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In this edition:

Reflections on Community, Mentorship, and Growth

Paul Haarala, Teaching Artist and Graduate Teaching Assistant

I have truly appreciated my time with the MSOE program over the past two years. Through both the assistant program director (2024) and associate program director (2025) roles, I have been entrusted with a wide array of activities—coordinating weekly planning meetings, organizing nightly logistics, guiding concert preparation, mentoring undergraduate students, conducting the orchestra, and countless other tasks. While you have likely heard perspectives from middle school, high school, and undergraduate perspectives about MSOE, I wanted to take a moment to share my perspective on the organization as a graduate student and senior administrator of the program.

Through my time in MSOE, I have grown not only as an educator, but a leader as well. The administrative responsibilities I took on—whether navigating last-minute changes, coordinating with the senior admin team, or supporting undergraduate instructional planning—gave me a newfound confidence in my ability to manage complex systems and set others up for success. I'm leaving this role with a sharper eye for detail, awareness of both global and local perspectives of an organization, as well as a strong belief in empathetic leadership in music education. One of the most rewarding parts of my experience was mentoring undergraduate students. These future educators brough such enthusiasm, insight, and creativity to the program. Supporting them as they led sectionals, engaged with students, and reflected on their own growth as teachers was rewarding. In many ways, mentoring others enhanced my own self-efficacy—I saw my own development mirrored in their personal victories. I was reminded of how powerful it is to be part of a learning community where teaching and learning flow in both directions.

I have also seen how MSOE can serve as a meaningful bridge between empirical research and practice. There is often a divide between empirical music education research and what teachers are actually doing in their classrooms. For me, it was a fascinating experience for me to learn about various empirical research in my graduate studies—on motivation, identity formation, human development, instructional practice—and see them embodied within live, week-to-week experiences within students of all levels. It was particularly rewarding to see teacher identity begin to form within the high school ToTs. By giving them the opportunity to teach and lead, MSOE empowered these students to begin envisioning themselves in educational roles, perhaps for the first time.

MSOE's ability to create individual success, personal relationships, and student agency capitalizes on how competence, relatedness, and autonomy can positively impact student motivations (as defined by Deci & Ryan's Self-Determination Theory). Students at every level (middle school, high school, collegiate) were clearly energized by a sense of purpose and peer support that define this program. The environment fostered more internally driven motivations by making students feel seen, heard, and valued. It also encouraged them to take musical and educational risks and see themselves as a vital contributor to a larger whole.

Each year, it is essential for us to establish a positive and collaborative community within MSOE. This program exemplifies what it means to be a member of a Community of Practice—a space where shared goals, collective learning, and mutual respect drive personal and group growth. It is a truly complex and multifaceted community: middle schoolers gain musical confidence, high schoolers step into leadership roles, and undergraduates refine their pedagogical approach—all under the guidance of the senior admin team. This idea of collaboration is not just aspirational; we were all working towards the same goal, and that shared purpose brought over 100 people from different walks of life together.

As I reflect on my MSOE experience, I am filled with hope and optimism for the future of music education. Programs like this are vital—not just for developing strong musicians, but for setting the next generation of music educators up for success. Currently, the profession is suffering from a lack of teachers who are appropriately prepared for the job. When young musicians are given the chance to teach, lead, and collaborate in meaningful ways, they begin to see themselves as teachers, mentors, and advocates for music in their communities. I believe that if more students have access to programs like MSOE, we will see a new wave of passionate, skilled, and community-minded educators entering the field.

I am especially grateful to the senior administration team for their mentorship and support— Dr. Erik Johnson, Dr. Seth Pendergast, Dr. Christina Herman, and Professor Jessica Warner. Through our shared work, I believe that we have helped shape this experience into something truly special. MSOE has been the perfect complement to my graduate studies—an authentic benchmark that has allowed me to see how my own teaching philosophy and practice has evolved over the past two years.

In short, MSOE has been more than just a music program—it has been a community, laboratory for growth, and a powerful reminder of why music education matters. I am proud of what we've accomplished and excited for what the future holds for the MSOE program.

The Value of Change

Olivia Zenzinger, Teaching Artist

I love change.I acknowledge the importance of mundane consistency when it comes to scheduling and concerts, but I love the idea of changing how we teach. With this being my first time teaching and not observing MSOE from the outside, I've seen so many changes: the first being the teachers. While we have consistent senior administration staff from year to year, our teaching artists always change. This allows students to always grow and learn with someone different with a new perspective. MSOE gets new middle school students every year with their own unique identities, with the constant change in CSU teachers, the students will get to experience teaching from someone whose identity is similar to their own- hopefully providing a newfound confidence. There is the opportunity for us as students to implement new and creative strategies to aid our learning as well as of our students. The right strategies can only be found through trial and error, we are preparing for the challenges of teaching in the field, and the experiences we create prepare us for our future. Every week we have a balance of consistency and change to always learn ourselves while trying out new teaching styles as well as new ways to run rehearsals. This provides an aspect of learning for both the students and the teachers, it allows experimentation and new opportunities to listen to one another and learn in a new creative, and exciting way. This year we did not do a MSOE carnival. We decided as a collective to do a “Super Saturday” rehearsal to prepare the students for the concert and experiment with our setups, teaching, and fun ways for us to get to know the students and the students to meet someone new as well. As one of the leaders of the Super Saturday planning team, I loved getting to plan something different. We had so many ideas and this new opportunity to experiment taught all so much. Change is the way we learn and grow, embrace the change in our lives no matter the outcome- both good and bad will come out of it, but it builds the foundation of who you are inside and outside the classroom.

The Magic of MSOE

Gemma Petrucci, Teaching Artist

We often refer to music as a universal language. While it's true that music can transcend barriers, it's just as true that human connection can do the same. Watching students from different schools, backgrounds, and identities come together through MSOE to create something reminds us that unity is possible, and that art is one of the few forces powerful enough to bridge the divides we so often feel.

I joined MSOE last year. As a freshman choral student, I participated in the orchestra—even though I hadn't picked up my cello since I was the same age as the students I was now teaching. That season, I was blown away: by the dedication of my professors, the leadership of my peers, the brilliance of the students, and the unwavering support of local public school educators. It was clear to me then, as it is now, that MSOE is something special.

What may seem to some a large commitment– three hours every Wednesday night, two hours every Friday– to another means the world. For the middle school students, many felt as though it wasn't enough time. One choir student articulated this sentiment the moment we lined up in the hall following our performance– "Ms. Petrucci, why does it have to be over?"

In the grand scheme of the life of a college student, five hours a week is not much. But to a middle schooler, the three hours a week might as well be a lifetime. These last six weeks were an opportunity for students to experience music in a new context. Another student shared before the concert that she felt that the MSOE choir was her home. Her school's choir has eight students in it, so this was her first time singing with a large group.

These stories serve as a reminder of what makes MSOE so magical. MSOE empowers students to understand that their voice matters, not only when they sing and play, but when they speak, when they lead, when they simply show up. The impact of this work doesn't end with the final bow or the last note of a concert. It ripples, carrying into classrooms, homes, and communities. It lives in the confidence of a student who finally feels seen.

We've all seen what is possible when young people are given space to grow, to belong, and to shine. And for as long as MSOE exists, we will continue to protect and nurture that space. We thank you sincerely for this responsibility.

The Question of Emo Professionalism: "It's Really Not a Phase, Mom!"

Maddie Flanagan, Teaching Artist

Has your sixth grader's closet suddenly become less and less colorful? Do they wear a lot of black eyeliner? Is the only store they ever want to visit called Hot Topic? Do not fret—your student is just emo! This is a natural benchmark in any young adolescent's development. My Chemical Romance, spiked belts, and band tees have become your student's entire life, and that is okay.

When we think about professionalism, our minds often conjure images of suit jackets, slacks, and blouses. This mold of professionalism has not changed much since the generation of our parents and grandparents, and one thing that is decidedly not included in this mold is clothing often associated with alternative identities and fashion. Any of these identities, whether it be emo, punk, goth, or metalhead has lived in the casual side of fashion because of our collective association of these identities with youthful degeneracy. Fashion like this is meant to convey an individual's intentional nonconformity, something that is looked down upon when considering professional dress. But why should we promote conformity, when we all want our students to be able to take hold of their individual identity?

In an article by Deb Kavis about Corporate Goths, an interviewee named Angel Boyd explained that "I feel most connected to my goth identity in the way I express myself deliberately and confidently." Individual expression is extremely important, especially at the middle school age, where students are beginning to think about their place in the world and what this looks like. It is also very important to note the correlation between alternative expressions of style and gender identity and sexual orientation. Many queer individuals find themselves dressing outside of the mainstream for many reasons, including self-expression, community signaling, and challenging norms.

It is important that we, as teachers, are also able to express our individual niches through style. Through my experience with MSOE, I was able to experiment with my professional style in a way that still expressed my own identity as emo. While still fitting some parts of the mold that are important for modesty and appropriateness according to the age you are teaching, teachers are a student's first point of access to the professional world. If we are not able to show our students that people who look like them are able to be successful in the professional sphere, we are discouraging them from entering these spheres and putting a cap on what they think they can do. It truly warmed my heart to see myself in some of my students throughout MSOE. Those students told me that they were comforted and inspired by the fact that I dressed so differently from all of the other teachers, and my hope is that they will take this knowledge with them as they continue through their education and hopefully enter the professional sphere while still keeping their identity intact.

Expression of fashion is not just a statement, it is an expression of identity. If we are teaching our students to be proud of their individuality, we need to start with modeling our own individuality as teachers.

When Life Gives You Potatoes (ToTs)

Nick Hailey, Teaching Artist

I had the privilege to be one the ToT mentor team members this MSOE season and I couldn't be happier with my decision to be a part of the team. Our ToT (Trying on Teaching) program is a program that allows for high schoolers to get a chance to work with middle schoolers, get mentored by professors and teaching artists, and have a chance to step into the teacher role. The ToT program is one of my favorite parts of MSOE because I think it exemplifies one of the best parts of the program, which is the community and learning at every level occurring through the act of doing.

The community created this year between the ToTs was a really special thing. We had a stellar group of high schoolers who excelled at stepping into a leadership role and really gave it their all. They also were such a kindhearted group which led to some awesome relationships and community building throughout the MSOE season. One of my favorite memories of the ToTs this year was when during our 'Super Saturday' the ToTs were responsible for dishing out our food for the day to all the teaching artists and MSOE students. Watching the ToTs interact with the students was so cool to see, these high schoolers were so nervous at the start of the season and by this point they all were cracking jokes with the kids and just overall really beginning to act like a teacher to these students.

The ToT program also exemplifies a core aspect of MSOE, which is the fact that everyone from the MSOE students to the program director are learning through doing. I think the ToT program specifically exemplifies this because they are trying something for the first time and their learning is very clear to see. At the start of the season they are scared and unsure as to what they might've signed up for and by the end of the season they can keep students in line and give effective lessons.

The ToTs add so much to the MSOE community and it was such a great experience to mentor and learn from the ToT I mentored, and the MSOE ToTs as a whole.

MSOE Teaching Artists (Undergraduate and Graduate Students)

Ethan Barker
Cameron Becker
Olivia Calzaretta
Kathryn Carlos
Zuzu Davis
Aundrea Dugas
Anna Dunn
Audrey Farrar
Madelynn Flanagan
Matthew Fox
Zeke Graf
Nick Hailey
Caelan Herk
Alexis Highland
Kailey Jeffs
Cameron Kregas
Michael Millan*
Mateo Novoa
Juno Okins
Gemma Petrucci
Elise Renner
Andrew Ressetar
Alex Strobel
Triston Told
Freya Underwood
Arjen Wynja
Olivia Zenzinger

MSOE Administrative Staff (CSU Faculty and Graduate Teaching Assistants*)

Dr. Erik Johnson
Dr. Seth Pendergast
Dr. Christina Herman
Paul Haarala*
Jessica Warner

Meet our Trying-on-Teaching High School Participants!

Raymundo Barrera
Jacob Brown
Collin Carlson
Melinda Fullenkamp
Kacy Larson
Maya Leisz
Brendan McKellar
Savannah Morris
Hayden Mosley
Alexis Nyambe
Ian Rose
Rayya Saleeby
Sienna Vogel

A Note About the Editor

Jessica Warner began her study of the oboe with Andrea Mather-Stow at the age of 10 in South Bend, Indiana. She made her solo debut at the age of 17 with the South Bend Symphony Orchestra. Ms. Warner holds a bachelor's degree from the University of Michigan and received her master's from the University of Texas at Austin. In addition, she has also studied the Aspen Summer Music Festival for three summers with John Mack, Joe Robinson, Jeannette Bittar, and Pedro Diaz. She has held the position as English hornist in the Roanoke Symphony Orchestra and Peoria Symphony, and oboist of Western Piedmont Symphony, Auckland Philharmonia, and Pontiac Symphony Orchestra. Ms. Warner has performed oboe and English horn with many orchestras throughout the United States and abroad, including Boulder Philharmonic, Greeley Philharmonic, Fort Collins Symphony, Cheyenne Symphony, Charlotte Symphony, Winston-Salem Symphony, North Carolina Symphony, South Bend Symphony, Illinois Symphony and Monterrey (Mexico) Symphony Orchestra. Ms. Warner has been working as administrative assistant to the Music Education Department at CSU for the past 6 years, where she has had the opportunity to work with the MSOE program and multiple other endeavors. She also works at Laurel Elementary School as the strings director, where she teaches orchestra and modern band to some amazingly talented young musicians. She spends her free time making modern band arrangements, gardening, cooking, and spending time with her lovely family. If you would like to contact Ms. Warner, please feel free to reach out at Jessica.Warner@colostate.edu