



# MANUAL TRANSMISSION

*The rubber meets the road for a new vehicle and those at the wheel*

I needed to buy a car. My trusted and weathered 2005 Honda CRV with 198,000 miles on the odometer was seriously showing its age. The hope to drive it forever just wasn't in the cards. With that understanding, I checked out a used car or two, decided against that route, and moved on to explore new territory.

Test driving crossovers at dealerships was like driving into the future. My old CRV had absolutely zero bells and whistles, but it was wholly reliable — like an old friend, really — and familiar in the best of ways. I knew what I had there, and I knew just how it operated, so I was completely comfortable in the driver's seat. Now, however, I was out of my element.

There was the odd feel of the automatic start-stop feature, a computer screen that looked like it could power a NASA shuttle, and a wide array of accompanying beeps and blurps to signal various considerations. I know it sounds ridiculous, but to an automobile anti-enthusiast the whole thing was a little disorienting. Yet, there was no denying that these cars really meshed with our current realities — far better, actually, than what I had been dealing with. The nature of vehicles had clearly evolved and, happy or not, it was time that I adapted and evolved too.

What does this have to do with NYSSMA®, you ask? The answer is simple: That last statement extends well beyond my car quandary, playing right into our current position with the new digital NYSSMA® manual. Think about the previous paragraph's closing sentence from that present, collective vantage point: the nature of vehicles has clearly evolved and, happy or not, it's time that we adapt and evolve too.

Life's only real constant is change, and if we look back, we see that this truth is tied to the entire life of the manual. Thanks to *A History of the New York State School Music Association (1932-1975)* by NYSSMA's first editor/historian, Frederic Fay Swift, we can quickly trace its evolution.

The idea for a graded list of repertoire for school ensembles, initially conceived of to support a desired system of competitive festivals in different states, came to the fore at the national level in 1941. But with the impact of World War II, plus the realistic acknowledgement of varying levels of music education across the nation, that plan was scrapped.

In 1943, NYSSMA® explored a Plan of Classification containing some 2,500 selections and graded on a scale of levels from 1-6. It sold for a quarter. Formalizing things further, a chairman for the original NYSSMA® manual first appeared in 1955.

Over the years, solo and small ensemble categories and repertoire lists started to appear, courtesy of the creation of separate content area editors. And when Swift published his history book in the mid '70s, the then-current version of the manual contained more than 17,000 entries (and cost six dollars).

The changes, however small or significant, kept on coming. And eventually, technology steered the conversation toward our present position. According to my predecessor, Tom Gellert, NYSSMA's Executive Council began discussing the idea of a digital manual, in some way, shape, or form, approximately two decades ago. And the general membership has been right there over the intervening years, having the same conversations from every angle.

At first it was all broad-stroke thinking — pipedreams and what ifs, advantages and limitations. But as time progressed, hypotheticals became practical possibilities that morphed into clear reality. According to NYSSMA® Manual Chair Andy Kittleson, preliminaries and talks led to an official kickoff on the process in January of 2024, and here we stand less than two years later with Edition 34 — the first digital version of the manual in our association's history.

So now that you know the backstory, where do we go from here? That's what's on everyone's mind. If you recall, just a few short paragraphs ago while talking about my automobile issue, the tone was centered on acceptance rather than excitement. And if that's how you're feeling at this particular moment, let me say this: that's perfectly fine.

Every new development in any corner of life is met with a wide range of reactions — open and instant embraces from some, indifference from others, reluctance and pushback from a few. You may immediately fall in love with the new manual format, simply go about your business in dealing with it, or shed a few Luddite tears, wringing hands and/or saying an ill word or two while acclimating. That's the bell curve and natural order of things.

Regardless of where you fall in or between those categories, we can all acknowledge and agree that there may be some bumps in the road here — nothing is perfect, after all. But we'll deal with them together. We enter this new era united.

In prepping for this editorial, and with that sense of community in mind, I reached out to our Manual Chair to ask that he offer a few helpful tidbits now and contribute a piece to *School Music News* down the road to get under the hood of the new manual and assist in this collective journey. Look for the latter in the January/February issue of this magazine. As for the former, here you go:

### Andy Kittleson's First Five Notes:

1. The manual is online! Not just as a pdf, but in a fully searchable format.
2. You need an Authenticator App. There are plenty of free ones. NYSSMA® is recommending Microsoft Authenticator or Google Authenticator, which are free options.
3. There is no paper version of the manual. Even the Manual Chairperson doesn't have one.
4. Enhancements in this new edition include a greater focus on making sure that listed repertoire is currently available for purchase, more inclusion of material from historically underrepresented composers, and more.
5. The best way to get clarification or help on any manual-related matters is to email Andy Kittleson at [manual@nyssma.org](mailto:manual@nyssma.org)

In closing, I offer some well-deserved congratulations to President Ed Chiarello for seeing this initiative through, and Past President Russ Faunce for paving the way; Andy Kittleson, for doing yeoman's work; the NYSSMA® Manual Committee for essential contributions; programmer Dan Whitehouse, who has gone above and beyond for NYSSMA®; NERIC, the developers, from Capital Region BOCES, and everyone else who played a part, large or small, in the new manual format's development. This is a sea change for NYSSMA® and its members, and I look forward to charting its evolution as we move forward. ||