

SUPPORT ED

EMPOWERING MUSIC EDUCATORS

GRADING vs.
ASSESSING

HOW TO START
A CHAMBER
ENSEMBLE



YAMAHA

2020 | VOLUME 5, NO. 1

Mike Block
In Pursuit of Efficiency

4 MORE GOALS THAN GRADES

Focusing on course objectives and learning goals rather than just assessments will help students and teachers grow.

6 CONFERENCE SURVIVAL TIPS

Learn, network and thrive at music education conventions.

9 THE INSIDE SCOOP: ERICH BERGEN

“Jersey Boys” and “Madam Secretary” actor Erich Bergen has a compelling passion and energy for music education.

10 MIKE BLOCK'S MUSICAL QUEST

Cellist Mike Block's output is staggeringly diverse, and he applies a high level of skill, commitment and efficiency into every style.

14 SMALL TOWN, BIG SOUND

School size doesn't restrict the musical accomplishments at Cle Elum-Roslyn School District in Washington.

18 INSIDE CHAMBER GROUPS

From instrumentation choices to final performance opportunities, the design of your chamber program can improve musicianship, communication and fellowship.

Editor's Note	1
News & Notes	2
Letter to Myself	20

Cover photo by Eric Levin Photography for Yamaha Corporation of America

EDITOR'S NOTE

A MILESTONE

This issue marks the beginning of the fifth year of SupportED. At the time we launched the magazine in 2016, music educators and advocates were celebrating the recent passing of the Every Student Succeeds Act. That year, we first heard words like Brexit and Zika. Leonardo DiCaprio won his first Oscar, and “Uptown Funk” was named the Record of the Year. In Rio De Janeiro, veteran Olympians Michael Phelps and Usain Bolt as well as first-timer Simone Biles amazed us. And President Barack Obama spent his final year in office.

SupportED was born after recognizing a need of many band and orchestra directors for more inspiration as well as nuts-and-bolts advice. Starting with that first issue, we have used the same lens through which all articles must pass — “Will this information help someone be a better teacher?”

That lens has never changed, and it never will.

My personal lens for the articles in SupportED and communication in general remains: “Say exactly what you mean to say, then stop talking.”

Out of respect to you, the teacher, we must be efficient and relevant.

I love how this issue's featured artist Mike Block states

it: “Efficiency holds intrinsic moral value. ... Inefficiency is a kind of sin rooted in a lack of appreciation for the preciousness of our time and other people's time.”

We know how busy you are, so we strive to get right to the point. We want you to be able to access, consume and grow from what we are presenting.

Yes, we are proud of the awards SupportED has won, and we are thrilled to see how issues disappear at state music education association conferences, The Midwest Clinic, Jazz Education Network and other shows. But we are most happy when we hear from you about how a particular article has helped you. We hope you enjoy this issue and that you share it with other music educators.

Please drop us a line at SupportED@yamaha.com and tell us how we are doing. With feedback from you, we can all be in “The Room Where It Happens” (from 2016's Tony-award winner “Hamilton”) and keep SupportED meaningful and relevant.

Musically Yours,



John Wittmann

Sr. Director, Artist Relations and Education



INSPIRING, EMPOWERING AND EQUIPPING MUSIC EDUCATORS AND STUDENTS THROUGH FINELY CRAFTED INSTRUMENTS, ACCESS TO LIFE-CHANGING MUSICAL EVENTS AND THE SHARING OF GIFTED ARTISTS

EDITORIAL

Editor: John Wittmann

Managing Editor: Christine Ngeo Katzman

Editorial Project Manager: June Kikuchi

Contributing Editor: Jalissa Gascho

Art Director: Brian Bengelsdorf

ARTIST RELATIONS AND EDUCATION

Sr. Director, Artist Relations and Education: John Wittmann

Artist Relations Manager: Jalissa Gascho

SALES

National Sales Director: Doug Steinmetz

Regional Sales Manager: Ed Boyer

Regional Sales Manager: David Suter

ATELIERS

Director of R&D and Ateliers: Bob Malone

MARKETING

Director of Marketing: Lisa Steele-MacDonald

Director of Marketing, Percussion: Steven Fisher

Sr. Marketing Manager, Winds: Brian Petterson

Marketing Manager, Education: Heather Mansell

CORPORATE OFFICE

President: Tom Sumner

Corporate Vice President: Garth Gilman

Yamaha SupportED magazine is produced by Yamaha Corporation of America

Yamaha SupportED

ADDRESS:

6600 Orangethorpe Ave.
Buena Park, CA 90620

EMAIL:

SupportED@yamaha.com

WEB:

YamahaSupportED.com



“UKULELE” TRANSLATES TO “JUMPING FLEA” IN HAWAIIAN

UKES CONNECT STEAM AND MUSIC

Ukuleles take center stage in Allison Larsen’s 6th grade STEAM class at Cuyuna Range Elementary School in Crosby, Minnesota. Using science, technology, engineering, arts and math skills, students build, paint, tune and even laser engrave ukuleles. An added benefit to this project is the cross-curricular connection with the school’s music program, giving students a real-world perspective of how the different disciplines work in concert.

“The kids can develop their STEAM skills while also learning how to play the ukulele,” Larsen said in an interview with the *Brainerd Dispatch*. “If they have a passion for music, then maybe that passion draws over to the tech or vice versa. So maybe if they really like STEAM class, it brings their excitement into music class.”

Students keep their ukuleles, “so it’s a personalized project where they get invested and they make something that’s theirs,” Larsen said.

In January, Larsen’s students showcased their ukuleles and their musical skills at a STEAM expo.

2020 IS THE YEAR OF CHICAGO MUSIC

The Windy City will focus on music this year, designating 2020 as the “Year of Chicago Music.” This year-long campaign will provide additional grants for music projects, encourage inclusion and equity, and call on many city sectors to support the music industry. It will also include a 17-day celebration of music starting on Memorial Day.

“Music is our universal language and the common thread that ties people together across geography, culture and time,” said Chicago Mayor Lori E. Lightfoot in a press release. “As the birthplace of gospel, house, urban blues and modern jazz — not to mention home to one of the world’s great classical orchestras — Chicago’s sounds and melodies reflect the diversity and dynamism of the people and communities we all call home.”



74

NUMBER OF
MUSIC FESTIVALS
IN CHICAGO



MOTOR CITY = MUSIC CITY

The Detroit Symphony Orchestra (DSO) is launching “Detroit Harmony” to ensure that all K-12 students throughout the city have access to instruments and music education.

“The DSO envisions a time when a culture of music-making defines the experience of growing up in Detroit, when every child will have universal access to music education and every teacher in every school in Detroit will have tools to incorporate arts-based learning into curricula,” said Anne Parsons, DSO president and CEO, in a news release.

The DSO initiative will put an instrument into the hands of every Detroit public, private and charter school student who wants to learn an instrument. The DSO will also look to develop the various professions required to sustain this expansion of music programs, including teachers, teaching artists, bus drivers and people who repair instruments. The plan will include collaboration with like-minded organizations to build partnerships between schools, arts and culture providers, and funders.

The 18-month planning effort is being funded by grants from the Ralph C. Wilson Jr. Foundation and the Max M. and Marjorie S. Fisher Foundation.

1887

THE YEAR WHEN THE DSO
PERFORMED ITS FIRST
SUBSCRIPTION CONCERT

DEBUT FELLOWS

The Young Musicians Foundation (YMF) announced the three recipients of its inaugural Debut Fellows Program. They each received a \$5,000 stipend, professional development and direct experience working with the students and communities that YMF serves in order to further YMF’s commitment to social justice and radical structural change.

More than 4,500 pre-K through adult students in underserved communities receive music instruction at 26 YMF partner schools and sites in the greater Los Angeles area. By directly working with these YMF students, Debut Fellows will have the opportunity



TOP 5 FILMS ABOUT MUSIC



“Soul,” the latest Pixar film, is slated to be released in June. The main character, voiced by Jamie Foxx, is a middle school music educator who dreams of performing jazz. Music and music education are popular, positive and powerful themes for movies. To celebrate SupportED’s fifth year of publication, here are our five picks for the best films about music education.

1. **Mr. Holland’s Opus (1995)**
2. **School of Rock (2003)**
3. **Drumline (2002)**
4. **Music of the Heart (1999)**
5. **Fame (1980)**

BONUS: For international film fans, *The Chorus* (2004) from France.

Do you agree? Did we miss your favorite flick about a music teacher or music education? Let us know at supported@yamaha.com.

to build and hone skills in community engagement, organization building, advocacy, fundraising and communication.

This year’s Debut Fellows are:

- Nina Shekhar, a USC composition graduate student
- Dr. James Sherry, the former director of instrumental music at Johns Hopkins University, the University of Dubuque and Mahidol University in Thailand
- Federico Zuniga Jr., a musician in the Latin alternative community, who teaches son jarocho style of music for California’s Arts in Corrections program.

Visit www.ymf.org/debut-fellowship for information.



MORE GOALS THAN GRADES

Focusing on course objectives and learning goals rather than just assessments will help students and teachers grow throughout the instruction period.

BY GREG SCAPILLATO

Music educators are no strangers to evaluation. Often, these evaluations happen when a culminating activity — like a festival, concert or recital — presents a finished product for consideration. While feedback (“How did I do?”) is certainly valuable at those points, assessments (“Am I progressing toward the goal?”) throughout the learning process have significant

benefits. The essential question is: Are we using assessments to report learning or to inform learning?

GO WITH THE FLOW

Learning goals are the context for any assessment. Starting with general and moving to specific state-ments, you can create a natural flow from course

objectives to learning goals to assessments, as seen in the example below.

- **Course Objective:** Students will demonstrate skill fluency on their instruments.
- **Learning Goal:** Students will perform major scales fluently on their instruments.
- **Assessment Target:** Students will perform 12 major scales for one octave each in eighth notes at 100 beats per minute.

The broad nature of the course objective and learning goal make them transferable to other units of study. The specificity of the assessment target allows students to focus their attention while relating to the broader goals. Throughout instruction, we keep students focused by continually referring back to these stated goals and targets.

Ready for the next level? Engage your students in developing specific targets within the broader learning goals. Get some base level data, then use guiding questions to help students “connect the dots” between their current level and the ultimate goal.

LESS IS MORE

“Assessing” is often synonymous with “grading” though this correlation may have unintended consequences. Studies show that when feedback includes grades (percentages or letters, for instance), students focus on the grade and not on the feedback.

We can assess students and offer specific feedback without attaching a grade to the activity. With rubrics, try to remove any points or letter grade attributes. Include only the descriptions for each level of performance. In other words, try grading less while continuing to offer students feedback through your assessments.

FORMATIVE VS. SUMMATIVE

If you can buy into the idea of grading less, the next step is to define when grading is truly needed. The “when” for the assessment will help determine its purpose, whether formative or summative.

Formative assessments give actionable feedback to students and shape instruction for the teacher while summative assessments report student achievement, usually on a grade or progress report.

Formative assessments give students the opportunity to demonstrate progress toward learning goals without impacting their overall grades. We can gather useful data measuring the progress of our classes toward mastery and offer suggestions to students for improving their performances.

“If you can buy into the idea of **grading less**, the next step is to define when grading is truly needed.”

ACTIONABLE FEEDBACK

Once we have scheduled formative assessments for each student, we also want to provide meaningful feedback through a rubric. The rubric is the start but not the end. A holistic rubric will have detailed descriptions for each level of performance across several components.

Though the rubric will let students know how they performed, it doesn’t guide them as they move forward in their learning. Consider adding a section to your rubrics to answer the “how” for students. Did they miss some rhythms? Did they fall short in tone quality?


Also share practice strategies or exercises they can use. You may even choose to develop a list of frequently used comments that can still be tailored, if needed, to an individual student’s situation.

DO-OVERS ARE COOL

If formative assessments are ungraded, students won’t need to be reassessed. They will have continued opportunities to show their growth.

But what if the summative doesn’t turn out as successful as either of you hoped? Offering the opportunity for students to redo a summative assessment can help alleviate test anxiety as well as serve your ultimate goal — for students to meet learning targets.

You can set up reasonable policies to prevent students from abusing these redo opportunities. For example, you could limit reassessments to those students who have submitted all of their formatives prior to the summative or set a specific deadline for reassessments.

Assessments are more than just grade generators. They can be powerful tools to shape our instruction and drive improvement in our students’ performances! 



ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Greg Scapillato is a band director in Northbrook (Illinois) School District 28. He is co-founder and coordinator for the Middle School Concert Band Camp at the Music for All Summer Symposium. Visit Greg’s website at on-the-shoulders-of-giants.com.

CONFERENCE SURVIVAL TIPS

Learn, network and thrive at music education conventions.



BY SARAH LINDENFELD HALL

Tradeshows can be powerful ways for music educators to hone new skills, network and find inspiration. But as attendees go to sessions and roam exhibit halls, the experience can be overwhelming.

Jessica Voigt-Page, now a veteran of music education conferences, remembers feeling so dazzled and overwhelmed at the 2012 North American Saxophone Alliance conference that when she met noted saxophonist Eugene Rosseau, she failed to introduce herself.

“It was the first time I’d ever been in the same space as a lot of the really big-name performers and pedagogues of my field,” says Voigt-Page, an adjunct lecturer in saxophone at Baylor University in Waco, Texas. “There was almost that starstruck nature.”

Forgetting to mention her name was a learning moment for Voigt-Page, who also teaches music entrepreneurship and professional development at Baylor. “I realized that I needed to have a plan when I met people and when I interacted with people,” she says. “I needed to know what I was going to say ... and to include my name in that elevator pitch.”

PLAN AND PREPARE

How can you thrive at your next professional development conference?

Some conferences feature dozens of sessions, so you could easily miss a must-see program if you don’t scan the schedule before the opening keynote. Check the schedule online before the conference opens to research the sessions, speakers and performers. “It allows you to better understand the angle they are coming from and the angle they are going to be taking in that clinic or presentation or performance,” Voigt-Page says.

Many conferences, including the Percussive Arts Society International Convention (PASIC), offer apps that let attendees browse the full events schedule and check off the sessions that they plan to attend to create a personalized conference calendar on their smartphones. Joshua Simonds, executive director of the Percussive Arts Society, recommends studying a map of the convention hall or hotel, so you can chart out your routes between programs.

ASK FOR FUNDING

Budgets may be tight for many music educators, but often school districts have professional development funds or innovation grants. Have a conversation with your administrators and department leaders about



PHOTO BY DAVE GERHART

why you want to go, what you hope to learn and, most importantly, how the new knowledge will help your students grow, says Daniel Berard, a Yamaha Master Educator and director of bands at Grain Valley (Missouri) High School.

Foundations or school booster groups may also be able to help cover at least part of the cost of attending a conference. If funding isn’t available, Berard doesn’t mind paying his own way. “I’ve never once regretted making a financial investment in my own personal or professional growth,” he says.

WALK THE EXHIBIT FLOOR

With dozens of vendors and organizations, the exhibit hall can seem daunting. To alleviate some of that stress, scan the full space, then zero in on individual areas.

At PASIC, Simonds likes to walk the entire exhibit floor first and then return later to visit specific booths based on his needs. On his second time through, he takes advantage of the opportunity to talk with the people behind the products and services.

“You are dealing with the actual people who make the instrument or know about it more than anybody else,” Simonds says. “They want you to talk to them. They may not want you to play on the instrument for 10 minutes nonstop. But you have their full attention, which is awesome.”

DON'T BE SHY

At larger conferences, you may turn a corner and run into a music education luminary or world-class performer. Resist the urge to nervously run away; instead, take the opportunity to introduce yourself, Berard says.

A turning point in Berard’s career was when he found the courage to ask legendary conductor

DO YOUR HOMEWORK:
Get to clinics and performances on time by studying the conference schedule and map before the event starts.

KEY MUSIC EDUCATION CONFERENCES

Here is a sampling of national conferences geared toward music educators. Check your state music education association for events in your area.

Music for All Summer Symposium

Location: Muncie, Indiana

Dates: June 22-27, 2020

This national summer camp is designed for band and orchestra students as well as teachers (camp.musicforall.org).

Amplify 2020: Bringing the Future into Focus

Location: Orlando, Florida

Dates: Nov. 4-8, 2020

Organized by the National Association for Music Education, this event combines the association's music research and teacher education conference with its national conference to consider the future of music education (nafme.org).

Percussive Arts Society International Convention

Location: Indianapolis, Indiana

Dates: Nov. 11-14, 2020

This annual event features more than 120 concerts, clinics, master classes, labs, workshops and more — all focused on percussion (pasic.org).

The Midwest Clinic International Band and Orchestra Conference

Location: Chicago, Illinois

Dates: Dec. 16-19, 2020

For more than 70 years, the Midwest Clinic has offered concerts, clinics and a sprawling exhibit hall for music educators and musicians (midwestclinic.org).

Jazz Education Network

Location: Louisville, Kentucky

Dates: Jan. 6-9, 2021

Attendees at this annual event can interact with thousands of people from around the world for education, networking opportunities and lots of jazz (jazzednet.org).

American String Teachers Association

Location: March 3-6, 2021

Dates: Louisville, Kentucky

String and orchestra educators, performing artists and students converge at this annual conference (astastrings.org).



Jessica Voigt-Page



Daniel Berard

Joshua Simonds


Richard Floyd what it would take for Floyd to visit his school. “Without batting an eye, Richard said, ‘Just ask,’” Berard recalls. “That one little conversation in the hallway of The Midwest [Clinic] turned into a lifelong dear friendship. People are so willing to share information, and that’s really ... the lasting impact of [going to] a convention.”

REMEMBER TO FOLLOW UP

Making connections and gaining new ideas are often the main goals of attending a conference; however, those tasks can be difficult if your notes are scattered. Conference veterans recommend creating your own system to stay organized.

Berard types out running notes on his phone, records voice memos and snaps photos of a concert program. After the conference, he’ll take the time to go over everything.

Voigt-Page gets a new notebook for each conference and jots down highlights from different sessions and details about the people she meets. Once she gets home, she sends each individual a quick thank-you message, stating something she learned or enjoyed from the meetup.

“We don’t always get told ‘thank you’ for the things we present and the work we do at these conferences,” says Voigt-Page, who often performs and speaks at conferences. “It’s going to make them feel really great about themselves, and you’ve built a really solid connection in a positive way.” 

EDUCATION INSIDER BY MARCIA NEEL

THE INSIDE SCOOP: ERICH BERGEN

Every year I attend the National Association of Music Merchants (NAMM) Advocacy Fly-In in Washington, D.C. For the last two years, I have had the pleasure of spending time with Erich Bergen, an actor and singer best known for playing Bob Gaudio in “Jersey Boys.” He recently ended his role as Blake Moran, policy advisor and executive assistant to the president on CBS’ “Madam Secretary.”

Q. When did you know that you were going to make music the focus of your professional life?

A. Music has always been a part of my professional life although it’s not the thing that has brought me the most notoriety. When I was about 3 years old, I discovered MTV, and from that moment on, music was integral to every corner of my life. I didn’t care about sports, comic books or spaceships unless it was in a music video, on an album cover or part of the stage design of a pop star’s world tour. I didn’t see a future that didn’t have music in it, and I turned out to be right.

My professional career started by playing The Four Seasons’ songwriter Bob Gaudio in the stage musical “Jersey Boys,” a role that I later played in the film version. It was the perfect hybrid of musical theater, a love I discovered in my teens, and the pop music that I had always loved.

While it certainly brought me some attention, it didn’t come close to the number of eyeballs that watch “Madam Secretary” on a weekly basis. That’s where most people know me from, but most of those people don’t know I have a musical background. It’s interesting to see people connect the dots that the guy behind the keyboard in “Jersey Boys” is also the guy working in the White House on “Madam Secretary.”

What book is on your nightstand right now?

I have a giant stack of things to get through. I buy books like they’re going to stop making them! Currently, I’m loving “The Dakota Winters” by Tom Barbash.

What is your favorite guilty pleasure food?

Chinese food in New York City.



PHOTO BY CORY RIVES

What is your biggest pet peeve?

Chewing sounds or certain food description words like “yummy” or “delish.” I’ve walked out of dinners before due to this. Don’t. Just don’t.

Why is music important to humanity?


Music is the great communicator throughout the history of the human race. It transcends all languages. For example, try to watch a movie without a score. It has little to no impact.

Which person from history, dead or alive, would you want to have lunch with, and what would you discuss?

I want to talk to the guys who wrote the U.S. Constitution. I have some things I want to update them on and see if they want to make some clarifications ...

Why is it important to protect access to music education?

When it comes to education, one size does not fit all. We are not robots. Memorizing facts, figures and equations is meaningless for many people — it must be applied to something. I would never have understood math if I couldn’t apply it to music. Arts education is an equal part of a well-rounded education, and anyone who doubts that should just look at the science. It’s been proven time and time again that those with access to music education do better overall in grades and test scores. Music education gives life and saves lives. Why is this even up for debate?

Go to yamhaeducatorsuite.com to read the full interview with Erich Bergen. 



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Marcia Neel is senior director of education for Yamaha Corporation of America. She is president of Music Education Consultants Inc. and serves as the education advisor to the Music Achievement Council.

A MUSICAL Quest

Cellist Mike Block's output is staggeringly diverse, and he applies a high level of skill, commitment and efficiency into every style.

BY BEN NUSSBAUM

PHOTOS BY ERIC LEVIN PHOTOGRAPHY

The quest to explore different traditions from around the world outside of classical music has really felt like a quest to discover more about myself," says Mike Block, an associate professor at Berklee College of Music and the New England Conservatory.

Block plays the cello and sings. Other than that, he's hard to pin down.

He has released 11 albums either as a solo artist, in a pair or trio, or as the leader of a group of musicians. The music he has tackled on his albums include bluegrass, original songs, Bach compositions alternating with modern classical music, and an upcoming duo album with an Indian tabla player.

He is part of Yo-Yo Ma's Silkroad Ensemble and has collaborated in performance or recordings with the likes of Stevie Wonder and Alison Krauss. He's also the first cellist to perform at Carnegie Hall standing up, using a cello strap of his own design.

ROOTS

Block's father, Glenn Block, is director of orchestras and a professor of conducting at Illinois State University. His mother, Nancy Cochran, is the former director of Lamont School of Music at the University of Denver. Block's siblings all play string instruments.

Classical music was the default — "it was what we played in the car," Block recalls.

Other styles of music had a mystique to them — the allure of the unknown.

"The idea of popular music fascinated me as a kid," Block says. "How can the same art form I'm studying, focusing on music from across the ocean from past centuries, ... how can all these same skills captivate millions of people today?"

Despite his varied output, Block is not a sonic tourist, dipping into a style just long enough to take a metaphorical selfie. "Anything can be done poorly or masterfully," Block says.

On his musical quest, he goes deep into whatever he's playing, whether it's Chuck Berry or Beethoven.

Block says he has seldom received pushback from his peers in the world of professional music although he jokes that the people who don't return his emails probably don't support his musical eclecticism. He adds with a laugh, "You never hear back from the people who don't like what you do."



SPOTLIGHT: EFFICIENCY

How is it possible to teach, have a family, play with other top musicians, embrace a huge range of musical styles and have a steady recording career? There's another quest behind Block's musical one. Block is constantly in pursuit of efficiency.

"Whether it's improvising on new jazz chord changes or trying to sing a new bluegrass song, there's always an efficient way to learn something," he says. "Efficiency holds intrinsic moral value for me. Inefficiency is a kind of sin rooted in a lack of appreciation for the preciousness of our time and other people's time."

Block laughs and adds, "I know I'm coming off quite harsh and dramatic. But, potentially to a fault, I'm always trying to design the quickest way to accomplish a goal, whether it's the layout of my office or the pacing and structure of a workshop I'm presenting."

Block explains that learning new things efficiently mattered to him from the beginning of his career. "I never felt like I had a huge natural talent," Block admits. "My hope was always that I could try to catch up to everyone else."

It's all about working hard and working smart. Block has a firm idea in his mind of his end goal and observes other musicians for patterns or habits that he can build from. He also emphasizes breaking down a new skill into small, manageable components.

Block embraces efficiency as a teacher too. "Keeping students motivated often depends on how clearly and efficiently you can share knowledge," he says.

FREE TO CHOOSE:

Mike Block gives his students the freedom to pursue music in their own way, including whether to sit or stand to play the cello. Here, both Block and his student wear The Block Strap.

BE DIFFERENT:
Mike Block embraces different musical styles and genres from bluegrass to modern classical. “I’ve always felt the opportunities I wanted came as a result of me doing things differently,” Block says.



STAND AND DELIVER

Block is an inventor and entrepreneur as well as a musician. He designed and patented The Block Strap for cellists to play while standing or moving.

Block’s friend Rushad Eggleston is known for playing cello while standing, but he uses a guitar strap. Block says that he was hesitant about giving it a try, even though he was “incredibly jealous” of Eggleston’s freedom to move around the stage.

Block explains that he used to think that “standing was Rushad’s thing. I won’t try that because people will think I’m copying him.”

One year, Block invited Eggleston to teach at the

Mike Block String Camp in Vero Beach, Florida. “The morning after the faculty performance, four cellists showed up to class with straps,” Block says. “I don’t know where they got straps by 10 a.m., but they were inspired by seeing Rushad, and they had no hesitations about trying to stand and giving it a shot. I realized I was also inspired by Rushad, but I had mental baggage that prevented me from trying it.”

At first Block tried a guitar strap like Eggleston and then attempted to adjust his technique — but the results were not encouraging. “Then I had an epiphany that seems obvious now,” Block says.

The eureka moment was that he could just design a new strap to match his existing cello technique. From there, designing the right strap became a two-year-long process.

Block points out that cellists are trained to direct their arm weight into the instrument. When cellists are sitting, that force is transferred from the cello to the floor. But when they are standing, the force enters their body, creating what Block calls “a much more visceral, physical experience.”

REBEL WITH A CAUSE

Although he eventually broke free, Block says that he felt confined when he first started to take music seriously. “I was frustrated that even though I was identifying as a musician who was training for a professional career, I couldn’t do all the things musically that I wanted to do,” he recalls.

When he was playing only the selections his

teachers assigned to him, he struggled to feel 100% invested in music.

“I didn’t feel empowered,” he remembers. “For me, self-empowerment comes with a streak of rebelliousness. But it’s not rebellion for its own sake, and it’s not directed at some outside authority. Ultimately what I’m rebelling against isn’t other people but the nagging voices in my own head. Living true to myself has meant examining assumptions I have about what I can do or what I shouldn’t be doing.”

Block works to make sure his own students have the freedom to pursue music in a way that empowers them, so that they can follow their own path. The key is to build on students’ existing passions and interests for various types of music and artists, rather than deciding all the repertoire for them.

As a teacher who wants to understand his students’ musical tastes, Block is constantly exposed to new sounds. He’s familiar with pop music, but he notes that his students arrive at Berklee with an unpredictable range of tastes and knowledge, remembering one student who had a deep knowledge of klezmer music (a tradition of the Ashkenazi Jews) and others who listen to cutting-edge jazz.

A FINE LINE

Executing at a high level is the goal, no matter the type of music. “There’s no style that justifies playing at a lower level or not working on your technique or achieving a high level of mastery,” Block says.

He isn’t big on teaching the same thing over and over. “By the time we figure out how to teach something really well, it’s at that moment that the thing we’re teaching dies, in a way,” Block says with a laugh. “Maybe that’s dramatic language. But finding ways to give students structure and help them progress while giving them space to find themselves and find new things — I often feel that tension in teaching.”

Block says that it’s “a particularly fine line when teaching improvisation or working on arranging and composition — giving students the space to explore versus making sure they work on the skills that have stood the test of time.”

Block constructed his Florida camp to marry timeless technique with of-the-moment music. The camp, entering its 11th year, hosts more than 100 students each summer. Students who choose the popular collaborative track are first taught several pieces of music by ear, ranging from Celtic fiddle tunes to contemporary jazz. Then they form groups



A LESSON TO REMEMBER

Cellist Mike Block, an associate professor at Berklee College of Music, remembers a huge moment from when he was in college at the Cleveland Institute of Music. It didn’t go as planned, but in retrospect Block sees that as a blessing.

“I was just beginning to improvise,” he recalls. “I was jamming with a couple friends, and I really wanted to play one of our improvisational pieces in our studio class.”


For Block, it was a daring move, one that he thought would impress and surprise his peers and his teacher.

“I was studying with a really fantastic, technically minded teacher, Richard Aaron,” Block says. “Richard was like, ‘That sounds really fun, but your vibrato is too tight. Let’s work on your vibrato.’ He sat with me for 10 minutes, and we worked on vibrato — after I improvised for him for the first time and played my heart out.”

Block was taken aback by his teacher’s business-as-usual response. “At the time I found it a little demotivating,” he says. “What I really appreciate about it in retrospect is that he never told me not to do non-classical stuff. It didn’t matter what kind of music I played as long as I did it at a high level and with attention to detail.”

and are coached through arranging, improvising and performing music. “They’re learning from existing traditions, repertoire and skills, but making it their own,” Block says.

The Mike Block String Camp is a great distillation of Block’s approach to music: Creativity paired with timeless skills. Classical rigor applied across a range of musical styles.

Block’s musical quest continues, but his standards never change. 



AT A GLANCE

Bachelor’s: Cleveland Institute of Music

Master’s: The Juilliard School

Current Position: Associate Professor at Berklee College of Music and New England Conservatory

Select Projects and Recordings:

- Mike Block String Camp
- BachInTheBathroom.com
- ArtistWorks.com
- “Step into the Void: The Complete Bach Cello Suites” (2020)
- “Walls of Time” (2019)
- “Final Night at Camp” (2018)



PHOTO BY SKYLAR BELFREY

SMALL TOWN, BIG SOUND

School size doesn't restrict the musical accomplishments at the Cle Elum-Roslyn School District with its dedicated music building, competitive marching band and many opportunities to perform in the community.

BY SAVY LEISER

Cle Elum, Washington, is a small town with a population of about 2,000 and a school district serving approximately 900 students in K-12 — but that doesn't stop the power of music flowing through it.

If anything, the town's size has helped people form closer connections through music. "Our community is really tightknit," says Nick Maupoux, music director for Walter Strom Middle School and Cle Elum-Roslyn High School.

The community's closeness has helped Maupoux with everything from securing grants for the music program's growth to finding an audience for student performances. "In Cle Elum, there are a lot of awesome organizations looking to help the school out," he says. "[And] in a small town, people just go to more events, I feel."

Since his hiring in 2014, Maupoux has added music as a mandatory part of the sixth-grade curriculum, revived the choir program and high school marching band, and moved the band from a one-room setup to a new music building.

STARTING WITH SIXTH GRADE

Before Maupoux, the district required music only through fifth grade. Maupoux worked to add an introductory band class into the schedule for all sixth-grade students in their first semester. Afterward, students can choose to stick with band or sign up for a different elective.

Maupoux collaborates with Ted Brown Music, which has six stores in Washington, to host an instrument petting zoo each spring. At the event, incoming sixth graders try out instruments and can also sign a rental agreement with Ted Brown.

For "parents who cannot afford to rent, ... we will provide [an instrument]," says Lara Gregorich-Bennett, the middle school principal, who is also a band parent.

Raising funds to have an instrument for every student has taken some effort on Maupoux's part. "I've been doing a lot of grant writing since I've been here," he says.

During the past few years, Maupoux has received

about \$18,000 in grants from local businesses to provide instruments for students.

Maupoux has seen an enthusiastic response from both parents and students who are grateful to try an activity that they may have otherwise overlooked. "We have kids whose parents are like, 'Wow! I had no idea they were going to like this,'" Maupoux says.

A NEW HOME FOR MUSIC

Just a few years ago, the music program was busting at its seams, occupying one middle school classroom packed tight with chairs that spilled into the hallway. "The community saw that we were outgrowing our current situation," Maupoux says.

When Cle Elum received levy funds, many members of the community prioritized a new music building. Band parents attended school board meetings to testify about the music program's importance.

FINISHING FIRST:

The Cle Elum-Roslyn High School marching band has won several Division A competitions in the Washington Tri-Cities area.



A NEW HOME FOR MUSIC: The new music building at Cle Elum-Roslyn, complete with band rehearsal and instrument storage space, opened in 2017.



“I would go to the school board and say, ‘Can I have two of the kids that just went to state come to the board meeting and play something for you?’” says Susan Bronkhorst, a member of the committee that hired Maupoux.

At that time, the band’s drum major was also a student representative on the school board. “She was always bringing to light the fact that she was a good student going to college, and music needed to be kept at the forefront of everyone’s mind,” Bronkhorst says.

Now a dedicated music building sits between the middle school and high school. In use since 2017, the building features high ceilings, a band room with a permanent jazz setup, a choir room with risers and a piano, three practice rooms, an instrument storage room with lockers and an office with a music library.

MARCHING INTO COMPETITION

As a former member of the Oregon Crusaders Drum and Bugle Corps, Maupoux also revived the school’s competitive marching band, which had not been active since the 1990s.

Maupoux’s “number-one goal was to get a marching band going,” Gregorich-Bennett says. “He started, step by step, implementing different things and taking it to the next level.”

First Maupoux introduced a pep band and then slowly added drill, a color guard and other elements. “In 2014, we did just one song and some drill,” Maupoux says.

Then in 2015, the band performed in its first exhibition, and by 2016, the band was competing throughout the Washington Tri-Cities area. “Now

we’re doing competitive field shows and getting trophies,” Maupoux adds.

The marching band claimed Best General Effect, Best Brass and Woodwinds, and first place in Division A at the 2019 Southeastern Washington Cavalcade of Bands as well as Best Music, Best Percussion and first place in the A Division of the 2019 Pacific Northwest Marching Band Championships.

COLLEGE CONNECTIONS

Although the marching band has only 24 students, running it takes a big team. Maupoux has developed a partnership with Central Washington University (CWU), his alma mater.

“I honestly couldn’t do it without the help of our



PICKING UP SPEED: Eighth-grader Alex Fader wins second fastest drummer at an Impact Percussion booth at a Cavalcade of Bands event.

PHOTO BY TANNER CORNELL



MARCHING FORWARD: Maupoux and three students hold awards won at a marching band competition.

[CWU] music education students,” Maupoux says. “I bring out one person per section. We have a band of 24 but have a staff of nine or 10. ... The college students can practice teaching, and my kids can get more information.”

Working with CWU students also exposes high schoolers to college-level music performances. “There are concerts at Central, and it’s great to have them so close that we can attend,” says Lisa Hegg, a band parent. “My daughter wants to continue at Central after she graduates.”

Seeing those programs has motivated students to practice harder. Gregorich-Bennett recalls a conversation between Maupoux and a student last year. “One of the kids asked, ‘How did they get so good at this?’ Nick replied, ‘They practiced.’ Then the student said, ‘That’s it?’”

Gregorich-Bennett adds, “They see what other people ... are able to do. That’s the point Nick stresses with the students. We can be that good; you’ve [just] got to practice.”

COMMUNITY PERFORMANCES

While Cle Elum’s strength doesn’t come in numbers, it does come from tightknit community bonds. “Every performance we have is in the newspaper,” Maupoux says. “The local TV station comes out and records our concert, and we can get a DVD.”

Students in the Cle Elum-Roslyn band want to perform every chance they get. Maupoux regularly organizes student performances for the school board where he hands out invitations to future shows. The music program hosts quarterly concerts as well as community performances for Halloween parades, holiday caroling and graduation, but some students

GROWTH — IN GRANTS —



PHOTO BY NICK MAUPOUX

Funding can be a major obstacle to growing a music program. For the past five years, Nick Maupoux, band and choir director for Cle Elum-Roslyn School District, has overcome this hurdle through grant writing and using the following strategies.

- **Search Locally:** Maupoux has acquired multiple grants for choir risers, new instruments and repairs from local businesses and organizations, including the Washington Music Educators Association, Shoemaker Manufacturing and Suncadia Resort.
- **Work with Administration:** Administrators can be a source of information and support during the fundraising and grant-writing process. “Make sure you talk with your building principal first,” Maupoux advises. Many times after Maupoux talked with his schools’ principals about grants, he learned that the district could allocate funds for what he needed. Keeping administrators in the loop about funding needs can also put them on alert for new available grants. “[For] a lot of grants, I got the information from my principals,” Maupoux says.
- **Keep a List of Priorities:** Even when no grants are in the works, Maupoux advises educators to keep a running list of what they’ll need for future expansions. “When you come upon an opportunity for money, you can say, ‘Oh, I can buy that new tuba! I can buy those risers,’” he says.

hunger for more. “I had two middle school saxophone players ... ask if they could play in front of a grocery store,” Maupoux says. “People started giving them money. They made it a donation to the band program.”

For all of his ensembles, Maupoux emphasizes quality over quantity. “We focus on creating the best sounds we can,” he says. “Focusing on tone quality, balance, articulation — all those details — is what makes music good.”

INSIDE CHAMBER GROUPS

From instrumentation choices to final performance opportunities, the design of your chamber program can improve musicianship, communication and fellowship.

BY FRANK DIMARIA

Chamber ensembles allow students to practice and perform with like-minded musicians while providing camaraderie. Being in smaller groups builds performance and technical skills, boosts confidence and connects musicians, says Dr. Matthew Geiger, director of percussion studies at East Tennessee State University in Johnson City.

In addition, teachers and coaches can better address matching, blend, balance and intonation in the intimate setting of chamber ensembles, says Dr. Heidi Radtke, an adjunct professor at Butler University in Indianapolis.

AUDITIONS AND INSTRUMENTATION

Repertoire for chamber ensembles is available for a variety of levels, making ensemble opportunities open to students with wide-ranging skills. Geiger requires students to audition, so that they work harder for spots.

Typically, he writes an original piece that isolates specific skills or picks a song from an audition method book.

Directors can group students in several ways. Ensembles comprising the same instrument allow instructors to provide targeted technical advice. However, some music programs lack enough of certain instruments, so mixed-instrument ensembles are formed, which does have advantages. “They connect students with peers they may not have worked with in the past,” says Geiger, who is experienced in solo and chamber percussion.

Larger chamber ensembles benefit younger players because the parts carry less weight and thus less pressure, Geiger says. While he’s tutoring his younger students, the older ones can lead their own groups. As musicians mature, he mixes the ages, allowing younger students to play at least one piece with older students.

THE DIRECTOR'S ROLE

Chamber ensembles are not conductor-driven, so students must be self-reliant. Radtke suggests that ensembles work best when each member is able to contribute. As opposed to having one specific leader, she appoints a new leader for each rehearsal or has students take turns cueing and leading the group in different exercises.

Although ensembles are student-driven, the director still must facilitate. “If you want students to know how to rehearse, you have to teach them how to be a chamber ensemble,” says Radtke, who coaches middle and high school groups in the Carmel (Indiana) Clay Schools.

Younger and more inexperienced groups will need more guidance and supervised rehearsals or coaching sessions, Radtke says. Her ensembles initially work without instruments. Students learn to look at one another, move together and breathe together. A metronome clicks while her students count. “They get used to looking at each other in the eyes and seeing how each other moves,” says Radtke, who wrote a doctoral dissertation on saxophone chamber groups and has performed with the Indianapolis Chamber Orchestra and the Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra.

All groups should spend a significant amount of time during each rehearsal focusing on fundamentals such as breathing, cueing, tuning, balance, melody passing and matching, and chorale study exercises, Radtke says. “Once a musician learns how to listen and how to read another’s body language, they’ll take those skills onto other, larger ensembles,” she adds.

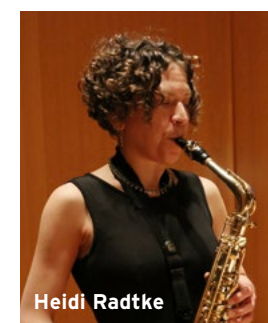
REHEARSAL SPACES AND TIMES

Ensembles need rehearsal spaces and dedicated practice time. A trio or quartet can squeeze into a band practice room, but bigger groups work better in a typical classroom. Rooms with speaker systems work best, especially for younger players, so the ensemble can listen to pieces of music together.

Geiger’s college ensembles rehearse at least once a week. When he worked with middle or high school chamber players, his ensembles met after school.



Matthew Geiger



Heidi Radtke

Geiger likes to keep his groups on consistent schedules and blocks out an hour or two every day, booking the various ensembles within those blocks for the same time each week.

Radtke recommends that chamber groups commit to a set place and schedule to rehearse. For those working on a recital program, she says that two to three rehearsals per week, each lasting 60 to 90 minutes, would be ideal.



PERFORMANCE OPPORTUNITIES

The most important aspect of being in an ensemble is performing in public. Radtke’s ensembles participate in the band program’s chamber music night.

Being on Butler’s staff allows Radtke to set up workshops in which her college students teach her high school and middle school ensembles. After the workshops, they perform together.

Because they are small, ensembles travel without much baggage. “The easiest performance opportunities include presenting chamber concerts at the school and at [other] local high schools or universities,” Geiger says.

Some states host solo and ensemble festivals for additional performance opportunities. At those events, musicians receive scores and useful feedback from guest adjudicators. “Chamber music competitions are plentiful at the high school and collegiate levels and can be a great motivator,” Radtke says.

Overall, chamber groups offer their participants the opportunity to build friendships beyond the larger band program. “If you have students who really want to work together, it’s worth investing in that opportunity,” Radtke says.

Dear Younger Marcia,



MARCIA NEEL
Yamaha Master Educator
Senior Director of Education, Yamaha Corporation of America
President of Music Education Consultants
Clinician, Educator, Consultant, Music Advocate

Congratulations on getting your Music Education degree! You're excited to get out there and realize your dream of becoming the next great American conductor like Robert Shaw, but before you begin polishing your conducting chops, I'd love to share some thoughts with you to keep in mind along the way.

First and foremost, you will hear that teaching is "not all about you," but it is! The most accomplished directors always bring their best to each and every rehearsal. They are always prepared, energized, inspired and seem to create situations that bring out the best in everyone around them. They continually serve as students of the art form and role models to be emulated by their students. It is through this continuous search for excellence that you will realize your true purpose — serving others.

You will also be responsible for teaching parents, colleagues, administrators, superintendents, school board members, politicians and the community in general. The constituents in your sphere of influence must understand the enormous benefits to music making, so start paying close attention to the research and spread the word. Embody this principle and live it to the fullest as it will serve you well throughout your entire career.

Spend time reflecting on why you are teaching music. You'll go through phases. The dream of becoming Robert Shaw will eventually fade, and you will realize your true calling — helping young people discover the joy of collaborative music making and the sense of fulfillment, purpose and love that come with that. You'll realize that music is the vessel for teaching about life and how so much can be accomplished when we choose to work together to achieve something special — something larger than the sum of its parts.

A few cautionary thoughts on how to deal with some challenging issues you'll face:

- Some people will not be as happy and fulfilled as you are, and they don't choose to be. You will not be able to do anything about them. Move on!
- If you get into trouble, whether it's difficulty in choosing the right piece for your ensemble or the time you burned a 25-foot-long black gouge into the high school's gym floor (yikes!), reach out and tell someone who can help you as soon as possible. Call a colleague or sit down with your supervising administrator. There will always be someone who can help, but you have to reach out to them.
- Be a good listener. Hear what is being said between the words. You'll perceive so much more this way.
- You will change lives through what you say and do, so choose your words and deeds carefully.
- Don't take shortcuts. You'll miss too much of the scenery along the way.
- Family always comes first, so make time to watch your little ones grow. Family time will be your greatest joy.

One final word — artistic discovery is what working with young people is all about. No matter their age group, your students deserve credit for being able to achieve more than you think they can. If you believe in them, they definitely will exceed your expectations!

I'm so excited for you! Go out and change the world!

Best,
Marcia Neel in 2020



PUSH YOURSELF AND YOUR STUDENTS WILL GO FURTHER

The Yamaha Master Educator Program

The musical journey never ends. That's why we brought Master Educators together to inspire teachers and students to realize their full potential. Workshops are designed for middle school through collegiate level and include topics such as: Habits of Successful Middle School Band Directors, Building Leadership In Your Ensemble, Developing a Programming Philosophy and more.

Master Educators include:



Dr. Rodney Dorsey
Professor of Music in Bands,
Indiana University



Dr. Travis J. Cross
Professor of Music and Music
Department Chair, UCLA



Dr. Emily Threinen
Director of Bands and Associate Professor
of Music, University of Minnesota

To learn more about the program and choose from 19 specialized Master Educators who will help you reach your goals, please contact Jalissa Gascho at jgascho@yamaha.com. Visit us at [YamahaEducatorSuite.com](https://www.yamahaeducatorsuite.com).

DON'T MISS INSIGHTS LIKE THIS:

“Living true to myself
has meant examining assumptions
I have about what I can do or
what I shouldn't be doing.”

— MIKE BLOCK

SIGN UP TODAY!

FREE FOR MUSIC EDUCATORS PRINT AND DIGITAL EDITIONS 4X A YEAR

YamahaSupportED.com

