_whitcomb@fastmail.fm**

Summer Workshop at Winona State University

Winona State University will be hosting a Music Tech workshop with Gillian Keller (Desmarais) on June 29-30. This workshop will present music technology strategies for all classroom models. CEU's are available. Register here!

Please reach out to Dr. Aaron Lohmeyer with any questions: **aaron.lohmeyer@winona.edu.**

Other Southeast Region Spotlights

On February 16, **Shattuck-St. Mary's School** hosted the Northfield Youth Choir for a night of sharing music and friendship. After eating a meal together and going on a campus tour, the Northfield Youth Choir and Shattuck-St. Mary's Choir sang for and with each other, culminating in an informal performance. The Shattuck-St. Mary's vocal performance director is Peter Schleif.

MSU Mankato's annual Jazz Fest took place February 27, hosted by Jazz Director Sarah Costello. The day featured clinics, sectionals, and rehearsals for high school ensembles, with special guest pianist Austyn Menk. The event culminated in student performances and an evening concert by the MSU Jazz Combo, Purple Jazz Mavericks, and Gold Jazz Mavericks with Menk as soloist.

In March, the Northwestern College A Cappella Choir visited **Kasson-Mantorville High School** for a joint performance. The visit featured performances by both ensembles, collaborative rehearsal, and a combined performance of Amazing Grace with KMHS choir students across grade levels. The choir director at Kasson-Mantorville is Andrew Faller.

On March 23, **Saint Peter High School** hosted a joint Jazz Band concert with the Cleveland High School Jazz Band and special guest trumpet player Kirk Garrison. Kirk Garrison is the professor of jazz studies at Elmhurst University. He is a native of Truman, MN and an alumnus of both Mankato State University and the United States Air Force Band. The Saint Peter High School Jazz Band is directed by Dave Haugh and the Cleveland High School Jazz Band is directed by Erik Hermanson.

In March, the **Maple River High School** Choir and Band students traveled to New York City. The choir, directed by Jessica Conover, performed at the Church of St. Paul the Apostle and the band, directed by Josh Tonkin, performed on the U.S.S. Intrepid.

The **Loyola Catholic School** music department has had a very busy March! Events included large group contest for the high school band and choir, Solo and Ensemble Contest, and a five day tour to Washington DC. The choir earned a superior rating at Large Group Sub-Section 5A Contest. The band director is Jodi Bennett and the choir director is Brandy Gullickson.

Rushford-Peterson Schools celebrated March Music in Our Schools month with a variety of activities, including a "Music Madness" bracket in grades K-4, a Class Notes presentation through Minnesota Public Radio, brass quintet performances, and a Rock & Read assembly with grades K-2. In addition, school staff wore Music in our Schools t-shirts every Wednesday to showcase the importance of music to the entire school community. The music teacher at Rushford-Peterson Elementary school is Jodi Monderson.

The 2026 **Cotter Jazz Festival** took place April 17-19, hosted by Cotter band director Andy Meurer. The weekend included clinics, masterclasses, and concerts featuring special guest Grammy Award-winning Bijon Watson and the Explosion Big Band.

In April, the **Lake City Jazz Ensembles** hosted their Spring Jazz Concert, featuring a collaboration with Snacklebox, a dynamic 10-piece jazz and funk group. The band director at Lake City High School is Eric Stashek, who was nationally recognized as a member of Yamaha 40 Under 40, Excellence in Music Education, Class of 2026!

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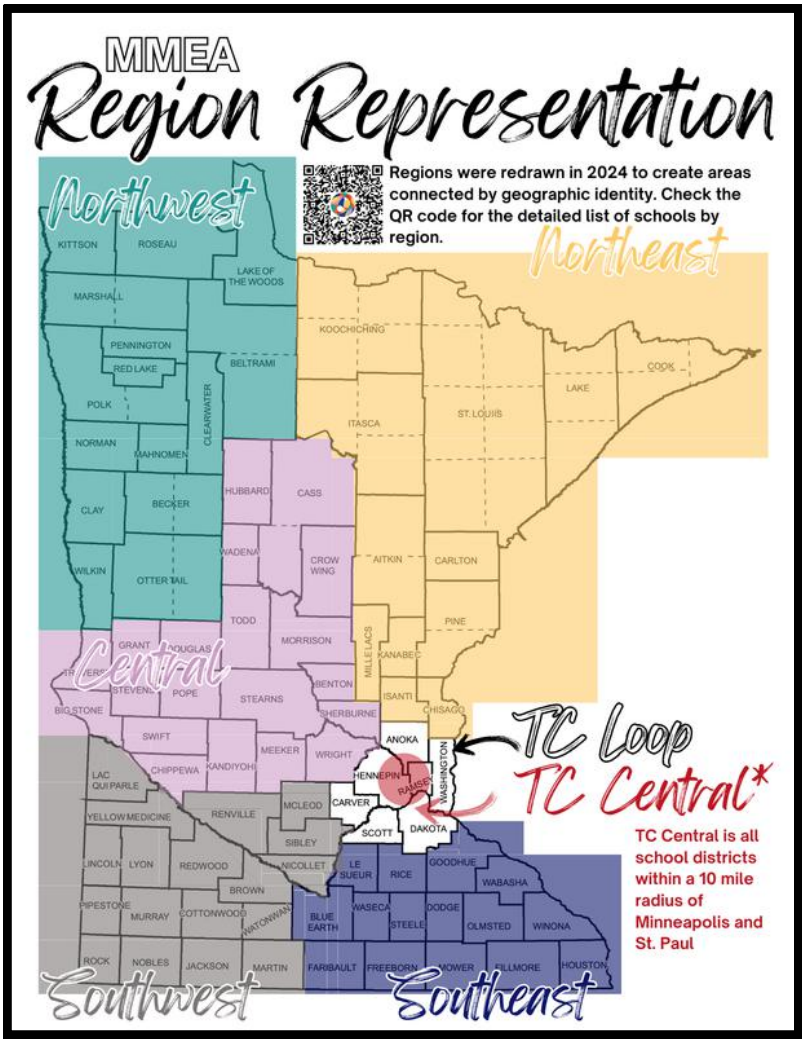

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