



# Music Education's Future Is Bright

I knew that my March SMN article needed to be something centered around Music in Our Schools Month, a time when all things musical are celebrated in New York State schools. Typically, I have something started and I am able to break into my small bank of article ideas, but I have decided to start from scratch this month based on the events of the past few weeks leading into this statewide and national celebration of music education.

## Taking over soon

The college semester started a few weeks ago, and I have the privilege of facilitating student teachers when I'm not doing NYSSMA® business. I have a new Spring '23 cohort whom I share with my facilitator co-pilot. It has only been a couple of weeks, but we're off to a promising start to what will be a fabulous semester.

The student teachers have been timely with online work, enthusiastic about getting into the classroom, and thriving on sharing their love of music with children. Their high-energy approach to teaching music is exhausting to an old guy who hasn't been a part of that daily routine since his retirement from the public school music scene several years ago. I so admire their level of commitment to student teaching, and I am confident they will each have a long and successful career that celebrates Music in Our Schools Month for decades to come.

## Mentorship

Supervising these six student teachers are three cooperating teachers with whom I have collaborated in the past and three newbies that I am just now meeting for the first time. All six are exemplars of Music Educators in Our Schools. The service they provide to the children in their home school districts can never be overstated.



The music lessons that I have witnessed in the schools I have visited have included Irish folk dancing, a lesson on the Lunar New Year, a beginning flute lesson in which colorful duct tape on their folder is a reward for practicing, and lots of playing and singing using Orff instruments, solfege syllables and hand signs. These cooperating teachers have built music classrooms that are one-in-a-million. It has been an absolute privilege and pleasure to see Music in Our Schools alive and well in a variety of central and northern New York school buildings.

## Albany performances

This article would not be complete without my sincere congratulations to, and recognition of, the fascinating roster of performing groups selected to perform in the Empire Plaza Concourse during the month of March. These statewide musical ensemble(s) represent all of us by enabling our elected leadership and their staff to have the opportunity to see how important Music is in Our Schools. Thank you for representing NYSSMA® in its finest form.

## Festivals and collaborative ensembles

To say that Music in Our Schools comes in many forms would be an understatement! Post-pandemic county and zone festivals are happening all over New York State. These honor ensembles are examples of teachers and students going above and beyond the daily/weekly call of duty, making music education an even greater influence in the lives of their students.

This NYSSMA® president had the opportunity to visit a VERY rural all-county festival featuring two small contemporary ensembles. The festival included a small number of students, approximately 40-50 total, who were making music that was vibrant and electric. There were fabulous guest conductors, welcoming festival hosts, and NYSSMA® members were on every corner helping and planning for their next project.

One weekend later, Music, Milkshakes and MEANYC provided me with another musical experience not to be forgotten. On a single Saturday morning I was able to see an all-city high school band rehearsal, which was in a post-concert rehearsal and starting new music, a Salute to Music middle school choir with beautiful unchanged tone, and an all-city high school choir rehearsal where when I asked how many of the singers had sung a NYSSMA® solo, hands went flying into the air.

I then headed over to the MEANYC Middle School All-City Festival concert. I was greeted by old friends, new friends and four ensembles of middle school music making. These NYC music educators, many of whom are active and dynamic NYSSMA® members, have developed a well-oiled musical machine. There were more fabulous guest conductors, more welcoming festival hosts, and NYSSMA/MEANYC members in abundance helping out and planning for more exciting and thrilling musical opportunities for their students to enrich their musical education over the summer months.

Ed Chiarello took the Long Island lead, supporting and attending a variety of all-county festivals and concerts. He also had the opportunity to visit another state and watch students, teachers, adjudicators, and festival leadership in action using an in-person digital solo and ensemble platform.

David Brown has been doing the all-county and area all-state circuit. Daryle Redmond covered the Capital District All-County Festivals and is currently working on a collaborative musical theater program in which students will have the opportunity to perform in a collective professional urban setting.

Finally, Kathy Perconti celebrates and supports Music in our Schools every single day in western New York, working with her award-winning high school choir, directing, and producing her annual high school musical, and serving as a guest conductor at various festivals and venues around New York State.

## The next generation

One of the rewards of NYSSMA® leadership is the opportunity to work with our collegiate members and newer teachers. My time with them at the NYSSMA® winter conference was some of the best. I thank them for including us in their events.

As we celebrate Music in Our Schools Month, I cannot help but be intrigued and enthusiastic about the future of Music in Our Schools. These young music educators will take us into the future with a new, fresh and contemporary outlook, promising to make a real difference to the students they will serve. These teachers are excited and enthusiastic about bringing Belonging, Equity, Diversity and Representation (BEDR) into their music classrooms.

Many of my encounters with collegiate students and young teachers center around two different scenarios. Many times, group conversations are filled with young professionals who are eager to learn how to navigate real classroom experiences. The questions they ask are centered on culturally responsive teaching and how they can best understand the background and culture of today's students. We live in such a different world, and I'm confident that music education is in good hands. That said, we must continue to recruit and enlist more of these young educators moving forward.

The second scenario I see in this generation of music teachers is their helping hands. Have you ever wondered how all those chairs and stands get moved at the winter conference? The answer is simple. It is an exciting group of new music educators willing

to roll up their sleeves and get their hands dirty, all with the intent of promoting music education for the benefit of students in our schools.

## Tri-M

Lastly, allow me to send a NYSSMA® shoutout to our Tri-M chapters in honor of the day-to-day work they do in making a real difference in honoring music in their schools. When you go to the Tri-M website, you will find this mantra: In a phrase, perform, lead, and serve.

I ask you: how better can we celebrate the month of March than by acknowledging the work of our student musicians in outstanding music programs across New York State? For those attending the Eastern Division Conference in April, make sure you check out the exclusive Tri-M opportunities on Saturday, April 15, 2023. It is a day devoted to the efforts of Tri-M.

## Time to celebrate

In conclusion, I might suggest that Music is in Our Schools all day, every day. I ask you to join me, NAFME and NYSSMA® in celebrating a Month of Music that highlights and underscores the work each of you are doing in your classrooms. For us, March 2023 is a 50-year anniversary and it all started in New York State. I invite you to engage your school communities in promoting the benefits of a high-quality music education in the lives of your students. Take time to raise an awareness of the importance of music education for all children and to remind your school community that school is where all children should have access to music education. ||

