

NYSSMA® Ignites the Spark 50 Years Ago for New York’s Music in Our Schools Day, Now NAFME’s Music in Our Schools Month

A Look Back in Time

March 14, 1973, will always be remembered as a stellar day in the history of music education in New York State. Now, 50 years later in 2023, with a stroke of her pen, New York Governor Kathy Hochul joins past governors Nelson A. Rockefeller, Malcom Wilson, Hugh L. Carey, Mario M. Cuomo, George E. Pataki, Eliot Spitzer, David A. Paterson, and Andrew Cuomo in proclaiming the month of March as Music in Our Schools Month in New York State.

This 50th annual event, themed “Connect, Belong and Create” for 2023, had its roots on Long Island in the fall of 1972 as a day-long celebration sponsored by a variety of musical organizations. It was the first coalition that advocated for music education programs in New York State. The event would soon expand exponentially beyond anyone’s wildest dreams.

Through the efforts of a newly formed advocacy group titled “Music Belongs” comprising the music industry, the Nassau and Suffolk Music Educators’ Associations, the New York State School Music Association, the Music Bureau of the NYS Education Department and the Music Division of the New York City Schools, “Music in Our Schools” was established.

Lauren Kaiser, Educational Director of the Sam Ash Music Company, in a conversation with newly elected NMEA President William Kupferberg, decided that music dealers, publishers, educators, and instrument manufacturers needed to come together to plan a course of action to save the struggling world of music education. The event would go down in history as a true reflection of the early 1970s, when music education was in trouble in many New York schools.

From that initial conversation there came funding to aid an advocacy action plan to support the work of “Music Belongs.” Sam Ash Music, Lauren Kaiser, Bill Kupferberg, and Joseph R. Sugar were the four initial members of “Music Belongs.” This all happened with the endorsement and support of the music industry and the *New York Daily News* newspaper that was at the time in the process of starting a Long Island edition of what had become one of the major newspapers in New York City.

Momentum builds

Word spread quickly through school district music programs in the metropolitan New York area that a very special event was in the works for a single day in 1973 and because of the interest in this event, it was moved to the epicenter of the performing arts universe in New York, if not the entire nation and the rest of the world, New York City!

New York Governor Nelson A. Rockefeller issued an executive proclamation declaring March 14, 1973, would be observed as “Music in Our Schools Day.” The day was a spectacular event! It began with massed marching bands converging on Manhattan at Fountain Plaza at New York City’s Lincoln Center on Broadway to play the National Anthem. This was followed by a display of 60 examples of music education in the lobby of Philharmonic Hall at Lincoln Center. Additionally, a set of performing groups were given time on the main stage at Philharmonic Hall. There was even a musical performance at the top of the most recognizable landmark on New York City’s skyline, the iconic Empire State Building!

Just look at this impressive list of music educators who took part in the day’s celebration:

**Program: Music in Our Schools Day Lincoln Center, NYC
March 14, 1973**

**Session I-Demonstration Groups - 1:15 p.m. to 2:30 p.m.
(Site)**

1. Electronic Theory Laboratory: Hewlett HS - Dr. Benjamin Suchoff; 2. Steel Drum Band: C.S. 129X - Mr. Carlos Benjamin; 3. Piano Laboratory: P.S. 420; 4. Kalimba Workshop: P.S. 20K-JHS 117K; 5. Swiss Handbell Choir: P.S. 112M - Mrs. Joyce DeGrass; 6. Music Reading Through Open Court: P.S. 91K; 7. Humanities in the Classroom: Huntington Elementary School - Mrs. Elaine Panik; 8. Brass Ensemble: Syosset HS - Mr. James Donnelly; 9. Suzuki String Program: P.S. 149K Annex; 10. Percussion Ensemble: Hewlett HS - Mr. Stephen Work; 11. Guitar Class: P.S. 306K - Mr. Robert Walker; 12. Suzuki String Program: P.S. 119 K - Miss Trudi Hochberg; 13. Special Education Class: Wantagh Public School - Mrs. Clara Sugar/ Brass and Wind Ensemble: Wantagh Public Schools - Mr. Burton Klayman; 14. Dalcroze Exhibition: P.S. 107 M - Mrs. Peggy Barrett; 15. Renaissance Singers: Wantagh HS - Mr. Thomas Farmer; 16. Orff-Kodaly Demonstration: Syosset Public Schools - Miss Charlotte Chieffo; 17. Woodwind Quintet: Hudde JHS 240K; 18. Opera for Children: Garden City Public Schools - Dr. Helen Plinkiewisch; 19. Music Theatre: Farmingdale Public Schools

**Session II - Demonstration Groups - 2:45 p.m. to 4:00 p.m.
(Site)**

1. Electronic Laboratory: Taft HS - Mr. Emile Elberg; 2. Steel Drum Band: Bildersee JHS 68K - Mr. Marvin Rosenberg; 3. Piano Laboratory: P.S. 72M - Mr. Robert Henson; 4. African Music in the Classroom: P.S. 210K - Miss Mona Bassell; 5. Using Xylophones: P.S. 20K - Mr. Drayton; 6. Recorder Ensemble: Harborfields HS - Mr. Eugene Reichenthal; 7. Rock Chorus: Jericho JHS - Mr. Barry Alyn; 8. Brass Ensemble: Harborfields Public Schools - Mr. Donald Bernstein; 9. Classical and Flamenco Guitar: HS of Performing Arts; Obed Diaz, Classical Guitar - Mario Escudero, Flamenco Guitar; 10. String Ensemble: LS. 303K - Mr. George Saslow; 11. Guitar Class: P.S. 297K - Mr. Robert Sage; 12. String Symphonette: Jericho HS - Mr. Alan Arnold; 13. Orff-Kodaly Demonstration: Jericho Public Schools - Miss Dolly Sironen; 14. Threshold to Music: District 12 Bronx - Mrs. Elton Warren; 15. Excerpts from "Don't Bother Me I Can't Cope": LS. 369 - Mr. Ernest George; 16. Using Resonator Bells: P.S. 335K; 17. Orff Kodaly Demonstration: Camp Ave. Elementary School - Dr. Lawrence Wheeler; 18. Elementary School Opera: P.S. 174Q - Miss Geraldine Agress; 19. Boys Jazz Dance Group: Rothchild JHS 294 K - Mr. Neil Schiller, Mr. Richard Vals, Mr. Karl Friedman; 20. String Ensemble: Half Hollow Hills HS - Mrs. Lois Hobbs;

**Session III - Demonstration Groups - 4:15 p.m. to 5:30 p.m.
(Site)**

1. Electronic Laboratory: Hofstra University- Mr. Herbert Deutsch; 2. Madrigal Group: Levittown Division HS - Mr. William Reynolds; 3. Piano Laboratory: P.S. 121M - Mr. Louis Schere; 4. "Umoja" Original Poetry and Music; North Babylon HS Stage Band - Mr. Scott Hamer; I.S. 55K - Mr. Ed Bonnemere; 5. Accordion and String Quartet: HS of Performing Arts - Mrs. Henrietta Silverberg; 6. Recorder Consort: Hicksville Public Schools - Gerald Burakoff; 7. Brass Choir: HS of the Performing Arts; 8. Brass Ensemble: Levittown Memorial HS - Mr. Harold East; 9. String Ensemble: North Shore HS - Mr. Dwight Dyer; 10. Percussion Ensemble: East Islip HS - Mr. Roy Milligan; 11. Guitar Workshop: Oceanside Public Schools - Mr. Albert Dalton; 12. String Ensemble: Elwood HS - Mrs. Antoinette Nigrelli; 13. Orff-Kodaly Demonstration: Oceanside Public Schools - Mr. Herbert Rothgraber; 14. Hoarse Norsemen: North Shore HS - Mr. John Sterling; 16. Orff-Kodaly Demonstration: Southold Public Schools; 17. String Ensemble: Hericks HS - Mr. Raymond Anderson; 18. The Singing Voice - Gigi Hageman, Soloist: The HS of Performing Arts; 20. String Ensemble: East Meadow JHS - Mr. David Barnett

Marching Bands, Jazz Bands, Choruses, Misc. Ensembles

1. The Vikings: Leggett Day Care Center - Mr. Billy Miney; 2. Shallow JHS 227K - Mr. Ronald Shaeffer; 3. Tottenville HS Marching Band - Mr. Ray Kirshmeier; 4. Maria Regina HS Marching Band - Sister Edith Halligan; 5. Central Islip HS Marching Band - Mr. William Kubach; 6. H. Frank Carey HS Marching Band - Mr. Charles Hubbard
(Site) A. Woodmere JHS South Stage Band - Mr. Joseph R. Sugar; Wantagh HS Srage Band - Mr. Rollan Masciarelli; Cold Spring Harbor Stage Band - Mr. Clem DeRosa; Freeport HS Stage Band - Mr. Robert Pearson
(Site) B. Latin Band LS. 29M - Mr. Ron Davis; Latin Band Ettinger JHS 13M - Mr. Shelron Booth; South Shore HS Stage Band - Mr. Dan Rerole
(Site) C. Garden City Girls Chorus - Miss Lydia Lockridge; Recorder Ensemble P.S. 195 Q - Mrs. Groff; Jazz Vocal Ensemble Curtis HS - Mr. Ira Shankman; Half Hollow Hills Madrigal Group - Mr. Louis Alouri; Black History Chorus Winthrop JHS 232 - Mr. Paul Bunyan; Massapequa HS Madrigal Group - Mr. Lawrence Holdridge

Major Performing Ensembles

1. 1:30-1:50 Long Island Recorder Festival: Mr. Eugene Reichenthal; 2. 1:55-2:15 The Martin Luther King Jr. Male Glee Club - Theodore Roosevelt HS: Mr. Alphonso Patterson; 3. 2:20-2:40 The John Dewey HS Wind Ensemble: Mr. Herm S. Gerston; 4. 2:40-3:05 Rockaway Beach JHS 180 Mixed Chorus: Mr. Anthony DiNapoli; 5. 3:10-3:30 Brookside JHS Varsity Band: Miss Naomi Kalos; 6. 3:35-

3:55 Erasmus Hall HS Cantata: Mr. Ian Kay; 7. 4:00-4:20 Nassau County JHS Festival Chorus: Mr. John Motley; 8. 4:25-4:45 Smithtown HS Band: Mr. Louis Sobel; 9.4:50-5:10 HS of Performing Arts Orchestra & Soloists: Mr. Jonathan Strasser; 10. 5:15-5:35 East Meadow Chorus, Wind Ensemble and Orchestra: Mr. Vaclav Nelhybel.

NYSSMA Steering Committee/MIOS Day

Roy S. Thrall, Chairman; Willard I. Musser, Project Director; James Truscello, NYSSMA Vice President; Donald Howard, NYSSMA Public Relations S.C.; Joseph Sugar, William Kupferberg, Paul Margolf, Project Advisors; A. Theodore Tellstrom, Eugene J. Cunningham, NYS State Education Department; Allan B. Segal, NYSCAME President; Joseph Herbison, NYSCAJ,FE Vice President; Alan Eisen, Public Relations Consultant; Samuel Chelimsky, Leo Sevush, N.Y.C. Board of Education

Music In Our Schools Day Metropolitan Region "G" Showcase Committee

Co-Chairpersons: William Kupferberg, Long Island - Michael V.W. Gordon, New York City; New York State Project Director: Willard Musser; Steering Committee: A. Theodore Tellstrom, Eugene Cunningham, Samuel Chelimsky, Leo Sevush, Roy Thrall, James Truscello, Joseph Herbison.

Area Chairpersons

New York City: Shelton Booth, Carl Benjamin, Mary Johnston. Marrin Milella, June Timmons. Area Chairpersons - Nassau County: Benjamin Garry, Naomi Kalos. Paul Margolf, Allan Segal, Joseph Sugar. Area Chairpersons - Suffolk County: Dr. William Baker. Thomas Ramsey, Eugene Reichenthal.

Music In Our Schools Day Exposition

Gerald Newman, Louis B. Schere.

Exposition Coordinators

Mary Johnston, Public Relations Coordinator; Joseph Rubel, Parade and Outdoor Concert Coordinator; Sandra Cooperstein, Celebrity Hostess; Carlesta Henderson, Director of Tour Guides; Rawn Spearman, Assistant Director of Tour Guides; Brian Wallach; Concert Stage Managers: Camille Taylor; Bernard Smith; Assistant Stage Managers: Carl Benjamin, Exposition Traffic Manager; Gail Dunmore, Journal Advertisement Coordinator.

Music In Our Schools began in 1972 in Nassau County, Long Island, and was sponsored by NMEA (Nassau Music Educators Association), Music Belongs, and the New York Daily News.

Movers and shakers

All of the music educators mentioned above were the movers and shakers back in 1973 who set the tone for what music education would look like for the next 50 years in New York State and across our nation. Their work is a wonderful testament to the tenacity of some of NYSSMA's strongest members in the early 1970s.

The manner in which this seminal event came into focus and the manner in which all of these music educators networked and mobilized, sent a clear message to the residents of New York: music education matters!

It is safe to assume that in their wildest dreams, the original four entities that conceived of this event (Sam Ash Music, Lauren Kaiser, Bill Kupferberg, and Joseph R. Sugar) would not have imagined that the success of this initiative would gather enough recognition to engender an event that would later be modified by MENC (now NAFME) culminating in an annual month-long celebration of Music in Our Schools across the nation and beyond.

Scanning the stunning roster of names, I cannot help but wonder about the conversations back in 1973. It would seem these individuals were willing to get involved, make a difference, and forge ahead with the common goal of strengthening the quality of music instruction in classrooms, regionally and statewide, across New York. What headwinds were those pioneers facing? I suppose we will never know.

These folks were entrenched in the same mission and vision that we live by today: to advance music education across New York State. They knew that membership in NYSSMA® / NAFME signified a commitment to the profession, excellence in music education, and their own professional growth. It represented active participation in the most significant professional force in music education in the State of New York and in the country.

I ask you to note just how different or similar the collective conversations were in 1973? Before you answer, take a closer look and you will find: Electronic Theory Lab, Rock Chorus, Classical and Flamenco Guitar, African Music in the Classroom, Special Education, Steel Drum Band, Boys Jazz Dance Group, Elementary School Opera, Latin Band and more!

One wonders about what the dialogue was as these music educators planned and executed such a wide range of musical performances for that day. Did their daily conversations include the concept of emerging ensembles? Was diversity, equity, and inclusion part of the dialogue?

So, please look over the roster again! They had a NYSSMA Steering Committee for MIOS Day. They had a showcase committee, area chairpersons and exposition coordinators. Certainly, the names have changed, but the same level of passion and commitment remains in the activities and events we are still presenting today.

The spirit lives on

If you're reading this article, you are most likely a 2023 music education advocate, and I am guessing that your passion for music education isn't very different from the thoughts and beliefs of our predecessors in 1973. Schools and communities throughout New York State and the country are celebrating with concerts and other musical activities based on the annual Music in Our Schools theme. Classrooms, concert halls, civic buildings, clubs, parks, libraries, and shopping malls are just some of the arenas in which the public can observe the processes and results of music education. The intent has remained the same 50 years later: to validate the importance of music education for all students.

The responsibility of advocating for music education continues to fall on us. Joseph R. Sugar Day is our event to emphasize and reinforce the importance of why we do what we are engaged in. I have spent the last year talking about "Connecting, Belonging and Creating." Our decision-making leaders in Albany still need to know that:

1. Music Creates cultural and personal Connections.
2. Music is a class where all children have the opportunity to Belong, get inspired, develop a sense of purpose and step outside of their comfort zone, embrace individuality and find themselves in the "right" place.
3. Music education across the country is where our nation's students get to create, build, design, discover, establish, forge, form, generate, initiate, invent, organize, plan, produce, set up, and shape. What greater lessons could we possibly teach?

From a historical perspective, NYSSMA has been at the forefront of shaping music education in this country for many years. Who knew 50 years ago that the folks behind March 14, 1973, would begin the national efforts that we know today? It is now our responsibility to continue and support the vision that our extraordinary predecessors initiated for us. The importance of the NYSSMA mission statement cannot be overstated.

Please join me in congratulating our NYS school districts who are sending performing groups to participate in The Albany Capitol Experience in celebration of Music in Our Schools Month - a program that includes daily concerts by student bands, choruses, and orchestras throughout the Empire Plaza in Albany during the month of March.

Our job as music educators goes beyond reading rhythm, ensemble rehearsals, singing, playing instruments, and concerts. It is our job to inform, educate and advocate for the well-being of music education over the next 50 years. Students in our schools are depending on us. We must not, we cannot, let them down. The future of NYSSMA and the recognition of the importance of music in a child's life is in our hands. ||

Thank You: Dr. Steve Schopp - NYSSMA Executive Director Emeritus; Tom Gellert - NYSSMA School Music NEWS Editor and NYSSMA Historian/Archivist; Dr. John Gallagher - NYSSMA Public Relations Chairperson, and Marc Greene - NYSSMA Past-President for their historical contributions to this article.

Portions of this article originally appeared in William C. Kupferberg's article "MIOSM's 25th Anniversary - New York Celebration" appearing in the March 1997, Volume 60, No. 6 issue of the NYSSMA *School Music NEWS*.

*Fun fact: NYSSMA Executive Director Emeritus, Dr. Steve Schopp was part of the March 14th celebration. As a young teacher, his junior HS brass ensemble from the Syosset School District was one of the 20-minute demonstration ensembles.