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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



Tom Finigan
SCMEA President

Dear SCMEA Colleagues,

The 2026 SCMEA Professional Development Conference was a tremendous success, bringing together music educators from across the state for several days of meaningful learning, collaboration, and outstanding performances. From the opening performance by the Rudolph Gordon Elementary Performance Ensemble to the inspiring message from Mickey Smith Jr., this year's conference offered memorable moments that reflected the strength of music education in South Carolina.

We also proudly recognized this year's SCMEA award recipients: Anne L. Turner, Outstanding Young Music Educator; Jovan Blancaflor, Memorial Scholarship recipient; Rick Magaha, Friend of Music Education; Kevin McLellan and Christina Randall, Deborah Smith Hoffman Mentor Award; and Martin Dickey, 2026 SCMEA Hall of Fame inductee. Each of these individuals represents the very best of our profession.

The success of the conference is a direct result of the dedication and leadership of many individuals. The SCMEA Executive Board worked diligently to plan a conference that was both engaging and impactful. With 83 exhibitors and more than 1,700 registered attendees, participation was exceptional. Performances across all divisions showcased the depth of talent and commitment present in music programs throughout our state. Special thanks go to our conference leadership team, Alexis Hatch (Conference Chair), Martin Dickey (Exhibits), Patti Foy (Registration), and Ryan Tinker (Registration & Technology)—as well as our division chairs, whose efforts ensured a high-quality experience for all who attended.

As we look ahead, the work of the organization continues. The Executive Board will meet in May to finalize the 2026–2027 calendar and begin long-range planning for 2027–2028. In June, SCMEA officers will represent our state at the NAFME National Assembly Hill Day in Washington, D.C., engaging with national initiatives and meeting with members of South Carolina's congressional staff. Planning for the 2027 Professional Development Conference will begin in August, and applications for clinics and performances are now open at www.SCMEA.net.

As I conclude my first year as president, I am grateful for the guidance and support of so many colleagues. I extend sincere thanks to Past Presidents Joe Gullede, Glenn Price, and Phil McIntyre for their continued wisdom and encouragement, and to Immediate Past President Colleen Marcou for her leadership and willingness to serve whenever needed. Patti Foy's steady direction as Executive Director remains invaluable to our organization, and I am thankful for the consistent support of Lisa Rayner. With the ongoing dedication of our Executive Board and the leadership of President-Elect Erik Hines, SCMEA remains well-positioned for continued growth and success.

It is an honor to serve as your SCMEA President, and I look forward to continuing this work in the year ahead. As the school year comes to a close, I wish you all a restful and rewarding summer break.

Musically,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tom Finigan". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Dear Readers,

As the final concerts wrap up, instruments are packed away, and classrooms grow quiet for a few brief weeks, there's a familiar mix of relief and reflection that settles in. The end of the school year always seems to arrive all at once—after months of rehearsals, performances, small victories, and challenges that only music educators truly understand.

This time of year has a way of sharpening our perspective. We start to see more clearly what worked, what didn't, and what we might do differently the next time we step onto the podium. Maybe it was a rehearsal strategy that finally clicked in March. Maybe it was a piece that didn't quite land the way you hoped. Or maybe it was a single moment—a student breakthrough, a section that finally locked in, a quiet sign of growth—that reminded you why this work matters

As we look ahead to the next season of the magazine, I want to share a shift in how we'll be approaching each issue. We'd like to have more engagement from our readers and to share ideas accross the state, each edition will center around a clear, timely theme that reflects where we are in the school year. The fall issue will focus on starting strong and supporting new teachers. Winter will lean into the realities of the midyear stretch—honest reflections, adjustments, and lessons learned. And spring will turn toward sustainability, growth, and what it takes to keep doing this work well over time.

Alongside these themes, we'll continue building a set of shorter practical columns that will change with each edition, things like—quick rehearsal fixes, short warmups, and small “quiet wins” that highlight the meaningful progress happening in classrooms every day. The goal is simple: to create something that feels both immediately useful and deeply relatable. But for this to work, it can't just be one voice.

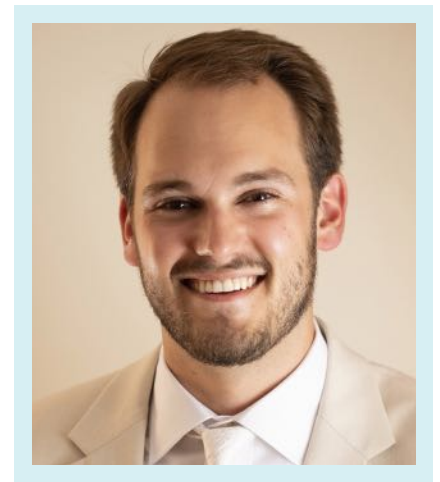
The strength of this magazine depends entirely on the willingness of educators like you to share what's actually happening in your classrooms and rehearsal spaces. Not the polished version. Not the perfect version. The real version. If something worked for you this year, there's a good chance someone else needs it. If something didn't work, there's just as much value in that story. If you're still figuring something out, you're not alone—and putting it into words might help more people than you realize. Be on the lookout for a form to submit these ideas and share with other eductaors.

Contributing doesn't have to be complicated. Submissions can be short. They can be simple. They can even start as bullet points. The most important thing is that they are honest and specific enough that another teacher could read them and think, “I can try that.”

As you close out the year and begin to look ahead, I'd encourage you to take a few minutes to capture one idea, one reflection, or one moment that stood out to you. Those small pieces, when shared, become the foundation of a stronger, more connected community of educators.

Thank you for the work you've done this year—work that often goes unseen, but never unnoticed by the students you impact every day. I hope this summer brings you rest, clarity, and maybe even a few new ideas worth sharing.

I'm looking forward to what we can build together in the year ahead,



Jake Henjes, *Editor*

BAND

As we reflect on this past year, I want to take a moment to celebrate the incredible success of our collective efforts across the South Carolina Band Directors Association. From region band auditions and clinics to performance assessments and state events, the level of excellence demonstrated by our students and directors continues to inspire. These accomplishments would not be possible without your dedication, professionalism, and unwavering commitment to music education. Whether you hosted an event, served as an adjudicator, prepared students for auditions, or supported your colleagues behind the scenes, your work has made a lasting impact on the students we serve. The experiences we provide go far beyond notes and rhythms—they shape character, discipline, and a lifelong appreciation for the arts.

I would also like to extend a sincere thank you to our Executive Board members. Their leadership, countless hours of planning, and thoughtful decision-making have been instrumental in guiding our organization and ensuring the success of each event. Their commitment behind the scenes allows all of us to do our work more effectively, and we are deeply grateful for their service. I am especially proud of the spirit of collaboration and support that defines our organization. Time and again, we see directors stepping up to help one another, sharing resources, and working together to ensure that every event is meaningful and successful. That sense of community is one of SCBDA's greatest strengths.

As we look ahead, the future of band education in South Carolina is bright. We will continue to build on this year's successes, explore new opportunities for growth, and remain focused on providing the highest quality musical experiences for our students. Together, we will ensure that our programs continue to thrive and evolve. Thank you for all that you do each day for your students, your programs, and this organization. It is an honor to serve alongside such an outstanding group of educators.

With the utmost appreciation,



Adam Scheuch, *President*

PIANO

Happy Spring, Pianists!

I hope you all are taking a moment to enjoy the sunshine and the flowers before the heat consumes us! By now, Spring festival has passed and we take a moment to reflect on this year and look forward to the years to come.

Much has been accomplished this year:

- A transformative membership meeting during the conference. How wonderful it was to break bread with you all, hear your perspective and engage you all.
- We worked to add a Multicultural Chair to our Officer's ranks.
- We added schools to our membership with every festival.

The growth is exciting and it is my honor to be here to watch it and work with you!

Next year, we look forward to a few new initiatives. Thanks to the leadership of William Harvey, we will consider a Jazz component to our Festival. Conference 2027 will bring a focus on the Piano Band featuring some special guests from around the country.

But this work can not be done without YOU! We need your help!

- The Piano Division is in search of a school exploring the "Piano Band" in a HIGH SCHOOL.
- We are in need of more hands for leadership - is this you?

If you can help with either one of these things please contact kristine.peters@scmea.net.

Regards,



Kristine Peters, *President*

CHORAL

It has been a busy spring in the Choral Division, and we aren't done yet! We had a wonderful Conference in February highlighted by great performances by Beech Springs Middle School, East Edisto Middle School, Walhalla Middle School, Byrnes High School, River Bluff High School, South Florence High School and Winthrop University! Bravo to all who performed. Your work is inspiring to us all! We were also led by Dr. Andrew Crane and Dr. Jami Rhodes in great conversations about vocal pedagogy alongside many other great presenters. Applications for the 2027 conference are open now and will be taken through June 1, 2026. Apply today at choraldivision.org



William Bennett,
President

Also this spring we have heard inspiring All State performances and heard great singing at all of our CPA events across the state. A special and heartfelt THANK YOU goes out to all of the Coordinators, committees and all of the teachers who worked to make these events successful. Your work to share the choral arts with our students is amazing! Our last events of the year will be Solo and Ensemble festivals across the state. We look forward to celebrating our singers in those events as well.

Applications for Outstanding Performance Award will open on April 20th and will close on May 11. We look forward to honoring our Outstanding choirs this fall at our Choral Arts Seminar. Please save the dates of September 11-12, 2026 at the University of South Carolina for our Choral Arts Seminar. We are excited to have Dr. Kenney Potter join us for that weekend. Please attend and learn more about the great things we have planned in the 2026-2027 school year. Please also encourage new teachers in your area to get involved and help build the future of music education in our state as well.

As always, please check out choraldivision.org for the most up to date information about events across the state. If I can be of service to you in any way, please don't hesitate to reach out. We look forward to seeing you all at an event soon!

ORCHESTRA

Dear Orchestra Division Members,

As we enter the final stretch of this academic year, I want to take a moment to reflect on what has been an incredibly successful and rewarding year for our Orchestra Division. Because of your dedication, leadership, and unwavering commitment to your students, this year has been marked by growth, excellence, and meaningful musical experiences across our state.

We began the year with a strong and collaborative Fall Meeting, setting the tone for the months ahead. That spirit of collaboration carried through every event, and it has been inspiring to see the continued strength of our community.

Our students and programs achieved remarkable success through the Outstanding Performance Awards, with 39 schools recognized across both Junior and Senior divisions. These accomplishments are a direct reflection of the high standards and daily commitment you bring to your classrooms.

Region Orchestra experiences reached a new milestone this year, with Region Five expanding to three orchestras for the first time in its history. This growth speaks volumes about the increasing interest and participation in orchestra programs throughout South Carolina.

The SCMEA In-Service Conference was a true highlight, showcasing the depth of talent within our state. From outstanding student performances to sessions led by our own members, the conference reflected both excellence and a shared commitment to professional growth. It was especially meaningful to see our students perform at such a high level, representing the very best of our programs.

All-State Orchestra auditions and performances once again demonstrated the dedication and talent of our students. The level of preparation, musicianship, and professionalism displayed throughout the process was exceptional, and the final performances were a powerful reminder of what our students can achieve.

Concert Performance Assessment continued its upward trend in participation, reflecting the strength and growth of orchestra education across South Carolina.

Our Solo & Ensemble Festival once again provided valuable performance opportunities for students across the state. With 10 sites hosting events, students were able to engage in meaningful, individualized musical experiences that support growth, confidence, and artistry.

As I reflect on this year, what stands out most is not just the numbers, but the impact—students growing in confidence, teachers supporting one another, and programs continuing to thrive. Each rehearsal, performance, and event has contributed to something much greater: a strong and vibrant community of orchestra educators and students.

On a personal note, I want to express my deepest gratitude for the kindness, encouragement, and support so many of you showed me during our conference weekend. After my fall and arm injury at conference, your prayers, messages, and willingness to step in and help meant more to me than I can fully express. It was a powerful reminder that this division is not just a professional organization, but a true community that cares for one another.

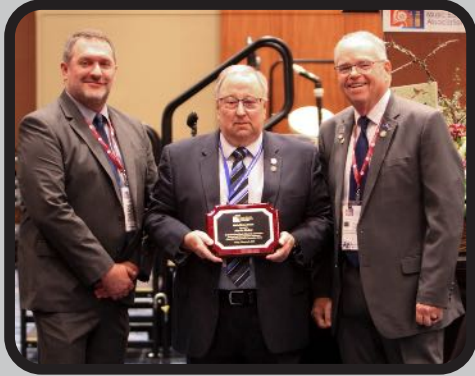
As we finish this year, may we continue to be reminded of the power of what we do. The music we teach, the relationships we build, and the lives we impact extend far beyond the classroom. Thank you for your passion, your excellence, and your unwavering commitment to your students and to each other.

With sincere appreciation,



Tammie Burrows, *President*

Awards



SCMEA Hall of Fame
Martin Dickey



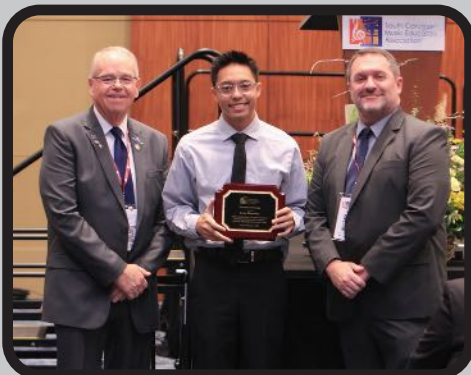
**SCMEA Outstanding
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**Deborah Smith
Hoffman Mentor Award**
Kevin McLellan



**Deborah Smith
Hoffman Mentor Award**
Christina Randall



**SCMEA Memorial
Scholarship Award**
Jovan Blancaflor



SCMEA Hall of Fame
Rick Magaha

Sessions



Performances



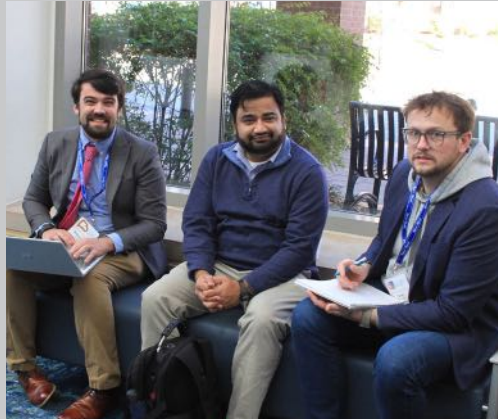
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Receptions



Porchfest and the Power of Lifelong Musicianship

Matthew Clauhs is an associate professor of music education at Ithaca College in Ithaca, New York.



Matthew Clauhs

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Imagine yourself in Ithaca, New York, on the third Sunday of September. Today is Porchfest, an annual festival featuring hundreds of local musicians performing on neighborhood porches. Hand-painted signs direct a pathway as you navigate through crowds of people with strollers, bicycles, and wagons. You hear an accordion harmonize with melodies from a harpist across the street, creating a beautiful soundscape of homegrown music. Young members of a punk band carefully arrange keyboards, guitars, and drums in front of a coffee shop. Around the corner, an older couple dances to “Sally in the Turnip Patch” in front of a porch lined with freshly picked tomatoes, squash, and zucchini. After a few hours listening to music of diverse genres by musicians from all walks of life, you stop at Thompson Park and buy lunch from a local food truck. You are surrounded by tents displaying handmade jewelry, tie-dyed clothing, and knitted goods. An artist captures the moment with live charcoal portraits. In the center of the park, the Fall Creek Brass Band, a New Orleans–style street band comprised mostly of local music teachers, is closing Porchfest with familiar crowd favorites: “Everybody (Backstreet’s Back),” “Paparazzi” by Lady Gaga, and an original composition they call “Don’t Step in the Hole” (Figure 1).

Amateurism in Music Education

In “A Return to Amateurism in Music Education,” John Kratus invited readers to “Imagine a world of amateur musicians. In garages and community centers, on porches and street corners, friends and families congregate to rap or tap, bow or blow, strum or drum for the joy of making music together.”¹ This is not difficult for anyone who has attended a Porchfest music festival in one of over 250 participating communities around the world. I hope my introductory vignette represents Kratus’s vision as well. Porchfest celebrates community through a shared love of music performed by local musicians. But how well do schools prepare students for this form of lifelong musical engagement in their communities? In another article, “Music Education at the Tipping Point,” Kratus argued that traditional music education in the United States has been too focused on the reproduction of Western classical music and performance excellence.² He suggested that this narrow focus may not serve students who do not aspire to be professional musicians in a Western European classical tradition. Many of the musicians at Porchfest represent a population of students who may have been less interested in traditional large ensemble experiences and professional-level preparation through Western classical approaches. By considering the ways Porchfest embraces amateurism, reflects a diversity of musical preferences, and removes barriers to participation, music teachers might find strategies to prepare their own students for lifelong opportunities in nonprofessional settings.

Although many music festivals are dedicated to a single genre or narrow collection of genres (e.g., the Newport Jazz Festival celebrates jazz, the BBC Proms features orchestral music), Porchfest includes the widest possible range of musical styles and genres: bluegrass, folk, funk, punk, rock, rap, jazz, classical, and beyond, representing the varied musical interests and backgrounds of the performers.³ Collectively, these diverse genres are the shared popular music of the local community. Building on prior scholarship, Bryan Powell explained that although popular music is sometimes defined in consumer terms, “within educational contexts, it is useful to think instead



Figure 1 The Fall Creek Brass Band Performs at Porchfest in Ithaca, New York (Photo by Casey Martin)

of popular music as the ‘people’s music’⁴ and as a ‘used music’⁵ that reflects the lives of those who engage with it.⁶ Students in our school communities have varied musical preferences and wish to see their identities and musical selves represented in a curriculum much like they are represented and celebrated at Porchfest.

In *Bridging the Gap: Popular Music and Music Education*, Carlos Xavier Rodriguez urged music educators to incorporate the informal and participatory nature of popular music into school music experiences.⁷ In *How Popular Musicians Learn: A Way Ahead for Music Education*, Lucy Green demonstrated one way this might be possible through informal music learning theory.⁸ In Green’s approach, students learn by ear and collaborate with peers, learning through imitation.⁹ Informal music learning is driven by the cultural backgrounds, musical interests, and personal identities of the student, not the teacher. It aligns well with principles of amateurism and therefore Porchfest, encouraging students to engage with music in ways that are personally meaningful and enjoyable to them. An informal music learning theory approach democratizes the learning process, making school music accessible for more children.

Contemporary approaches to teaching musical amateurism are rooted in philosophical perspectives dating back decades in the field of music education. In 2007, philosopher Thomas Regelski explained how amateurism is essential to the health of music education and music in society. He wrote, “The stigma attached to amateurs, and the cultural pedigree behind it, are increasingly major problems for the health and well-being of music and music education in society today. Professional musicians abound. Yet the richness of the ‘music world’ depends on far more, and amateurs—including especially audiences—are the key.”¹⁰ David Elliott’s philosophy of praxis in music education, developed most fully in his book *Music Matters: A New Philosophy of Music Education* (first published in 1995 and revised with Marissa Silverman in 2015), emphasizes music as a form of doing and making rather than merely knowing or consuming.¹¹ Elliott’s approach, called “praxial music education,” situates musical understanding within active, contextualized music-making and provides a strong foundation for valuing amateurism in music. Elliott also argued for music education to include a diversity of styles beyond the Western classical tradition, including those that may not require many years of formal study and virtuosic technique to perform.¹²

Inspired by the work of these music education scholars and my own experiences attending Porchfest in Ithaca,

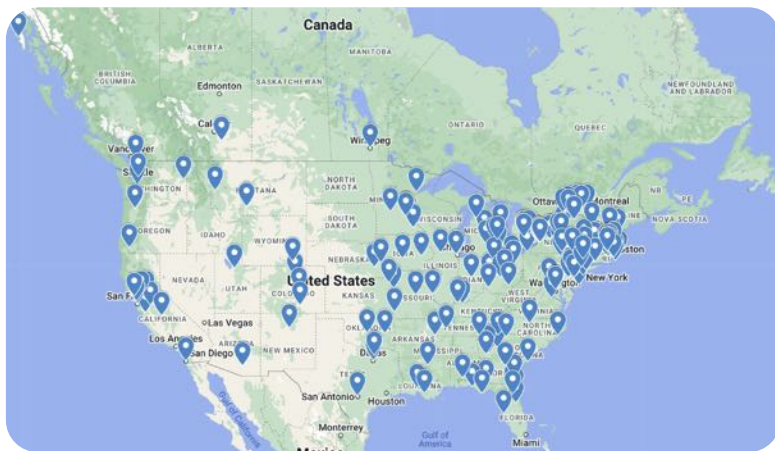
New York, I sought to learn more about this model of community music. Starting with a cofounder of the original Porchfest established in 2007, Lesley Greene, I interviewed musicians and festival organizers to learn how they operate and what Porchfest means to their individual communities. After traveling to several Porchfests around North America and talking with a multitude of organizers, musicians, and porch owners, I developed new understandings regarding opportunities for amateurism and lifelong musical engagement.¹³ Therefore, the purpose of this article is to explore how Porchfest serves as a model of community-based amateurism for teachers who wish to prepare their own students to make music for life.

What Is Porchfest?

Most of the Porchfests I have attended are strikingly similar to the one in Ithaca, as described in the introductory vignette. This is likely due to guidelines that Lesley Greene published on her website (Porchfest.org) and the spread of ideas through the Porchfest Organizers International Facebook group, created and maintained by Greene and her Porchfest partner, Andy Adelewitz. Although Ithaca’s Porchfest now hosts hundreds of musicians, the very first festival in 2007 was relatively small, featuring twenty neighbors performing strictly acoustic music on their own front porches. Greene told me the concept was organic and grounded in the network of local musicians. The event quickly gained the interest of the community and rapidly expanded in the subsequent years, eventually adding amplified acts but always limiting participation to local musicians.

In 2009, a part-time Ithaca resident brought the Porchfest model to Cleveland, Ohio, establishing a Porchfest community in the Larchmere neighborhood.¹⁴ Another Porchfest took root in Canada that same year, after two residents of Belleville, Ontario, attended the festival while traveling through Ithaca.¹⁵ In 2011, Nancy Goodman, a resident of Somerville, Massachusetts, visited Ithaca and brought the idea for Porchfest to the Somerville Arts Council.¹⁶ Currently, Somerville hosts one of the largest Porchfests in the world, featuring over 400 acts in May 2024, including the now famous band Guster, comprised of former Somerville residents.¹⁷ From there, the success of Porchfest in Ithaca, Cleveland, Belleville, and Somerville inspired hundreds of other communities to follow suit (Figure 2).¹⁸ The simplicity of the festival and the focus on local artists made it an appealing event for cities and towns looking to deepen a sense of community through the arts.

Figure 2 Map of Porchfests around North America (Google Maps)



Common Porchfest Themes

The cofounders of the original Porchfest, Lesley Greene and Gretchen Hildreth, had very few rules: “Start on time, end on time, and don’t play too loudly.”¹⁹ However, some guiding principles and characteristics of the festival emerged over the years and were widely adopted by a majority of Porchfest communities. These themes help to promote musical amateurism, remove barriers to participation, and strengthen communities. Recognizing these themes is essential to understanding how the festival can inform music teaching practices.

Commercial-free

On the homepage of the Oakhurst Porchfest in Decatur, Georgia, founder Scott Doyon explains that Porchfest is “your commercial-free grassroots community music festival where front porches become stages, yards become venues, and radical generosity and good will rule the day.”²⁰ I traveled to Decatur and experienced Doyon’s vision of “radical generosity” for myself, observing a refreshing absence of advertisements and sponsors in favor of a large network of volunteers dedicated to their community. Although many music festivals are driven by profit, Porchfest is clearly driven by a greater purpose to bring neighbors together. Doyon has explained how this leads to a shared sense of responsibility for the community, with neighbors advocating and truly caring for one another.²¹

Curbside Coachella

Mac Johnson, a journalist for *The Philadelphia Sunday Sun*, wrote, “I tend to think of it as a curbside Coachella, where your only admission is how many steps you’re willing to take in the sun.”²² Coachella is a massive music festival in the California desert, featuring famous artists performing on various stages. Unlike Porchfest,

Coachella is famously expensive, costing much more than steps in the sun. While attending Porchfest in West Philadelphia, I observed audience members navigating through Porchfest with paper and electronic maps, following handmade signs and banners, or simply wandering to stumble upon new sounds, genres, and artists.

The organization required to plan a “curbside Coachella” varies by community, but almost all Porchfests require volunteer porches and volunteer musicians. When he is not playing with JP Honk Band (a Porchfest favorite), Kirk Israel of Jamaica Plain, Massachusetts, manages over a dozen websites for Porchfests in the Boston area and helps with their planning process (Figure 3). He explained to me that some festivals have a “BYOP” (bring your own porch) model, and others offer a matchmaking service. Israel builds flexible tools to accommodate both models; his goal is to make navigation and scheduling as user-friendly as possible.



Figure 3 Kirk Israel (right) and Members of JP Honk Perform at Porchfest in Jamaica Plain, Massachusetts (Photo by Kirk Israel)

Accessible for performers and audiences

Organizers often express a desire to provide a barrier-free platform to local musicians of all ages. There are no auditions to perform at Porchfest, and many organizers have more local artists than available porches. Some Porchfests rotate musical groups over the years, and some have quotas to guarantee new opportunities for Porchfest rookies. Nancy Keller of Bristol, Rhode Island, told me she makes a promise that “half of the performers will be new performers to Porchfest every year.” These efforts align with Lee Higgins’s research on community music. Higgins explained that community musicians “believe everybody has the right and ability to make, create, and enjoy music of their own” and to “seek to enable accessi-



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ble music-making opportunities for members of the community.”²³ The event is also relatively barrier-free for the public. John Carter helps to organize Porchfest in Portland, Oregon. Carter told me that Porchfest events are “the height of accessibility, in terms of putting it out in the public realm and costing nothing for people.” If mobility is a factor, audience members can stay at a single porch and experience a rotating cast of musical acts. Some communities offer shuttle services or golf carts to provide porch-to-porch transportation.

Nearly every Porchfest I have studied takes place on the weekend, avoiding conflicts with weekday work and school schedules. Many of them advertise the event as “family and pet friendly,” removing potential barriers for caregivers of children and animals alike. Bowling Green’s Porchfest has included American Sign Language (ASL) interpreters at select performances, and the Oakhurst Porchfest has advertised ADA (The Americans with Disabilities Act) seating availability. Organizers are committed to ensuring every member of the community is welcome at Porchfest.

Reflecting individual community identities

Porchfest reflects the values, musical styles, and even architecture of individual communities, so there

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are some differences in how Porchfests operate around the world. For example, Dockfest at Ossipee Lake in New Hampshire features local musicians on waterfront locations but is still part of the larger Porchfest movement. Porchfest in the Jamaica Plain neighborhood of Boston aims to build community and dismantle racism through an inclusive and joyful celebration of local music that features musicians of color.²⁴ Nia Mobley, an organizer in the Southeast neighborhood of Washington, DC, described how their Porchfest reflects musical traditions deeply rooted in the cultural and social life of local Black communities, especially through the performance of go-go music. Go-go (short for “going and going” on the dance floor) is a subgenre of funk that emphasizes audience participation.²⁵ Nia told me, “Go-go is the music of the city, and people here in DC absolutely love to hear go-go. We kind of stand out among the other Porchfests because we really scout for go-go bands and give them a platform to perform. We like to highlight the history of that music and what it means to the community.” Similarly, at the Hohner Porch Party in Kitchener, Ontario (a Porchfest-adjacent model inspired by the Grand Porch Party in Waterloo, Ontario), an organizer told me they feature the artistic traditions of the indigenous community in their neighborhood and include works by local members of

that population.

Some Porchfests have a philanthropic element. By the time I attended Porchfest in Sanford, Florida, in February 2025, their nonprofit foundation had raised over \$300,000 in scholarships and financial aid for arts education in Seminole County (including \$80,000 at the 2025 event alone). Shelly Allen, one of four women responsible for Sanford Porchfest, explained to me how these fundraising efforts help strengthen the local community: “These funds were raised by grassroots efforts in Seminole County, so they’re going to stay in Seminole County.” Her comment highlights a commitment to the local community and demonstrates how Porchfest fosters a sense of collective ownership and pride. Their scholarships help to develop a new generation of musicians, contributing to the long-term artistic vitality of the community. These unique differences in Porchfests highlight how organizers shape the festival to align with the cultural identities and individual values of their populations. Educators have a tremendous opportunity to do the same for their music classrooms.

What Porchfest Means for Music Education

The vision statement of the National Association for Music Education (NAfME) states that “NAfME is an

association where all people are heard, seen, and feel they belong throughout their lifelong experiences in music.”²⁶ I believe Porchfest is an ideal realization of this vision. The elements of amateurism and lifelong musicianship celebrated at Porchfest could inspire music education practices, ensuring that all students have opportunities to make music throughout their lives regardless of their musical preferences and professional aspirations. Drawing on field observations and interviews with organizers, musicians, and community members associated with over seventy-five Porchfests across North America, I have identified implications for preparing students for musical lives beyond their school music careers. The following implications are interrelated and by no means exhaustive of the ways in which school programs can increase lifelong participation in music. Collectively, these implications promote an expansion of school music and shift power dynamics between teachers and students in ways that might attract more students to offerings across the program.

Broadening Programs

Just as Porchfest makes room for all types of musical experiences and demonstrates respect for a diversity



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of styles without hierarchies and judgment, school programs could embrace musical styles and traditions that have historically been excluded (e.g., styles outside of the Western classical tradition). Some teachers may fear offerings that include these styles will draw students away from existing large ensemble experiences. However, music education scholars have demonstrated how broadening course offerings to include popular music (music of the students) may not negatively impact the enrollment of large ensembles.²⁷ And the latest national surveys of school music enrollment show that 76 percent of high school students are not enrolled in a large ensemble,²⁸ providing an enormous opportunity to attract students who are not already participating in school music ensembles.

The modern band movement is one approach to broadening programs and increasing access to school music. Introduced by the nonprofit organization Music Will (formerly Little Kids Rock), modern band teaches students to “play, perform, improvise, and compose using popular music that the students themselves select... with an immersive approach that empowers students to start playing on day one.”²⁹ These programs draw on the musical interests of students to identify repertoire and performance styles that reflect the school community, much like Porchfest. As modern band scholar Bryan Powell wrote, “both community music and popular music education are facilitated in response to the participants involved in the music-making.”³⁰ A learner-centered approach, such as the one Powell describes, places the music teacher in a role of facilitator³¹ or teacher as producer.³² This conceptualization of the teacher may be less comfortable for some music teachers, but it is essential for empowering students and promoting independent musicianship required for lifelong music-making, whether in the community or in a professional capacity. Refer to the following list to explore modern band materials and resources and consider how they may expand access to music in your school community:

- **Music Will:** Formerly known as Little Kids Rock, Music Will is a nonprofit organization promoting the modern band approach in K–12 music education. Their site includes free lesson plans, training opportunities, equipment resources, and more. <https://www.musicwill.org>

- **Modern Band Summit:** An annual national conference hosted by Music Will, bringing together educators from across the country. The summit includes workshops, performances, and sessions on popular music pedagogies. <https://www.musicwill.org/modern-band-summit>

- **Modern Band Higher Education Fellowship:**

A program for college faculty who are preparing preservice teachers to teach modern band. Fellows gain curriculum access, connect with a network of educators, and often present at conferences.

The music performed at Porchfest celebrates the diversity of musical preferences and cultural backgrounds of its community members, much like modern band celebrates the diversity of preferences in the classroom. Washington, DC, Porchfest features its original musical style of go-go (Figure 4), whereas Somerville (the birthplace of HONK! activist street music) features numerous HONK! bands. There is not a one-size-fits-all approach to the Porchfest program, and the same could be said of public school music offerings. Students should play an important role in determining what any curricular expansion involves so that new opportunities truly reflect the musical preferences and learning goals of the students.



Figure 4 Performers at Porchfest in the Adams Morgan neighborhood of Washington, DC (Photo by Brian Barrie)

Removing Barriers

Broadening school music programs may inherently remove some barriers to participation, especially if expanded offerings do not require any prerequisite skill set or formal study. Additionally, music teachers can remove barriers in existing school music experiences by maintaining flexibility in instrumentation and scheduling.³³ Some students may not be enrolled in school music simply due to scheduling challenges. Music teachers, especially at the

secondary level, might find ways to offer multiple sections of classes or flexible rehearsal schedules to accommodate the greatest number of students. When music ensembles are limited to a single period within the school day (i.e., they are “singleton” courses), students may not be able to participate in an ensemble due to scheduling conflicts. If offering multiple sections of an ensemble throughout the day is not possible, music teachers could at least ensure that extracurricular ensembles do not require participation in curricular ensembles (e.g., requiring enrollment in concert band to participate in an after-school jazz or rock band).

At the most extreme end of the flexibility spectrum, I once directed an “open-door” ensemble at a community college in which students were free to join or leave at any time and new members were always welcome. We emphasized learning new music and building musicianship without necessarily focusing on preparing for a single performance. Multiple Porchfest musicians informed me their ensemble operated the same way. After listening to the JP Honk Band at Jamaica Plain Porchfest, a barefooted trumpet player with rolled-up sleeves shouted to the audience, “This is a community band and anyone who plays an instrument or sings is welcome to join at any time! We rehearse on Tuesday evenings at Stony Brook station.” This approach to membership is radically different than most school ensembles, but there may be small ways (perhaps through extracurricular offerings at first) that music teachers could allow students to make music as their schedule allows without strict attendance requirements.

Teaching to a New Standard

In 2014, NAFME partnered with the National Coalition for Core Arts Standards (NCCAS) to release a new set of standards to guide public school music education. The new standards represented a shift away from content, skills, and knowledge and toward student understandings and musical independence.³⁴ The new music education standards strive for autonomy, critical thinking, and decision-making. Porchfest musicians are primarily self-directed during a performance and rarely utilize any form of music notation. This type of independence exemplifies the very definition of musical literacy established by the NCCAS: “knowledge and understanding required to participate authentically in the discipline of music by independently carrying out the artistic processes of creating, performing, and responding.”³⁵ Reading five-line staff notation may not be required or appropriate to “participate authentically” in many styles of music, especially those

found at Porchfest. These styles are historically rooted in the aural transmission of folk tunes, jazz standards, or original compositions by songwriters. It would be inaccurate to say these Porchfest musicians were “illiterate,” regardless of their familiarity with music staff notation. Tom FitzStephens, a music teacher in DeKalb County, Georgia, located just five miles from the center of Oakhurst Porchfest, believes that music teachers should prepare students to become amateur musicians so they are better equipped “with abilities to make music independently and in small groups, for their personal enjoyment.”³⁶ The emphasis on independent musicianship inherent in musical amateurism and community music aligns with this new definition of music literacy and the latest National Standards for music education. Music teachers can embrace amateurism and teach creative musicianship without sacrificing standards for music education. In fact, they may find their practices align with contemporary music education standards promoting musical independence.

Collaborating with Community Partners

Music is an integral part of most cultures and is embedded in the framework of many communities. Music teachers, therefore, have a tremendous opportunity to leverage the cultural values of the local community in their classroom, increasing the relevancy of what they teach and the level of engagement from students. In a NAFME Blog article, Mara Culp and Karen Salvador encouraged teachers to avoid assumptions and overcome biases, know their students as individuals, and foster participation that reflects the school community.³⁷ Of course, it is impossible to fully understand the experiences, customs, and values of all people, especially from populations that may differ from our individual cultural identities. However, music teachers can engage with community partners to deepen their understandings of musical traditions and customs that affirm the musical lives of all children in the classroom. A few Porchfest organizers informed me they partnered with local cultural centers and other organizations to identify local artists who reflected the racial and ethnic diversity of the community. Music teachers could similarly partner with local cultural centers and promote these experiences in their classrooms.

Andi Merrill is the director of a community music school that participates in Ithaca’s Porchfest each year. She told me she works closely with local schools to provide scholarships for music lessons and create programs that mix traditional ensemble experiences with community-based informal learning styles, including jam sessions.

Music teachers could collaborate with community music partners to create new opportunities for students that may not be possible within the constraints of a school building or academic schedule.

Practical Strategies for Embracing Amateurism in PK–12 Music

The implications outlined in the previous section may require new perspectives on teaching music to an increasingly diverse (by race, socioeconomic status, and musical preference) student population. Practical applications of these themes in one school may look radically different from those in another, depending on the musical traditions and preferences of individual members of the school community. When considering any new teaching strategy or approach, music teachers must be cautious not to make assumptions about students, musical preferences, or learning goals. Instructional changes should be made in collaboration with the most important stakeholders in the learning process, the students themselves. Keep this in mind as you consider the practical strategies for embracing amateurism in school music classrooms shown in Table 1.

Closing Thoughts

A consistent theme in Porchfest, and perhaps broadly throughout amateur community music-making experiences, is an overarching goal to bring people together. Members of the Porchfest community truly care for one another as neighbors first and as musicians second. I would like to think some of the implications and strategies in this article ultimately demonstrate caring for students as humans first and musicians second while recognizing their potential to contribute to communities beyond our classrooms and their school music careers. Irina Rasputnis, an organizer from Porchfest in Tacoma, Washington, described their Porchfest to me in a simple but powerful message: “Porchfest is for everyone. Porchfest has a space for everyone and everyone belongs at Porchfest. From established bands to backyard jam bands, from opera to experimental noise, everyone is included.” All children have the potential for meaningful music experiences in their community. Not all children have the skills and resources to do it on their own. By embracing principles of Porchfest and amateurism, music educators can create meaningful and accessible musical experiences for all students, promoting a lifelong passion for music irrespective of their professional aspirations.

Table 1 Practical Strategies for Embracing Amateurism in PK–12 Music

TABLE 1
Practical Strategies for Embracing Amateurism in PK–12 Music

Porchfest Implication	Teaching Strategy	Description
Broadening programs	Diversify musical offerings	Include styles beyond the Western classical tradition, such as popular, folk, and culturally relevant genres.
	Implement modern band programs	Use student-selected repertoire and immersive methods that empower students from day one.
	Shift teacher role to facilitator	Embrace learner-centered approaches where students cocreate and direct their music-making experiences.
Removing barriers	Offer flexible scheduling	Provide multiple class sections or extracurricular ensembles to resolve conflicts with singleton course blocks.
	De-emphasize prerequisites	Design ensembles and opportunities that do not require prior experience or technical proficiency.
	Encourage open-door participation	Create ensembles or clubs where students can join freely, without strict attendance or performance pressure.
Teaching to a new standard	Emphasize musical independence and creativity	Focus on student agency through creating, performing, and responding in diverse, authentic music-making modes.
	Redefine music literacy	Recognize aural traditions and iconic notation as legitimate forms of musical understanding and participation.
	Incorporate student-led projects	Encourage students to design their own musical projects—such as songwriting, beat-making, or organizing performances—that reflect their personal interests and learning goals.
Collaborating with community partners	Partner with local cultural organizations	Integrate the musical values and traditions of the community into the classroom through guest artists and events.
	Mix formal and informal learning styles	Combine traditional ensemble experiences with community-based learning, such as jam sessions or collaborative events.
	Provide access through community support	Work with community schools and nonprofits to offer additional programming.
	Participate in (or create) a local	Perform in your local Porchfest and encourage students to do the

Footnotes provided on following page.

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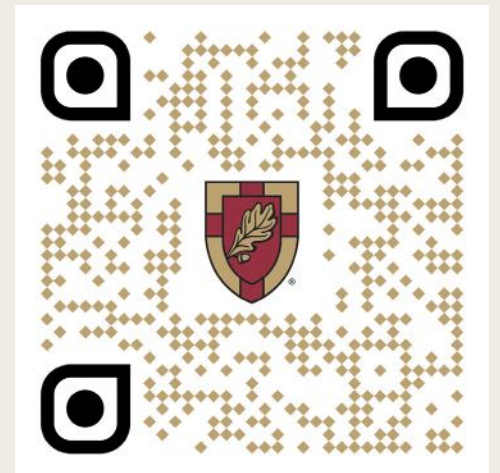
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