

◆ TEACHER'S EDITION ◆

THE YOUNG MUSICIAN'S TEXTBOOK

intune

VOL.23 • NO.8

MONTHLY

HOW TO PLAY
YUNGBLUD'S
"ZOMBIE"

MUSICAL
SUBTRACTION

WRITING YOUR
FIRST SONG

STRAY KIDS

With 31 million albums sold, the K-Pop superstars
celebrate their eighth anniversary

- ◆ Inside the Conn Selmer Institute National Event
- ◆ Music Creation Stations: Acquisitions and Impacts
- ◆ End-of-Year Reflection & Gratitude Activities
- ◆ The MusicFirst Academy
- ◆ Nothing Beats A Drum Corps Show

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Student Needs
to Get **In Tune!**
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for your class, see
the back cover

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CSI National Event

Mishawaka, IN • June 14-17, 2026



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**THIS EVENT
WAS EXACTLY
WHAT I NEEDED.**

I left with clarity,
confidence, and
a renewed
sense of purpose.



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division of education

Where do we go from here?

IT WAS AROUND this time of year 23 years ago when the decision was made to launch *In Tune Monthly* in the coming fall. State and local government funding for education was waning, and districts were eliminating their music programs. “Music technology” was relatively new, and “the traditional curriculum”, (classical, a little jazz, and marching) was either “music appreciation” or band, orchestra and chorus. What’s more, the generation of music educators in service were arm in arm, protecting the status quo.

Today’s generation of music teachers routinely embrace and offer a myriad of musical subjects and musical styles to their students, with the support of administrations, parents and the national standards. The advancement of “a well-rounded music education experience as the gold standard is huge victory for everyone involved.

Where do we go from here? *In Tune* has long promoted the use of technology in the teaching of music creation and production. More schools are seeing that this element of education attracts students who might not have opted for music study. We’ve also advocated for lessons on the various aspects of the music industries as early as possible. Teaching the benefits of a higher music education has been high on our list. Exposing students to as broad a range of musical genres not only reflects the cultural diversity of America, but its inclusiveness also brings more students into “the tent.”

Our message for this last issue of *In Tune* is therefore about encouragement. We encourage you to continue rounding out the “well-rounded music education experience” with more units on some of these subjects and hope you will similarly encourage your colleagues in this quest. Summer is a great time to plan those lessons for the fall, and while we wish you some R&R during the break, we also hope that you’ll find the time to work on getting your students *In Tune*. •

Teachers can go to intunemonthly.com/lessonplans for full lesson plans and videos. This month, lesson plans are available for the following stories:



K-Pop’s Kids Turn Eight

Stray Kids is one of the most influential and dynamic acts in modern K-pop, known for their self-produced music, high-energy performances, and deeply personal themes. Since their debut in 2018, the group has carved out a distinct identity that blends hip-hop, EDM, rock, with experimental pop into a sound that resonates globally and has endured in a highly competitive segment of the music business.



Musical Subtraction

Start with a scale, a melody, a riff, a phrase in a piece, and then take away a part, which then creates new music. It can also alter the listener’s musical expectations and create excitement by messing with or subverting them.



How To Play “Zombie” by YUNGBLUD

The lyrics to “Zombie” by YUNGBLUD explore inner struggles and feelings of disconnection. With gritty vocals and intense energy, the song captures vulnerability and frustration, blending alternative rock with modern angst to create a powerful, relatable anthem. Our writer details how an ensemble can dissect and tackle a version.



The Goal of a First Song is...To Finish It

Our writers say, “If you’re thinking about writing your first song, now is the time to start. Perhaps, you’re interested in trying, but have been waiting for the perfect idea. Something meaningful. Something original. Something good. But here’s the truth: your first song probably won’t be any of those things. And honestly, that’s exactly how it’s supposed to be.”

The Tao of In Tune

AT LEAST ONCE BEFORE IN THIS SPACE, we have offered that by calling this page “the Tao,” (the fundamental, ineffable principle of Chinese philosophy and Taoism, translating to “the Way,” “Path,” or “Principle”) we mean to explain not only why we have chosen to include the issue’s content, but why we exist as a product. Hopefully by now, you get it. We’re trying to supplement your programming, bring you reading material for students that broadens their musical horizons. We know that not everything we publish will hit the mark for every teacher or student. However, we try to imagine who you are, and who they are, and include something that will serve (almost) everyone.



MUSIC NEWS

Our collection of music news is designed to keep music students aware of the broader music world around them. This issue’s vignettes include “SoundCloud announces ‘Follower Exclusive Releases’”, “RAYE Apologizes for Vinyl Mix-up”, “Instagram Claims To Be Main Source Of Music Discovery”, and more.



INFLUENCES

The Marias are an indie pop band from Los Angeles known for their dreamy, cinematic sound blending jazz, psychedelia, and Latin influences. They were inspired by singer/songwriter Clairo who in turn was inspired by the iconic 70’s singer/songwriter Joni Mitchell. Mitchell has been quoted as being influenced by the poetic lyrics of Bob Dylan.



MEDIA

Our monthly collection of music media features the new book “*On the Record: Music That Changed America*” by Anna Harwell Celenza, *What is Music? A Music Podcast About Music*, and a Mix With The Masters video that went viral after claiming that different DAWs...sound different.



FRONTRUNNER

This issue’s five emerging acts are Anyma (aka Italian-American DJ and producer Matteo Milleri), actor and country music singer-songwriter Luke Grimes, re-invented k-pop trio BIGBANG, the resurgent Turnstile, and Afro-Appalachian singer-songwriter Mon Rovia.



WHAT DO YOU DO?

Based in Nashville, Juliana Lee is a nonprofit leader and music-education advocate who works with the Give A Note Foundation, a U.S. nonprofit that supports music programs in schools.



MUSICAL MOMENTS

The performance by Tejano superstar Selena Quintanilla-Pérez at the Houston Astrodome—just weeks before her tragic death in 1995—is considered her defining live moment, and one of the most iconic and bittersweet performances in Latin music history. Performing for over 60,000 fans, she delivered a genre-blending set of Tejano, cumbia, pop, and disco medleys with commanding charisma and vocals.

Need to spend those **“use it or lose it”** funds before the end of the school year?

Introduce **music tech** to your students **now!**

Music Production

+ FREE Resources & Tutorials



DJing

+ FREE Resources & Tutorials



Podcasting & Audio Recording

+ FREE Resources & Tutorials



We've curated a collection of specially priced music technology gear and resources **starting at just \$79** to help teachers maximize their 'use it or lose it' end-of-year funds.

Investing in this equipment now is a cost-effective opportunity to boost student engagement through music technology and ensure you are fully prepared to integrate these new tools into your curriculum for the upcoming school year.

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End-of-Year Reflection & Gratitude Activities

Spring is the perfect time to help students look back and look inward!

AFTER MONTHS OF REHEARSALS, performances, and shared effort, the weeks before and even after the final concert offer a rare window to pause, take stock, and recognize how far the ensemble has achieved together. Research on student retention consistently points to the same truth: students are far more likely to stay in a program that takes time to celebrate growth, honor contribution, and make meaning of the experience. The purpose of this article is to share ideas that will lead your students to truly reflect on the value of being engaged in your music program and help them understand that playing in an ensemble gives them the chance to work alongside others to create something beautiful that none of them could create alone.

- Make growth audible by pulling out recordings from the first weeks of school and play them back-to-back with recordings from one of your more recent concerts. Ask students to share their responses aloud during class.

- In the days leading up to your reflection activity, post favorite quotes, inside jokes, section photos, programs from every performance all around the classroom. Also include photos from trips, festivals, and other events. Invite students to add their own captions, memories, or thank-you notes on sticky pads. When they sit down to begin their reflection activity, they will already be surrounded by evidence of everything they built as a group.

- Create a slideshow set to a meaningful piece from the year or songs that capitalizes on their sense of unity. Students cherish seeing themselves laughing with their friends as well as the



formal shots to be sure to include plenty of both. The memories that have been built will be with them long after they leave high school.

- Create a Reflection Activity and call it *“Beyond the Notes: My Year in Review”* or something similar. Ask students to respond either in writing by way of a creative handout or aloud in class. Sometimes writing first and sharing later will give our more reserved students the opportunity to think through their responses first before sharing them. As students share their memories of great performances and fun times together, it will create a joyous atmosphere where students will come to deeply understand how much the past year in music has truly meant to them.

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The MusicFirst Solution for Modern Band offers a comprehensive suite of tools and resources designed to bring modern music education to life.

Ideal for schools and educators looking to engage students with contemporary music styles, this solution integrates cutting-edge software with high-quality instructional content, providing everything needed to create a dynamic and inspiring music program.



Comprehensive Software Integrations

- **MusicFirst Classroom**
Single-sign-on hub for music learning
- **PracticeFirst**
Practice assessment
- **OGenPlus**
Beat and loop creator
- **YuStudio**
Digital audio workstation
- **Auralia First + Musition First**
Ear training and music theory
- **Focus on Sound**
Multimedia music encyclopedia

Courses

- **Modern Band 101** – Steve Holley
- **School of Rock Levels 1-3**
Bass, Guitar, Keys, Drums, and Voice units
- **Modern Band Instrument Lessons** – Steve Giddings
Specialized lessons in modern band instruments
- **Popular Music Theory** – Ethan Hein
Exploration of music theory in contemporary music
- **Drum Channel 100-level** – Mike Packer
Foundational drumming course

Lessons and Resources

- **Music Will lessons and resources:**
Engaging materials designed to support modern music education
- **MusicProfessor Instrument Lessons:**
Comprehensive instrument tutorials for various skill levels
- **Drum Channel lessons and supplemental resources:**
High-quality drumming tutorials and resources
- **Making Music with OGenPlus:**
Creative music production and arrangement activities using OGenPlus



Learn more at:
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Support Music Education with Every Purchase!

For every seat sold of the Modern Band solution, MusicFirst will donate \$0.25 to Music Will, supporting music education for all.

Reflection builds culture and continued improvement. Retention is about individual students understanding that they have impact on the whole ensemble.

Some prompts to consider are:

- What musical skills are you proudest of improving this year?
- What personal achievements are you most proud of?
- What was your favorite piece of music that was performed and what made it so meaningful to you?
- What was your favorite concert overall and why?
- What was your favorite moment in class or rehearsal?
- What aspects of our program did you enjoy most?
- Who in our ensemble helped you grow most as a musician or person?
- When did you feel most connected to the group as a whole?
- What are you most grateful for?
- What is something the ensemble accomplished together that you could not have accomplished alone?

The last question is worth giving extra time on because it reflects why the ensemble experience is so valuable. When students can articulate this out loud, they truly understand that their contribution mattered and hopefully, they will also come to realize that they were counted on by others which is a huge confidence-builder for young people.

A few additional ideas:

- Consider writing personalized notes to each student acknowledging something specific you noticed in them this year. It will take time, but your students will keep these notes for years. In fact, your “gratitude notes” will become something that returning students will look forward to receiving in subsequent years.
- Ask senior students give a short talk to the underclassmen reflecting on their own journey in the program. This will become an emotional moment for both the speaker and the ensemble who will hear first-hand from someone who has chosen to remain in the program since day one. These talks encourage younger students to continue and remind them that the friendships, memories, and growth they are building now will flourish in the coming years.
- Encourage section leaders to thank their sections publicly and gift each of them with a special gratitude note or piece of memorabilia of their own.
- Ask students to write and send a thank-you note to a parent, teacher, or mentor who supported their music this year.

Reflection is not an add-on to the musical year. It is how the musical year becomes even more meaningful. When students leave your program either for summer break or for the rest of their lives, they will remember how it felt to be part of something larger than themselves. Giving them the opportunity to realize that feeling is one of the most important lessons we can offer.

Your Own Gratitude

Take a few minutes to reflect yourself. Keep a “feel-good file” of notes, emails, and moments. Celebrate what *you have* built. Share with your students your most memorable moments from performances or individual student achievements. It is important to let students know what you have observed regarding their musical growth during the year.

Reflection builds culture and continued improvement. Retention is about individual students understanding that they have impact on the whole ensemble. By collecting and analyzing data, seeking feedback, and planning for the future, you can ensure your program continues to meet the needs of your students.

The Importance of Data

- Develop regular assessments to help monitor student development and program effectiveness from one year to the next as well as within the year itself.
- Keep a spreadsheet detailing the number of students who begin playing as beginners in elementary or middle school and update it annually through the students’ graduations.
- Note patterns that seem to boost engagement in the data. It may help identify areas that need improvement when it comes to recruitment or retention.
- Use your data to set goals that will better serve your students in the coming year.
- Identify areas where you can grow and seek relevant training. **T**



MARCIA NEEL serves as Senior Director of Education for Yamaha Corporation of America. She also serves as Education Advisor to the Music Achievement Council, a 501(c)(6)

organization whose sole purpose is to assist directors in recruiting and retaining students in instrumental music programs through effective professional development.



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What I see from some of the students who come to a DCI Tour event is a lot of light bulbs where they are connecting what the performers are doing and transitioning it into what they do on a day-to-day basis. They're seeing the things these performers are doing and saying, 'Hey, that's cool. That was awesome. I want to try to recreate that.'"
— BAND DIRECTOR ROBERT MARSHALL | LA PUENTE, CA

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RECHARGE, RECON

Inside t



CONNECT, REIGNITE!

The Conn Selmer Institute National Event



CSI

CONN SELMER INSTITUTE

June 14-17, 2026
Bethel University
Mishawaka, IN

Most music educators have been there. They attend a conference, sit through sessions, take notes and return home inspired but unsure about how to apply what they've learned.

The ideas fade. The connection is missing. Professional development should do more than inform. It should model, offer techniques, supply lesson content with assessment materials, and supporting concepts. It should elevate and enhance how you teach. The Conn Selmer Institute (CSI) National Event, June 14-17, 2026, at Bethel University in Mishawaka, Indiana, offers that something different.

WHAT IS CSI NATIONAL?

Now in its 29th year, the Conn Selmer Institute (CSI) National Event is a four-day professional development experi-



ence that brings together music educators, college students, and fine arts administrators for a program designed to recharge your energy, strengthen your teaching, and reconnect you to why you do this work. From the moment you arrive, you're able to feel the difference. The setting is intentional. The pace allows for reflection, and the environment is built for conversation, not just presentation.

You're not moving from session to session with a crowd. You are engaging, asking questions, and working through ideas with people who understand your day-to-day reality.

"No other event encourages community and connection like CSI, and that's what makes it so powerful. You're not just sitting in sessions—you're engaging with people, sharing ideas, and walking away with relationships and practical tools that truly impact your teaching."

**- Michael Kamphuis - Conn Selmer
Sr. VP - Division of Education.**

And, learning doesn't end when a session does. It continues over meals, between sessions, and through meaningful connections with faculty and peers who are invested in your growth. The result is an experience that is not only informative, but lasting. Instead of leaving with a notebook full of ideas, you leave with clarity, confidence, and a renewed sense of purpose. Overheard at a previous CSI, "This conference renewed my enthusiasm to return to my classroom," and, "No other event encourages community and connection like CSI. The event was exactly what I needed. I left with clarity, confidence, and a renewed sense of purpose."

WORLD-CLASS FACULTY - A LINEUP LIKE NO OTHER...ANYWHERE

The CSI National Event features dedicated tracks for new teachers, middle and high school directors, college music majors, and fine arts administrators with sessions built around strategies and resources you can use immediately.

Highlights include:

- Concert and jazz sessions with Bach artist, [Sean Jones](#)
- Conducting sessions for all tracks led by Dr. Paula Crider
- Mariachi sessions and a reading ensemble featuring Ramon Niño & Imelda Martinez
- Practical instrument repair sessions
- A session with composer, [Brian Balmages](#)
- Mock interviews with fine arts administrators for college students
- Ultimate Drill Book sessions
- Rehearsal lab band led by Colonel Lowell Graham



- Reading band led by Richard Saucedo and Michael Sweeney
- A special after-hours session “A Chat with [Queen Cora Coleman](#)”
- Jazz reading band
- And The Blue Devils Marching Arts Experience (on Wednesday, June 17th at Mishawaka HS)

PRACTICAL, APPLICABLE LEARNING

From rehearsal techniques to leadership and program development, the focus is on real-world application that translates directly to your next step, whether in your first classroom or the next phase of your career. As it often is at the great meetings, some of the most valuable moments happen outside the sessions. CSI creates space for those conversations, about teaching and growth. Speakers don't disappear after presenting. They sit and talk with you, share meals, and invest the time need to share their experiences and expertise.

Live performances and musical experiences throughout the event serve as a powerful reminder of why this work matters. A Conn Selmer factory tour offers a rare opportunity to see the craftsmanship behind your instruments. Full days of immersive learning brings together world class clinicians for sessions designed for both educators and students, combining instruction, collaboration, and performance. Optional graduate credit through VanderCook College of Music provides an additional pathway for those looking to extend their learning.



FOUR DAYS. REAL CONNECTION. LASTING IMPACT.

You spend your year investing in your students and your program. CSI National is your time to step back, reflect, and invest in your own growth. In just four days, you can reset your perspective, strengthen your approach, and return with renewed energy and purpose. **T**



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CONN SELMER INSTITUTE

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Music Creation S Acquisitions and

Music students at Ada S. Nelson Elementary School with their new SoundKEY keyboards and GEC5 lab.



By Michael Stewart

tations: Impacts

EARLIER THIS YEAR, the In Tune Teachers Edition began publishing profiles of the work being done by KORG SoundTree to bring technology resources to classrooms. The first story was about the renaissance of KORG SoundTree products and services and followed up with one about “teaching with labs.” The piece you’re now reading is a third in the series, this time focusing on the evolution of keyboard labs into “music creation stations” with feedback from educators on what this has meant for students.



WAYNE SPLETTSTOESZER, Director of Instrumental Music/Music Technology at Torrington High School in Torrington, Connecticut has implemented the Korg Nano series—headlined by the nanoPAD2, nanoKONTROL2, and nanoKEY Studio. He says that this has marked, “a fundamental shift in both the aesthetic and functional ‘vibe’ of the modern music classroom.” And that, “These are not merely peripheral devices; they are purpose-built interfaces designed to align with the intuitive, tactile workflows of digital-native students.”

Sharon Selinger, M.Ed. is Band Program Director, Digital Music Librarian, Fine Arts Department iPad Administrator, Grade 5 Music Production and Grade 3 General Music teacher at the Pine Crest School - Boca Raton Campus in Boca Raton, Florida. The set-up she’s acquired also includes an interface, mics, headphones, nano controllers and drum pads, and she’s working on purchasing mini oscilloscopes and mini digital controllers to integrate STEM lessons.

Justin Francis teaches music at Ada S. Nelson Elementary School, Aeolian Elementary School, and Rancho Santa Gertrudes Elementary School in the Los Nietos School District, Whittier, CA. He’s implemented the KORG GEC5 system as part of a comprehensive keyboard lab, utilizing KORG SoundKey keyboards that are fully networked. “Students connect to the keyboards using Logitech headsets with integrated microphones, enabling two-way communication,” says Francis. “This setup supports whole-group instruction, individualized practice, one-on-one coaching, and small group collaboration—all while students remain in headphones, allowing multiple activities to occur simultaneously at different paces. Additionally, the keyboards are connected via USB and function as MIDI controllers for our after-school music production classes.”

In this setting, students engage with an online DAW, developing skills in recording, editing, looping, exporting, and mixing. The system’s flexibility allows it to support both foundational piano instruction and more advanced music production workflows. “Through our partnership with SoundTree, we were also able to expand our resources with additional equipment. Our elementary students utilize EVO 4 audio interfaces, microphones, and stands for recording projects. At the middle school level, we incorporated 12 Novation Launchkey MK4 MIDI controllers, which are used in conjunction with Ableton Live to further enhance music production instruction.”

While Selinger wasn’t able to train on her gear and had to learn as she went along, that “working with Ken Greene from the SoundTree team was essential in developing new



Music students at Ada S. Nelson Elementary School



strategies and ideas for integrating music technology.”

Francis said, “Professional training played an important role in the successful rollout of our program. I participated in formal video onboarding sessions, one-on-one coaching with SoundTree representatives, and hands-on exploration of the equipment.” However, he added that like Selinger, “While these resources were valuable, the most impactful learning occurred through direct classroom application. Integrating the system into daily instruction provided practical experience in managing a full keyboard lab, differentiating instruction, and connecting the technology to real-world music production practices.

Spletstoeszer then gave a rationale for acquiring mobile technology resources. “In a 1:1 environment, the “classroom” is no longer defined by four walls or a rigid row of fixed keyboards. The portable nature of these controllers allows a standard student desk to be instantly transformed into a professional-grade production hub. By moving away from static, heavy hardware, we are effectively “taking music off the bench” and putting it directly into the students’ hands. This mobile setup fosters a dynamic, flexible atmosphere in which students engage in hands-on sound design. Through the use of physical faders and pads, they achieve expressive control, real-time automation, and nuanced mixing that are simply irreproducible in a “click-and-drag” digital environment. The true power of the music creation station lies in its minimal physical footprint. Because these stations fit comfortably alongside a laptop or iPad on a standard desk, music can finally move beyond the dedicated rehearsal room and into the broader school curriculum.

Selinger commented that her program was acquired “through generous gifts made to the fine arts through our giving program.” Francis said that his program was shaped by a vision his superintendent, Dr. Ramiro Rubalcaba, placed before his team.

He recognized that music and the arts are valuable parts of students’ social development and emotional well-being, and he challenged us to dream big as we built a new music program.”

We worked closely with district leadership and industry partners to design a space that would support both music literacy and practical, real-world skills. When I reached out to SoundTree, it was because I wanted to strengthen the foundation of instrumental study through keyboard instruction while also allowing for greater student autonomy and differentiated pacing. The GEC5 proved to be the perfect bridge between music instruction and technology in

our classrooms. After receiving quotes for the labs, we used both ELOP funding and grant funding to purchase the necessary equipment. ELOP (Extended Learning Opportunities Program) supported part of the cost because of our plan to use the labs for after-school music production classes.

All agree that the impact of their programs on students has been profound. Selinger said, “We’ve seen a significant increase in student agency, especially among those who might feel nervous performing. We’ve noticed an increase in students continuing with band electives (band, rock band, and jazz band) after the first year.

Francis offered that “The GEC5 environment creates immediate engagement. Students are not just learning about music—they are actively making it. It bridges traditional musicianship with modern production tools, which strongly resonates with today’s students. The result has been higher participation, stronger skill retention, and a deeper sense of ownership in their musical growth. The impact has been significant. Students who may not have initially connected with traditional ensembles are finding their place through music technology. I’ve seen increased confidence, creativity, and collaboration.

Students are composing, producing, and performing at levels that were not previously accessible in a general music setting. The program has also opened doors to career awareness in music production, audio engineering, and digital media. We live in a world full of digital consumers, but we need to train and inspire the next generation of digital creators. This program has given our students a dedicated space to do exactly that.

As for their advice to other schools and educators contemplating the acquisition of technology for music education, Selinger suggests, “Don’t be afraid of the tech. The gear is there to facilitate the music, not replace it. Start simple and gradually incorporate more complex software



Music students at Ada S. Nelson Elementary School



as you and your students get comfortable. Francis adds, “Start with a clear vision but stay flexible in how you carry it out. Focus on student engagement first—technology is the tool, not the goal. Establish clear procedures for how students will use both computers and keyboards together, since that structure helps overcome many of the common challenges in a lab-based setting. It is also worth exploring whether after-school funding is available, especially if you are considering launching a music technology program beyond the school day.

There are so many great teaching resources available, so take advantage of them. Invest time in classroom management strategies specific to a lab environment, and do not hesitate to introduce creative, project-based learning early on. Most importantly, connect your program to real-world applications—whether that is performance, production, or industry pathways. When students understand the “why,” everything else accelerates.” **T**



The MusicFi

Professional Development Designed for Music Educators

At [MUSICFIRST](#), we believe that technology should serve musicianship, not replace it. When digital tools are paired with strong pedagogy, they open new possibilities for students; without purpose, they are simply another thing for teachers to manage. To support educators in finding that purpose, we are excited to launch the **MusicFirst Academy**—a dedicated learning hub designed by music educators, for music educators.

Why the Academy?

Music teachers are often asked to fit into generalized professional development models that weren't designed for the realities of the music classroom. The Academy meets two critical needs:

- Foundational Software

Training: Structured coursework that moves beyond “quick-start” guides to help teachers apply tools directly to rehearsals and assessments.

- Music-Specific PD:

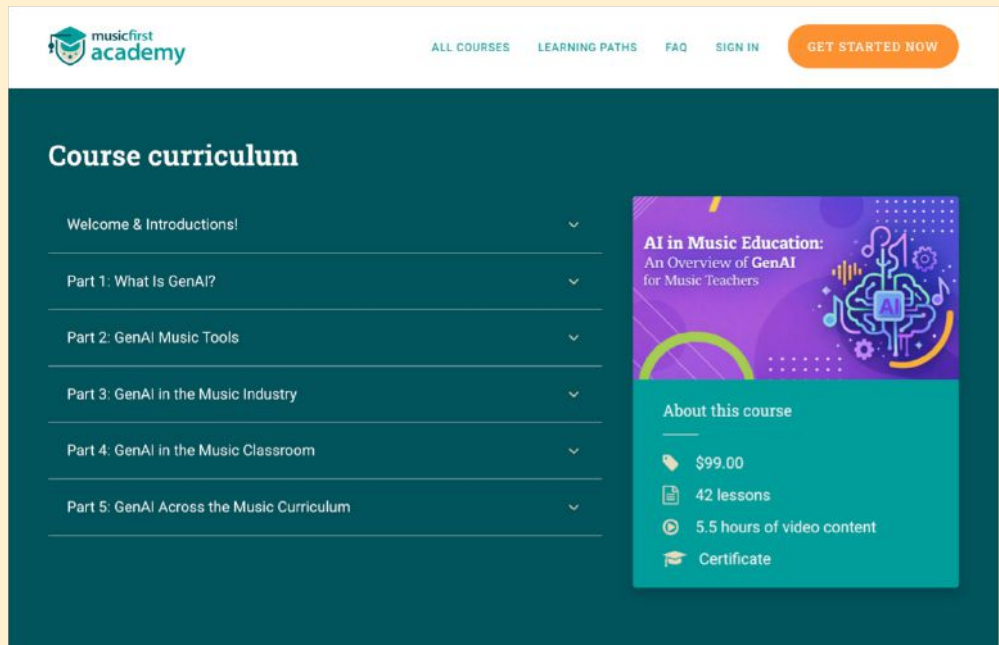
Discipline-specific learning grounded in real classroom practice, starting with our flagship course on AI in Music Education.

Flexible Learning for Busy Schedules

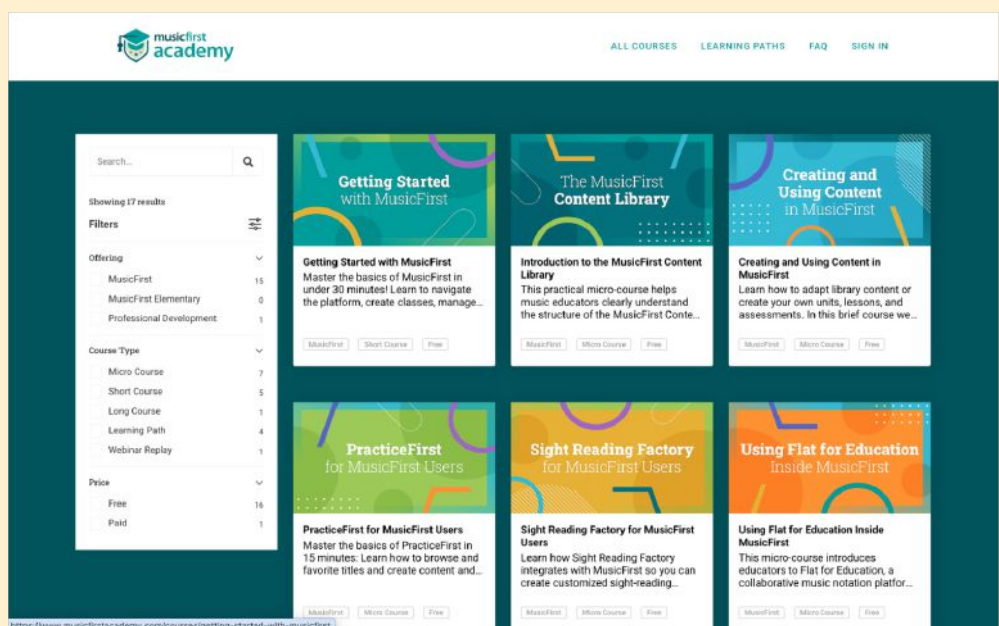
We know music teachers juggle rehearsals, performances, and complex schedules. The Academy is built to fit into a real teaching life:

- Self-Paced & Asynchronous:

Learn during planning time or over breaks with no required live sessions.



MusicFirst Academy Course Curriculum page



MusicFirst Academy Course Library

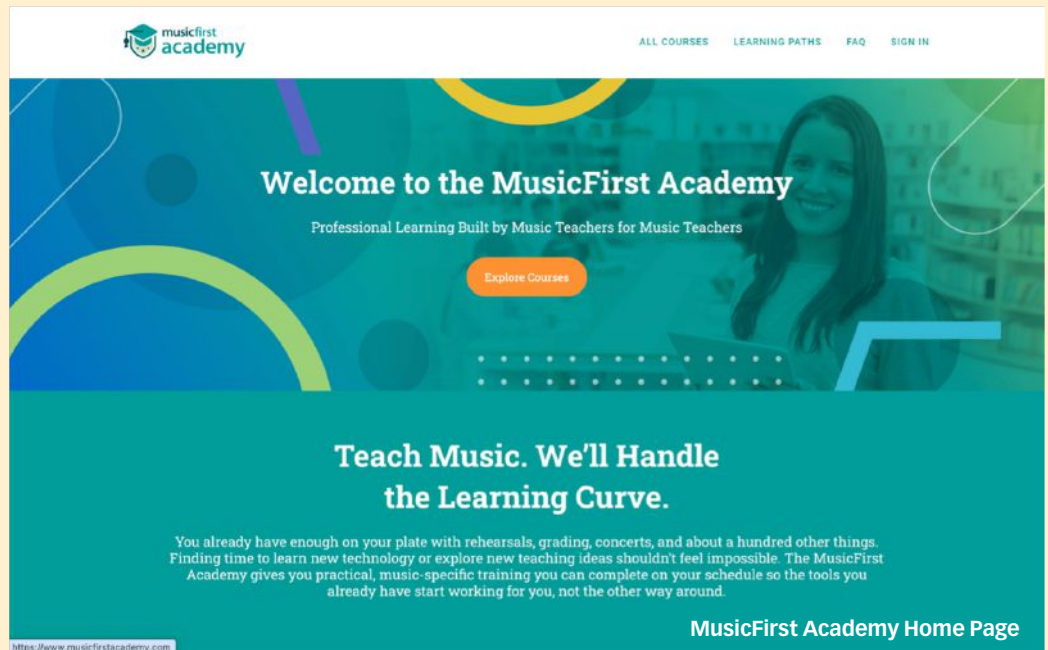
By Dr. Giovanna Cruz

MusicFirst Academy

- **Modular Design:** Content is broken into manageable chunks, ranging from 10-minute microlearning to deep-dive courses.

- **Free & Paid Options:** Free courses help new users build confidence, while paid PD courses offer deeper exploration and structured pathways.

- **Certificates of Completion:** Selected courses and all learning paths provide documentation of PD hours to meet district or state requirements.



MusicFirst Academy Course Examples

At the MusicFirst Academy launch last month, in April 2026, available courses include free courses on using the MusicFirst Classroom and its associated software solutions like [PracticeFirst](#), [Sight Reading Factory](#), [NoteflightLearn](#), [Flat](#), [Auralia & Musition](#), [Focus on Sound](#), [OgenPlus](#), and [Soundtrap](#). As course content is added, there will be learning modules on [MusicFirst Elementary](#), and more.

The first longer-form course for a fee is by MusicFirst founder and master educator, [Dr. Jim Frankel](#), on AI in music education. The course takes about 6 hours to complete and professional development “clock hours” are available.

In the five-part course, Dr. Jim Frankel explores the impact of AI on music education and demonstrates how teachers can use AI tools to enhance learning, creativity, and assessment. Rather than replacing teachers, AI can serve as a powerful as-

sistant that supports lesson planning, differentiation, and student engagement. This course helps music educators understand how AI works, what tools are available today, and how to guide students in using these technologies responsibly.

A Commitment to Teacher Growth

Led by Dr. Giovanna Cruz, Head of Professional Development and a former public-school music teacher, the Academy is a natural extension of our belief that music education deserves specialized training. Whether you are exploring MusicFirst for the first time or looking to deepen your instructional practice, the Academy is here to support your journey.

Visit the MusicFirst Academy today at musicfirstacademy.com to explore our current courses and join a community dedicated to the future of music education. **T**

Dr. Giovanna Cruz became Head of Professional Development at MusicFirst on September 15, 2025. With a career spanning nearly two decades, her professional experience includes orchestral performance, lecturer positions at Wartburg College and Central College in Iowa, public school teaching in the Austin Independent School District in Austin, TX and progressive leadership positions at MakeMusic, Inc, where she spent the previous 10.5 years of her career. She holds Master and Doctor of Musical Arts degrees in Cello Performance from the University of Iowa and

a Bachelor of Education from the Universidad Metropolitana in her native Caracas, Venezuela. Giovanna is an author, educator, and public speaker and has been featured in the School Band and Orchestra Magazine (SBO), the Music Ed Mentor Podcast, and the Profiles in Teaching with Technology podcast by Dr. Jim Frankel. Giovanna has also served on the board of TI:ME. Dr. Cruz carries the motto of her primary and secondary school in Venezuela “No hay cultura sin cultura musical” and advocates for music education for all.

NOTHING BEATS A DE LIVE...OR BIG, LOU



By Michael Stewart

DRUM CORPS SHOW, BIG, LOUD & LIVE!

In the stands or on a screen, your marching band students need to see a DCI show this summer!



THERE'S NO BETTER WAY to inspire your marching band students than by taking them to see a Drum Corps International performance. Nevertheless, with the tour taking place over six weeks of summer vacation, that might present a challenge. There's also the fact that the tour may not visit a town within reasonable proximity of yours, and group travel might not fit into your budget. That said, a drum corps show is certainly a destination worthy of fundraising. In any case, if you can pull it off, and for those who haven't been, attending a DCI performance can be life changing. And, at the very least, it can certainly provide continuity for your band program over the break.

An alternative to attending a DCI event in-person is to stream shows live on FloMarching at a cost of \$29.95 per month. For example, all of the performances during DCI Championships week in August can be seen for that one monthly charge. However, there's another option that brings the pageantry and extraordinary sound of drum corps to life and also offers a group environment: DCI has recently posted that their "Big, Loud & Live" will return to movie theatres nationwide on August 6, 2026. The announcement goes like this:

"Drum Corps International is set to bring the power and precision of the world's finest marching music ensembles to the big screen. The 2026 edition of "Big, Loud & Live" returns on Thursday, August 6, presented in partnership with [Fathom Entertainment](#), the leading specialty distributor of theatrical content worldwide. [USBands](#) and [Ultimate Drill Book](#) will serve as marketing partners. Featuring the DCI World Championship Prelims live from Lucas Oil Stadium in downtown Indianapolis, the annual event showcases the top 15 competing corps. The broadcast is designed to capture every intricate visual detail and musical impact in high definition, providing fans with a cinematic perspective of one of the most competitive nights of the



analysis, exclusive behind-the-scenes interviews, and real-time scoring. For the DCI fandom, the theatre event offers a “50-yard line seat” to the drama of the 2026 World Championship Prelims, where every hundredth of a point matters in the race to earn a spot among the top 12 finalist corps. Long-time host of the broadcast Steve Rondinaro said, “I’ve heard from fans who (turned the event into) a party at the movie theater celebrating all things drum corps...It’s drum corps’ night to shine.” Tickets and a participating theatre list for [DCI 2026: Big, Loud & Live](#) will be available online on Friday, June 26 and at participating theatre box offices. For more information and to be among the first notified when tickets go on sale, please visit [FathomEntertainment.com](#).”

Whether your marching band members are middle or high schoolers, getting them to a stadium, theater, or monitor, to see “marching music’s major league” is the perfect way to set the stage for the coming school year’s marching seasons. For more on Drum Corps International and the 2026 DCI

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A photograph of a DJ booth in a club or event space. In the foreground, a DJ's hands are visible on a laptop and DJ mixer. The background shows a large crowd of people dancing and raising their hands under warm, orange lighting. A large speaker is visible on the left side of the booth.

A Special Teacher's Edition Two-Part story on DJing

HOW THE PRINCIPALS

STARTED TO S

DJ Hapa in action.



IN THIS TWO-PART STORY, Principal Tim Long, (aka DJ Moxie) talks about becoming a “campus coach” and the Start to DJ program at his school. Then Priscilla Rahn shares how she’s incorporated DJing into her programs, most recently at Hamilton Middle School in Denver. Ms. Rahn will become Headmaster Rahn at Excalibur Classical Academy, a new private school in Centennial, Colorado, this fall. The following stories and video clips are from conversations with DJ Coach’s General Manager Marci Bencomo about each educator’s experiences teaching DJing.

SPIN

This is a tale of two administrators, one a principal and another on her way to becoming a headmaster at a new school, who found in DJing a curricular tool that appeals to young students and teaches a variety of unique lessons.



“Hey, DJ Moxie!”

Tim Long heads the lower school at the Awty International School in Houston, Texas. Awty first level is pre-K to first grade, the lower school is second through fifth, and secondary is sixth through the 12th grade. Before Awty, he spent time in Ecuador at an international school there. Now at Awty, he’s not just lower school principal but he also works with its DJ club where each year a group of fifth grade student members join a “Start to DJ” program. This is Long’s third year as DJ Moxie, the school’s DJing facilitator, and its campus coach.

“I learned about the Start to DJ program at an ISTE conference, looking at the various offerings at probably one of the biggest, if not the biggest, tech conference around for educators. When I saw a session on Start to DJ, I had to go. Back in the day in high school, I did some high school dances, some DJing of my own back then on vinyl. So I just thought it would be exciting to learn what was going on. And I just did the session, fell in love with the program, had various conversations with DJ Hapa during the conference getting excited about what we could do at our school. Really, I decided it would be my passion

project for that first year launching it. As a principal, we're often a little more disconnected from students on the day to day than teachers are. And so I was excited about this as a way that I could find new connections with students and also just bring a really cool, fun activity into the day to day."

"What Got Principal Long Spinning"

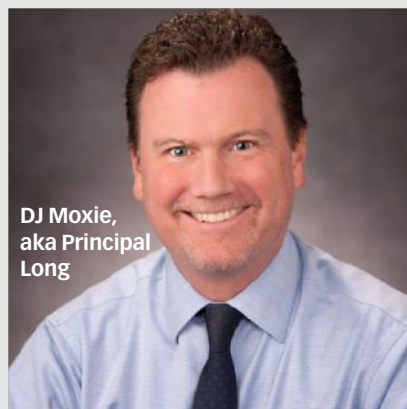
"I guess what attracted me to the program was, well, maybe the selfish part of my own enjoyment of music and mixing music and things like that. Also increasing, you know, the way I could connect with students. But knowing that it also provides a space for students to express themselves in ways that they might not normally have. We offer at the school music classes, of course, but those are, we have a set curriculum students are following. Typically, there's instrumental as well as vocal things going on, but DJing is another aspect of creative outlet that we certainly didn't have in place. And I thought it be fun to do just on that personal level. I had a great time at the conference connecting at various moments with DJ Hoppa and even got to see some of the virtual DJing stuff. I think there's a power behind uh bringing music to any setting and was just excited to do that."

Principal Long says that he had an easier time incorporating Start to DJ as a club in that he approves the budget for those kinds of things! "It's a passion project, for sure. I'd love to see it maybe expand if others have interests, but in that sense, it was easy. Also, within our curricular day in lower school, we have a club space where we offer some additional classes for students that appeal to students' interests, typically in our fifth grade. Art, choir - we have a video production activity - and DJing just fit perfectly in there. The school's clubs are held after school space during normal dismissal. We dismiss a little bit earlier than our secondary school so we have about a 35-40 minute window. Kids are starting their aftercare activities and we're able to provide a few of these clubs."

Long acquired the skills he needed and got certified as a campus coach by going through the Start to DJ video cycle, which is the same one that used by students. "It was a lot of fun...and eye opening to see how much things have changed," he said. "It's just incredible to see what you can do now with the DJ software and hardware, and how they work together to create a very different DJing experience than I had when I was in high school and college."

Getting certified took as much time as it took to watch

Principal Long says that he had an easier time incorporating Start to DJ as a club in that he approves the budget for those kinds of things! "It's a passion project, for sure. I'd love to see it maybe expand if others have interests, but in that sense, it was easy. Also, within our curricular day in lower school, we have a club space where we offer some additional classes for students that appeal to students'



DJ Moxie,
aka Principal
Long

the videos. "...and then your own practice, which just for me became a fun release," he said. "Friday afternoon sitting out on the porch, do some mixes, up my own skills a little bit. So that's how I went through the program and prepped myself prior. And then each year I just preview each new lesson and, given our time constraints, I'm usually running each session in two to three of our actual meeting times. So I've been breaking it down into smaller chunks because we don't

have a full hour on the clock or anything like that to do it. And I build in lots of practice and play time for the students to really build their skills.

One of Long's challenges though is creating a path for his young DJs after they matriculate out of fifth grade. Start to DJ has more to offer, so he's working on getting some other campus coaches involved. "Then those fifth grade DJs will have an outlet to continue as they move into sixth and seventh grade."

"DJs For Hire"

"We have a great event every year called the Fall Fun Festival, where we have, it's around Halloween time and it's like a carnival. And I put a shout out to my former DJs and got about six of them who came together and just gave them sets and let them roll with it. And it was great to see how they had continued on their own. They'd built up a lot more of their music repertoire and mixes and things like that. So they ended up putting on a good chunk of the entertainment for a big school event. One even got offered an outside job, but his parents said they were gonna wait till



he's older than 13 before he picks up any jobs."

Long sees strong value with Start to DJ and considers it an outlet that allows some students to a different way of expressing themselves they might not have otherwise. "Some might be the bouncier kiddos who, all of a sudden, find great focus in getting into the music and the mixing and the nuances. And then other students who maybe aren't as openly expressive, seeing that it becomes a way to shine and to step up on stage. So through the coursework that we do, I'm always building in additional ways in which they can combine practice with performance. Sometimes we stop and pause to take off the headphones, use the out-loud audio station, and get them up there mixing in front of their friends, to build confidence."

"I think what the program does is make things easier, the fades and filters and all the stuff that's built in. Having the video resource is great to have someone else explain it, show it, demo it. I'm at the point where I'll re-demo things as well. I mean, I've learned the same skills along the way or, you know, highlight some of the things that I might see students playing around with. But it's not hard to get there. You love music and you enjoy it. I think many of us always wanted to be a DJ, you know, or get up on the stage."

"This Is How We Do It"

"I think what the program does is make things easier, the fades and filters and all the stuff that's built in. Having the video resource is great to have someone else explain it, show it, demo it. I'm at the point where I'll re-demo things as well. I mean, I've learned the same skills along the way or, you know, highlight some of the things that I might see students playing around with. But it's not hard to get there. You love music and you enjoy it. I think many of us always wanted to be a DJ, you know, or get up on the stage. So if anyone, you know, loves music and, you know, loves to mix things up or, you know, put that together or just loves going to an event with a DJ, it's easy to do at a basic level. Getting to that, you know, top pro level, that takes a whole lot more practice, certainly. But ah it's easy to go through the video.

So just, you know, jump in if you have a love for it. Jump in, try it out. You know, I don't know for you all, in how you manage the program, you know, I went ahead and just purchased it and got everything in line and then just started doing the coursework. I don't know if there's any way that you all could offer people, you know, trial run, you know, do session one or something so they can get into it and see that it's not as hard as maybe you think. And it's a whole lot of fun and to build that confidence if someone is you know, maybe less confident about taking on the responsibilities of running a class."

Long says that for him, it's just seeing how excited the students who really love it get. Certainly there are some who decide that it's just not for them. Nevertheless, he's kept, good cohorts each year and for most, knowing that there's a space for them to do something that brings joy a couple of times a week, is critical at this point in their lives. "They're practicing at home and going on and on. The more opportunities we can provide in a school setting, the better it is overall. And that's in any aspect, even at recess, thinking about what activities are available for students. Can we add another activity? Can we add more choices? It just allows a lot more interaction and finding that sweet spot for them, whether it's choir, or art, or DJing, or what have you. So I think it's that. And it's a lot of fun to be DJ Moxie for the students. I'm either Mr. Long or DJ Moxie and often it's just a great personal connection with kiddos, seeing them during the day. "Hey, DJ Moxie!" "How you doing, DJ Energy?" You know, and all the things that go along with that. So it's definitely worth it. It builds community connections and provides kids with a wonderful outlet for their creative side." ●

MS. RAHN ST



Students fiddle with DJing apps in Ms. Rahn's classroom

STARTS TO DJ



PRISCILLA RAHN is currently in her 32nd year of teaching. Most of that time has been teaching choir and band, but she's now teaching middle school band, orchestra, . . . and DJing, at Hamilton Middle School in Denver, a Title 1 school in Southeast Denver. She's previously taught in Texas, Alaska and Colorado, she plays piano at her church. Priscilla is married to multi-Grammy nominated jazz saxophonist and producer Darren Rahn (who's had 29 No. 1 *Billboard* singles and tours around the world). "We just have this amazing life of music," she says. Rahn is also getting ready to make a move of her own having been hired as headmaster of the newly created private school Excalibur Classical Academy opening this fall in Centennial, Colorado.

"Start to DJ" has allowed Rahn to gain a skill that she can in turn provide to her students, all in one program. However, she had to be extremely self-motivated to acquire it. She had to watch the YouTube videos to hear about what DJs do, learn about the process, but also learn about the gear. That said, Start to DJ's founder, leader and professional touring DJ, Coach Hapa, was available for in-person tutoring sessions. "He's come and visited my classroom two times," said Rahn, "And he's based in California, but he has flown into Denver and met my students and answered questions. It's so cool to have a world-class DJ in our classroom, so it's really been special."

"Priscilla Throws The Book at DJing"

"I've always been really intimidated with DJing. You know, I never was taught how to DJ. I didn't know anything about sound waves, you know, the way you really need to, and mashing up music. um But this DJ program had a breakout session, and they said, come on over, check us out. And I thought, well, I'm just gonna go. Mainly as a board member to see what you're teaching. But when I learned they had, Start to DJ had a curriculum, and they said, "we have a book." And I thought, oh, wait a minute, you have a book? That changes everything. And he said, "yeah, I teach all the lessons. I've recorded everything." So really all I had to do was stay one lesson ahead of the kids, right? We had the software, the videos, and the book to go along with it. Coach Hapa made it so easy, so accessible, so clear that I felt like I could do this. It sounded like something really fun. And, you know, after you've been teaching for 30 years and you're looking for something fresh to do with your students, I thought, you know what? You can teach an old dog new tricks, you know? But I didn't realize the investment, because most schools are doing the 'Start to DJ' as an afterschool, out of school, extra extracurricular type of class, not an actual daily class. So I had to fundraise and get money to buy controllers and iPads and the books and pay for the software and all of that."





DJ Hapa visiting Ms. Rahn's classroom

Along with the student handbooks, the program has a teacher facilitator book that goes along with the videos. “I think if he didn’t have those resources, I really wouldn’t feel comfortable trying to teach a DJ class,” said Rahn. “The cool thing about Start to DJ is that Coach Hapa approaches the content like an instructor, not just as an artist. So the way he explains things, the way he has his camera pointing to the controller but also his screen so you can kind of see in real time what he’s doing and what you’re going to see on the screen. So it makes more sense. But the more you do it, the more you sit down with it as a teacher and watch, pre-watch the videos before you show the students, and then you do it yourself, it makes it clearer. So I definitely think that with that resource and the curriculum, it makes it so any musician can make a class out of this.

“It’s really amazing because (with the Start to DJ program) our students are learning how to curate and arrange music,” says Ms. Rahn. “They’re learning about beats per minute. They’re learning what they like stylistically, which is expanding their creativity. And they have to articulate. I’ll ask, “Why did you choose this song? Why do you think this song is a great transition for this next song?”

“Music is for everybody, she says. “You can find your lane. And the beautiful thing about it is, if students feel frustrated by learning to play an instrument, or they feel like they’re not necessarily a singer but they love music because they’re always listening to music, they constantly say how much fun it is. Every Friday, we have the kids (in our program) DJ during lunchtime, and they’re becoming rock stars. Other kids are coming up to the DJ booth making requests. So you know that if they’re coming up in middle school making requests, they’re listening to music. But then they start to

see themselves, “well, my classmates are doing this and it looks like fun. I wanna take that class too. I wanna learn how to DJ.” And so you, you demystify the process.

Her big goal was for the students to DJ the school dances and school events, which they now do. “I think it builds a lot of confidence. I have seen my students become more courageous. And it takes a lot of nerve to put yourself on stage anyway. As a musician, as a singer, as a horn player. A lot of people don’t want to be the solo artist. But when you’re the DJ, you are the solo artist. You’re very exposed, so this course teaches students how to build that confidence, Part of their test is to actually DJ. They have to mix three to four songs and use the effects button. You have to know how the controller works and you have to be able to know when a song is getting ready to end in order to load up the next song and be ready so there’s no dead space. So there’s a lot of planning that comes along with it. Students have to practice over and over and over, because you can’t just do it on a whim. As beginners they’re taught to plan on how they’re going to transition from one song to another; what song they’re going to start, why they’re starting with that song, which song they’re going to end with and how they’re going to transition and add effects. And so they’re having to organize themselves. I’ve just seen my students really thrive and become more confident in that way.

“Adding An Opportunity”

We’re living in a technology age, right? We’re seeing more and more of AI. And I’m not a fan of AI music, but kids are on technology and they’re listening to music. And again, I just go back to, there’s certain things. I always told my musicians, my horn players, you know, you’ll never be hungry because if you’re hungry and you go out on the street and you start playing your instrument with a bucket, you can make some money and you can go have a meal. You know, um it’s the same thing with DJing. If you can get yourself a little controller and an iPad and a speaker, you can go out on the street or you can work. You’ll never be broke. You’ll always, you know, you’ll never be hungry, right? So it’s so practical. It’s just a practical thing and you don’t have to spend hours practicing your flute or your violin or your cello or singing, right? You don’t have to be a quote unquote great musician in order to... You can go do parties, and you can be busy doing parties every weekend. So, you know, I would just encourage us traditional music teachers to figure out a way to add this as an opportunity for students, especially in our city schools where, you know, if you can give a kid a spark, then you just never know what they’re gonna be able to do with it: **T**



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POP QUIZ

The following quiz questions can be used to test for comprehension or for general reading of this issue of *In Tune*.
(The answers are on page 3 of the Teacher's Edition.)

1. Who is the "leader" of Stray Kids?

- A. Felix
- B. Lee Know
- C. Changbin
- D. Bang Chan

2. Which scale degree does saxophonist David S. Ware subtract from the minor scale to create the melody for "Crossing Samsara?"

- A. 3rd
- B. 6th
- C. 4th
- D. 7th

3. A finished song teaches you more than a _____ perfect idea ever could.

- A. Book
- B. Perfect idea
- C. Parent
- D. Journal entry

4. What makes a record breathe?

- A. Subtleties
- B. Compression
- C. Tempo
- D. Volume

5. When a composer subtracts something from a phrase or melody so that it resolves quicker than we expect, it's not unlike the _____.

- A. Phantom limb syndrome
- B. Phantom vibration syndrome
- C. Phantom stair feeling
- D. Phantom Menace

6. What was the name of the 2017 reality show that spawned Stray Kids?

- A. *Stray Kids*
- B. *Making The Band: K-Pop Edition*
- C. *Stray With Me*
- D. *Seoul Horizons: The Quest Begins*

7. "Zombie" by YUNGBLUD was nominated for which award at the 2026 Grammys?

- A. Best Rock Song
- B. Best Male Vocal Performance
- C. Best Rock Audio Production
- D. Album of the Year

8. Instead of asking, "Is this good?" first-time songwriters should try asking:

- A. Can I finish this?
- B. What happens if I keep going?
- C. What can I learn from this one?
- D. All of the above

9. Which Stray Kids albums have achieved No. 1 chart positions?

- A. *Oddinary*
- B. *Maxident*
- C. *NOEASY*
- D. A and B
- E. None of the above

10. What is YUNGBLUD's birth name?

- A. Andrew Lloyd Weber
- B. Riley Gaines
- C. Omar Saddiq
- D. Dominic Harrison



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