



Saving Lives

I recently made the acquaintance of a retired hospital administrator. His job had required strong organizational and management skills. The work included budgeting, overseeing all departments, writing reports with recommendations, implementing cost-cutting measures, scheduling employees based on patient needs, maintaining and overseeing patient records, aligning with and applying healthcare regulations and laws, and generally working consistently to produce recommendations to maintain and improve services. A very demanding job indeed!

During our impromptu conversation, we exchanged perspectives about our careers, and I elaborated on the work of a musician, a music educator, and a music administrator. Referring to his work, he commented, “Well, my work involves saving lives.” I was somewhat taken a back! After all, overseeing the bureaucracy of a hospital is not quite the same as practicing medicine.

That declaration motivated my reflection on our daily work in the trenches as music teachers. I began to think, “How many students’ lives are impacted by our work, and, yes, how many lives have we saved?”

It is a fair question. Many of us have encountered students who were lost at school. Perhaps they were not considered worthy of the “in crowd.” Maybe they were not athletic, but shy, introverted, not academically achieving, consumed with body image, and perceiving themselves as socially awkward. Perhaps they were socially awkward. We have all known these students as we have worked with them for years. It is even possible that growing up, we were these children!

Music is nonjudgmental

Music doesn’t care about outward appearance, social tendencies, athletic skill, or academic scores. Music is a place that welcomes everyone. The gift of organized sound, melodic and harmonic compatibilities, pulse and rhythm, and the sheer energy of music represents a place where anyone can find connections and all are welcome. The business of listening, learning, enjoying, perform-

*Music is a place
that welcomes
everyone*

ing, and improvising music engages a reward system that feeds the soul.

Through music, human beings can comprehend things with the heart that often are not possible with the mind. Darwin noted that social instincts, including song, are the prelude for much of what governs our social evolution. Music lifts us and takes us to places where our emotion and spirit combine and euphoria results. Our students are not immune to this. They may not be able to label or define it; however, they are absolutely affected by it. Music feeds our humanity, empowers us, and is innate. Music is a solution.

How many of your students regularly come down to your music classroom during their free period, lunch, or before and after school? How many students have we observed who either lost or, perhaps, never had the interest and/or motivation for school? Possibly they summarize that school represents an environment that neither understands nor supports them. For some, their home life is unpleasant, unhealthy, or worse. Some students may perceive that in school, as in daily life, they are merely going through the motions, being burnt out from everything they are either doing or not doing, and frustrated by all that is expected of them.

Music is connection

Please now consider the student(s) that you have worked with over the years who found themselves in your music classroom. They connected with singing or instrumental performance. Perhaps they discovered ease with memorizing musical phrases and motifs. Maybe they demonstrated rhythmic acuity, intonation skills, and/or technical facility. Maybe they did not excel musically but they were touched and moved by the music your class experienced and they connected in some other way with the music you brought to them.

Whatever you shared in your music room touched their soul, captured their spirit, and put a smile on their face and a purpose in their day! It helped them feel good about themselves and maybe even the people and space around them. Maybe they found a friend through your class. Possibly the world was not so cruel that day. I am often reminded of the reality that a parent once brought to me about their child: “The only reason he

gets out of bed in the morning is to come to your rehearsal.”

There is an oasis in your music classroom. Your safe space provides an escape route. It may have something to do with the sound, the rhythmic energy, the melody and harmony going on simultaneously, or just a song that takes the spirit to another level. Maybe it is the lyrics associated with a song or the skill required to manipulate an instrument or voice to produce a quality sound. All these examples provide pleasing, uplifting, motivating distractions. All of these outlets take the student to a safe place leading to comfort, calming, and peace. Even the most troubled students smile and feel emancipated, connected, and ultimately supported.

Sometimes, being in the company of others who also enjoy the kindred spirit that is a byproduct of music-making can be the catalyst. The whole gamut just adds color and depth to their existence.

Ultimately, these human beings feel better about themselves. They find new motivations and new goals to realize. We have watched this occur over and over, year after year, and we participate in and endorse it by just being there to teach music and support the students.

Music is community

Music additionally represents an art form that builds relationships. Music opportunities engage students in a music community and the only requirement is showing up and contributing. How many of your students over the years have earned the respect and appreciation of their peers because of their effort in your program? How many have learned self-worth because of the sheer opportunity you provided in teaching them to contribute and express themselves? How many students have you guided into successful careers? How many lives have you touched?

Recently, I visited with several music teachers from a variety of schools. These cooperating teachers work as mentors with my student teachers. I asked the question: “Do you have anything to contribute to the conversation about music teachers saving lives?” What I heard was both powerful and moving!

Everyone had saved those Post-it notes from students, letters from parents, and had moving stories to tell of their experiences. What I enjoyed the most was that everyone remembered the circumstances vividly. They each called to mind the particulars as if they had happened yesterday. Clearly, those students meant as much to you as you meant to them.

In case you haven't heard it enough: thank you, thank you, thank you! You probably have no idea just how many lives you have saved. ||

Now On Sale!!!

NYSSMA® Manual Edition 33

(Effective July 1, 2022 - White Pages/Green Tabs)

Prices

(all include Ground Shipping within NY State)

Complete (Binder & Insert Pages) – \$70.00

Insert Pages Only – \$65.00

Binder Only – \$15.00

Shipping & Handling

New York State:

Ground Shipping – No additional charge

Optional Express shipping – add \$25.00 per item*

Out of State (within the Continental U.S.)

Ground shipping – add \$25.00 per item*

Optional Express shipping – add \$30.00 per item*

Out of State orders of 3 or more Manuals qualify for bulk shipping.

Please contact the NYSSMA Manual Chairperson for more information.

Ways to Order

1. Order online with a credit card at:

<https://www.nyssma.org/committees/manual/>

2. Email a school purchase order

(made out to “NYSSMA Manual”) to the email address below

3. Mail a check or school purchase order

(made out to “NYSSMA Manual”) to the address below

4. Fax a school purchase order

(made out to “NYSSMA Manual”) to the number below

For all other shipping costs and other NYSSMA® Manual order information, please contact:

NYSSMA® Manual Orders, Kathryn Struzik, Distributor

535 Rondo Lane, Webster, NY 14580-1214

Phone: (585) 670-9252 • Fax: (585) 670-0214

E-mail: Manualorders@nyssma.org

For general NYSSMA® Manual information and questions, please contact:

Andrew Kittleson, NYSSMA® Manual Chairperson

3379 Pennytoyol Ct., Walworth, NY 14568 • (585) 831-2944 • manual@nyssma.org

NYSSMA® Manuals are also available for purchase in the NYSSMA® Manual Library Room at all NYSSMA® Summer and Winter Conferences.

*One “item” is one Complete Manual, or one Insert, or one Binder Only. Please note: All NYSSMA® Manual Sales are final. No returns will be accepted. No credits will be issued. (Damaged items may be exchanged for the same item only – please contact the NYSSMA® Manual Chairperson for further details)