

Middle School Outreach Ensemble proudly presents....

THE VAULT

MSOE Weekly Newsletter-Dr. Erik Johnson, Director Heather Ewer- Editor

April 4th, 2018

Substance over Perfection

Musical perfection is never possible. You cannot expect your students to be perfect, especially at the beginning band level! It is important to realize that while you may strive towards perfection, you have to be aware that you cannot demand it of students. Always be sure to challenge your students to the best of their capabilities, but support them when they make a mistake (wrong note, incorrectly counted rhythm, missed accent..). Instead of being disappointed in them, use it as an opportunity to grow. Ask students questions like “How am I able to help you with this so that you will feel more confident on it next time?” or “What do you feel you are struggling with the most?”. We are there to support and help our students grow- not only as musicians, but as individuals as well. –Nicky Tisdall, Trumpet Teaching Artist



MSOE Carnival!

THIS Saturday at the UCA in Fort Collins!!!

**April 7th– 9 a.m. to 1 p.m.
Registration begins at 8 a.m.! And...IT IS FREE!**

All middle school students are welcome! Come participate in clinics such as: “Creating Movie Music”, “Experience the Blues”, “Making Your Reeds Work for You”, “Musical Jeopardy”, “Rhythm Twister”, and more! See you there!

Social Justice-Play it Forward!

As many people have discussed before, it can be difficult to find ways to incorporate “Playing it Forward” into the sectionals in ways that make sense musically! With some combined ideas between suggestions from mentors and peers, I have found a strategy that my students have grown quite fond of! In our sectionals, we practice honoring each other’s ideas. I have students suggest what they want to do musically with pieces, and after we play as a group, we break down what we accomplished and what we still need to work on. After that, we evaluate how well we did with honoring their peer’s suggestion. If they believe they can do better work, we play it again with more effort to better match what the original suggestion was! It is creating a community of musical collaboration and I can see the musicianship developing more and more within these students each time we meet! - Alex Salek, Clarinet Teaching Artist



Why Music?

Walking back to my dorm about a week ago, I was approached by a representative of a particular religious group (which I will keep hidden). He began to speak to me about certain aspects of the religion and whether or not I believed in them. Being a part of the overall religion he was a representative of, I gladly agreed to talk with him and engaged in a rousing discussion. However, this discussion soon turned into a debate as he began critiquing my own perspectives. Eventually, we parted ways in a stalemate, agreeing to disagree with one another, and wished each other well – albeit half-heartedly. Returning to my dorm, I began pondering the ideas of the representatives within my own religion and how often they were very circular in their thinking.

Now before you continuing scrolling, I write this not as a slight against religion or holding religious beliefs, but this experience caused me to look at how we, as teachers, approach validating music logically. We too enter into this cycle of circular thinking in our approach to answering the question of “Why music?” When we teach, we often make decisions about music for the sake of music (to make it sound better, be more authentic, etc.). I do this all the time – if I hear a wrong note from the saxophone section, see incorrect posture in my private lesson students, or even I flub a rhythm in my own practice, I fix it. If one of these students asked me, “Mr. Dutch, why do I need to do this?” I would most likely answer with, “Because it will make the music sound better” or “It fits with the style of the piece” or something similar. Students rarely probe further, and this is where the questioning ends, but what would happen if a student asked, “Why is that important?” This gets to the essence of music education and even music itself. It is easy to answer the question of **why** are we making this musical choice, or playing the correct pitch or rhythm, or even sitting with correct posture because our answer is a musical answer – because it will **benefit the music**. But how do we respond when a student asks, “Why music?” or something else related to that question.

If the answer is one based in music, we are doing a disservice to our students. One of the most common answers is that music allows us to express ourselves through the medium of sound. This is absolutely important and should be shared with our students, but this is not always the strongest answer. So many activities are mediums for self-expression, not exclusively music – and in an age of pluralism, anyone can self-express through anything and feel satisfied. Music is not the sole answer. Digging deeper and finding this ultimate “why” is crucial to our teaching because it provides a concrete foundation for our craft. It provides context, clarity, and, most importantly, logical reason to support why they are doing what they’re doing and accepting the decisions we are making in their musical education. While they might understand what, where, and how they are getting to a certain goal, they do not know why; and therefore, they have no reason to get there. The question then becomes, how do we as teachers logically arm ourselves to answer the question of “Why music?” without becoming entrapped into a cycle of circular logic? By no means do I have the answer, but I will attempt to offer whatever I can.

Music has meaning, all of us experience this – this is why we do what we do. We find an intrinsic motivation within ourselves to pursue music because it is meaningful to us. But in reference to our students, we must be careful with how this meaning is articulated. Leonard Meyer, the author of *Emotion and Meaning in Music*, articulates the idea of musical meaning quite clearly in essay aforementioned:

“... Anything acquires meaning if it is connected with, or indicates, or refers to, something beyond itself, so that its full nature points to and is revealed in that connection.’ Meaning is thus not a property of things. It cannot be located in the stimulus alone. The same stimulus may have many different meanings. To a geologist a large rock may indicate that at one time a glacier began to recede at a given spot; to a farmer the same rock may point to the necessity of having the field cleared for plowing; and to the sculptor the rock may indicate the possibility of artistic creation. A rock, a word, or tone in and of itself, merely as a stimulus is meaningless... They become meaningful only in so far as they point to, indicate, or imply something beyond themselves.” (34)



Why Music continued...

To answer the question of why music, we must foster these connections in ourselves and in others. They must point to something beyond music itself. The answer to why music, is not music for music's sake, but the connections to external objects we find intrinsically significant (but not music or the external object alone). The reason why we find ourselves struggling as teachers to foster this is because our external object for "why music" is educating others. We see the opportunity as teachers to use music to teach others external values for becoming a more complete (whole) citizen and student. Rarely will students realize and make the connection that music is making them a better person – and not all of them are capable of seeing music in this light. We must draw out their ability to make personal connections in their own lives, not impress upon them our perspective as the outside teacher. If we can accomplish this, our students latch onto music forever for reasons that provide them with a foundation that cannot be shaken, a bedrock upon which the efficacy of music will not be shifted.

In MSOE, we can start with the Social Justice Theme: *Playing It Forward*. This does not mean by telling our students how our music connects to the theme, but instead allowing them to understand how to make their own connections between the two. We must use Reimer's "Four Pillars" to do so because if playing and making music (Praxialism) alone fails, often one of the others will succeed. If students are not understanding how playing the music we have chosen will *Play It Forward*, perhaps allow them the opportunity to discuss the significance of how audience members (especially those who might be going through difficulties) might be impacted by hearing *Song of Hope*. Referentialism is powerful because it can immediately take us to a place outside of the music. What if students are not resonating with the Social Justice Theme at all? Strive to help them make connections with the music in general first, then incorporate the Social Justice Theme.

Experiment. Try new things. Try to push beyond the social justice theme as well, some students may find it difficult to grasp that concept. We owe it to our students to provide them with the ability to create a firm foundation in their own minds for the efficacy of a life-long relationship in music. This is not the only answer. I encourage you try to find your own. Just try not to fall on the adage of explaining musical choices because it makes the music better (although times where we are short on time we might resort to this tactic). Go forth and teach, your students are waiting! Go MSOE! - Andrew Dutch, Saxophone Teaching Artist

Supplemental Readings:

Meyer, Leonard B. *Emotion and Meaning in Music*. Univ. of Chicago Press, 1985.

"What Music Cannot Do." Seeking the Significance of Music Education: Essays and Reflections, by Bennett Reimer, Rowman & Littlefield Education, 2009, pp. 5–14.

Trivia is my favorite thing!

Welcome to the trivia column of the MSOE 2018 Vault! Each week, there will be at least two questions. Sometimes they will be multiple choice! Submit your answers to heather.ewer@colostate.edu, and correct answers will earn you a raffle slip in the hat for a prize! Drawings will be held during our Wednesday night meetings!

Trivia Week #9:

1. When you were in middle school, was it more challenging for you to:

A. Read notes correctly

B. Read rhythms correctly

2. What are strategies you or a teacher used to improve your skills?

3. Which of the following drummers IS NOT also a singer?

A. Phil Collins

B. Karen Carpenter

C. Buddy Rich

D. Ben Folds

Letter from the Editor-

“Out of the box...out of the box. (modulation!) Out of the box, out of the box!” Not just a catchy title song from an early 2000’s kids’ television program, this idea is important for you to remember while you teach! You have tried and tried and tried some more to get your students to play that Eb in tune, or to count that syncopated rhythm correctly. They still are not getting it. What ideas can you conjure up that lie just outside of your musical box? You only have two more sectionals left! It is time to try something new! You have many options that I bet none of us have even thought of yet! And the best part is, if you heard an excellent strategy from your peers at the last meeting (I know I did!)- USE IT! Teaching is borrowing ideas from others and seeing what works for your students! Have fun thinking out of the box this week!

Stay excellent everyone!

-Heather Ewer, Associate Program Director



Contact Us-

Please send submissions
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Questions?

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Go MSOE!!!!!!