

# The Vault

## MSOE Weekly Newsletter

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## The Suitcase Theory

**M**iddle School wasn't that long ago for some of us teaching artists. Many of us can still recall our early memories of music and the craze that accompanied learning a new instrument. One of my clearest memories from middle school was drama class. I remember acting out a scene that involved a very heavy suitcase. One of my peers was trying to show the suitcase was heavy by leaning into it when our teacher stopped the scene. He explained that when we carry heavy items, like the suitcase, our natural habit is to lean against the weight and fight against the weight. Never to give into the weight. The suitcase theory is about how, we as a society and humans, always fight to reach a goal. When there is a passion or a goal, we will fight against the weight.

Over the past few weeks this is something I have continued to see inside each MSOE student, teacher, and admin. A fight against the weight. The weight of the world holding us back from in person events, classes, and music. Yet, every week students from all across Colorado continue to show up and participate in MSOE. For many students, this is their only opportunity to play and explore music with other students. My own students and I have been taking this opportunity to explore musical topics we normally wouldn't get to discuss in a full music class setting.

The act of 'Keeping Music Alive' in today's society is all rooted in the passion each student and teacher has to fight against the hardships and obstacles. Instead of letting the social distancing and online courses drag them down, they look past that and find ways to have fun and be musical.  
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## The Suitcase Theory (continued)

Each week my students explore new musical topics we normally don't get to talk about in regular classroom settings. One week we had fun making our own variations of a theme by composer Benjamin Britten using a website called *Variation Playground*. Over the past seven weeks we have had fun playing our piece "Vibin'" and discover found percussion. It has been a blast seeing my students and all MSOE squads learn, grow, and overcome!

- **Maya Reno, Percussion Teaching Artist**



CSU PERCUSSION WORLD MUSIC CONCERT,  
MARCH 21ST, 2021 @ 6PM. FIND TICKETS [HERE](#).



## Teaching Tips from Brandon

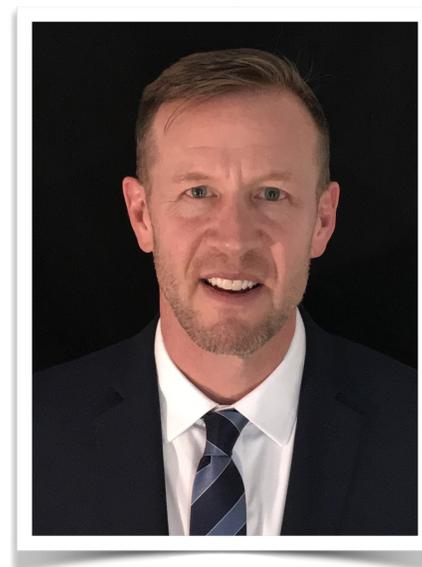
- ▶ **Breakout Rooms:** In working to build a section identity and community at MSOE, I have found a fun way to use breakout rooms in a bit of a different way! Especially during social justice work, I like to send my students into breakout rooms in pairs to answer the question of the week. I don't ever go into the breakout rooms to check on them, but trust them to have made progress and actually talked to each other. When they come back, it's really interesting to have one student answer for the other to help encourage making connections.
- ▶ **Building Relationships:** Next week, I think we should keep focusing on building relationships not just with the students, but give them a chance to make connections with each other! Many sections are starting to get close to the point where they are ready to record their music, so you may be tempted to address only musical issues, but don't be afraid to take the time to let your students just have fun!
- ▶ **Reducing Teaching Talk:** Try not to think out loud if you get stuck on something! Just take a second to process what is happening and what your next steps could be and move on.
- ▶ **The 3 C's:** Be **competent** at what you're doing and what is happening, be **confident** in your teaching and yourself, and be **compelling**. These will help get your students to be as invested in the learning as possible.

- **Brandon Graese, Trombone Teaching Artist and Feedback Leader**



## Be Our Guests: Meet Our Week 7 Master Teachers!

**Craig Westwood** is in his 13th year as Director of Bands at Cherry Creek West Middle School and serves as an Assistant Band Director with the Cherry Creek High School Marching Band. Prior to taking the position at West, Mr. Westwood was Director of Bands at Wheat Ridge High School for 9 years where his Marching Band was a state finalist each year. He holds an Undergraduate degree in Music Education from Colorado Christian University and a Masters Degree in Conducting from The American Band College at Southern Oregon University. Mr. Westwood is an active clinician/adjudicator in Concert, Jazz and Marching Band in Colorado. From 2013-2017, Mr. Westwood served as a guest conductor at the Lebanese Band Association for the Promotion of Music (LeBAM) International Band Camp held near Beirut, Lebanon. He is a member of the Colorado Bandmasters Association, Colorado Music Educators Association and Phi Beta Mu and is an active performer in the Denver/Boulder area as a Percussionist, primarily playing drumset. Craig has performed with a variety of artists including Bo Diddley, "Pinetop" Perkins, Big Bill Morganfield, Don Lanphere, and The Boulder Philharmonic. A native of Colorado, Mr. Westwood grew up in Littleton and graduated from Columbine High School.



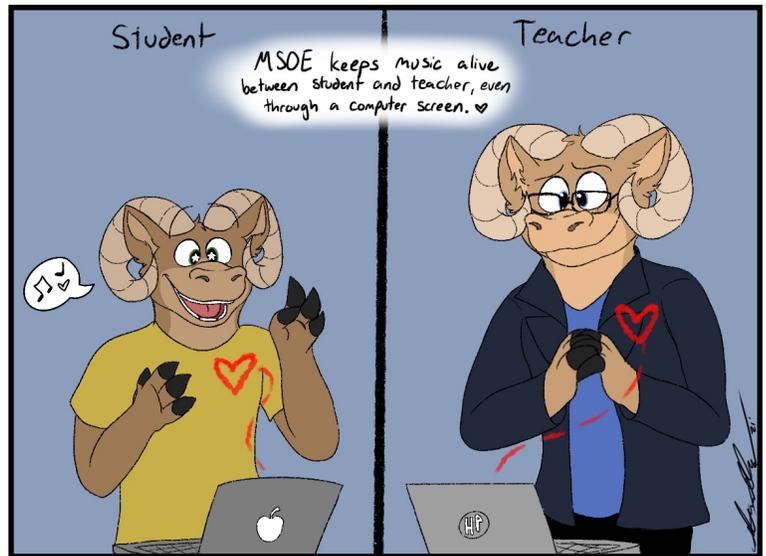
**Danielle Johnson** is currently in her 17th year teaching orchestra in the Adams12 Five Star Schools in Westminster and is sought after as a guest clinician and adjudicator along the Front Range. An active freelance performer, Johnson plays associate principal viola in the Steamboat Symphony Orchestra. For 12 years, she spent the summer months as Dean of Women and Interdisciplinary Faculty Instructor for the string chamber music program, Rocky Mountain Summer Conservatory (Steamboat, CO). The last 10 summers she conducted internationally in Europe (Voyageurs, Int.) and the Middle East (Lebanese International String Orchestra Workshop). In 2013, Johnson was named Colorado's "Music Director Who Makes a Difference" by

the publication, *School Band & Orchestra*. In addition to teaching orchestra at Mountain Range High School, she also conducts the Front Range Youth Symphony at the Arvada Center. Previously, she taught for Wheaton's pre-college program outside Chicago, Illinois, the International School of Bangkok in Thailand, Boulder Suzuki Strings, and the public schools in Omaha, Nebraska and Northglenn, Colorado. Johnson received her Bachelor of Music Education from Wheaton College Conservatory in Wheaton, Illinois, her Masters in Violin Performance/Pedagogy at the University of Colorado at Boulder, and her Suzuki certification/apprenticeship with William Starr.

## First Teaching Experiences

When a music education major starts their journey in learning to teach at CSU, normally they are able to observe teachers in the classroom. For me, this experience has not yet happened. Because of the unpredictability of the past year and the unexpected pandemic, college has been a little different. Even most of my own classes have been online, and the education experience on both sides has been largely different this year. For a first year teacher to start learning how to educate in a world of online learning is definitely a challenge, and it applies completely to MSOE. MSOE is on a completely virtual platform this year, so to have MSOE as my first teaching experience is different for sure. Music is not the same through a distorted microphone as it is in a room together. But the successes of MSOE online have been absolutely incredible. The challenges that overshadow this year do not negatively affect MSOE and the achievement of our students and teaching artists and staff. For my first group of students to be through a screen, it has been incredibly inspiring and educational for me. At the beginning of the MSOE season, we had a training session to prepare us for what is ahead. Our staff had us grab something to draw with and on, and they asked us to draw what they think MSOE means to us. When I thought about what MSOE means to me, I didn't have any other teaching experiences to go off of, so I thought ahead. I drew what I foresaw MSOE being to me, and looking back at this drawing I realize I was right. The drawing depicts two characters, one representing me and the other representing my students, connecting over music despite things being virtual. Music brings people together no matter where they are or how far the distance is between them. MSOE has been an incredible first teaching experience, and I cannot wait to see what my students will do next.

- **Alexa Hudson, Trumpet Teaching Artist**



### FROM THE EDITOR: CHANGED FOR THE BETTER

I've been thinking a lot about one of Dr. Johnson's reflection prompts from last week: "How have I seen my students change, and how have they changed me as an educator?" As I reflect on my goals for students and the change I have hoped to instill in them, I often forget about the change they have instilled in me. This reflection prompt was an excellent reminder of how much we have to learn from our students. And while we hope that we have impacted them along their musical journey, don't forget to soak up all they have to offer you as well. Anybody else feel like quoting the musical *Wicked*? "Because I knew you, I have been changed for good!"

- **Maddy Cort, MSOE Assistant Program Director, "The Vault" Editor**

