



# *South Carolina* **MUSICIAN**

Vol. LXXVIII

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No. 1



## THIS ISSUE FEATURES:

Common Individual and Ensemble  
Timing Issues and Solutions

Dr. Isaac Brinberg

Increasing Musical  
Persistence and Engagement  
in the Contemporary Music  
Classroom

Dr. Matthew Schatt



## Announcing J.W. Pepper's 150<sup>TH</sup> Anniversary Scholarship Program

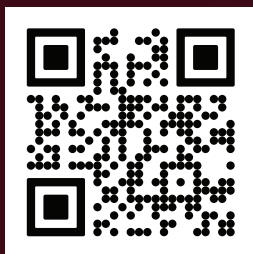
*One recipient will be chosen from each state, Washington D.C., and the U.S. territories*

52 scholarships, countless futures!  
\$3,000 each, with \$10,000 for the top scholar

J.W. Pepper is turning 150, and we can think of no better way to celebrate than by empowering students across the U.S. to teach music. Our landmark scholarship program awards 52 scholarships for students entering their first year of college as a music education major. \$3,000 scholarships will be awarded to one student recipient from each state, plus a student from Washington, D.C., and another for a student from the U.S. territories! The top scholar of all 52 recipients will be awarded a \$10,000 scholarship! The scholarship recipients must be entering their first year as a full-time student majoring in music education in fall 2025.

We aim to help aspiring students pursue their dream of becoming music educators. We invite music students from every corner of the U.S. to participate in this extraordinary opportunity.

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[jwpepper.com/scholarships](http://jwpepper.com/scholarships)

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## Call for Articles

The SC Musician is looking for original articles regarding music education from teachers, researchers, or administrators for this school year. Please submit your articles to Jake Henjes at [jake.henjes@scmea.net](mailto:jake.henjes@scmea.net)

## Call for Advertisements

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# President's Message



Colleen Marcou  
*SCMEA President*

**H**appy New School Year to South Carolina's "spectacular" music educators! As we brave the heat of the marching field, a multitude of meetings, and the endless non-music professional development sessions, let us never forget that we have the coolest (the heat of July and August notwithstanding) jobs in the world. We get to "do" music all day, everyday. We are the teachers for which the students come to school. We inspire, teach, and drive the artistic passion and musicianship of the next generation...How awesome is that?!

After thirty-two years of teaching, I still look forward to the start of the new school year and meeting the new musicians that will make this year unforgettable. Each year comes with new challenges and new accomplishments and never does a dull moment creep into our incredibly and, sometimes insanely busy, days. I expect this year to be even more exciting than the last with

many new collaborations, performances, and accomplishments across the state and within the South Carolina Music Educators Association.

As always I want to express my gratitude and appreciation to each of you, your divisions, and your programs. Your dedication to music education makes our state and our students grow and shine. May 2024-2025 again be filled with joy, inspiration, and moments of musical brilliance as you embark on exciting new ventures in your classrooms and rehearsal spaces.

In June, NAFME and the state MEAs were able to join together in Washington D.C. for Hill Day 2024. Again, we climbed the Hill to visit our Senators and Representatives in person to promote Music Education and express our goals and concerns for the future of Music programs in our schools. The South Carolina delegation was blessed with an opportunity to actually meet with some of our representatives in person and not just their amazing staff. It was wonderful to hear Senator Tim Scott announce how important music education is and how it trains the brain to work differently - in a more productive and creative manner. Never will we forget that Representative Jim Cliburn is himself a musician - clarinet, piano, and percussion. And, how about his love of opera with *Madame Butterfly* being his all-time favorite? Once again, I want to push for participation in our own Hill Day here in South Carolina. As the world of education changes around us, we need to be sure our voices are heard in support of music education for

the next generation.

At the national level, we are happy to welcome our new NAFME President Deborah Con-fredo. It is very exciting to watch her leadership take off with focuses on collaboration, advocacy, helping our new music educators survive, and standing together as one force to get things done. As if through a prediction - not long after the National Assembly and Hill Day we were informed that our federal government wants to make major cuts in the education budget - not a big surprise as we fight this battle annually. However, this time they want to cut arts and music programs as education "funding should focus on core subjects like reading, writing, and math." Music IS a core subject! Let's join together and make sure our parents, students, and communities remind our government of this fact. Music has the power to shape young minds, instill a sense of discipline, self-motivation, and self-expression, and produce well-rounded, well-educated adults. That is the point of education!

If you need anything from me, please feel free to email me at [colleen.marcou@scmea.net](mailto:colleen.marcou@scmea.net) anytime. We encourage everyone to be active members in SCMEA and their divisions. The future of Music Education needs you and, most importantly, your voice. I am always open to suggestions and ideas for making SCMEA even more "Spectacular!" Here's to a fantastic year and many amazing musical moments and events.

# Editor's Note

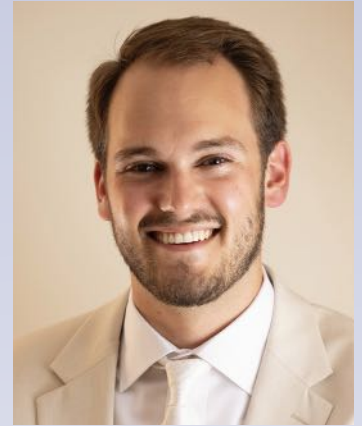
Dear readers,

I hope that your summer provided you with opportunities to rest and left you refreshed and ready to begin a new school year.

As always, it is the goal of the SC Musician to provide meaningful and insightful content for educators in all phases of their careers. In this edition of the SC Musician you will find articles that I hope will give you new ideas and perspective on technical and cultural topics that can be applied to your classroom.

If you have a topic you are passionate about or currently researching, please feel free to reach out and share your work as they could be articles that others would be interested in reading. If you are interested in submitting an article, please reach out to me at [jake.henejs@scmea.net](mailto:jake.henejs@scmea.net). Additionally, if you or a business in your area would like to advertise with the SC Musician, please reach out to me.

Thank you all for your continued support and engagement with our publication!



Jake Henjes, *SC Musician Editor*

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## HIGHER EDUCATION

Fellow Music Educators,

As we begin the 2024-2025 academic year, let us continue to highlight diversity in music education. This is a profession of which diversity may be practiced and observed. At all levels, teaching music provides opportunities for introducing and performing music of different styles that inherently offer content for learning. Among others, such music may include art music, jazz, country, gospel, rhythm and blues, blue grass, hip hop, and music from around the world. Teaching and performing music of all styles may also improve the chances of expanding students' cultural awareness. Regardless of race, ethnicity, culture, or gender, music is a venue through which ideologies, events, and principles are communicated. Music may be one of few venues by which diversity may be readily observed.

As you plan for this year's annual South Carolina Music Educators Association (SCMEA) Conference, plan to make note of repertoire you hear, presentations you attend, and workshops you attend that include components of diversity strategies.

I pray that you have a productive, successful year in continuing to make quality music education accessible to all students.



Rosetta Dingle, *President*

# BAND

Dear Friends,

It is with much gratitude and excitement that I reach out to welcome you to the 2024-2025 year in SCBDA! I trust that what summer you MAY have gotten was a time of rest and relaxation and renewal for you and that you're able to meet the challenges that lie ahead with as fresh a perspective as is possible.



In a time of increasing external pressure, the field of education is a landscape that must be navigated with more finesse, awareness, and sheer determination than ever before. We must support each other, find the good in each other, and understand that, despite whatever differences we may have, we are still and always will be our own best advocates. Be strong, be diligent, and be PRESENT for each other. The smallest of gestures offered to a colleague who may be struggling can go a long way to ease what may feel like a mountain of pressure.

The lives of many students will be wonderfully affected by each of you in the coming days. Remember that we do what we do for that reason. Perspective, especially early in our careers is often a moving target, so always stay true to what you know is the foundation of your philosophy. As my high school director, Lane Moore always showed me, our ability to positively change a life rests more in the connections we make than in the trophies we bring home. Success has many faces.... make sure the most important ones are the ones looking back at us every day!

Your association is strong, and you have allies all around you. Your board is committed to leading with grace and dignity through good and bad, and we are here for you—all of you. I wish you all the very best in every aspect of the development of your programs this year. I wish you all health, peace, fulfillment, and growth personally. Humbly, I thank you for your trust, and I look forward to continuing to carry the torch forward with a wonderful group of board members AND all of you!

See you all at the fall meeting! We got this!

Leslie Gilreath, *President*

# ORCHESTRA

Welcome to the 2024-2025 school year! Whether you're a new teacher just starting your journey, someone in the middle of their career (year 16 for me), or nearing the end with a wealth of experience, I am honored to welcome you to the SCMEA Orchestra Division. With all the events our division has to offer, I know it will be another fabulous year of making music, creating memories, and inspiring students.

I am excited to announce the launch of our new website! Our new site offers easier access to information, a streamlined registration process, and valuable resources and support. I would like to extend a heartfelt thanks to our Executive Director, Susan Wines, for her vision and hard work in bringing this project to fruition. We hope you find the new website valuable and look forward to hearing your feedback. Check us out at [www.scmeaorchestra.com](http://www.scmeaorchestra.com).

The beginning of the school year can be a stressful time. Please remember that you are not alone – reach out to trusted colleagues at your school or connect with fellow orchestra teachers in the division for support or guidance. Collaboration is a powerful tool that helps us not only navigate the challenges we face but also celebrate our successes throughout the year.

Thank you for your unwavering dedication and passion for music education. It's a privilege to work with you and witness the impact you make on your students. I look forward to seeing you all soon and the wonderful things you will accomplish this year!



Allison Key, *President*



# PIANO

Hello and welcome to the 2024-25 school year, SC musicians. The Piano Division hopes you are replenished and ready to bring your best to your classrooms. Students are counting on us to be the highlight of their school year!

The 2024 SCMEA State Spring Piano Festival Masterclass & Honors Recital was on Saturday, May 18 where we witnessed some fine performances that took place from Middle through High School students. The event took place at James Island Charter High School's Performing Arts Center. The afternoon began with our Masterclass Clinic led by Carol Commune, Charleston Southern University's adjunct piano professor and accompanist as well as a premier Spotify composer/musician. She skillfully had students pay attention to the finer details of their pieces and refine the great work they had already done. She really brought out their best! Our Honors Recital began shortly after. Congratulations to all the students who performed and their supportive teachers. We were extremely excited to see four new schools participating in our events this year and appreciate all who have gotten the word out about our events. A huge thanks to Mrs. Krissy Peters who organized the Festival and the Masterclass/Honors Recital so beautifully.

We are gearing up for our 2024 Fall Piano Festival which will have Midland and Lowcountry sites. We are hoping for a large turnout again. We are extremely excited to add an event for Group Piano Ensembles to be able to perform virtually at our Piano Festivals in order to get feedback and be given a rating similar to the Concert Performance Assessment in our counterpart organizations. I can't wait to see the performances to come this year!

I wanted to take a moment to recognize our Past President, Hunter Cox for all his work in our division. Hunter and I worked side-by-side for the last five years to give our organization a resurgence in SC and appreciate all the time and energy he poured into SCMEA Piano. Cox was recently awarded the SCMEA Outstanding Young Music Educator Award at the 2024 SCMEA Conference. Sadly, he has moved to Raliegh, NC where he will be teaching Piano at Enloe Magnet HS and will be nearer to his family. Please wish him well!

If you're eager to learn more about the SCMEA Piano Division, we invite you to explore our comprehensive website. Here, you can find the latest updates, the 2024-25 Calendar, and our informative newsletters. Please feel free to reach out to me directly if you need any additional information.



Andrea Quinn, *President*

# CHORAL

Greetings!

It has given me great pleasure to serve our SCMEA Choral Division in the role of president. I continue to be thankful for our choral music education community in South Carolina. I especially want to thank our committee chairs, committee members, webmaster, and treasurer. Each of these individuals puts in time for no gain of their own except to provide opportunities, experiences, and support for the choral directors and choral students in our state. Your service does not go unnoticed or unappreciated.



We have been working like mad to continue to provide more for our choral division! We will kick things off with Choral Arts on September 6-7, 2025 with Dr. Jeremy Mims as our clinician. Dr. Mims is Director of Choral Activities at Winthrop University. He comes with a wealth of knowledge and interaction within our community as a clinician, judge, conductor of SCMEA performing choirs, and so much more! Most importantly, he is a passionate, talented music educator that gets that we are all better when we each share our best with each other. We would love to see our future music educators currently in college/university present as well!

Throughout the year, please, continue to visit us at our website to see event information, important dates and to register for events. We have so many things to participate in— High School All-State, Middle School and High School Choral Performance Assessment, Region Choir, Middle School Clinic which offers SSA, TTB, and 6th grade options, and Solo & Ensemble. We had record participation across the board at events this past year and only want to continue to reach students through these impactful events. Lastly, we are very excited about the potential of our SCMEA Choral Division conference offerings on February 6-8, 2025. We have been fighting to keep up with our growth as a division by securing more performance spaces, brainstorming and planning in order to feature more choirs as well as more variety of choirs, and including more sessions for each attendee. These will be finalized at our SCMEA Executive Board and Conference Planning Meeting.

We are also very excited about our headliner— Dr. Jason Max Ferdinand. It is impossible to sing his praises enough. We will experience two sessions and a reading session. One session allows selected members of our choral community the opportunity to lead and conduct with feedback on gesture and achieving the ideal sound. His choirs have been featured at numerous national and international events with his collegiate choir being winners of The World Choir Games and his professional choir being featured at BBC Proms! Dr. Ferdinand has been a headliner for all of the major choral conferences in the USA.

We cannot wait to see each of you and, please, be in touch!

Maurice Burgess, *President*

# ELEMENTARY

Welcome Back to the 2024-2025 School Year. I hope that you had an amazing summer and are recharged and reinvigorated for this upcoming school year. I would like to bring you up to speed as to what has been going on in the division as well as some important events coming soon.

1 - 2024 Fall Workshop: Our 2024 fall workshop will once again take place at Camden Elementary on Saturday September 14th 2024 (Please note the date change) from 9:00-1:00 PM. We will be having Dena Byers as our clinician for Fall Workshop as well as our Guest Director for Honor Choir. She will be doing a workshop followed by our Fall Business meeting and Honor Choir music reading.

2 - 2025 Elementary Honor Choir: We are gearing up for our 2025 South Carolina Elementary Honor Choir. As mentioned above, Dena Byers will be serving as our director this year and we are so excited to have her. In addition we will be bringing back Tammy Lorick to serve as our Accompanist. There are a few changes to the Honor Choir process this year and more information will be coming soon. If you are planning on auditioning your students please make plans to attend the Fall Workshop as we will be discussing this in greater detail. If you have any questions regarding Honor Choir please contact Denise Thomas (denise.thomas@scmea.net) or Kristin Rutledge (elemsecretary@scmea.net).

3 - 2025 Professional Development Conference: We are so excited to have our SCMEA in service conference in Columbia on February 6-8, 2025. We will once again have our spring division meeting on Thursday February 6th at 4:45 PM. We will also be sponsoring a guest presenter this year at our conference. Her name is Missy Strong; she is currently a music teacher in New Jersey and is well known for her Music Ed Podcast Music Ed with Missy. She will be presenting three sessions at conference this year so please make plans to attend. There will be other sessions as well and the schedule will be sent out soon.

4 - 2025-2031 President Elect: This year is an election year for our division as we are in search of our upcoming President-Elect there are only two requirements to hold this position:

- a. You must be a member of SCMEA in good standing
- b. You must be a member of the Elementary Division

Please remember that this is a six year commitment in that you will plan to serve for six years

2025-2027: President-Elect

2027-2029: President

2029-2031: Immediate Past President

If you are interested in this position or you know of someone who you would like to nominate for this position please email Seth Phillips.

I hope that you have an amazing school year.



Seth Phillips, *President*

# GUITAR



Friends and Colleagues! What a privilege to write and tell you of all the Guitar happenings in SC. It has been such an encouraging year watching our Division take shape. In February we added some amazing people to our team. Ian Grimshaw, from Academic Magnet in Charleston, Dr. Isaac Greene from Bob Jones University, Dr. Brett Floyd Charleston Southern, Dr. Christi Pickle, and McKenzie Cochran from River Bluff High

School. It is such a privilege to work with such caring professionals. This team helped pull off another awesome event in May that we call Guitarfest. With so many hands on deck we are now able to pull off better and better events each year!

Professional development remains a huge priority in our growing efforts to expand opportunities for Guitar students. This summer, the team at Austin Classical Guitar (ACG) graced us again with an awesome training that was totally free thanks to a grant written by USC student Michael Bunny. Since 2014, ACG has lead the way in guitar education, community development, and advocacy both in the US and Internationally. We were so fortunate to have them here again in the great state of South Carolina. Over the course of three days ACG trained approximately forty guitar teachers from across the state and a few across the country. We got to know so many great guitar teachers who are in our backyards and districts. Those who participated in the training will form the Directors Ensemble and perform this year at the conference!

On November 9th we will hold our annual All State Auditions at Dreher High School. Get your students ready early. All excerpts and updates can be found on the Guitar Division web page via [scmea.net](http://scmea.net). All State Guitar Ensemble performs at Guitarfest on May 3rd, 2025 at River Bluff High School.

The SCMEA Conference 2025 is a going to be awesome! We are blessed to have Phil Swasey from ACG bring us his wisdom on building and sustaining your guitar ensemble. Grammy Nominated Mak Grgic from UofSC will also be there showing us his new video game that teaches notational literacy on the guitar. There will be a Reading Session and don't forget the Directors Ensemble!

I am humbled and privileged to be a part of the path ahead. We are continuing to investigate more opportunities for guitar students to thrive in and out of the classroom and grow as musicians. Thank you for coming along side us!

Chris Essig, *President*



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# String Review

## With Contributions From

**Bianca Long**  
Camp Road Middle  
Charleston, SC

**Chandler Klotz**  
Bryson Middle  
Greenville, SC

**Emily Kirkpatrick**  
Stone Academy  
Greenville, SC



The String Review includes orchestra pieces that were reviewed by members of the SCMEA Orchestra Division.

Thank you Susan Wines for organizing the review!

### **East and West**

**Arr. Deborah Baker Monday**

This is a great holiday piece for developing orchestras. The piece allows students to practice switching between the Dorian and Phrygian finger patterns and all sections receive the melody at some point throughout the piece. In addition, it also gives students practice with basic articulations (legato and accented), dynamics, tempo changes, key changes, and ties/slurs. The added piano part also adds extra support on all parts if needed.

Bianca Long

### **Santa's Spring Break - Larry Clark**

Santa's Spring Break is a lively medley of holiday tunes for the beginning orchestra. Students will utilize staccato bowings, ties, accents, legato bowings, and various other articulations at a quick tempo. There are plenty of dynamic contrasts that will help the young musician develop these skills.

### **Trois Danses Royales - John Dupuis**

Trous Danses Royales is a great piece to introduce playing multi-movement music. It includes many different articulations, such as slurs, staccato bowings, accents, as well as double up bows scattered throughout. This piece invites students to play in 3 different time signatures (2/4, 3/4, 4/4). The conductor's score also conveniently has the time signatures marked in extra large print for added clarity.

### **Gothic Quest - Emily Golan**

Gothic Quest is a dark piece featuring simple rhythms at the start, but later passes melodic material between violins and cellos. There is a beautiful slower section in the middle that will be good for students to practice producing a quality tone. Violin sections are doubled at the end for a strong and powerful ending.

Chandler Klotz

### **Acropolis - Matthew Putnam**

This work for beginning string orchestra uses only the notes of the D major scale and introduces simple syncopation. The melody passes to each section, and this piece also includes simple slurs, legato and marcato bowing, and pizzicato. A slow introduction, simple rhythms, and dynamic contrasts help portray the famous archaeological site in a bold way.

Emily Kirkpatrick





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Department of Music

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February 22, 2025

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## Schedule an Audition

Dr. Robert Gardiner, Audition Coordinator

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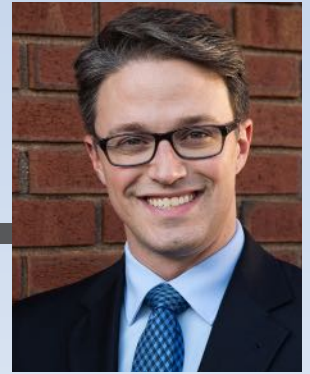
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# Common Individual and Ensemble Timing Issues and Solutions

Dr. Isaac Brinberg | Augusta University



Individual and ensemble pulse and rhythmic timing is crucial to musical excellence in performance. In recent experiences working with ensembles of all ability levels, I have noticed students struggling to establish an even flow of pulse that feels and grooves with the expression of the repertoire. This article provides pedagogical and musical ideas that will help your ensemble perform with more precision, groove, and artistry.

## Causes of Pulse and Timing Issues

There are several overarching causes to ensemble pulse and timing issues in the concert setting. At the foundational level, weak individual sense of inner pulse, coordination of subdivision, and tracking pulse during sustains or silence prohibits achieving great ensemble timing. Ensemble timing can be disrupted by inherent difficulties in the music like syncopations, rests, and orchestration as well as performance techniques such as inefficient breathing/bowing mechanics and poor placement of breaths/bow lifts. Additionally, the acoustics of each instrument, rehearsal/performance space, and ensemble setup can distort precision of timing and ensemble sense of pulse. The following are strategies to address these different issues and foster better ensemble awareness of pulse and timing.

## Individual Timing

Every ensemble member must have a keen sense of steady tempo, even flow of pulse, and rhythmic accuracy. There are many pedagogical strategies and practices in place to teach and refine this that are beyond the scope of this article. However, one tool I have found beneficial in my own practice that may supplement your own rhythm curriculum and pedagogy is the Rhythm Sight Reading Trainer (\$3.99 on iOS and Android). This app has an extensive catalogue of short rhythmic passages with a variety of meters, divisions, and syncopations appropriate for beginners through professionals. The user taps the device screen with the notated rhythm and the app measures rhythmic precision, grading the user on a percentage of accuracy and showing the average deviation of taps from perfect time. The user can adjust the tempo and

customize the experience, such as removing an audible metronome “click” and adjusting the number of times they tap through the rhythm example. It is one of the best apps I have encountered in my teaching experience for refining individual rhythmic accuracy.

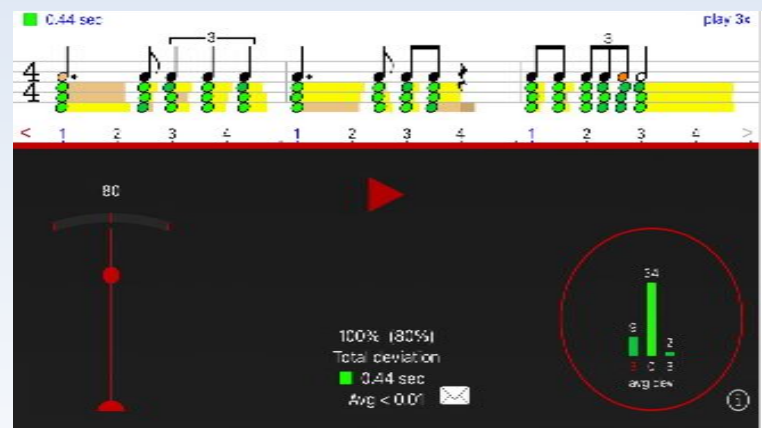


Figure 1: Sample screenshot from Rhythm Sight Reading Trainer

## Ensemble Timing

I use a counting game with ensembles to sharpen the group sense of pulse. If ensemble pulse is not in sync, I will have them count out loud in different meters with eighth-note subdivision to whatever tempo I gesture (intentionally not verbalizing the tempo). Students tend to initiate counting slower than the tempo shown and slowly accelerate to the correct tempo. Students also tend to count too legato with sluggish diction, causing the “envelope of sound” to become too wide. Once the ensemble becomes more precise and synchronized with their counting, I have them turn vocals on and off via gesture, counting internally when vocals are off. Difficulty can be increased to scale, starting with switching vocals on every downbeat, every other measure, longer phrases, and on other metrical beats. This game heightens ensemble pulse awareness through the random vocal on/off cueing and maintaining internal pulse during varying stretches of silence.

If ensemble initiation of sound is imprecise, I use the “now” exercise. I will cue the ensemble to say the word “now” in the style I am showing gesturally. At first, there is too much delay between the gesture and the ensemble vocalizing “now,” but after some repetition the ensemble becomes more precise and musical with saying the word. Once students feel comfortable saying “now,” the exercise can be extended to the playing or singing a single note or chord. This exercise sensitizes the ensemble to precisely initiate sound with the tip of the baton, unifying sense of timing. These are quick rehearsal strategies to establish a sense of ensemble pulse generated within and not relying on an external metronome, developing stronger self-reliance on finding, maintaining, and changing pulse as an ensemble.

### Strategies: Use of Metronome in Rehearsal

One strategy to consider is varying how we use the metronome in rehearsal. We often default to the metronome clicking on every beat, sometimes adding the first level of subdivision. This provides a basic framework to establish even flow of pulse. In my experience, I have found that only using the metronome with these settings can foster ensemble reliance on the metronome for generating a steady pulse, becoming an external crutch that pulls an ensemble along. Once removed, the ensemble

has difficulty retaining an even flow of pulse.

There are additional ways to use a metronome in the rehearsal setting that does not encourage reliance. Changing the number of clicks per measure, such as clicking every other strong or weak beat, only clicking on downbeats, or even clicking at a hypermeter (once every other measure or the beginning of each phrase) challenges ensemble members to retain even flow of pulse between the clicks. The metronome becomes a checkpoint to measure even flow of time rather than a crutch to pull time along. The app Time Guru (\$1.99 on iOS and Android) achieves a similar effect, where the metronome click can be set to randomly disappear a certain percentage of the time. The random disappearing, especially when approaching 50% and above, is an effective test of the ensembles’ even flow of time and internal pulse.

See Figure 2: Sample screenshot from Time Guru

### Musical Solutions

Focus on individual/ensemble timing and metronome use sharpens objective aspects of rhythmic precision and even flow of pulse. While this enhances ensemble clarity and accuracy, focusing on objective elements does not inherently produce musical results. This approach can lead to technically correct yet robotic performance, like asking text-to-speech software to recite a Shakespeare sonnet. Music, like poetry, needs variety of metrical and rhythmic inflection, weight, and emphasis to be compelling. Listen to outstanding artists like Hilary Hahn or my colleague Wycliffe Gordon to hear musical poetry in motion. What are strategies to help students approach rhythm and pulse with more musicality?

### Strategies: Note Groupings

One method comes from knowing metrical hierarchy of beats and notes in a phrase. David McGill’s book *Sound in Motion*, rooted in James Thurmond’s *Note Groupings* and Marcel Tabuteau’s numbering system, explores a detailed and systematic approach to understanding hierarchy of beats and notes in relation to phrasing. This system assigns a number to all notes in a phrase that denominates its emphasis relative to other notes in the phrase (e.g. 1 is the least and 10 is the most, as shown in the example below). Emphasis comes from different expressive techniques such as dynamic shaping, changing tone color, articulation weight, or vibrato.

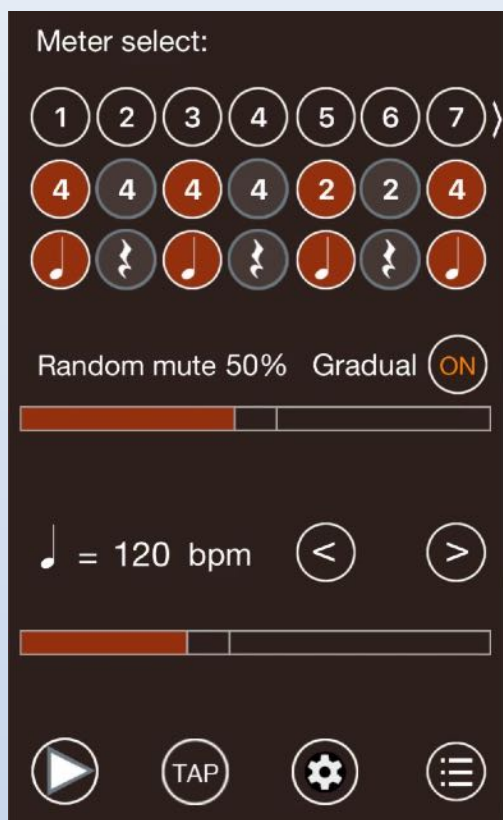


Figure 2: Sample screenshot from Time Guru



Incorporating elements of note grouping can be done at an age and developmentally appropriate level. Introduce the concept during fundamental work and apply to performance repertoire in phrase length segments. Use singing, wind pattern, sizzling, air bowing, or other scaffolding strategies to help connect the concept to technique. Listen to great solo, chamber, and large ensemble performances with your students to build their aural vocabulary for their own performance. As it becomes engrained, note grouping will elevate students' understanding how phrases can be shaped with subtle changes of emphasis through different musical techniques.

Terry B. Ewell, "A Bassoonist's Expansion upon Marcel Tabuteau's 'Drive,'" *The Journal of the International Double Reed Society* 20 (July 1992): 27-30.



The Journal of the International Double Reed Society 20 (July 1992): 27-30.

## Strategies: Creating Feel/Groove

Counting systems or note grouping aids students' understanding of rhythmic structure and its relationship to phrasing. Those systems are more meaningful when students connect them to feeling and groove. I encounter students who conceptually know how to count/clap rhythms or identify basic phrasing, yet their performance does not feel musical. Intentionally connecting conceptual knowledge to experiential feeling is crucial to fostering musical rhythm and groove. Have students sing or scat a phrase to illuminate this connection. A sound before sight methodology through call and response singing/scatting allows students to feel the musicianship before applying a counting/number system, which can be particularly helpful for syncopated or visually complicated rhythms that feel more intuitive than they look on the page.

Another musical solution for ensemble timing is fostering active individual rest counting. I've seen this addressed at all levels, including ensembles comprised mostly of graduate performance students! When ensemble members rest for significant time before entering, an established procedure for how students should prepare for their entrance (setting playing position in advance, feeling and locking into ensemble pulse, breathing in tempo) can help keep tempo moving seamlessly.

## Strategies: Acoustics and Setup

Individual and ensemble awareness of instrument acoustics and ensemble setup can counteract natural tendencies that influence ensemble timing. Ensembles that lack timing precision have a wide "envelope of sound," meaning that instruments are not uniform in establishing tone in relationship to the pulse. The most common culprit are "football" shaped initiations of sound rather than a clear "block" initiation that are essential to strong ensemble timing. The book *Visualizing Music: An Illustrative Guide to Exceptional Rehearsals and Performance* by David Kish has excellent illustrations of this concept. Drawing the ensemble's attention to these different shapes and striving for immediacy of sound clears ensemble sound and timing. Have wind players do breath attacks during fundamentals and "bop" phrases (playing initiations of notes only, no sustains) in rehearsal can help refine immediacy of sound.

Consider the room acoustics and ensemble setup in guiding students' listening. Larger instruments that naturally take longer for tone production tend to sit furthest away from the audience, so training those ensemble members to slightly anticipate the pulse will help counteract the sound delay. Ensemble members instinctively slow down if they sense the bass voice behind the pulse, which starts a negative spiral of dragging behind the pulse. Have the bass voice anticipate to propel the ensemble through the pulse with forward momentum.

## Conclusion

Improving individual and ensemble timing, rhythmic precision, and even flow of pulse can greatly enhance ensemble clarity, accuracy, and musicianship. Through drawing awareness to certain acoustic tendencies, establishing immediacy of sound, cultivating strong individual rhythmic exactitude and bridging knowledge with musicianship, your ensemble will find more rhythmic feel and groove in performance. I hope these strategies and resources are helpful teaching tools for you and your students in your rehearsals. Please feel free to contact me by email with any questions, comments, or your own strategies!

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# Increasing Musical Persistence and Engagement in the Contemporary Music Classroom



*Dr. Matthew Schatt*

This article was originally published in *Music Educators Journal* 110, no. 3 (2024): 20-27. Reprinted with permission from the National Association for Music Education (NAfME).

Does the world feel a little different to you lately? If so, you are not alone. As a result of changes in student outlook, culture, and determination toward schooling, your students may be experiencing less persistence, perseverance, grit, focus, self-concept, and self-efficacy than those students you encountered in your classrooms just a few years ago before the sociological (and educational) upheaval of the COVID-19 global pandemic.<sup>1</sup> In music classes, you may have noticed this leading to decreased involvement and persistence in elective musical experiences, among other frustrations and engagement challenges. To be clear, this is not a criticism of today's students but an acknowledgment of one of the best (and more challenging) aspects of our profession: the continuous opportunity to evolve and develop our teaching and learning strategies to meet the needs of our students.

While many of students' physical needs are likely being met through various educational and social programs, students' psychological needs have suffered in recent years with virtual learning, diminished in-person collaboration, human isolation, and distanced participation<sup>2</sup> affecting traditional modes of in-person instruction and the positive experiences often associated with school music participation. As elective music instruction typically occurs at the preadolescent and adolescent levels of development, it is essential to notice the intersection, with this age group also being at greater risk for psychological challenges compared to younger children and adults.<sup>3</sup> Even before the global pandemic, adolescents tended to be more susceptible to behavioral and societal challenges over the last decade.<sup>4</sup> Regardless of age level or teaching context, however, the fulfillment of psychological needs is important to all humans and helps explain why we engage in activities and the quality of engagement in that activity.

## Supporting Students' Self-Determination

Fulfilling students' psychological needs, both in and out of the classroom, leads to favorable outcomes for music educators and growing musicians alike. In light of recent sociological challenges, a revisiting of psychologists Richard M. Ryan and Edward L. Deci's self-determination theory (SDT)<sup>5</sup> of motivation is warranted. As music teachers' goals typically include increasing student enrollment, engaging student participation in their classes, retaining students throughout their time in school, helping students grow in music, and creating lifelong musical participants, SDT provides a psychological foundation on which to base classroom practices that consider individuals' development and functioning in harmony with their social environment.<sup>6</sup> Of note is that a subtheory of SDT proposes that human well-being and thriving depend on satisfying three fundamental needs and that fulfilling these needs leads to growth, wellness, vitality, and a better opportunity to attain one's potential.<sup>7</sup> For the music classroom, this means that students tend to learn more, enjoy learning more, participate in class more fully, and have greater focus and attention on their work,<sup>8</sup> among other positive outcomes. In sum, the more students have their psychological needs satisfied, the higher their quality of intrinsic motivation, the more they will experience engagement in classes and activities, and the more likely they will be to persist in musical study. According to SDT, the three psychological needs that require fulfillment are the human desires for autonomy, relatedness, and competence.

In considering psychological needs support, it is essential to consider the balance achieved by all three needs. It may be helpful to consider a three-legged stool to demonstrate the concept of balance and psychological well-being (see Figure 1). Conceptually, satisfying (or fulfilling) one psychological need (i.e., a leg of the stool) would not lengthen the leg of the stool, which would result in the stool being unbalanced and teetering; rather,

fulfilling a psychological need would expand the diameter of that leg, thus leading to stronger overall well-being. This article explores the three psychological needs suggested by self-determination theory and offers practical suggestions for incorporating needs-supporting activities into the music classroom to increase student persistence and engagement.



Figure 1 Visualizing Psychological Needs Satisfaction

## Autonomy Support

Often, the word autonomy is used synonymously with choice, volition, or agency in educational contexts. These are quite different: autonomy is more appropriately viewed as the control or freedom developed when a person chooses to engage in a meaningful activity.<sup>9</sup> As control is included in this definition of autonomy, not surprisingly, the biggest influence on student autonomy support in the classroom is the teacher. After all, it must be the teacher who affords and allows students the opportunity to engage in a meaningful activity by providing the freedom for student expression. Autonomy support has been shown to lead to more interest and enjoyment, as well as increased intention to continue participation in musical activities.<sup>10</sup>

When considering autonomy support in the music classroom, it is helpful to consider this broad topic in two categories: student voice and student choice. Both categories provide opportunities for student engagement and fulfillment. To support student autonomy, teachers may engage in various activities that focus on offering students the time and space they need to begin taking control of their learning (see Sidebar 1). Of note in these strategies is the setting of realistic expectations, offering rationales for decisions, and providing students the time to indulge in their musical interests. Each of these has one major constraint in full view for the music educator—

time. With a lack of time always being a consideration in the music classroom, it would be far too easy to overlook the need to fulfill our students' psychological need for autonomy; however, music educators often reteach concepts regularly (e.g., at the beginning of a new school year and throughout the year), so incorporating autonomy-supportive activities into the music classroom at the outset may actually save time and better foster personal ownership of learning. Educational psychologist Jerome Bruner provided a phrase for the idea of reinforcing ideas at various levels of depth throughout the teaching and learning cycle: the spiral curriculum.<sup>11</sup> Some autonomy-supportive activities, however, require little additional time for implementation.

### SIDEBAR 1

#### Supporting Autonomy in the Classroom

- Demonstrate patience in allowing students the time they need for self-paced learning to occur.
- Communicate realistic expectations.
- Provide rationales about choices made from the podium.
- Offer constructive feedback.
- Adjust activities to the levels of students' abilities and progress.
- Allow students to indulge their musical interests.
- Help students to select activities that are personally relevant and meaningful to the learner.
- Respect students' perspectives and suggestions.
- Encourage initiative-taking in the classroom.

Offering students a voice in music class helps fulfill their need for autonomy<sup>12</sup> by providing them with the opportunity to feel heard in class. This can be as simple as giving prompts that engage the student's ideas, including encouraging statements that begin with "I heard . . .," "I noticed . . .," and "What if we tried . . .," in addition to offering opportunities to provide feedback on the class itself, which might begin with "One thing I hope we do tomorrow in class is . . .," and "Participating in this class has taught me . . ." Student voice can also be encouraged by regular reflection opportunities, including the use of visual response systems (e.g., holding up fingers from 1 - I do not understand - to 5 - I completely get it; or thumbs up/down/to the side to acknowledge full and partial understanding), video reflections, portfolio creation, and group goal-setting. For the latter, having Post-it notes or a chalkboard wall on the way into or out of the classroom can provide students with a space for their "Goals for tomorrow" or "Something I personally want to work on is . . ." All students have a voice, but providing them with the atmosphere and classroom climate to openly use that voice can take time and patience on the part of the teacher.



Students could also benefit from exercising their powers of choice in the classroom to support their basic psychological need for autonomy. Often, music classes offer different locations or stations with which to engage in a variety of tasks. Students might be told to rotate through each station for an equal amount of time; however, allowing students to self-select stations and durations that are directly tied to their perceived areas of weakness allows students to self-reflect on where they need further growth and (with the teacher’s assistance and a degree of structure) will enable them to start taking control of their learning. Similarly, students may be given a variety of diverse musical works (i.e., eight to ten) to help guide performance or classroom work, or students may be nurtured by providing access to a breadth of resources for procuring available materials for classroom use, giving students opportunities to modify the curricular path of the class. If a variety of works is offered, students should be encouraged to help select the top three works for inclusion in the next programming or classroom cycle, while the teacher selects their own choices from the set to create a balance of educational opportunities. This structure decreases music selection and activities solely based on the majority opinion and affords additional opportunities for diverse music selection based on a wider variety of student feedback. In sum, the classroom tone for autonomy support changes from “must do” to “may do.”

Along with the complementary ideas of voice and choice in the music classroom should be the consideration of how student backgrounds affect curricular ideas and decisions. Students bring diverse experiences, ideas, interpretations, and desires about music to each class. Therefore, providing a space for students to articulate and discuss their interests in various types of music leading to repertoire selection for performance and study, discussions about how students should be assessed and graded in class, and topics of study that are most relevant and meaningful to the students should be considered. Offering students opportunities to self-select music, plan topics or themes for classes, and consider class practices are simple starting points to engendering student autonomy in the classroom, leading to deepened engagement and persistence.

A tangible example of autonomy support can be found in Figure 2. In this example that provides both student voice and choice, students select their practice routines (or other classroom activities) for the day or week in a tic-tac-toe/three-across format. Students are required to work on the same sections of multiple songs but have the opportunity to engage in various musical activities to

satisfy different learning styles. Adding fill-in spaces or additional columns based on the students’ age or developmental level would allow students to start evaluating and using teacher-supported strategies in their practice and classroom routines. In addition, by providing students with a voice, the forthcoming choice board could be completed by an individual, a small advisory group of students, or in a full-class setting. This activity also provides for differentiated learning where diverse learners can complete different activities at their level.

Figure 2 A Practice Strategy Choice Board

<i>Song A:</i> Chunk in small segments mm. 1–16	<i>Song B:</i> Slow down mm. 15–24	<i>Song C:</i> Explore the background of the composer
<i>Song C:</i> Sing mm. 9–24 on a neutral syllable	<i>Song A:</i> Compose a rhythmic warm-up to practice mm. 1–4	<i>Song B:</i> Transpose the melody from mm. 15–24 for a different instrument
<i>Song B:</i> Mark in the counting for mm. 15–24	<i>Song C:</i> Simplify; then silently rehearse mm. 9–24	<i>Song A:</i> Improvise a new response for the melody (call) in mm. 9–12

### Relatedness Support

In considering our human desire for association with others and the world around us, we might consider relatedness satisfaction as a connection with other people and a sense of warmth toward others.<sup>13</sup> The psychological need for relatedness is essential for students as they begin to take ownership of their learning, leading to increased classroom engagement.<sup>14</sup> In contrast, relatedness frustration has been associated with depression, self-criticism, and decreased happiness. Even with a solitary activity like musical practice, musicians are more likely to participate in this skill-building activity if they believe it will help them engage more fully and skillfully with others later in their musical journey.<sup>15</sup>

Relatedness support can find its way into the classroom in various ways (see Sidebar 2). Developing a connection with other class members in which there is a spirit of cooperation and interdependence on each other’s work, as well as all those activities that teachers engage in to create positive rapport between teacher and student, are tangible daily opportunities to foster relatedness support. Connections leading to relatedness fulfillment can also be developed with other music programs in neighboring or geographically diverse areas through the use of technology, such as social media, applications including VoiceThread or Flip,<sup>16</sup> and videoconferencing. Related-

ness can also be strengthened with other buildings at all levels in the same school district by creating pen pal/buddy-type programs and through the sharing of students, resources, and teachers. On a broader level, helping students foster connections with other musical professionals through videoconferencing, invited master classes or webinars, and engagement through social media posts helps develop relatedness satisfaction with the breadth of the musical world. Finally, encouraging relatedness support with an audience is vital to the musical experience. Tangible examples, including student-initiated program notes, preconcert talks, or invitations to sit onstage or nearer to an ensemble, help “break the fourth wall”<sup>17</sup> of musical performance by engaging more intimately with the audi-

ence and bringing together diverse and interrelated parts of the musical experience.

## Competence Support

Our final psychological need that requires fulfillment for humans to achieve optimal growth is competence, otherwise considered the state in which we feel effective and capable in a task.<sup>18</sup> Competence support helps to improve our sense of self-esteem and self-efficacy.<sup>19</sup> Fulfilling the desire for competence helps us persist in challenging tasks when things get complicated and rebound after perceived failures, which is an essential part of musical development.

There are many readily implemented, authentic ways to help our students fulfill their need for competence (see Sidebar 3). Some of these strategies include providing a clear structure and learning goals at the beginning of a lesson or activity to help students align their efforts and monitor progress with measurable objectives for success. This can be as simple as explaining the what and why of our rehearsal strategy at any given moment. If we see our advancement toward a result, we are more likely to continue with that task even when challenges ensue. More-

### SIDEBAR 2

#### Supporting Relatedness in the Classroom

- Express enjoyment in teacher interactions with students.
- Demonstrate warmth and empathy toward students.
- Promote cooperative and interdependent tasks.
- Encourage an inclusive learning environment.
- Provide examples based on the teacher's personal experience.
- Minimize intraclass competition.
- Offer timely and informational feedback.
- Thank students for their efforts in music-making, even when the performance outcome is unsuccessful.

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over, discussing students' work privately, rather than in a full-class setting, supports a focus on the individual and their role in the music classroom rather than a singular goal of group excellence, which may or may not correlate with individual growth. Furthermore, focusing on the learner's intrinsic rather than extrinsic goals helps fulfill the basic psychological need for feeling competence in an activity. In this way, the teacher supports music study as an integral part of the student and their future instead of pursuing growth in music to achieve external rewards or recognition.

### SIDEBAR 3

#### Supporting Competence in the Classroom

- Provide a clear structure and learning goals.
- Allow students to practice at their level.
- Differentiate lessons at different levels of mastery.
- Encourage individual rather than collective effort.
- Discuss performance with students privately.
- Ask students about their perceptions of their performance.
- Promote realistic goal setting.
- Focus evaluations on learner's intrinsic rather than extrinsic goals.
- Give students opportunities to work with musicians at high levels.
- Offer sufficient time for students to achieve objectives.

Many strategies for fulfilling students' psychological need for competence center around differentiation, based on the idea that all students bring unique ideas, experiences, and skills to the classroom. Allowing students to practice or complete assignments at their personal level while selecting activities tailored to their individual growth affords a better opportunity to feel accomplished. For example, while some students can tackle adding nuance and style early in the learning process, others may need to focus on perfecting notes and rhythms before moving to another level of musicianship. Thus, a one-size-fits-all approach may not lead to success. To this end, encouraging realistic and individual goal setting, effortful practices, and taking sufficient time to maximize achievement affords a more complete feeling of competence.

When striving for competence satisfaction, a singularly important word is yet. We all have our own personal path to progress toward a goal and achieve success, so we are likely not experts in our activity . . . yet. In alignment with psychologist Carol Dweck's work in helping to cultivate a "growth mindset," our words may not always have the intended reception with students. For example, praising ability or achievement, rather than effort and process, can be debilitating for some students.<sup>20</sup>

For this reason, long-term activities, such as the creation of portfolios, can help demonstrate growth over time. Using technology<sup>21</sup> and letting students take control of their portfolio can streamline the process, as long as there is a regular review of earlier submissions by the student to demonstrate just how far they have grown in a relatively short time. Simply uploading or posting artifacts to a portfolio without regular reflection opportunities will not afford meaningful or demonstrable growth. Moreover, creating sight-reading recordings and routinely comparing them with versions taken during the learning process or at a performance clearly demonstrates that growth has occurred. To reduce student performance anxiety, students can record themselves individually using a device on their music stand (or close to the student) while performing among the full ensemble. In addition, using the same performance or grading rubric multiple times and overlaying a new performance and rating with the past version helps show that growth has occurred visibly.<sup>22</sup> Similarly, allowing multiple submissions of an assignment allows a student to continue to refine and grow through a process that helps to fulfill the psychological need for competence.

Students might also engage with feelings of competence in various ways. While range or technique may be essential components of competence for some novice musicians, other students might consider musicality to be of primary importance. In this way, soliciting student ideas and values in creating assessment rubrics and offering diverse ensemble opportunities afford students tangible growth opportunities in various musical domains,<sup>23</sup> leading to persistence and engagement in musical study.

### Gaining Life Skills for Success

Students, like everyone else, are constantly influenced by those around them. Perhaps not surprisingly, teachers<sup>24</sup> and parents or guardians<sup>25</sup> appear to be the most influential factors in providing children with the appropriate conditions necessary for autonomy fulfillment. In contrast, our peers appear to be important for supporting relatedness and, to a lesser degree, competence satisfaction.<sup>26</sup> Interestingly, less experienced students seem to display benefits similar to those of more experienced students as to psychological needs satisfaction.<sup>27</sup> This suggests that it is never too early to start helping our students to fulfill their psychological needs. Notably, the time students decide to cease music learning is closely associated with more frustration and less satisfaction of



psychological needs.<sup>28</sup> If students seem less engaged or attrition from music classes appears to be higher for certain groups of students, considering which psychological needs are being fulfilled in the music classroom may be a vital reflection activity.

With the added explicit (and implicit) pressures of performance requirements and teaching mandates, finding time to adapt our instruction toward fulfilling students' psychological needs may seem improbable, if not impossible; however, if student engagement, retention, and lifelong musical participation are our goals, then consideration of our students' (and our own) basic psychological needs is warranted. As with so many intangible aspects of music study, music classes are more than just the teaching of the content. Aiding students in taking control of the development and fulfillment of their psychological needs is yet another life skill for success gleaned in the music room. By nurturing and nourishing our students' environment—their school and classroom setting—in supporting the basic human needs for autonomy, relatedness, and competence, improved student engagement and retention will undoubtedly follow.

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