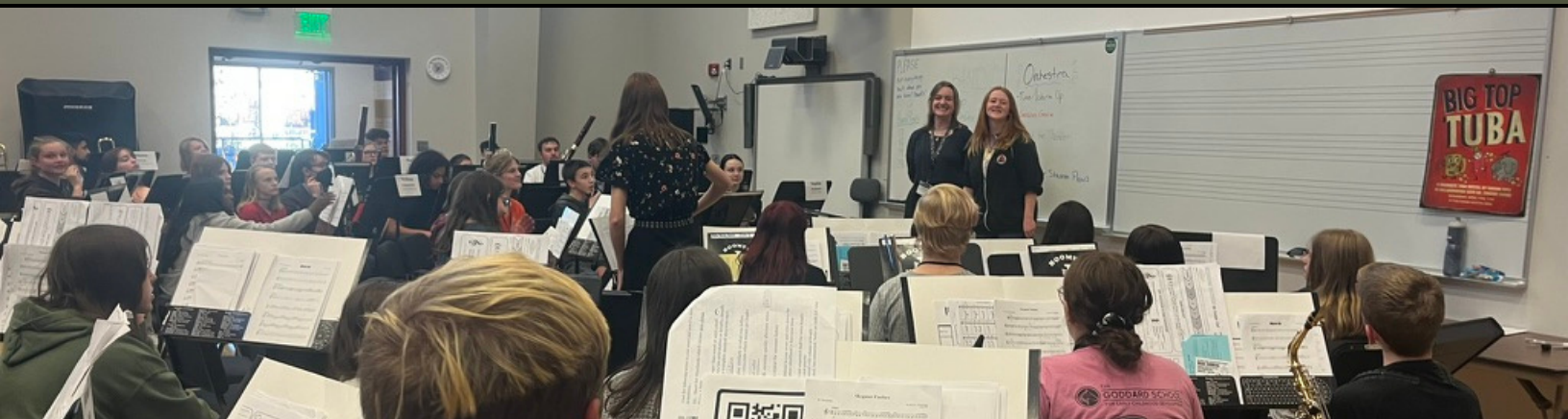




THE VAULT

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



“Bringing the Groove”

Zeke Graf
Teaching Artist

We are nearing the concert date, and students are beginning to get excited for it, as well as nervous. This not only goes for students, but Teaching Artists and Administration as well, who want the concert to run as smoothly as possible. There are a lot of tense faces as you look around the room at our weekly Friday Meetings, that we are nervous despite knowing that it is going well. Well, this article will hopefully shed some light on not getting so caught up in the concert planning process that we forget that we get the chance to groove and make great music together.



Picture this; You are in your high school’s symphonic wind band, and you are getting ready for your fall concert, and you are particularly excited about this one. Usually, you would act like this is another fall concert, and you just get the chance to play some music with your friends. But you are excited, because in August, you had just gotten a brand-new instrument, and this would be the first time you would be performing with it! But as you prepare in the band room before you take the stage, you notice that your instrument has a key that is not quiet bending all the way down, preventing you from accessing the entire range of your instrument. In other words, you cannot use it! You must use the school instrument that you have played for years, and it sounds nowhere near as good as your own. You perform with it, and afterwards you leave the stage disgusted and gross about the performance, as it was not even close to your best.

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This is the exact experience I had last fall of my senior year, and all of this happened to me. I felt horrible. It might have been one of the worst performances I have had in my career. I was out of tune, out of time, and overall, just out of my normal “Zeke Juice” (Passion). I assume that some of you can relate to this experience. Something happens during the week, or before the concert, and we get so caught up in everything wanting to be perfectly smooth that when something like this goes wrong, we lose the wonder of the music we are making with the people around us and focus on our problems and how “bad” we are.

So how do we find that wonder when nothing goes perfectly, like “poetry in motion”? We all perform. I have never met a musician that does not perform, whether that be teaching, playing, singing, recording, the list continues. So, what do we do? We do not assume perfection. It is not going to be perfect. I just watched Nick Hinman’s Lecture Recital on Julie Giroux’s Symphony No.6 “The Blue Marble”, and it was as close to perfect as you can make it. It was so perfect that if he had not messed up a passage towards the end of the recital, I did not know if he was human. It was too good. See, if it goes perfect, then it is not human. Mistake-free life is not real, and neither are mistake-free performances. Otherwise, we are not human. So, we should accept the fact that it will not be great, so we can let some things go.

Another way that I hope you all really take from this is that we are all musicians. We are people, and we get the opportunity to groove, and find the beauty of performing. There is no greater privilege for all of us than to be able to teach music and perform music. We get the opportunity to have a wonderful time with our friends and colleagues on stage, doing what we love and showing the audiences what we have gotten, which is all that our students in MSOE want. When we want perfection, we lose the joy of performing. Experiencing the joy of performing is the true essence of the humankind. So, instead of expecting “these notes to be in tune” and for “this rhythm to be in time” here. It will, it will not, but you should enjoy the music.

This last week in my sectional, we talked about what each of the pieces meant to us. One of my students had mentioned that the first and third movements of the song “Three Czech Folk Songs” had a nice groove to it, and he really enjoyed playing the piece even though it was not perfect, and it was not spectacular, but it has a groove, and is still fun to play. So that is my recommendation to you, teachers, performers, and conductors everywhere. Enjoy the music. Enjoy the time spent with your peers and students because it does not last forever. And as always, bring the groove.

“The Importance of Jazz Education”

William Edmundson
Teaching Artist

While most of you might know me as one of MSOE’s clarinet teaching artist, and primarily a clarinet player, it might surprise you that I am actually mostly focused on jazz saxophone and the philosophy of education surrounding the concept of improvisational music, particularly relating to the field of jazz.

The American music education has a heavy leaning for the teaching and pedagogy relating to classical European music. If you look at any of the massive top colleges in music they all are acclaimed for their classical departments and receive a lot of praise. When I mention the school Juilliard, most people think about all these famous classically trained violinists, but in reality, they’re one of the top jazz schools in the country. Wynton Marsalis brings in young musicians from Juilliard to play in his ensemble for tours. All of this is to say that music education leans really heavily into the classical realm and does not give jazz music the attention that it deserves.

The main reason for this occurring is simply because jazz in academia is incredibly young. One of the first schools to have a jazz studies degree was University of North Texas in 1947. Since jazz academia is so recent in the academic world of music, the job then falls upon us as educators to help maintain the tradition of jazz and improvisational music in educational space.

There are so many reasons that jazz needs to be perpetuated in our music programs. Jazz has several different rhythms that don’t happen as often, typically syncopated rhythms like the charleston, claves, hemiolas, and inverses of these rhythms. These rhythms typically are highly syncopated which requires the students to feel comfortable with subdivision and allows them to be much more comfortable playing highly syncopated music across all styles. Jazz music also gets students to use a different, more relaxed embouchure which lets them get a brighter tone. This allows for students to gain a wider color pallet from how they produce tone.



One of the most important reasons for jazz education from a musical perspective has to be familiar and capable with improvisation in music. Improvised music can lead the students to learn about form, chords, scale and chord relationships, and understanding jazz vocabulary to start building up a large bank of information. Improvisation has personally helped me in several classical situations. Within my solo repertoire, I have messed up in the past and been able to improvise my way back onto the page through my use of understanding of form and harmonic structure which I learned from jazz improvisation.

Jazz has an incredibly rich history, being one of the first genres of music made entirely in America, there is so much history to be shared. Jazz had it rough, it came from an incredibly marginalized community and had its beginnings as a solidified genre during times of segregation and incredibly strong racism in America's political and social views. Having discussions around this important historical content is really important for our students to know how jazz got here, and also how jazz currently affects our current popular music in genres such as funk, blues, rock and roll, R&B, and most recently, rap music.

So how do we educators help continue the tradition of jazz, for starters having a jazz band class is so incredibly important for our students. But if your school does not have the funds for a full jazz band, be sure to try and program jazz music for your large ensemble, or at least music in a jazz styling so they are aware about all the same topics even if they are not able to have the full jazz band experience. Be sure to take a day out to teach them things like improvisation, jazz articulations, how to listen to jazz, and potentially encouraging jazz transcriptions for solo and ensemble activities. All in all, jazz education teaches your students about different styles, different cultures, and opens their minds to more musical concepts. It can push them, but it also can excite them to be pushed. Hopefully you add jazz to your future plans as an educator.

“Diverse Programming”

Ethan Barker

Teaching Artist

According to the National Association for Music Education, over 80% of music educators identify as white. That, when compared to the statistic that 45% of students are white, paints a confusing picture. How did this happen, and how is it still happening today in the 21st century, an age of increasing awareness of equity and inclusion? As music educators one of our highest responsibilities is choosing well-rounded, engaging music for our students. We hold the expertise and experience that makes us the most qualified for this job and typically directors spend hours selecting repertoire for their students. When music directors search for music, they usually pull up a few popular websites, JWPepper or Sheetmusic Plus, where they are immediately greeted by the best ‘standards’ or ‘classics’ on the front page. This all seems great! The website is making the directors' job easier by suggesting music that fits all the criteria. The only issue? Most of the music only represents a specific group, often white composers. This creates mass underrepresentation because so many music educators are white, and therefore a student's sense of representation in the classroom can only come from the composer of the works.

One instance of this issue can be seen in the 1930s, in which many black composers were creating prolific works that inspired many and frightened others. Composers such as Samuel Coleridge Taylor and William Dawson created awe-inspiring works that had audiences stunned. This music impressed many and scared more, causing it to be hidden from the spotlight and only performed rarely to not be spread to the public. So how does this relate to the percentage of white teachers compared to students? It's all about students feeling seen and represented in their classroom environment.

According to John Hopkins University Students who feel represented in the classroom are 13% more likely to enter college. This is immensely important, and it's the exact cause as to why so many music educators are white. The composer's name in the top right corner of the literature I've played almost always sounds like mine, and therefore I feel very represented in my music classrooms, but this comes at the cost of minorities who only ever see a few works composed by people whose names sound like theirs. The solution is, at a base level, programming music from diverse composers. But we've been doing that for ages, curating concerts with all-black composers for black history month and putting women in the spotlight during Women's history month.

All this diversity is great but only programming works during a month or week of celebration for that minority could be considered tokenism and sends a message to your students that they should only be represented during that time. While I know no educator is directly trying to tell their students that they should only be represented during a single month, this is the message that can subconsciously be relayed and it's detrimental to the feeling of representation for students. I think this issue is as simple as programming diverse music throughout all concerts and not making it the theme of the concert. Let's say hypothetically you program 5 works at a concert, why not make a conscious effort to program 3 diverse composers, that way when your students read the name of the composer and it sounds like theirs, they feel represented. Music is one of the most vibrant and beautiful programs in a school, and everyone deserves to experience its beauty. By making more students feel represented and included we can do just that, slowly making the demographics of music educators look more like the demographics of their students.





Prior 2024 MSOE Master Teachers

Thank you to all of these teachers for making this a great season of MSOE!

Week #2

Katrina Hedrick - Colorado Music Bridge, Director of Education | Spur Music Lab, Program Director |

Joshua Greiner - Preston Middle School, Orchestra Director | Northern Colorado Youth Orchestra, Co-Director |

Dr. Cody Gifford - Carol Morgan School, Dominican Republic, Director of Instrumental Music | Alexander Technique Specialist

Week #3

John Hermanson - Fort Collins High School, Orchestra Director | Chair of Colorado ASTA Large Group Orchestra Festival

Alex Koster - Windsor Charter Academy, Band & General Music Teacher

Week #4

Melissa Claeys - Boltz Middle School, Orchestra Director | Boltz Middle School, Musical Theater Choreographer

Week #5

Dr. Ingrid Larragoity-Martin - El Sistema, Executive Director | Conservatory Orchestra of Denver Young Artist Orchestra, Conductor

Danielle Johnson - Front Range Youth Symphony, Conductor | Steamboat Symphony Orchestra, Associate Principal

Week #6

Aaron Herman - Fossil Ridge High School, Band Director

Dr. Seth Pendergast - Colorado State University, Assistant Professor of Music Education

Week #7

Phuong Nguyen - Boltz Middle School, Band Director

Kathy Van Wert - Bill Reed Middle School, Band Director | Mountain View High School, Assistant Band Director

Liz Richardson - Greeley Central High School | Loveland High School, Woodwind Instructor

Week #8

Dana Kettlewell - Lincoln Middle School, Band/Orchestra/Drama Teacher

Rose Dunphey - Lewis-Palmer District 38, Retired Music Teacher | Bitterroot Community Band, Drumset Player

Leanne Griffey - Kinard Core Knowledge Middle School, Orchestra Director | Private Instructor