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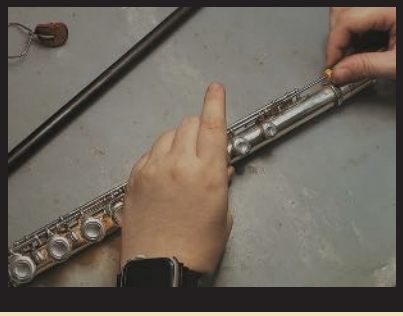
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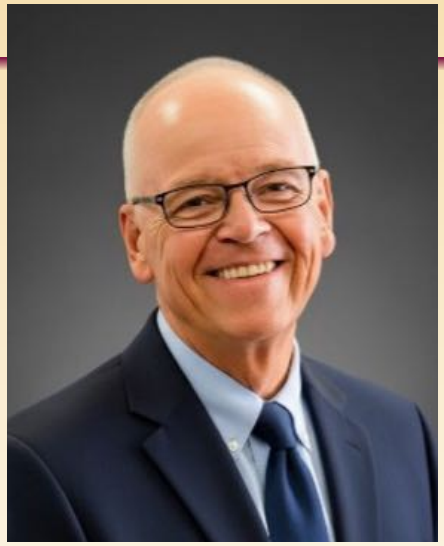
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President's Message



Dear Colleagues,
I hope each of you has had the opportunity to enjoy a well-deserved summer break. I hope you've found time to rest, spend time with family and friends, and recharge for another exciting school year. As music educators, we pour so much of ourselves into our students, and I hope this summer has given you a chance to renew your energy and your passion for teaching.

As I begin my second year as President of the South Carolina Music Educators Association, I find myself incredibly grateful. This past year has allowed me to meet so many outstanding music educators from every corner of our state. Whether you are just beginning your career or have spent decades in the classroom, your dedication to students and your passion for music education continue to inspire me. It is truly an honor to serve alongside such an extraordinary group of professionals.
I would like to express my sincere appreciation to our Past President, Colleen Marcou, for her outstanding leadership and friendship. I also want to thank our President-Elect, Erik Hines, whose enthusiasm and vision continue to strengthen our association. I am equally grateful for the support and guidance of Patti Foy, Lisa Rayner, Martin Dickey, Alexis Hatch, and Ryan Tinker. Their willingness to serve, offer advice, and work behind the scenes every day is one of the many reasons SCMEA continues to thrive.

Our Professional Development Conference last February was one of the highlights of the year. Seeing more than 1,700 music educators gather to learn, collaborate, and celebrate music reminded me how special this profession truly is. Mickey Smith Jr.'s inspiring message challenged all of us to remember our purpose and to continue making a difference in the lives of our students. Our NAfME Southern Division President, Susan Smith, delivered a keynote address that encouraged and motivated educators across every level of instruction. One of my favorite parts of the conference was watching our student performers. From our elementary ensembles to our collegiate groups, every performance reflected the outstanding teaching, preparation, and musicianship taking place in classrooms across South Carolina. Those performances reminded all of us why music education matters.

As we begin another school year, I am excited about what lies ahead. All of our committee chairs are in place and ready to serve, and I appreciate each of them for volunteering their time and talents. SCMEA is successful because of members who are willing to get involved, share ideas, and work together. I encourage each of you to find a way to serve our profession, whether it's joining a committee, mentoring a new teacher, presenting a session, or simply offering encouragement to a colleague. Every contribution matters.

This school year also marks a personal milestone for me as I begin my 40th year as a band director in South Carolina. Looking back, I realize how fortunate I have been to spend my career doing something I truly love. Music has given me lifelong friendships, unforgettable experiences, and countless opportunities to make a difference in the lives of young people. Every day I walk into our band room, I am reminded that teaching music is more than a job, it is a calling. I remain just as passionate today as I was when I began in 1986, and I am thankful for the privilege of serving both my community and our state through music education.

Thank you for everything you do for your students, your schools, and our profession. Your work changes lives every single day, often in ways you may never fully realize.I wish each of you a wonderful school year. If there is ever anything I can do to support you or your program, please don't hesitate to reach out. If you have ideas or would like to become more involved with SCMEA, I would love to hear from you. Here's to another incredible year of making music together!

Musically yours,

Tommy Finigan, *SCMEA President*

Editor's Note

Welcome to the 2026–2027 school year! I hope the year is off to a great start and that you are settling back into the excitement, challenges, and opportunities that come with a new year of music making.



In this issue of The South Carolina Musician, I'm especially excited to feature the voices, ideas, and experiences of several outstanding educators from across our state. One of the greatest strengths of SCMEA is the knowledge, creativity, and experience found within our own membership, and I hope the magazine can continue to be a place where that work is shared and celebrated.

I encourage you to consider contributing to a future issue. Whether it is a teaching strategy that has worked in your classroom, an idea that has transformed your program, research you would like to share, or simply a perspective that might benefit another music educator, we would love to hear from you. Your experiences can be a valuable resource to colleagues across South Carolina.

Thank you for your continued support of The South Carolina Musician and for all that you do for music education in our state. I wish each of you and your students a successful, rewarding, and music-filled 2026–2027 school year!

Jake Henjes, *SC Musician Editor*

PIANO

Greetings, SC musicians! Did you take some time to refresh this summer? I know a few of you took some new jobs and found new beginnings. Congratulations to you! New or seasoned, we are so grateful to our Piano Division community.

Dr. Tom Hicks from College of Charleston had an awesome presentation during our Spring Masterclass. Complete with musical scores projected behind the participants, he offered many insights useful for more than the pieces we heard. The Spring Honors Recital directly followed and showcased many talented students from across the state at the College of Charleston Recital Hall on Saturday, May 16, 2026.

We hope to see our annual Piano Festival continue to grow in the coming years. We invite all of our membership to participate, but specifically our Elementary Piano Programs. There's so much wonderful repertoire to explore at the rudimentary level, we encourage you to have your students play it and submit them to the Virtual Piano Festival to be eligible for performance in the LIVE Masterclass & Honors Recital.

This year, our Fall Piano Festival will be held on December 11th for the Lowcountry at West Ashley High School in Charleston, SC. All SC Piano programs are welcome to participate via our Virtual Festival with registrations due October 28 and submissions due December 8. Our Fall Master Class clinician is Dr. Irina Pevzner, a College of Charleston Piano professor. The Fall Honors Recital will be at the 2027 SCMEA Conference.



Our mission in 2026-2027 is to continue connecting with as many piano teachers and programs across the state as possible so they have all the support they need to thrive. We are constantly seeking out feedback and listening to what you have to say, so please do not hesitate to reach out.

If you're interested in learning more about the SCMEA Piano Division or sharing ideas with us, feel free to contact me at krissy.peters@scmea.net.

Regards,

Kristine Peters, *President*

ORCHESTRA

As I begin my second year serving as President of the SCMEA Orchestra Division, I do so with a heart full of gratitude and excitement for all that lies ahead. Last year was one of growth, collaboration, and celebration, and I am continually reminded how blessed we are to be part of a community that is passionate about music education and deeply committed to our students.

Over the past year, I have had the privilege of watching educators across South Carolina pour their hearts into their programs, inspire young musicians, and create meaningful musical experiences that will last a lifetime. Your dedication does not go unnoticed. Whether you teach beginning strings, lead a thriving orchestra, direct a chamber ensemble, or mentor students one-on-one, the work you do matters tremendously.

This season, I find myself reflecting on the beauty of a kaleidoscope, how many individual colors and shapes come together to create something vibrant, unified, and ever-changing. In many ways, our orchestra division is much like that image. Each teacher, student, conductor, adjudicator, volunteer, and supporter brings unique gifts and perspectives that strengthen our organization and make it beautiful. Together, we create something far greater than any of us could accomplish alone.

As we look ahead to another exciting year filled with all of our SCMEA Orchestra events and our annual conference, I am hopeful for what we can continue to build together. I am especially excited about the opportunities we have to encourage one another, support excellence in music education, and continue finding ways to serve both our teachers and students well.

I also want to express my sincere appreciation to the Executive Board, committee chairs, region representatives, and the many individuals who work tirelessly behind the scenes. Their commitment and countless hours of service help make every event successful. I am thankful every day for the team of leaders surrounding this division.

To our educators: thank you for continuing to show up for your students even on the hard days. Your influence reaches far beyond rehearsals and performances. You are shaping confidence, discipline, creativity, compassion, and community through music. The impact you make may not be immediately visible, but it is lasting.

On a personal level, I remain grateful for my supportive family, my school community at Chesnee, and the many mentors and colleagues who continue to encourage me along this journey. God has been faithful through every season, and I am thankful for the opportunity to serve this incredible organization.

As we begin this new year together, my hope is that we continue moving forward with unity, purpose, and enthusiasm, celebrating one another's successes while never losing sight of why we do this work in the first place: our students and the power of music to change lives.

Thank you for allowing me the honor of serving as your President. I look forward to another wonderful year of music-making with all of you.

With gratitude and appreciation,



Tammie Burrows, *President*

CHORAL



Hello Choral Division! We hope you have all enjoyed a fun and relaxing summer break! We would like to extend a heartfelt THANK YOU to all of our officers, committee chairs and members who have worked this summer planning for this year. They continue working hard to make choral division even better for the future. The Choral Division leadership has been hard at work reviewing Interest Session proposals and working with our adjudicators for our performance choirs for the 2027 SCMEA Conference. We are excited to have eight performance choirs performing this year in addition to engaging sessions by Dr. Nicole Lamartine from the University of Central Washington. Please plan to attend the conference on February 4-6 2027 in Columbia. More information about performances and sessions will be shared at the Fall Choral Arts Clinic!

We hope you plan to join us for the Choral Arts Seminar on September 11 and 12th, 2026 at the University of South Carolina. What is the "Choral Arts Seminar" and why should you attend?
The Choral Division presents an annual Fall Choral Arts Seminar where directors can meet, get up to date information about events around the state, be inspired by great teaching from an esteemed clinician and vote on matters pertaining to the Choral Division.

This year's Choral Arts Seminar will include workshops by Dr. Kenney Potter as well as other great opportunities to meet with other colleagues from across the state!

Most importantly you should be at Choral Arts to help us celebrate our Outstanding Performance Award winners and hear about all of the updates that we have this year for events around the state. There are a LOT of changes happening next year in the Choral Division and we will share that information at Choral Arts! Registration for Choral Arts weekend is open now. The cost for attending is $40 until September 1st for regular members and $10 for Collegiate/Student members. The registration cost will increase to $50 after September 2nd.

We have been busy updating our calendar for this year! You can see and link to our Google Calendar or find the updated dates on our website. As always, please check out www.choraldivision.org for the most up to date information about events across the state.

It takes many hands to keep the Choral Division running smoothly, and I invite each of you to be part of that collective effort. Please encourage new teachers in your area to get involved and help build the future of music education in our state. If I can ever be of service to you in any way, please don't hesitate to reach out. It's through collaboration and shared commitment that we'll accomplish our goals for music education in South Carolina.

Thank you again for your dedication—and welcome to another exciting year with the South Carolina Music Educators Association.

William Bennett, *President*

HIGHER EDUCATION



Higher Ed Division President's Letter

I hope everyone's school years have gotten off to a great start! It's looking to be another great year for music education in our state.

The Higher Education Division is excited about the sessions we're sponsoring at our annual conference in February, which we hope will be of interest to many of you! We are once again sponsoring a modern band session at the conference. Scott Burstein of Music Will will present "Tips and Tricks for Facilitating Modern Band. For our collegiate members who are preparing for their first jobs next year, Rosalee Bailey's session, "Teaching with the Ghost of Teacher Past" may help you ease the transition for your students between your predecessor and you, and prepare them for your way of doing things.

Because so many music educators are being asked to do more and more with less and less, we're sponsoring two sessions relating to resilience, preventing burnout, and self-care. Phillip Vallejo will present "The Best Version of You," a session focusing on work-life balance and personal well-being. Lita Mae Button's session, "From Burnout to Belonging," will explore ways that educators can regulate stress and improve resilience.

Finally, Mary Rita Watson will present a session titled, "Know Your Rights: Empowering South Carolina's Educators." It's not always easy to know about your professional and legal protections, so this session will keep you informed and help you feel empowered when navigating challenging situations in the workplace.

We'll also be sponsoring some research presentations and poster sessions, highlighting some of the excellent work from graduate students and faculty across the state. Thanks to Mandi Schlegel for organizing the research sessions again this year.

Looking forward to seeing everyone at the conference in February!

Julia McCallum, President

ELEMENTARY

Welcome to the 2026–2027 school year! I hope you had a restful summer and are ready for another exciting year of making music with your students. As we begin the new school year, I'd like to share a few important updates and upcoming opportunities for our Elementary Division.

2026 Fall Workshop & Business Meeting
Join us on Saturday, September 12, from 9:00 AM–1:00 PM at A.C. Moore Elementary School in Columbia, SC, for our Annual Fall Workshop and Business Meeting. We are excited to welcome Julia Turner as our guest clinician. Julia will lead us through a "day in the life" of a modern band classroom at A.C. Moore Elementary School. Participants will experience engaging, hands-on activities as we move, sing, and perform popular music using sequencing designed for PreK–5th grade students. In addition to the clinic, we will share important information about the 2027 Elementary Honor Choir, discuss upcoming nominations for the Elementary Executive Board, and conduct our annual business meeting.

Attendance is free, but we encourage everyone to pre-register. Honor Choir music packets will be available for purchase for $20 at the workshop (limited to the first 30 attendees). Cash or check is preferred; credit cards will be accepted with a small processing fee. We hope you will join us for a morning of professional learning, collaboration, and fellowship.

2027 Elementary Honor Choir
The 2027 Elementary Honor Choir Audition Packet has been distributed via email and should provide everything you need to begin preparing your students. Additional information about the audition submission process will be presented during the Fall Workshop on September 12. Please remember that teachers must be current SCMEA members in order to submit students for the Elementary Honor Choir.

Please keep these important dates in mind:

September 14: Audition submission portal opens
October 9: Audition submission deadline
November 8: Honor Choir rosters released (no later than)
December 11: Registration deadline

Thank you for your continued dedication to music education and for the countless ways you inspire your students each day. I look forward to seeing many of you this fall and wish you a wonderful school year filled with meaningful musical experiences, professional growth, and lasting memories.

Musically,



Ginny Capps, *President*

BAND

Dear Friends,

Welcome to the 2026–2027 school year with SCBDA!

I hope your summer provided you with time to rest, recharge, and reconnect with the people and experiences that inspire you. As we begin another year together, I am excited about the opportunities ahead and grateful to be part of such an outstanding community of music educators.

What we do every day is incredibly meaningful. Through music, we have the opportunity to help students discover their talents, develop confidence, build lasting relationships, and learn the value of perseverance, teamwork, and commitment. The performances are certainly something to celebrate, but the growth we see in our students along the way is what makes this profession so special.

One of SCBDA's greatest strengths is the way we support and learn from one another. Whether you are beginning your career or have been teaching for many years, you bring valuable experiences and ideas to our organization. When we share our knowledge, celebrate one another, and work together, we strengthen band programs across South Carolina and create even greater opportunities for our students.

As you begin this school year, I encourage you to celebrate the small victories, appreciate the relationships you build, and take time to recognize the difference you are making every day. Your influence extends far beyond the rehearsal room, and the impact you have on your students will last long after their final performance.

Your SCBDA Executive Board is honored to serve you and is committed to supporting our directors, strengthening our organization, and continuing to provide outstanding opportunities for our students.

Thank you for the passion, dedication, and heart you bring to this profession. It is a privilege to serve alongside you, and I look forward to all that we will accomplish together.

Here's to an inspiring, rewarding, and memorable 2026–2027 school year!



Dr. Adam Shuech, *President*



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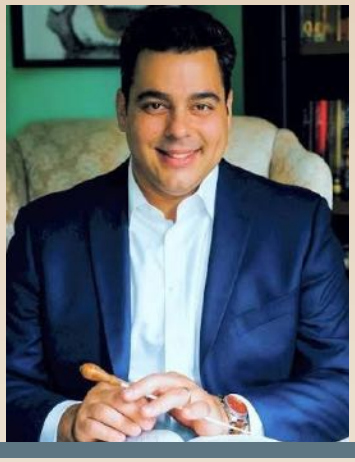
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Thinking Like Athletes in the Music Education Space

Changing Our Narrative Around College Recruiting to Keep the Music Alive



Eytan Wurman is the Founder and CEO of CommonTime Pathways (CTPathways.com) - a platform connecting music students and families with college recruiters and hundreds of millions in music scholarships nationally. Eytan was a middle and high school music teacher in the Boston and Cambridge Public Schools before becoming the Director of Fine Arts in the Dedham Public Schools in Massachusetts.

My son, at 3.5 years old, signed up for mini-kickers soccer in our typical suburban American town. The kids were having occasional toddler meltdowns and falling on top of the ball as often as successfully kicking it, yet a pop-up ad was waiting for me when I downloaded the app to communicate with the coach and families about field assignments. "Want to get a scholarship to play sports in college? Sign up for NCSA today! Click below for more information." I was stunned.

I spent twelve years in the classroom trying to convince my students to keep music in their lives when they go to college. I spent those same twelve years trying to convince parents, school counselors, and school principals to help me - only ever with mild success.

We are appropriately proud of our students who commit to being music majors or simply continuing ensembles after high school, but for years and years I've watched our cultural narrative expect that merely being an athlete is enough to warrant a college scholarship while for most of us musicians the same narrative sounds like "you'll never be good enough". Why the dichotomy?

~Messaging~

Fourteen years in advance of college applications the athletics narrative was pommeling me with messaging about sending my kid to college with a sports scholarship, and without a doubt these scholarships are getting ridiculous. If you don't think so you should do a search on the internet for a news story about two high schoolers from the Denver area in 2024 who got full rides to college to play cornhole…no…I'm not joking…cornhole…as if it's a skill more worthy of recruiting than music.
We have to address our messaging, and I mean hard. We can't forever live on top of the pedestal proclaiming that music is good for personal and intellectual development. It is! Of course it is! But that message isn't cutting it anymore. It's time to take music to the bank - literally.

According to the Massachusetts Cultural Council the arts and culture sector of the US economy is calculated at more than 1.4 trillion dollars. Performing arts college scholarships are expected to top $5 billion dollars this year while according to the NCAA D1 and D2 athletes will only be awarded $3 billion dollars. It's no mystery to most of us that music can pay for college and provide a path to economic stability as an adult, so it's time to double down and change our narrative.

Instead of just saying
"You can always join an ensemble for community when you get to college"
you can also say
"But you can also network with a college music director when you're 14 and 15 years old so that they know who you are. Maybe they'll earmark scholarships for you and boost your chance of admission when the time comes."

Instead of just saying
"Music is something you love so you should stick with it"
you can also say
"Music is going to get you more scholarships than financial aid alone, so don't leave that money on the table"

Instead of just saying
"A career in music is really hard - not a lot of people make it"
you can also say
"But it's just like anything else difficult. If you want to be a doctor you need to spend years in medical school. Being a pro musician is just as doable as being a doctor or a lawyer."

~Convincing Ourselves and our Students~

If for one moment we think the student in front of us isn't worthy of a music scholarship we must remember the story of the two students from Denver who earned full-ride cornhole scholarships. I'm sure they are deserving, but we also need to process the fact that they got it mostly because their parents/coach/manager believed they could.

Will our students get a scholarship to Harvard for the French Horn? Probably not, but that doesn't mean they shouldn't have a full ride from another school in hand if they get waitlisted. Will the third row of clarinets get a music scholarship to study at Juilliard? Of course not, but that doesn't mean state schools, smaller private institutions, and more specialized colleges and universities won't give them two, three, or five thousand dollars a year to play in the marching band, the orchestra, or the jazz band. I haven't met a family that wouldn't like to have $20,000 over four years put back in their pockets.

As one final piece of persuasion consider that in 1990 everyone knew you had to attend one of seventeen high schools within a hundred miles of Notre Dame to get recruited to their football team. In the coming years athletics programs nationalized their recruiting pipelines and now Notre Dame can recruit football players from Florida, and Duke can recruit basketball players from Texas and California. That pipeline consolidation created March Madness and exploded the Big Ten. Imagine what it could do for the world of music.

~Musical Value in the College Admissions Process~

There is a tectonic shift coming in college admissions, and it's the result of what everyone is calling the Enrollment Cliff. If this is a new term for you, allow me to explain. During the market crash of 2007-2008 birth rates dropped significantly and that dip remained in place until 2014. The class that was born in 2007-2008 is this year's high school seniors, and between 2026 and 2033 there will be three million fewer college students in the US. That's a lot of programs struggling to stay afloat, and everyone sees it coming. The colleges are reframing their branding and marketing strategies accordingly, and that usually employs three methods of adaptability - differentiation relative to their peers, student retention and mental health initiatives, and direct admissions.

Music programs are receiving catered scholarship and fellowship money to support specialized programming as part of the differentiation landscape. This year the University of Massachusetts Lowell is aiming to give out twenty new choral fellowships to the incoming class. Other programs across the country are doing the same, and this is all in an effort to make those schools attract students to smaller specialized programs that can give them resources, a community, and a quality education.

"...between 2026 and 2033 there will be three million fewer college students in the US."

With regards to student retention and mental health, we all know music students are made of stronger stuff than their peers. We know they have grit. We know dedication, community, integrity, and empathy are the hallmarks of the music room. We also know that these are qualities that colleges and universities are seeking desperately. Mental health in colleges is a pandemic all on its own, but people with good support systems (musical or otherwise) can cope and heal faster than those without. Perhaps this is why the differentiation tools are targeting our student musicians disproportionately, but all to our advantage as a profession of music educators.

Lastly is the new trend of direct admissions. Students whose families agree to share their data online in protected databases for the purpose of recruiting are receiving offers of admission prior to submitting formal applications. You read that right…students in September and October of senior year are receiving admissions offers from colleges trying to get ahead of the curve. Students outside of athletics are getting signed as early as freshman and sophomore year for specialized programs that are trying to build program pipelines outside of traditional marketing capabilities. On the Common App alone,

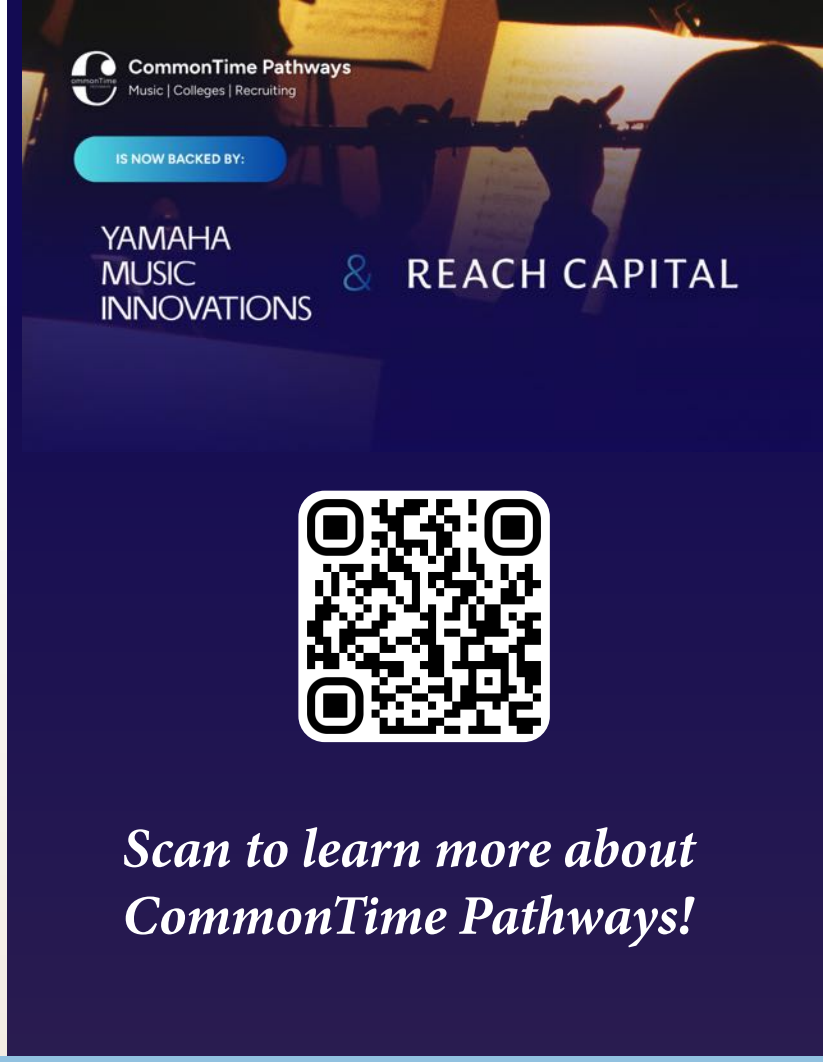
direct admissions grew from 70 colleges in 2023 to 117 colleges in 2024 with the number expected to grow even faster this year.

~Conclusion~

Now is the time to talk about musicians like athletes, and while acknowledging the athleticism of today's marching bands we can say it has nothing to do with physical prowess. Musicians are worthy of advanced and preferential admissions with attached scholarships specifically because they are musicians and have all of the most valuable skills of their athletic peers and then some.

But now I'm preaching to the choir, so before I get off my soapbox please allow me to distill these thoughts one more time:

Music can pay for college whether the kid wants to be a music major or not, and all we have to do as music educators is start talking about it that way and showing them how.



Want to be featured in the next edition of the SC Musician?

Featured Winter Topic: Anonymous Confessions

Honest reflections on the parts of teaching music we don't often say out loud.

- Things you're still figuring out
- Midyear doubts or burnout moments
- Lessons learned the hard way
- Funny moments where you just had it all wrong

Scan to learn more!

Standing Columns:

- **Rehearsal Fixes That Work** - Tips & Tricks to try with your ensemble.
- **30 Second Warm-ups** - Things to add to your warm-ups that make all the difference
- **Quiet Wins** - Highlight something going on in your program or someone else's that deserves sharing!

Seasonal Columns:

- **One Thing That Actually Worked** - Something unexpected that worked well for you.
- **Why This Piece Didn't Work** - You picked the perfect piece that became a flop. What went wrong?

New Teacher Survival Notes

Keep Recharging Your Battery: Tips on First-Year Work-Life Harmony

Dr. Isaac Brinberg

The first year of teaching is an emotional rollercoaster, even in the best of situations. I was very fortunate to start my teaching career as an assistant director at a strong middle school program in Indiana. My head director (who I am still very close with) provided support and perspective by sharing stories of his first-year teaching. This helped calibrate my emotional response to student achievement and progress since as a first-year teacher, my self-esteem was closely tied to my students' success and failures. I also learned to accept it is perfectly normal (and encouraged!) to emulate great teachers. Again, my self-esteem was tied to being original and innovative as a teacher. Many of the issues you may experience as a first year teacher have existing solutions and resources. Why reinvent the wheel? The key is adapting the resources to fit your particular teaching situation. It is okay to use paths that already exist.

Create clear work/life harmony through healthy boundaries. Physical exercise and hobbies outside of the profession go a long way to feeling your best while teaching. For me, I found social salsa dancing as a hobby and went once a week with friends outside of the profession. I also limited the amount of time I spent on schoolwork during the weekends. However, I scheduled time on Sunday to sketch out classes for the coming week so I would have a framework for my more detailed lesson planning during the week. Planning ahead, meal prep, and other weekend prep saved a lot of time during the week. The first year of teaching is a marathon, so pacing, planning, and recharging are all critical elements towards longevity in the profession!

Physical Musicianship: The Missing Link in Ensemble Performance

Dr. Susan Wines

In music education, we often prioritize tone, articulation, phrasing, and musicality as the hallmarks of strong performance. Yet beneath these visible outcomes lies a foundational element that is often assumed or frequently underdeveloped: how students physically engage with their instrument. This concept, referred to here as physical musicianship, is the coordinated and efficient use of the body in support of musical performance.

While traditional musicianship emphasizes what students know and artistic understanding, physical musicianship addresses the physical means by which that artistry is executed. When overlooked, students may struggle with consistency, endurance, or injury, regardless of their musical understanding.

Why Physical Musicianship Matters

During daily rehearsal, directors frequently encounter students who compensate physically to address technical challenges. A clarinetist may collapse through the torso, a trumpeter may elevate the shoulders during inhalation, or a violinist may rely on excess tension for stability. These patterns are not simply technical; they are physical habits that influence sound production and efficiency.

Research in performing arts medicine indicates that maladaptive physical habits, inefficient postural alignment, and repetitive strain are contributing factors in performance-related musculoskeletal disorders (Fry et al., 2016). Additionally, forward head posture and shoulder misalignment have been associated with increased strain in the cervical spine and upper extremities (Dutton, 2012). While injury prevention is one concern, the more immediate issue for educators is that these habits limit tone, control, and endurance.

Physical musicianship aligns naturally with our standards for developing independent, expressive performers. While the standards prioritize tone production, technique, and expressive qualities, these outcomes depend on efficient physical execution.

Tone Production is directly influenced by posture, breath support, and tension management.
Technical accuracy relies on coordinated, efficient movement patterns
Expressive performance is enhanced when physical demands do not inhibit musical intent.

By addressing physical setup alongside musical instruction, educators strengthen the foundation upon which these standards are achieved.

From a motor learning perspective, repetition strengthens both musical and neural pathways. When students practice with poor alignment or unnecessary tension, they are not simply "making mistakes," they are encoding those patterns neurologically.

Horvath (2010) emphasizes that musicians must learn to "play without unnecessary effort," highlighting the importance of efficiency rather than force. Similarly, movement-based pedagogies such as the Alexander Technique and Body Mapping advocate for awareness and re-education of habitual movement patterns.

For directors, this reinforces a key principle: students do not simply practice notes; they practice how those notes are produced.

Assessing Musculoskeletal Coordination in the Classroom

One of the challenges for educators is that physical inefficiencies are not always immediately visible. Teachers can begin with simple observational questions:
Is the student's head balanced or projected forward?
Are the shoulders level and relaxed?
Is the instrument supported efficiently, or compensated for through tension?
Are movement patterns economical, or exaggerated and effortful?

Practical Strategies for Music Educators

Integrating physical musicianship into instruction does not require a complete overhaul of the curriculum, additional class time, or specialized equipment. Instead, it can be embedded into daily rehearsal routines.

1. Normalize Physical Awareness: Begin rehearsals with brief posture and alignment checks. Simple cues such as "balanced head," released shoulders," and "grounded feet" can create immediate awareness.

2. Prioritize Setup Before Sound: When addressing tone or technical issues, first evaluate the student's physical setup. Many performance challenges originate from inefficient positioning rather than a lack of effort.

3. Use Slow Repetition Strategically: Slower tempos allow students to monitor tension and coordination. This is especially important when introducing new material or technical passages.

4. Reinforce Efficient Movement: Acknowledge and model ease in performance. When students demonstrate fluid, tension-free playing, reinforce it as a marker of sturgeon technique.

5. Address Habits Early: Physical habits develop quickly, particularly in beginning and middle-level ensembles. Do not assume students will "grow out of" poor posture or inefficient technique. Early guidance and correction prevent long-term challenges or the need for extensive retraining at advanced levels.

Implications for Long-Term Musicianship

When physical musicianship is consistently reinforced, ensemble outcomes improve in measurable ways. Students demonstrate greater endurance during rehearsals, a more stable tone, and increased technical reliability. Perhaps most importantly, they gain the ability to focus on musical expression without being limited by physical inefficiency.

Conclusion

Physical musicianship is an essential, yet often underemphasized or overlooked component of music education. By intentionally addressing principles of posture, alignment, and movement efficiency in our teaching, we equip students with skills that extend beyond the rehearsal room. We are not just training young musicians, we are developing sustainable, life-long performers.

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More Than Rules:
Building an Orchestra Culture That Inspires Excellence

Dr. Sharese Pearson-Bush, Author
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Dr. Sharese Pearson-Bush is an educator, orchestra director, instructional leader, and doctoral researcher committed to empowering students through meaningful music education. Her work focuses on creating inclusive learning environments where musical excellence and student growth develop hand in hand.

Mr. Jason Bush is a math educator and graduate researcher dedicated to fostering academic excellence and motivating students toward success in high-stakes assessments. His work emphasizes creating inclusive learning environments that build conceptual mastery, support diverse learners, and develop both mathematical proficiency and strong character.

Walk into a thriving orchestra classroom, and you'll notice something immediately. Students aren't just playing notes; they're collaborating, taking risks, asking questions, and encouraging one another. While strong classroom management is essential, the most successful music programs are built on something much deeper than a list of rules. They are built on a culture of learning.

For many years, music classrooms relied on traditional expectations such as "Raise your hand," "Stay in your seat," or "Don't talk while the director is speaking." Although these expectations certainly have value, today's students thrive when classroom norms focus on personal growth, critical thinking, and artistic ownership.

The following six classroom principles have become the foundation of a learning environment where every student, regardless of ability level, feels safe to learn, fail, improve, and perform.

1. Celebrate Your Mistakes
Mistakes are often viewed as something to avoid. In the orchestra classroom, they should be viewed as evidence of learning.

Students who fear mistakes often stop taking musical risks. They play softly, avoid challenging passages, and become dependent on the teacher for reassurance. Instead, celebrate errors as opportunities to diagnose, adjust, and improve.

When a difficult rhythm falls apart, or an entrance is missed, resist the urge to simply correct it. Instead, ask students:

· What happened?
· What did you notice?
· What might you try differently next time?
Over time, students begin viewing mistakes as stepping stones rather than setbacks, creating resilient musicians who continue growing long after rehearsal ends.

2. Make New Mistakes
If students are making the same mistakes every rehearsal, little growth is occurring.

Encouraging students to make new mistakes shifts the focus toward continuous improvement. Every rehearsal should stretch students slightly beyond their comfort zone, whether through more advanced literature, sight-reading, improvisation, or leadership opportunities.

Growth happens at the edge of ability. When students are challenged appropriately, mistakes become evidence that learning is taking place.

3. You Know More Than You Think You Do
Many young musicians underestimate their abilities.

Whether preparing for sight-reading, tuning independently, or solving rhythmic problems, students often possess more musical knowledge than they realize.

Instead of immediately providing answers, ask guiding questions:

· What patterns do you recognize?
· Where have you seen this rhythm before?
· How might your section solve this together?

These conversations build confidence, independence, and musical decision-making. Eventually, students begin trusting their own musicianship instead of waiting for the conductor to provide every answer.

4. Ask Interesting Questions
Curiosity is one of the greatest indicators of meaningful learning.

An orchestra rehearsal should be filled with thoughtful questions:

· Why does the composer mark this phrase differently?
· Why should the violas lead this entrance?
· What emotion are we trying to communicate?
· How can balance improve this section?

Questions like these move rehearsals beyond note accuracy and into artistry.

When students become comfortable asking thoughtful questions, rehearsals transform into collaborative musical conversations rather than one-way instruction.

5. Explain Your Thinking
Musicians often know what they hear but struggle to explain why.

Encouraging students to verbalize their thinking strengthens both musical understanding and ensemble communication.

Instead of asking, "Was that better?" consider asking:

· What changed?
· Why did that improve?
· What did you hear differently?

These discussions reinforce music literacy, listening skills, and analytical thinking while helping students become reflective performers who can evaluate their own progress.

6. Honor the Performance
The performance begins long before the first note.

Students should understand that honoring the performance means respecting the audience, fellow musicians, directors, composers, and the music itself.

This includes:
· Professional stage presence
· Respectful concert etiquette
· Focus during rehearsals
· Pride in preparation
· Gratitude for every performance opportunity

When students recognize that performance is an act of service rather than self-promotion, concerts become meaningful experiences for everyone involved.

Beyond Classroom Management

These six principles create something far greater than orderly rehearsals; they cultivate resilient learners, confident performers, thoughtful collaborators, and compassionate leaders.

Music educators have a unique opportunity to teach far more than scales, rhythms, and bowings. Every rehearsal becomes an opportunity to develop perseverance, curiosity, communication, confidence, and respect.

Long after students forget individual concert repertoire, they will remember how their orchestra classroom made them feel: challenged, supported, valued, and capable of achieving more than they imagined.

Perhaps that is the greatest performance any music educator can conduct.

Change My Seat

Gilbert Wermelling

I love the circle carpet in my classroom. Much of my first class sessions revolve around getting to and exiting from the circle carpet. Students walk into my classroom from the hallway and process directly to the circle carpet. I find that this allows me to capitalize on the way homeroom teachers structured the line. Ideally, students are already positioned in such a way to minimize distractions and behavior challenges. As the year progresses and homeroom teachers change line orders to accommodate classroom dynamics, these changes are preserved in my classroom.

However, there will always be times when students may need to switch where they are sitting around the circle carpet in order to avoid distractions or behavior challenges. I also tend to know when this will need to happen within the first minute or two of class. Switching seats in a circle carpet can be tough for students, physically and emotionally. It's very conspicuous, and usually requires another student to switch seats with you or for other students to scooch to make room.

For these reasons I always play "Change My Seat" with my students for the first several weeks of school. It is a brief echo song using SMD solfège that we sing at a piano dynamic before I select two students "at random" to quickly switch seats through the middle of the carpet while other students are challenged to stay totally silent (This also helps me reinforce student names). We can blast through a full round that gets to every student in 5 minutes or less, and just like that the circle is rearranged to optimize behavior and participation.

We don't always play Change My Seat in music class, but when I do pull it out it's nice that students experience a fun game while they are secretly being set up for success.

Scan for PDF of "Change My Seat" Song

Why Schools Should Start a Tri-M Music Honor Society Chapter

Kevin McLellan

In today's educational landscape, where programs are constantly asked to justify their value, music education continues to stand as one of the most impactful experiences a student can have. Yet, one of the most underutilized tools for strengthening music programs and developing student leaders is the Tri-M Music Honor Society.

Tri-M is more than just an honor society it is a structured, student-led organization that recognizes musical achievement, academic excellence, leadership, and service. Sponsored by the National Association for Music Education, Tri-M gives music students a platform to grow beyond the classroom and make meaningful contributions to their schools and communities.

Building Leaders Through Music

One of the most powerful aspects of Tri-M is its emphasis on student leadership. Members are not simply participants they are planners, organizers, and ambassadors for music education. Through chapter meetings, service projects, and outreach performances, students learn how to lead with purpose.

Whether organizing a community concert, mentoring younger musicians, or supporting school events, Tri-M students gain real-world leadership experience. These are the kinds of skills that extend far beyond band, choir, or orchestra they prepare students for college, careers, and life.

Strengthening Music Programs

Starting a Tri-M chapter can transform a music program from strong to exceptional. Chapters create a culture of accountability and pride. Students begin to hold themselves and each other to higher standards both musically and academically.

Tri-M also encourages increased participation. Students become more invested in honor bands, auditions, performances, and daily rehearsals because they understand they represent something bigger than themselves. The result is a program that grows not just in numbers, but in quality and commitment.

Service That Makes an Impact

At its core, Tri-M is rooted in service. Chapters are required to complete service projects, which often include performing for the community, supporting local events, and promoting music education.

These service efforts do more than check a requirement they build connections. Schools with active Tri-M chapters often see stronger relationships with their communities, increased visibility for their programs, and greater support from stakeholders.

Recognizing Excellence

Students work hard, and they deserve to be recognized. Tri-M provides a formal way to celebrate students who excel in music and academics while demonstrating strong character.

Induction ceremonies, honor cords, and national recognition opportunities give students a sense of accomplishment and pride. For many, being a member of Tri-M becomes one of the most meaningful parts of their school experience.

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The Power of the Pivot

Nicolas Arguello Nino

One thing that unexpectedly made a huge difference in my string classes was teaching students to pivot with the left hand instead of treating every finger like a separate movement.

At first, I focused heavily on finger placement and accuracy, but many students still struggled with tension, weak tone, and inconsistent intonation. What finally clicked was helping students understand that the left hand should move as a balanced system.

By pivoting, I mean allowing the hand and arm to make small natural adjustments between fingers and strings instead of stretching or locking the hand in one fixed position. Pivoting looks different on every string instrument. Violin and viola students may use smaller adjustments, while cello and bass players often need larger arm movement and weight shifts. But the goal is the same: balance and flexibility.

I also realized this is a major part of building a strong technical foundation early on. Pivoting is not only about movement — it is about how the weight and balance of the hand naturally shift toward a note or position. Once students feel that balance, they begin exploring the instrument more freely and with less tension.

Almost immediately, I noticed:
Fuller, more resonant tone, better intonation, less squeezing and finger pressure, and more relaxed left-hand posture.

One simple slow finger-pattern exercise helped students hear and feel the difference right away.

What surprised me most was how quickly students became more confident once they stopped forcing the hand to stay rigid.

Sometimes the biggest breakthroughs are not complicated. Sometimes it is one small physical concept that suddenly helps everything else make sense.

Hidden Gem: Selections from Princess Mononoke Arranged by Kazuhiro Morita

Will Jung

Selections from Princess Mononoke is arranged by Kazuhiro Morita that features the compositions of Joe Hisaishi from his score to the movie of the same name from Studio Ghibli. Although it comes at a higher price tag compared to many other accessible works, it's a small price to pay for the rights to a score from an internationally renowned movie studio.

The arrangement features three main movements: Legend of Ashitaka, Demon God (Ta Ta Ri Gami), San and Ashitaka in the Forest of the Deer. The first movement is a suspenseful setting that leads into the heavy furioso of the second. Lastly, the medley ends with an absolutely gorgeous ballad. One does not need to be familiar with the movie to appreciate the emotional writing by Morita and Hisaishi.

Educationally, this ten minute medley covers a wide variety of performance styles, tempo, and dynamics that I feel many students will enjoy learning from. The movies of Studio Ghibli are popular amongst the younger generation.

For those who may not be familiar, studying this work will introduce them to a world of captivating aural fantasies from the teamwork of Joe Hisaishi and Hayao Miyazaki, fortunately made available by Kazuhiro Morita.

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