

# SUPPORT ED

A MAGAZINE FOR INSTRUMENTALISTS

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 YAMAHA

2020 | VOLUME 5, NO. 3

# Mimi Stillman

From Prodigy  
To Pedagogue



Supported 2020  
Volume 5, Number 3

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### EDITOR'S NOTE

# 5 POSITIVE LESSONS FROM 2020

*For this final issue of 2020, Yamaha Senior Director of Education Marcia Neel concludes our celebration of our fifth year of publication with a heartwarming Top 5 list.*

I'd like to share an uplifting collection of lessons that K-12 music educators have learned during this tumultuous year, proving that even in chaos, the power and reach of music prevail!

**1. A New Relationship with Technology.** Mister Rogers was way ahead of us. He understood how to teach young people effectively and virtually — something we were forced to tackle in 2020. But remote teaching has its upsides. Teachers can better gauge students' understanding of concepts because each student is seen in an equal space. Paradoxically, virtual teaching makes conversations more personal. The chat function engages more students because they often answer each other's questions. And students who don't like to speak up can enter a "safe zone" and directly "talk" to the teacher.

**2. More Professional Development.** Technology transcends geography, creating opportunities for educators to attend more conferences. With time and cost savings — as well as the ability to listen to all the sessions rather than choosing from the ones offered during the same time slots — comprehensive professional development is more within reach. In addition, music educators are creating a huge

online community, sharing ideas and materials. The overall quality of music education will be positively impacted in the long term, and best practices will survive the pandemic.

**3. Access to Artists.** More guest artists can be brought into the classroom through virtual means, so students gain access to an increased number of experts. At one Nevada high school, the band students have been treated to guest speakers every week since distance learning began. That could never be accomplished via in-person teaching.

**4. More Expressive Outlets.** Some students have discovered that their creativity goes beyond playing music. Composing, arranging and creating videos have allowed students to enhance traditional music-making activities by finding their own voices.

**5. New Opportunities for Student Leaders.** Student leaders are rising to the occasion more than ever before. A choral director reported that her student leaders are "running our breakout room sectionals, creating remote spirit days, helping to produce our virtual performances, spreading positivity by weekly check-ins with their sections and setting the most positive examples for their peers."

All My Best for 2021,

Marcia Neel, Senior Director of 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

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#### Yamaha SupportED

**ADDRESS:**  
 6600 Orangethorpe Ave.  
 Buena Park, CA 90620

**EMAIL:**  
 SupportED@yamaha.com

**WEB:**  
 YamahaSupportED.com



### POPULARITY OF GUITARS AND UKULELES SURGE

One of the hottest trends during the coronavirus lockdown was learning to play a new instrument. Music stores around the world reported a surge in sales of musical instruments with guitars and ukuleles leading the way.

According to the Kyodo News, sales of both guitars and ukuleles in Tokyo from June through August 2020 doubled compared to the same period in 2019. Yamano Music, a retailer with 40 stores in Tokyo, saw the biggest increase in ukulele purchases, especially among young women.

The BBC reported that Gear4music, an online retailer in the United Kingdom, saw an 80% increase in sales during the 2020 April-to-June period compared to 2019.

Among the biggest sellers were electric and acoustic guitar starter bundles. And Duke of Uke, a London shop specializing in ukuleles, saw an unprecedented surge in sales, according to the Music Industries Association.

In September, an article in The New York Times proclaimed, “Guitars are Back, Baby!” People of all ages — from baby boomer men to young adult and teen women — picked up guitars in 2020. According to the Times article, guitar manufacturers and stores reported record sales during the lengthy lockdown. Instructional sites and apps also saw huge spikes in traffic and downloads during the spring and summer.

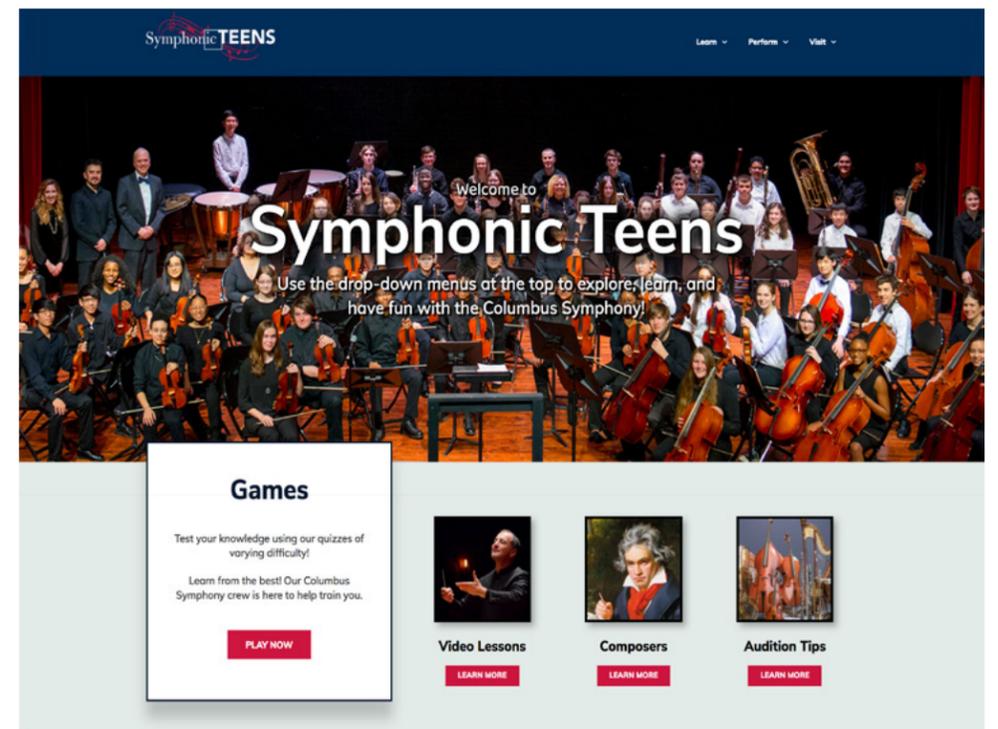
Even older Americans joined the trend, reported AARP. In an article, Rachele Morgan, a board-certified music therapist in Missouri, recommended the ukulele as a good starter instrument for her older patients because the instrument is easy to learn and is small and manageable.

**IN 1966** YAMAHA PRODUCED ITS FIRST FOLK GUITAR, ELECTRIC GUITAR, ELECTRIC BASS AND GUITAR AMPS.

### NEW MUSIC WEBSITES FOR KIDS

The Columbus (Ohio) Symphony Orchestra launched two interactive websites to promote music education for young children and teens. Kids Korner ([csokidskorner.com](http://csokidskorner.com)) is geared toward K-6 students with the symphony’s mascot, Bee-thoven, guiding children through the various areas of the website. The Symphonic Teens ([symphonic teens.com](http://symphonic teens.com)) site offers auditioning tips, career insights from members of the symphony and more.

Both websites have games and quizzes, educational videos, a virtual tour of the Ohio Theatre and information about music, musicians and composers.



DANNY CLINCH



### WITH A LITTLE HELP FROM HIS FRIENDS

Students at the Fernando Pullum Community Arts Center in Los Angeles were treated to some star power during the COVID-19 stay-at-home orders in the spring and summer.

When the center closed in March, its free music lessons moved online.

Executive director Fernando Pullum, an award-winning music educator and GRAMMY-winning trumpeter, asked some of his famous friends, including Wynton Marsalis and John Mayer, to guest-teach via Zoom.

“It was startling; the answer [was] yes immediately,” said Pullum in an interview with CBS Los Angeles in September. “Most people wanted to help.”

Another friend, Jackson Browne, recorded the vocals to his famous song, “Running on Empty,” accompanied by Pullum’s students. The sales from the song will help fund the center’s educational programs next year.

The nonprofit Pullum Community Arts Center provides free arts education to more than 600 students, aged 5 to 20. It is part of the Berklee City Music Network, which helps children from underserved communities. For more information about the center, go to [pullumcenter.org](http://pullumcenter.org).

**WYNTON MARSALIS BECAME THE FIRST JAZZ MUSICIAN TO WIN THE PULITZER PRIZE FOR MUSIC IN 1997 FOR HIS ALBUM “BLOOD ON THE FIELDS.”**

### NEW HAMPSHIRE ROCKS!

New Hampshire Rocks!, a grant program started by the New Hampshire Department of Education in July 2020, provides instruments and musical training to schools throughout the state. Since the initiative started, 30 music teachers have received



curriculum and training for in-person or online music instruction, reaching 6,000 students. Thirteen of those teachers also received instruments for their programs.

The New Hampshire Department of Education partnered with Little Kids Rock, Graystone Builders of New Hampshire and The Milagro Foundation, founded by Carlos Santana, to launch this initiative.

“Modern band music programs empower teachers to use the music that kids know and love, including rock, pop, R&B, country and hip-hop, to master music competencies,” said Marcia McCaffrey, an arts consultant for the New Hampshire Department of Education, in a press release. “Through these classes, students gain musical skills that enable them to play together, compose songs together, build community, and express through music their thoughts, ideas and emotions.”

# BEST PRACTICES FOR ONLINE REHEARSALS

As schools continue aspects of virtual learning during the COVID-19 pandemic, restructure your ensemble practices to help students stay engaged in today's modern music classroom.

BY MATTHEW BLACK



And there it was ... the email that said we were limited to online-only rehearsals for summer band camp. With COVID-19 numbers rising locally and our governor restricting mass gatherings, putting hundreds of band members in a room together would not be possible.

The news did not deter me. I am a tech nerd. I could figure this out. I scoured the internet for the most efficient and engaging ways to rehearse remotely. I found many helpful hints, but nothing prepared me for that first rehearsal. It was so quiet. A student was eating Taco Bell. Everyone was texting on their phones.

I needed to reevaluate how this rehearsal would run. My students were in their most comfortable spaces ... their bedrooms or their basements. How was I going to get them

in the same mindset that they would be in the band room?

I had to figure out more than just software settings. Here are some ways that I overcame the pitfalls of remote rehearsing.

## LEARN THE SOFTWARE

Virtual meeting tools like Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Webex and Google Meet allow teachers to connect with their students in real time even while socially distanced. When deciding on software, consider participant and meeting length restrictions. I recommend a Zoom account, currently free for teacher use with up to 100 participants and no time limits.

Most web conferencing platforms offer chat, screen sharing, recording and mute/unmute features. Become

familiar with the options and create a tutorial document or video for your students. Include a meeting password to preserve privacy.

## MAINTAIN AND ADAPT INSTRUCTIONS

When you meet with your ensemble online, routines must be set up like they would be in your classroom. Students should choose well-lit and distraction-free spaces, away from younger siblings and pets.

Because they are at home, students might feel more casual about their posture and embouchure. Students should set up their cameras at a distance, so you can see their techniques.

Remind students to follow normal rehearsal protocol, including no cell phone use, eating or leaving without

permission. Within a week of reinforcing these guidelines, I started to see progress.

When using any video messaging application, a slight delay occurs as the video and sound travel over the internet, making unified playing nearly impossible. Consequently, you must mute all students and teach more visually. Use the software's spotlight feature, which allows you to see one student in full screen mode, so you get an eye on posture, embouchure, fingerings and bowing or percussion sticking techniques.

## HOLD SECTIONALS IN BREAKOUT ROOMS

Some programs offer breakout rooms, so you can split up your ensemble manually into sections or peer mentor groups as well as randomly for icebreakers and team-building exercises. While other online platforms may not have the same feature, you can create multiple section-specific meetings that occur at the same time.

I ask my section leaders, first chair players or more experienced students to lead sectionals. Before the rehearsals, I meet with the leaders to brainstorm lesson plans that cover specific passages and techniques. They need a clear vision for rehearsals, so that they feel empowered, prepared and organized.

As the meeting moderator, you can move from room to room, listening to passages and giving bursts of feedback. When jumping between rooms, ask the student leaders how they are progressing through their planned lessons and offer quick tips to keep their rehearsals moving.

When your leaders run their groups, they may become frustrated. Follow up with them after rehearsals to reflect on difficulties. You will feel more appreciation from your student leaders since they have put themselves in your shoes.

## MAKE USE OF CHAT FEATURES

With the chat feature, you can give feedback to the students privately or publicly, and the students can ask questions while you are lecturing or demonstrating. I recommend eliminating student-to-student chat in the settings to avoid distraction.

Try this: Tell your students to play a passage, one person at a time. Type the corrections into a private chat, so the student can review areas of improvement while you listen to the next person.

Though online classrooms may never replace the electric feeling we get while performing in a live ensemble, we can provide our students with lightbulb moments and feelings of success. 

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

**Matthew Black is the associate director of bands at Carmel (Indiana) High School, five-time Bands of America Grand National Champion. He has taught ensembles in Drum Corps International, Bands of America and WGI Sport of the Arts.**



# ADAPTING TO CHANGE

Change is a constant. Dealing with it in the classroom means to evolve as an educator and a person.

BY FRANK DIMARIA

**N**o stranger to change, Briana Engelbert Vogt accepted a position in June 2019 as assistant band director at Franklin (Tennessee) High School, just months before her maternity leave. She began by co-teaching with Jacob Campos, who had recently been appointed director of bands. When Vogt returned from leave, everything was different. “COVID happened ... just as we were trying to develop our relationship as co-teachers,” she says.

Due to the pandemic, Vogt and her students had to pivot to remote learning for the last three months of school. Since resuming the new school year in a face-

to-face setting, students are adapting to a new set of protocols, such as remaining six feet apart, equipping their instruments with bell covers and rehearsing outdoors. Franklin’s marching uniforms now feature a facial covering.

To help his students deal with the changes that COVID-19 brought to Arizona State University, Josef Burgstaller, associate professor of trumpet, advised them to accept, embrace and even surrender to change. “If we fight [change], or we lament, or we label it as negative, or we mourn what was or get angry, that’s what all our focus is on,” he says. “If we’re focused on ‘Poor us,’ [then] we’re not solution-based,” he says.

## BUILD STRONG RELATIONSHIPS

Vogt and Campos built their co-teaching strategy based on shared values. “We have the same philosophy about teaching ... relationships first,” Vogt says. “If I have [relationships] in the forefront of my mind, then the change doesn’t matter.”

Music directors should not tie the success of their programs to one individual, like a superintendent who is friendly to the arts. “[Music educators] think because the superintendent has their backs, they don’t have to cultivate other relationships,” says Bob Morrison, CEO of Quadrant Research and director of Arts Ed NJ.

Failure to develop relationships with several individuals within the district and administration may later haunt a music director, Morrison says.

## AVOIDING AND ADAPTING TO BUDGET CUTS

A music program’s budget is often in flux. To avoid finding themselves on the short end of a budget cut, band directors should launch a preemptive strike, Morrison says. The most effective time to advocate for a music program is during times of prosperity. “It prepares you, the community and your supporters for when there may be an issue you’re faced with, like staff reduction and budget cuts,” Morrison says.

Budgets for 2021-2022 currently look shaky, dependent on whether districts receive federal funding to backfill declines in state public education funding due to the pandemic. With so much in doubt, band directors must advocate for their programs now. “Proactive is better than reactive,” Morrison says.

When faced with budget cuts, Vogt turns to the band’s booster program. “They are our support and our go-to,” she says.

## LETTING STUDENTS LEAD

Music educators often “have challenges letting go of ... control,” Burgstaller says.

Vogt says that she’s learning to trust in students. “We’re giving up a lot of control and putting it in the students’ hands,” she says. “We’re saying, ‘Teach us how to help you in this new world that we’re living in.’”

From mid-March until late June, many of Franklin’s students studied from home and took the opportunity to make instructional videos, “teaching people how to march [using] themselves as models,” Vogt says.

Students also created workout challenges to stay engaged and in shape for marching band. “It’s like one

“

We’re giving up a lot of control and putting it in the students’ hands. We’re saying, ‘Teach us how to help you in this new world that we’re living in.’”

— BRIANA ENGELBERT VOGT  
ASSISTANT BAND DIRECTOR AT FRANKLIN HIGH SCHOOL

”

collective group coming together to push us through with their proactive leadership,” Vogt says.

Burgstaller says that the musician’s role in the community is more important than ever. Therefore, he has encouraged his students to write and perform music for family and friends.

## STANDING ON SHOULDERS

Over the years, music teachers of all levels experience an endless parade of students wending through their programs. Instead of looking at it as a revolving door, Burgstaller sees his students as an ever-growing, interconnected group. When students graduate from his program, Burgstaller stays in touch with them. “I look at my students as a continuation of my lineage,” he says. “Everyone of us stands on the shoulders of those before us.”

Building a great culture in a music program starts with the relationships that students develop with each other, Vogt says. Entering freshman are taught respect and personal responsibility. When the rising seniors take the reins and lead, “it’s this beautiful cycle,” Vogt says.

Burgstaller, who views life as a practice room, says that musicians are experts at true growth because of constant practice. “Change is necessary; change is organic; it’s authentic,” he says. “True growth is most often uncomfortable and sometimes emotionally painful [but] always worth it.” <sup>10</sup>



Briana Engelbert Vogt



Bob Morrison



Josef Burgstaller

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# ACCOMPLISHED *Approachable*

Flute prodigy **Mimi Stillman** showcases the physical, intellectual and emotional aspects of music making – and shares these skills with students around the world.

BY BEN NUSSBAUM

Mimi Stillman was only 12 years old when she started working toward her bachelor's degree at the prestigious Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia. "I did a lot of media interviews about being a prodigy, but I was very lucky," she remembers. "I was just doing what I loved to do. I had the most supportive family and teachers who thought of me as a whole person and not just a music-playing being. [My family] made sure I always had balance and perspective in my life."

Her lead teacher at Curtis was the legendary Julius Baker, who had been the principal flute for the New York Philharmonic for 18 years before retiring to focus on instruction. "He took me under his wing with great warmth and caring," Stillman recalls. "I had long admired his playing on recordings. Even though he was rather senior when I began studying with him, Julie was in fantastic playing condition and would play in every lesson. I will never forget the overwhelming thrill of hearing

his signature, lush Baker sound right beside me while we played duets."

Baker, who became a beloved grandfather figure to the preteen Stillman, insisted that his students were their own best teachers — a philosophy Stillman has embraced throughout her career. "There was so much profundity to that," she says. "You might spend an hour with your teacher, but you're always with yourself. With time, I unpacked the depth and wisdom of what he was saying. You have to be critical, learn to listen, learn to help yourself. And hopefully when you become a teacher, you'll pass along to your students the skills and independence to coach themselves."

Beyond the technical skills, being your own teacher involves "questioning, learning, going beyond the notes," Stillman says. "I'm always thinking of ways to do that myself and with my students."

## DEBUSSY DEVOTEE

Stillman graduated from Curtis at 17. Even though she immediately took on a full schedule of performing, including extensive travel, she juggled her flute career with an academic one, earning a master's in history from the University of Pennsylvania.

After completing courses about art history, military strategy and medieval history throughout early modern Europe and Asia, Stillman wrote her thesis on the influence of Asian music on the French composer Claude Debussy.

**YOUNG TALENT:**  
Mimi Stillman began studying with Julius Baker, her lead teacher at Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia, at just 12 years old.



COURTESY OF MIMI STILLMAN



PETE CHECCHIA

"Since I was a child, I felt a kinship with Debussy's writing for flute, which deepened into a scholarly interest," Stillman says. In addition to her thesis, she arranged a book of Debussy songs and has written several articles on aspects of his music.

During the 2012-2013 season, Stillman's chamber group, Dolce Suono Ensemble, presented a season-long series of concerts celebrating the composer's 150th birthday. "At the same time, I celebrated Debussy's birthday with my own personal project, which I called 'Syrinx Journey.' I performed and filmed his flute masterpiece, 'Syrinx,' every day for the entire year — in concert, in my living room, on a train, with friends. I started and ended on August 22, his birthday."

Stillman uploaded all 366 videos to a special YouTube

channel (Syrinx Journey) and continues to add bonus videos. "I never tire of the genius of this evocative piece," she says.

## AN ACADEMIC APPROACH

The academic aspect of music is a crucial part of Stillman's professional life. "I feel like music encompasses everything," Stillman says. "It all works together. Playing music involves the physical. ... It's a skill; there's drill [and] there's daily practice. But the intellectual part always has to be active in the playing and the execution, but also the artistry, the expression, the learning, the interpretation about what you're playing. And music also functions on a really emotional level, of course."

Stillman explains that some musicians' approach to

**ALWAYS LISTEN:**  
According to Stillman, listening is the most important thing musicians do. "Encourage your students to listen with more understanding, more focus and more passion than ever before," she says.

**CONNECT THROUGH MUSIC:** Stillman – shown here teaching at a Music For All workshop – is committed to educational outreach and volunteerism. “I feel privileged to be able to give back in this way and expose people to the transformative power of music,” she says.



COURTESY OF JOLIESCH PHOTOGRAPHY

learning new pieces is, “Let me learn the notes, and then I’ll figure out what they mean.” But for her, knowing the history and context of the music allows the work of interpretation to start right from the beginning.

Stillman writes most of her own album and program notes, and her appreciation for the past works its way into everything she does. “Intellectual content enriches the music,” she says.

In a review of Dolce Suono Ensemble, *The New York Times* captured her artistic goals: “Ms. Stillman is not only a consummate and charismatic performer but also a scholar. Her programs tend to activate ear, heart — and brain.”

Stillman constantly pushes herself to learn new skills — including new approaches to technology and social media to reach her audience. “My learning curve has been steep on how to share my music through technology,” she admits.

Embracing the challenge, Stillman launched a

Facebook livestream series called “Tea with Mimi,” which mixes performance with discussion and education. “One of the greatest blessings about being a musician is that we get to grow our entire lives! I hope every day to become a better flutist and artist or at least to learn something in the process of trying,” Stillman says.

Another recent challenge has been learning how to improvise cadenzas in Mozart concertos — what Stillman calls “a daunting and mind-opening challenge!”

### CONNECTING WITH STUDENTS

Stillman laughs when asked if her past as a prodigy gives her any insight into the best way to teach music to kids. “As a 12-year-old and then teenager performing in professional settings, I never realized how young I was!” Stillman says. “I was doing what I love, having fun and making friends. It was only much later that I realized that I’ve had an unusual life in many ways.”

Stillman often visits schools to perform concerts and lead clinics. “Instilling an appreciation and a love for music — and a passion for making music — is really important,” she says. “If teachers are able to build lifelong listeners, that’s a huge success. And if they build someone who plays music all [his or her] life, even better.”

Beyond gaining a solid foundation in technique, young students should have an understanding of the music canon, Stillman says. “I have seen the power of [classical] music’s impact on people who have never heard it before,” she says.

One example from almost 20 years ago sticks with Stillman. Over the course of three days, she performed

in front of 1,000 students in San Diego public schools, with classes in Spanish and English. “In a school with no music program, one little boy raised his hand during the Q&A and asked me if I would play the Mozart again,” she says. “Coming from a child who had probably never encountered Mozart before, it was awe-inspiring. I experienced firsthand the power of music as a universal language of communication.”

Stillman began teaching inner-city students in Philadelphia on a volunteer basis when she was around 14 and is now an artist-in-residence at Temple University. “My experience has taught me to be creative and open-minded and most of all to be resourceful in solving problems and finding ways to unleash the musical spirit in my students,” she says. “An important part of being a musician is psychological and emotional, so being intuitive and sensitive to others is key.”

Stillman grew up speaking Spanish and English. “As a Spanish speaker, I feel a strong connection to Philadelphia’s Latino populations of all backgrounds,” she says.

Stillman’s Música en tus Manos (“Music in Your Hands”) program, operated by her chamber group Dolce Suono Ensemble and funded by an award from the Knight Foundation, puts on bilingual events including performances, presentations, and side-by-side performances with Latino students in Philadelphia.

### COLLABORATIVE LEARNING AND LISTENING

One of Stillman’s goals as a teacher is to show her students how to practice and interpret music for themselves. “I want to foster their development as independent, creative artists in their own right,” she says.

Stillman embraces teaching by example, inviting her students to be part of her day-to-day life. “My students see what I do as a performer, soloist, chamber musician and teacher,” she says. “They also see me as an entrepreneur. They see my career from close up, which makes them think about career paths for themselves.”

Stillman also teaches technique collaboratively. “During lessons, I demonstrate the pieces they’re working on as well as play duets ... and flute ensemble works with [them],” she says. “We even warm up together with technical exercises at studio classes and before my studio recitals. I think this hands-on approach fosters strong skills and confidence in my students.”

The most important part of being your own teacher? Listening. “One of our main jobs as musicians is to listen,” she says. “At times, listening is very concrete — let’s listen for rhythm, let’s listen for intonation, let’s listen for the

# Sweet Sounds



PETE CHECCHIA

Flutist Mimi Stillman compares her role of managing the chamber music group Dolce Suono (“Sweet Sounds”) to running a small country.

Although she quickly gives credit to a strong team and dedicated board, Stillman’s roles as founder, artistic director and executive director mean she dives into “everything, from the minutia of scheduling rehearsals to grant writing, grant reporting, publicity, music licensing, development and donor relations.”

The actual programming is often done as a team. Because chamber music is a sort of conversation, having a literal conversation about the pieces the group plays makes sense, Stillman says.

Many of the performers are fellow Curtis alumni. Even if they didn’t overlap at the school, the shared experience creates a close-knit group.

Stillman loves planning new performances. “There’s a part of it that is conceptual, ... coming up with a deep question or theme about the music and carrying it out in a project,” she says.

Bringing a new concept to life can be slow; one project took seven years from idea to performance. One reason is that Dolce Suono often commissions new pieces.

Stillman embraces the work. “Combining the two hats that I wear, as a musician and historian, and having our projects have that intellectual component reflecting those two areas is very, very rewarding,” she says.

phrasing, let’s listen to our vibrato, let’s listen to ourselves and record it back.”

Listening can also be philosophical. “As musicians, we know in our mind how we want [the music] to sound. ... There’s the concrete listening and the idealized listening.”

Stillman sums up the duality of her listening philosophy with a Pablo Picasso quote: “Everything you imagine is real,” she says. “I think that’s so fitting for artists. We are constantly inventing a world for ourselves in music.”

## At a Glance: Mimi Stillman

**Bachelor’s:** Curtis Institute of Music

**Master’s:** University of Pennsylvania

**Current Position:** Artist-in-Residence at Temple University; Founder, Artistic Director and Executive Director of Dolce Suono Ensemble

**Selected Recordings:**

- “American Canvas,” as part of Dolce Suono Trio with Lucy Shelton (2018)
- “Freedom,” with pianist Charles Abramovic (2015)
- “Odyssey: 11 American Premieres for Flute and Piano,” with pianist Charles Abramovic (2011)



COURTESY OF JOLIESCH PHOTOGRAPHY

# THE PIPES AND PERCUSSION OF CALEDONIA

Extracurricular ensembles excel at a Michigan school district with support of administrators, eager students and community partnerships.

BY SAVY LEISER



Strike up the percussion ensemble and bring on the bagpipes. Extracurricular music at Caledonia (Michigan) Community Schools entertain audiences with a variety of sounds from steel drums and Japanese music to rock ballads. Concerts aren't just in the school auditorium, either; a surprise bagpipe march might energize students who are walking the halls to their first class. In honor of the Caledonia High School mascot, the Fighting Scots, the school has a thriving pipe and drum band, created by Kyle Wellfare, director of bands. In addition, students ranging from elementary through high school can participate in the percussion ensemble Strike, which is the brainchild of Don Raaymakers, music teacher for Kraft Meadows Middle School.

Extracurricular ensembles excel at Caledonia due to the collaborative and open-minded culture within the district. "For us, it's not about the competitive side of [music]," Wellfare says. "We want to

encourage students to explore and try things at a high level."

Caledonia's administration finds power in pursuing new ideas, including those within the music department. "During my 20 years at Caledonia High School, the administration has always been very supportive of the music program," says Jim Crites, an assistant principal. "This includes lending support to the teachers as they explore creative and unique ensembles."

## BREATHING LIFE INTO THE BAGPIPES

Back in 2011, Wellfare was teaching a music appreciation class unit on Scottish music. Wellfare suddenly remembered that he had a set of bagpipes stored in his office.

"I stumbled my way through explaining what the bagpipes are," Wellfare says.

Then a student expressed interest in learning



CHRISTINA TELL



COURTESY OF ELISABETH WELLFARE

to play the bagpipes, considering the school's mascot. After some networking with adult bagpipe performers in the community, Wellfare decided to make the pipe band a learning experience for everyone — including himself.

Wellfare enlisted the help of Dan Smith, a local piper and friend of Caledonia's orchestra director, to teach him and his first pipe students. Smith, who has since passed away, introduced Wellfare to Dorothy

Wilson, a performer for the Muskegon Regional Police Pipes and Drums, who became a volunteer instructor as well.

Each year, the Caledonia Pipes and Drums band comprises 15 to 20 performers. Some are students and others are teachers, administrators or members of the community.

The group meets Tuesdays and Thursdays, with Tuesdays devoted to teaching new pipers the basics.

**BIKES, BOOKS AND BAGPIPES: The Caledonia Pipes and Drums band performs at several local events and venues, including the Barry-Roubaix gravel-road bike race and at a pop-up library concert.**



COURTESY OF ELISABETH WELFARE

**FIGHTING SCOTS: The Caledonia Pipes and Drums band performs at a hockey arena as part of a St. Patrick's Day celebration.**

On Thursdays, experienced players are joined by percussionists, which include snare, tenor and bass drum players.

Bagpipes have a big learning curve. “The first step is you learn the tunes on a chanter, a glorified recorder,” Welfare says. “If you don’t know songs by memory, playing the bagpipes is nearly impossible.”

According to Wilson, perseverance and motivation are key factors for keeping students engaged during these early stages. “You start out just going up and down the scale,” she says. “It gets boring at first. That’s the hard thing, playing the same tunes over and over again.”

Wilson recommends demonstrating harder tunes as inspiration. “You say, ‘If you keep on practicing, you can play these tunes!’” she says.

Once performers memorize their songs on a chanter, they can start using the pipes. “It’s a unique process,” Welfare says.

Since its inception, the Caledonia Pipes and Drums band has become a ceremonial staple for school events, performing a procession at graduation every year, leading the football team between the field

and locker room, and honoring athletes on senior nights. “It gives me goosebumps to see them perform at school events,” Crites says.

### GROWING UP WITH THE DRUMS

While the Caledonia Pipes and Drums band is completing its first decade, the Strike Percussion Ensemble has existed for more than two. Founded in 1997 with six of his private students, Raaymakers registered Strike as a not-for-profit in 2000 and

“**If you’re part of a high school pipe band, you’re going to attract a lot of attention. Other pipe bands take notice.**”

— KYLE WELFARE  
DIRECTOR OF BANDS,  
CALEDONIA HIGH SCHOOL

brought it to Caledonia in 2004 when he started teaching at Kraft Meadows.

The Strike program has a continuum of levels: 4th and 5th graders can join Lil’ Strikers; 6th through 8th graders can participate in Mini-Strike; and high schoolers can perform in Strike. High schoolers in Strike must also be a part of Caledonia’s curricular band or orchestra.

Strike rehearses at the middle school but performs concerts at the high school in November, March and June. The June concerts feature college-level music by composers like David Maslanka, David Gillingham, Ivan Trevino and Christopher Rouse as well as steel drums, Japanese drums and popular music by bands like Blink-182 and Jimmy Eat World. The Lil’ Strikers make an appearance, joining Strike for the pop songs. Mini-Strike has its own concert in April.

Like the Pipes and Drums band, Strike has become popular with students as well as faculty. “I have attended a number of Strike events over the years,” says Crites who played percussion in his youth. “I have a special fondness for all things percussion.”

In 2018, when Dr. Dedrick Martin became the district’s new superintendent, Raaymakers tried to introduce Martin to Strike and was surprised by his response. “He said, ‘I know what Strike is; I have my June concert tickets!’” Raaymakers recalls.

### EXPLORING UNIQUE OPPORTUNITIES

In previous years, Raaymakers has assembled Travel Strike, which played in places like Disney World, New York City and Hawaii. Travel Strike was scheduled to perform at Disney World in 2020 but canceled the trip because of the COVID-19 pandemic. The group has also appeared at the Percussive Arts Society International Convention.

The Pipes and Drums band performs locally but with a wide breadth of paid and unpaid performance opportunities. The Barry-Roubaix bike race is one of the pipers’ biggest annual events. “We stand in the middle of nowhere, and hundreds of bikers ride by us,” Welfare says. “I always joke that they’re riding fast to get to us or to get away from the sound.”

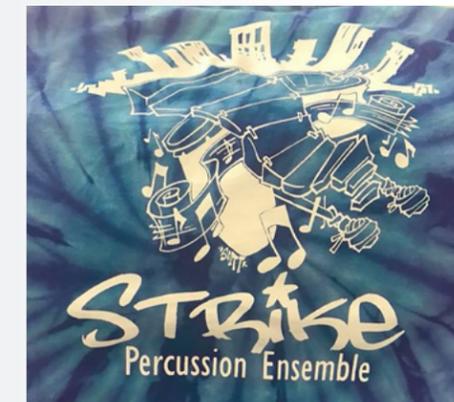
However, Welfare says that one of his favorite gigs is the Armed Forces Thanksgiving Parade, which fosters connections within the pipe band community.

### CONNECTING THE COMMUNITY

The supportive, family atmosphere in the pipe band community has been a force for growth. “If you’re part of a pipe band, you’re going to attract a lot of attention,”

# STUDENTS BECOME TEACHERS

Throughout Strike’s 23 years in operation, Don Raaymakers, music teacher at Kraft Meadows Middle School, developed a six-level program where students gain skills in performing and teaching. That way, older students get teaching experience, and Strike’s education stays in the family.



COURTESY OF STRIKE PERCUSSION ENSEMBLE

Newcomers enter at level one. To advance to level two, they must record performances of six pieces. Level two students get to perform one piece of more difficult music in the first half of the June Strike concert and become eligible to travel on Strike performance trips. At level three, Strikers access all of the June concert music.

At level four, students become eligible to teach Strike lessons. All lower-level Strike members must take lessons with upper-level performers. “I don’t do any of the lessons anymore; I do the supervising,” Raaymakers says.

Teaching these lessons becomes a part-time job. According to Raaymakers, level four students make \$16 an hour, which increases if they hit level five and level six. Strike members pay a yearly fee to cover lessons and operating costs, but they can offset this fee by selling tickets to concerts.

Also at level four, students take a six-week class where Raaymakers teaches them music pedagogy and applied behavior analysis. Level five comes with a pay raise, and level six performers get their names on an honorary Strike plaque.

“Strike has levels that students can achieve, like a testing program,” Raaymakers says.

Welfare says. “Other pipe bands take notice.”

Through connections, a partnership grew between Caledonia and the Muskegon’s police band. “They have been really supportive of us with equipment and giving our students extra performing opportunities around the state,” Welfare says. “Some students were able to [participate] in competitions with that group.”

Wilson says that the support of administrators and family members make Caledonia a successful home for a variety of extracurricular ensembles.

“If the parents aren’t supporting it, it’s lost,” she says. “The kids love it because it’s something different.”



JEFF OSARCZUK

# PERFORM INCLUSIVELY

Five ways to build more diversity in your repertoire.

BY SARAH LINDENFELD HALL

**M**otivated by the dialogue about systemic racism following the deaths of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery and others, Indiana University Bloomington music students circulated a petition calling for more diversity across the music school's curriculum. Students also met with the conductors of Indiana's large ensembles, asking for diverse concert programs too.

The discussion led Dr. Rodney Dorsey, the chair of the Department of Bands, to explore the possibility of joint projects with Indiana's Latin Jazz Ensemble and ballet program. But he's recognized the lack of diversity in music for years. As a student, he remembers telling his parents that he didn't see many Black men leading college bands.

Throughout the last decade, music educators have been acknowledging the need to build concert programs that include a diverse range of composers and musical styles.

Falling back on the classics, typically written by white

men, means that a broad swath of students will rarely perform music written by somebody who looks like them or is familiar with their culture, says Dr. Cory Meals, head of analytical activities for the Institute for Composer Diversity, a group based at the State University of New York at Fredonia.

"We need to be mindful of the constellation of other information swarming around any given work: the composers themselves, their backgrounds, their stories, and how those stories intersect or reflect those of our students and communities," says Meals, who is also assistant professor in music education at the University of Houston.

When building a diverse repertoire for your music program, try these five tactics.

## 1. LEARN WHERE TO LOOK

According to research from the Institute for Composer Diversity, white men wrote nearly 95% of the pieces on suggested repertoire lists for school bands in 23 states. Therefore, state lists should not be the only source for programming ideas, says Liz Love, band director at Grisham Middle School in Austin, Texas.

Meals recommends sites such as the Institute for Composer Diversity, ...And We Were Heard and the Kassia Database. Self-published composers, smaller publishers such as Meredith Music Publications and co-ops like the Blue Dot Collective can also turn up new options.

Following minority composers on social media may also provide inspiration. When Love and her students went to the University of Texas at Austin to sit in on a college

“We need to be **mindful** of the constellation of other information swarming around any given work: the **composers** themselves, their **backgrounds**, their **stories**, and how those stories **intersect** or **reflect** those of our **students** and **communities**.”

— DR. CORY MEALS, HEAD OF ANALYTICAL ACTIVITIES,  
THE INSTITUTE FOR COMPOSER DIVERSITY



**MEMORABLE EXPERIENCES:**  
Liz Love's students met composer Omar Thomas and performed his rendition of "Shenandoah" in 2019.

rehearsal, they met Omar Thomas and later performed his soulful rendition of "Shenandoah" at the 2019 Midwest Clinic International Band and Orchestra Conference. Some of Love's students started following Thomas on Instagram and shared their excitement about his updates.

## 2. CONSIDER COMMISSIONING

Commissioning new pieces can be costly, but bands can split the composer's fee through consortiums or other creative means.

While conducting the University of Oregon wind ensemble in 2016, Dorsey received a faculty grant to commission a piece by Andrea Reinkemeyer called "The Thaw" for voice and winds. Reinkemeyer had attended Oregon as an undergraduate student.

Love sought support from the Grisham Band community to pay for a commissioned work, also performed for the 2019 Midwest Clinic, called "Everybody Sang (In a Universal Language)" by composer Jack Wilds. The piece features folk songs from China, Mexico and Bulgaria, capturing Grisham's diverse population.

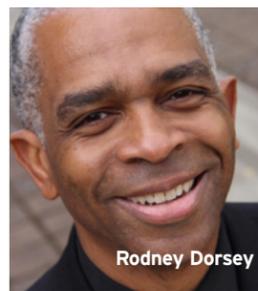
Love says that Wilds, a white composer, was worried about appropriation, but the composition was a collaborative effort. Love had reached out to her students and their families to get feedback about their favorite folk songs. The work resonated with families, including a father who "was surprised and elated that, as part of [his daughter's] schooling, she was to play something that he recognized," Love says.



Cory Meals



Liz Love



Rodney Dorsey

## 3. THINK INCLUSIVELY

When creating a concert program, don't focus on a single type of composer, such as all female or all Black, Meals advises. That situation can lead to "othering," suggesting that underrepresented individuals are different or separate in some way.

Instead, when planning concert programs, he recommends a one-to-one ratio. For every Gustav Holst, Paul Hindemith or other classic, feature a work by an underrepresented composer.

## 4. GO BEYOND THE MUSIC

While Dorsey plans to program more pieces by underrepresented composers going forward, he has made efforts to incorporate them into his concerts in the past.

For the Indiana University wind ensemble two years ago, he featured "AMEN!" by Carlos Simon and the "Heritage' Concerto for Euphonium and Band 2014" by Anthony Barfield.

Dorsey takes time to educate his students about the people behind the music. "At the start of the rehearsal cycle, I will talk about the composer and any pertinent information about the piece," Dorsey says.

Performing newer works also creates the opportunity for students to meet composers directly. Barfield attended the Indiana concert. Reinkemeyer attended the dress rehearsal and premiere at Oregon.

## 5. BE BRAVE

Finding new material and learning to teach it take effort. Some band directors may shy away from unfamiliar musical cultures, styles or composers for fear that "they [might not] have the background, training or knowledge to navigate the musical and cultural content successfully," Meals says.

To remedy this, he recommends a three-phased approach. First, learn more about the piece. Dive into any resources the composer has offered. Smithsonian Folkways Recordings and the Routledge World Music Pedagogy Series can help.

Second, connect with culture bearers who can provide context to the musical piece. That person could come from your community, from a local university or from within your own school. "Look broadly and be inclusive," Meals says.

Finally, once you've performed the piece, re-engage that culture bearer to ask what went well and how you and your students might improve your understanding. "We're educators," Meals says. "We should also be lifelong learners." 

# THE INSIDE SCOOP: AL BERNSTEIN

Al Bernstein is best known as the voice of boxing — on ESPN, NBC and now Showtime. In 2012, he was inducted into the International Boxing Hall of Fame. I met Bernstein about 10 years ago while dining at a local restaurant that features entertainment. The lead performer announced that Bernstein was in the dining room, and I expected him to stand and give an obligatory celebrity wave — but no! Bernstein stepped up to the stage and sang "My Funny Valentine." Imagine my surprise when I heard this "sports guy's" beautiful, smooth, warm, passionate voice. He crooned standard after standard from the Great American Songbook. I was blown away. As soon he sat down, I walked over and introduced myself, and we've been friends ever since!

### Q. What's something about you that most people don't know?

A. Most people are surprised to learn that I would have pursued a music career if journalism and sportscasting had not worked out for me. I really have to thank boxers Marvin Hagler and Sugar Ray Leonard for my side career as a singer. In 1987, during the week of what became a highly controversial bout between them, Caesars Palace asked me to do a three-night engagement. I've been performing ever since. My love of music has always been strong, which is why I have devoted part of my professional life to singing.

### Why is it important to protect access to a musical education?

Every student benefits from musical education. One of my favorite movies is "Mr. Holland's Opus." The final scene when his former band students — including the governor — come back to play his opus sends tingles up my spine every time I watch the movie. No young person should be deprived of experiences in music making.

### Other than music, what brings you inspiration?

I get inspiration from horseback riding. I have been a horseman since I was 29 years old and have participated in team-penning events and celebrity rodeos. And I have enjoyed countless trail rides. It feeds my soul the same way music does.



### What piece of music do you wish you had written and why?

The entire score of "Finian's Rainbow." It's my favorite Broadway musical score. Every song is perfect for the moment in the play, and yet every song stands on its own as a great song to play or sing.

### What is your favorite food?

Deep-dish pizza from Lou Malnati's — the best Chicago pizzeria.

### Why is music important to humanity?

Music is the universal language of the world. It allows us all to communicate on an emotional and intellectual level. It's hard to imagine this world without music.

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

This is a hard question to answer! There are so many candidates. The top candidates would be Sidney Poitier, John Huston, Steve Allen, Orson Welles, Franklin Roosevelt, Mel Brooks and finally my actual choice — Theodore Roosevelt. I believe he was our best president, and he was a fascinating man. I would love to talk with him.

### What book is on your nightstand?

I am currently reading "Becoming" by Michelle Obama. It is inspiring.

### What is your biggest pet peeve?

My pet peeve is people who use bad grammar. It drives me crazy.

Go to [yamahaeducatorsuite.com](http://yamahaeducatorsuite.com) to read the full Q&A with Al Bernstein. 



**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.

# Dear Younger Jeffrey,



FRED STUCKER

**JEFFREY GROGAN**

Yamaha Master Educator  
Professor of Music and Director of Orchestral Activities at Oklahoma City University  
Artistic Director and Conductor, Oklahoma Youth Orchestras

teaching paradigm using smaller groups and exploring some of the greatest music ever written.

During the last 25 years as a music educator, I have learned so much about myself. Here are some invaluable tips — things I wish I had known on Day 1.

Find a few good mentors, people you respect and can rely on to tell you the truth. Ask them a lot of questions because figuring out what you don't know is the key. Trust me, you don't have all the answers ... and seeking out new ideas is a never-ending quest!

I know you like to “fix” things during rehearsals, but inspired students possess superhuman skills. Always keep them inspired, and you'll find that you have less to fix!

You will be tempted to let the importance of the final product outweigh the process. Don't let that happen! Always keep the reasons you became a musician and educator at the center of everything you do. Pass along this love of music to your students.

Record your rehearsals. Though potentially painful to experience, you will learn so much about yourself and your students. Recording will be easy in the future — everyone will have portable phones that have video cameras! With the phone, you can send messages and check your emails, like having a computer that fits in the palm of your hand. By the way, you're going to love these things called emoji — 😂.

But most importantly, your students and the people you meet and work with over the years will bring you indescribable joy. They will keep you going through the tough times and will enrich your life beyond measure.

I know how nervous and excited you are as you embark on your first day as a music educator. Let me assure you, the journey will be fun and rewarding, full of ups and downs. The highs will keep you motivated and inspired. You will work with tens of thousands of talented students, and you will feel the biggest rush when you perform together in concert halls all over the world.

The lows will be few and far between. Don't be discouraged by them — instead, have fun figuring out how to overcome and solve these obstacles.

Be ready for anything, and I mean anything — even a terrible pandemic that shuts down schools across the country! The silver lining is that you will invent new ways for your students to learn and grow without actually being together in person. You'll digitally host famous performers and artists who will engage your students in conversations. You will work together with your friends and colleagues to create a new

Love everyone!

in 2020



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