



# THE VAULT

The official newsletter of CSU's Middle School Outreach Ensembles (MSOE) 2023



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## *Fragile: A Musical Discussion of Mental Health*

Rachel Nieves, Conductor and Teaching Artist

Mental health is an important topic in our world today, especially for middle schoolers. According to the World Health Organization, one in six adolescents between the ages of 10 and 19 is struggling with some form of a mental disorder, yet many of these go unnoticed. This season, Ram Band is performing *Fragile* by Randall D. Standridge- a piece that is dedicated to those who feel hopeless in their mental health battle.

My goal in teaching *Fragile* is to normalize conversations around mental health. Only when adolescents feel safe to talk about their mental health will we be able to find a solution as a society. This topic is heavy and hard to talk about, but it is necessary for us to delve into with middle schoolers, in a place where they feel safe. This week in Ram Band, we will each take a moment to dedicate our playing to someone we know (or even ourselves) who is struggling with their mental health. This exercise will be done privately and will give students a chance to reflect on the people in their community.

In our society, talking about mental health is becoming more and more normal, and we can continue in this trajectory by teaching people at a young age that it is okay to share their struggle. One practice that I use to encourage this is the mental health check-in. First, I have students close their eyes, next I have them answer three questions on a scale from 1-5. These questions can be answered on their fingers or silently in their minds. The questions are as follows: how is your week so far? How is school going? How are your friendships and relationships? And how is MSOE going so far? This exercise gives students an opportunity to reflect and unwind.



**Continued on page 2**

## Fragile (continued)

After every check-in, I remind students that they should talk to a trusted adult if they are struggling. Other ideas to encourage mental health communication with middle school students include journals, peer sharing, highs and lows, and professional vulnerability.

Once we begin to talk about mental health, we can take small steps in our classroom to help improve our students' mental health. Of course, these do not replace professional care, but they may make the school day more manageable. The first simple strategy is starting class with a brief meditation. There are several kid friendly meditation resources available on Youtube. Another option is to incorporate movement into your teaching. Sitting all day can cause exhaustion, irritability, and exacerbation of depressive feelings. Movement can look like a 'Just Dance' game, switching up seating for a rep or two, or a five minute sunshine break.

Struggling with mental health symptoms can make school difficult for students. When we meet these students in a place of empathy and compassion, we give them a safe space to grow and work through their symptoms. We have an amazing opportunity to make someone's day every day through simple mental health practices.



Rachel Nieves conducts "Fragile" with the Ram Band

If you or anyone you know is struggling, call the Suicide Crisis Line- 988 or Colorado Crisis Services 1-844-493-8255. These are 24-hour, toll-free, confidential suicide prevention hotlines available to anyone in suicidal crisis or emotional distress. You can learn more about the resources for mental and emotional health at CSU by visiting <https://health.colostate.edu/mental-emotional-health/>



## Building Community and Connections

Lucy McCrossan, Feedback Leader and Teaching Artist

This is my second year participating in the MSOE program, where I serve as a Teaching Artist in the Aggie Band, a Feedback Leader, and a Mentor to two Trying on Teachers. I really enjoyed gaining hands-on experience at teaching middle schoolers during my first year of MSOE last year, and I am so excited to see what more I learn during this upcoming season. As I approached this MSOE season, I thought a lot about how I want to build both community and connections. MSOE is amazing in that it brings together middle school, high school, and CSU students from Northern Colorado all together, and it is our job as staff in MSOE to build this community.

During my first week of MSOE, I was really excited to meet my students and start forming a relationship with them. I really wanted to establish a sense of community within our sectional room, so we took the time to do some group bonding. We went around the room and found three things we all have in common: we all have siblings, we have all been ice skating, and we all like pizza. From here, we came up with a group name! After much deliberation, we landed on the name "Fantalastic Floboes" and from here, we created group name tags. Every week, my students are starting to engage with each other and with me more, and I am looking forward to seeing how we continue to build community throughout the MSOE season.

I am also fortunate enough to be a Mentor to two Trying on Teachers for MSOE this year. Being a Trying on Teacher is a great opportunity for high school students to get experience at teaching music to students, and I am so happy that I am able to assist them with this. So far, my Trying on Teacher has led a warm up, and I am excited to see how they do with leading music rehearsal in sectionals! I have really enjoyed being able to pass down my knowledge to my Trying on Teachers, and I am looking forward to seeing their growth throughout this MSOE season.

Finally, I am really grateful that we have the opportunity to hear from Master Teachers each week. Getting both individualized feedback and hearing general advice from music teachers who have been working in the field has been really valuable. Each week, I write down key takeaways from the Master Teachers, so that I have resources to look back on. I now know more music educators from Colorado, and can even take the time to go and observe their classrooms. MSOE is truly an incredible program in that it provides CSU music education students with hands-on opportunities at teaching and brings together middle school students who love making music into one community.



# Meet Our Master Teachers!



**Melissa Claeys** has been teaching for 19 years, and has been the Orchestra Director at Boltz Middle School since 2014. Prior to this position, her career has spanned all three levels of instrumental music. She has directed groups at the elementary, middle school and high school level. At all levels, her groups have a history of receiving Superior ratings at festivals and achieving prestigious honors and championship awards at both the State and National level. Mrs. Claeys received her Bachelor of Music Education and Performance degrees from Fort Lewis College in Durango, CO in 2003. She graduated Summa Cum Laude and also received the Educator of the Year Award in Music. In 2008 she received a Master's Degree in Integrated Arts Education from the University of Montana. Earning this degree allowed her to become more educated in other passions of hers as a performing arts educator which includes dance, drama and music collectively. Not only is Mrs. Claeys a music teacher, but she is a dance instructor as well, currently teaching the only middle school dance program in Poudre School District at Boltz Middle School. Outside of the orchestra classroom she has also coached Winter Guard and her groups have medaled several times at the State level and have won a State Championship. Currently, she is also the choreographer for the Boltz Middle School Musical Theater program. Aside from teaching music, Melissa Claeys' other passions revolve around being a wife to her husband Jason, and mom to her three children Emmalene, Annaliese and Remington. As a family, they enjoy spending time outside on their boat up at Horsetooth Reservoir, scuba diving and just living life to the fullest— together.



**Phuong Nguyen** received his Bachelor of Music Education degree from Colorado State University and learned from such greats as Dr. Charles Lawson, Dr. Gary Moody, and Dr. J. Steven Moore. He also received his Masters of Music in Conducting at Colorado State University, studying with Peter Sommer, Wes Kenney, and Dr. J. Steven Moore. While at CSU, Phuong was awarded the David Paul Knight Scholarship for Jazz, the Award of Highest Distinction at the CSU Research and Creativity Symposium, and was a Senior Honors Recital recipient. Phuong currently plays saxophone and performs with the Fort Collins Wind Symphony, Twelve Cents for Marvin, Choice City Seven, the Fort Collins Jazz Friends as well as a slew of side projects. With more than 20 years of experience performing in Colorado rock/jazz/ska/reggae bands, he has performed with famous rock bands, Vietnamese pop stars, and has even starred in a few short films!

Mr. Nguyen has been honored to be a clinician in music programs all over Colorado, and his bands have performed at the Colorado Music Educators Conference. Aside from teaching at Boltz Middle School (the best middle school in the world!), Mr. Nguyen also teaches private lessons and coaches students in the Youth Music Collective, a group of high school rock musicians from all over Fort Collins.

Phuong currently lives in Fort Collins, Colorado, with his beautiful wife Nicole Wilshusen and two lovely daughters, Claire and Ella. He likes to hike, ride motorcycles, snowboard, play basketball, and watch cheesy action movies. Oh, and he's a huge Star Wars nerd.



Conductor Paul Beyer leads the MSOE Orchestra



Teaching Artist Ethan Dunkerton takes a moment of respite during a saxophone sectional

## THE SEED BANK

The Seed Bank is ever-expanding- new teaching techniques and resources are always being added!

Check out what's growing by visiting [https://tinyurl.com/2p8jp37c!](https://tinyurl.com/2p8jp37c)

## Letter from the Editor

The winter just keeps on giving, and its icy roads and poor visibility caused us to cancel last week's MSOE, but warmer weather promises more music making and community building this week!

We're all excited to get back to teaching and learning this week, and I think I speak for everyone when I say I'm looking forward to Spring!

