

Austin Stroup – NYSSMA®/NAfME Collegiate President 23-24, Nazareth University



Pizza + Music = Inspiration

During my college semesters and on break I have had the opportunity the past few years to work occasionally at a pizza shop. One of my favorite days to be scheduled is on Saturdays when I typically work open to close. Why I like it has not much to do with the prep work or the long hours, instead it has everything to do with the owner and his interest in me as a musician, and future educator, as well as his general interest in music.

On my very first day working, I was learning to make dough and the owner came into the shop with his bugle and played a little bit of Reveille. It put a big smile on my face and after the initial shock of what was going on, I knew from that moment it was going to be a great place to work. The atmosphere the owner created and still fosters is warm and inviting, and he is purposeful in how he relates and connects with his employees.

Cooking to The Oldies

Over the next few weeks, I came to find he loves to show YouTube videos mainly of songs from the 1950s-90s. He often says, “The song is really good, but you have to watch the video.” So, I watch the music video and it usually is a really good song I may have not ever known about. After a while of him recommending songs and videos to watch or play, I decided to make a playlist with all the tunes he had shared.

This playlist has now by and large become a weekly playlist for my Saturday shift. It puts the owner, me, and my co-

worker in a great mood for the morning. It is now commonly referred to as “The List,” and it currently has more than 200 songs totaling about 14 hours. It ranges from Jim Reeves to Herb Alpert and the Tijuana Brass to Elton John to Van Halen and much more. Sometimes songs are even suggested and added for me to show my future students, honestly, just because it is a good song. I am sure I can find some use for them in the future.

*Music is the medium
that makes a
difference*

Seeing is believing

All of this time, I am thinking about how touched by music the owner is. He played euphonium in his school bands and says he loved it. He was able to have a passionate experience with music, as well as develop an understanding of its importance in the schools.

If you are reading this, I would guess at some point music became a serious passion for you. The coolest part is he still tells me now several decades later how important the presence of music education is in our schools. He has reaped

the benefits of music education and seems to have even incorporated some of the lifelong skills acquired into his flourishing pizza business approximately 40 years later.

Music has power, and as music educators, we have the responsibility to not just share powerful music experiences with students but also offer something almost tangible, where they can see themselves represented in the musical world. There are many ways to connect with students and colleagues. It is just a matter of bridging the gap between someone who is simply present in your classroom and a life you can impact forever.

Inspiration

This Music in Our Schools Month® is all about students’ seeing themselves represented in music education. The pizza shop owner was inspired by someone, and I would have to bet one of those people was his music teacher — a teacher who gave him a voice and related to him personally. Music is the medium that makes a difference in the lives of all whom it encounters.

I challenge you to find something to share with someone, even as simple as a song or music video, that inspires you. Inspiration translates to others and your inspiration could be the piece of a puzzle that blossoms into a meaningful relationship 40 years from now. ||