



# A Few Short Essays

Thomas N. Gellert – The School Music News Editor

I have been ruminating for the past month over a meaningful editorial covering Thanksgiving, the holidays, the beginning of winter and the New Year. Each time I started to write I suddenly found myself veering off onto another topic. Perhaps this is only normal considering the huge number of concerns on all of our minds in these uncertain times. So, what follows is a series of short essay expositions that present some of the themes in my head right now.

### Difficult, frustrating times ... So, what else is new?

What would any of us do during these difficult days without knowing that there are others around us who are also struggling but are still always there for us?

Back in the late 16th century the Elizabethan playwright Christopher Marlowe penned the tragic play, *Doctor Faustus*, based on German folktales having to do with the title character, Faustus, selling his soul to Mephistopheles (a.k.a. Lucifer).

Mephistopheles at one point intones: "Solamen miseris socios habuisse doloris," that translated from Latin reads, "It is a comfort to the unfortunate to have had companions in woe" or roughly translated, "misery loves company." Applied to the here and now, Marlowe's observation is an understatement.

We may at times be miserable together but, it is only going to get better if we can collectively work together to climb out of the situation we are in. Stay safe, stay the course and stay focused on better days ahead.

### I've got those "Influenza Blues"

Oh, those feelings of hopelessness during these tough times. While we have much to be thankful for especially at this time of the year, it is nevertheless easy to be caught up in feeling that all is indeed not well, and we know things certainly are not normal. We'll always have music to remind us of the good and, yes, even the not so good.

It turns out that there really is an old jazz standard called *The 1919 Influenza Blues* that reflects on the awfulness of the Spanish Flu pandemic that walloped the world back in 1918 (just as World War I ended) and would continue on through 1919.

I'll spare you from the sad lyrics of this tune popularized in the 1930s (You can find the lyrics and sheet music on line). We know that music, even in times of supreme sadness, can remind us of the need to keep forging ahead. We will. You'll see to that.

### Music educators as "First Responders"

We are certainly thankful for our first responders: everyone connected with the medical profession, our police, our firefighters, our EMTs, our mail carriers, folks who keep our transportation infrastructure up and running, supermarket workers and anyone who plays a critical role in our day-to-day lives. By the way, this includes everyone in the education profession here in New York State. You are all "first responders" (and heroes)!

Many around us tend to forget just how quickly our profession responded to the pandemic last March. Today, eight months after the fact, I continue to marvel at the way we have persevered and just how our response has helped NYSSMA® to stay the course as well!

Our music education community remains very strong. We are resilient in a way that none of us ever could have imagined pre-pandemic. NYSSMA® will carry on through these tough times and will always be there for you. Thank you for your continued membership and for keeping music alive in our schools!

### Here's what my last fortune cookie had to say ...

"Being enthusiastic is contagious. Not being enthusiastic is also contagious."

### A favorite movie quote to share

"Sometimes, at the height of our revelries, when our joy is at its zenith, when all is most right with the world, the most unthinkable disasters descend upon us."

Author/Screenwriter Jean Shepherd,  
*A Christmas Story* movie, 1983

Here's to a wonderful and bountiful Thanksgiving, a very Happy Chanukah, Merry Christmas and Happy Kwanzaa and, to a very healthy, safe and better New Year in 2021 for us all! ||