

ENHANCING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR MUSIC EDUCATORS
THROUGH PODCASTING: EXPLORING THE PRODUCTION OF A
PODCAST ABOUT INSTRUMENTAL
MUSIC PEDAGOGY

Jennifer Wise

Program in Music Education
Department of Music

A THESIS
Submitted in partial fulfillment
Of the requirements for the degree of
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Dr. Teresa Purcell-Giles, Thesis Supervisor

(Thesis Supervisor signature)

Department: Music

Dr. Payton MacDonald, Department Chair

(Chairperson signature)

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ABSTRACT

When blended with existing approaches to instrumental music pedagogy, podcasts can serve as a versatile tool for disseminating research and informing best practices for busy music educators. This action research thesis focuses on producing a podcast — *Take a Cue*— and is dedicated to presenting information about instrumental music pedagogy. Through observation of the processes involved in podcast creation and the analysis of educational podcast content, this study seeks to inform educators of the benefits of acquiring knowledge through podcast consumption in order to inspire innovative approaches to the presentation of pedagogy in instrumental music education settings. Research questions were (1) In what ways are podcasts an effective medium for professional development and environmental support for music educators? (2) What is the process of collaboratively producing a series of podcast episodes devoted to instrumental music pedagogy? (3) What is the impact of the podcast on the professional development of the educators involved? The author's role as the host of the podcast adds a unique perspective to the action research methodology used in this paper, highlighting the benefits of utilizing podcasts for professional development in music education.

Keywords: beginning band pedagogy, instrumental music pedagogy, professional development, podcast, podcasting,

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Chapter I: The Research Objective

Music educators must fulfill regular professional development requirements to maintain certification and are shown to sustain longer careers and feel more confident when empowered with best practices in pedagogy. Yet they are often limited in resources such as time and access to information specific to their teaching assignment. Professional development needs are also different at various stages of a music teacher's career. Music teachers need environmental support to survive and thrive in the field. As a result, more research into tools including podcasts that can help busy music teachers meet these professional needs is necessary and is the foundation for the problem addressed in this study.

Podcasts are a new staple of communication, entertainment, and information consumption, and offer a unique space for music educators to share their thoughts about making music, teaching, and learning. Considering the afore mentioned limitations that practicing music educators face, podcasts are a highly accessible medium that enable teachers to interact with information from a diverse group of presenters, broaden their professional sphere, and participate in professional development that is specific to the discipline. Podcasts offer a special opportunity for both listeners and podcasters to hear about best practices directly from other educators, professional musicians, and researchers.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this action research project is to investigate whether and in what ways specific podcasts and podcasting benefit music teachers. The podcast examined herein is titled *Take a Cue* and is cohosted by me, Jennifer Wise and my colleague, Erik Donough. I am an elementary band teacher with sixteen years of experience teaching band at all levels in Northern New Jersey. Donough teaches middle school band in the same district and has taught a total of

twenty years. In its second season of production, *Take a Cue* podcast is providing practical information to music teachers who are working in the field and those who are preparing to enter the field of education. This is the show description from the *Take a Cue* Spotify page:

Every episode promises to entertain and inform listeners with the hosts' real-world experiences as band directors, marching instructors, jazz educators, musicians, spouses, and parents. In addition, Erik and Jen chat with guests about their own stories and experiences in the music and education fields (Donough and Wise, 2023).

Additionally, by participating in the creation of a podcast, music teachers can have an opportunity to deeply analyze their own teaching.

Guiding Questions

The guiding questions for this action research inquiry are

1. In what ways are podcasts an effective medium for professional development and environmental support for music educators?
2. What is the process of collaboratively producing a series of podcast episodes devoted to instrumental music pedagogy?
3. What is the impact of the podcast on the professional development of the educators involved?

Research Design

Action research examines social reality by acting within it and studying the effects of the researchers' actions. It is sometimes described as an ongoing series of cycles that involve moments of planning actions, acting, observing, and reflecting on one's observations (Anderson et al., 2007). The action research method of study was chosen for the purpose for this paper because of my involvement in the cycle of the production of the podcast as host, my analysis of

feedback from listeners and other music teachers, and reflections on my own teaching that will inspire future podcast episodes and changes to my teaching.

The series of *Take a Cue* podcast episodes examined in this project is titled “The Starting off Right Series.” This series incorporates interviews with expert musicians, demonstrations given by master teachers, other relevant podcasts, academic books, journals, and other primary sources to present episodes focusing on best practices for the first lesson on each beginning band instrument. The research process includes planning and recording podcast episodes, conducting reflective discussions on the production experience, collecting informal feedback from listeners, transcribing episodes, and analyzing the impact of the podcast on teaching and learning practices. In this study, qualitative data was collected from planning documents, show transcripts, personal reflections from the hosts, social media posts and informal listener feedback. Social media interactions were coded to place listener comments into categories for further analysis (see Table 2). Coding of social media posts gives insight into how the podcast is impacting listeners.

Chapter three presents the analysis of several episodes leading to a deeper analysis of a single episode (Episode 034, *Starting Off Right: Oboe*) in chapters four and five. Findings and reflections are presented throughout the paper using my personal narrative to preserve my voice as host and allow the reader to connect more intimately with the content (Mertova & Webster, 2019).

By actively engaging in the creation and analysis of educational podcast content, the findings of this research can inform educators on the benefits of acquiring knowledge from podcasts and inspire innovative approaches to the presentation of pedagogy in instrumental music education.

Terms

Best practices in teaching are existing practices that already possess a high level of widely agreed effectiveness (Alber, 2015; Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012).

Environmental support refers to the network of support surrounding teachers. Environmental support can include support from administrators, support from other teachers, community support, opportunities for professional development, participation in a mentor program and participation in professional conferences (McLain, 2005). Environmental support also encompasses various resources available to educators in formal and informal settings such as publications, journal articles, podcasts, and other online resources.

Pedagogy is the combination of teaching methods, learning activities, and learning assessments that contribute to the formation and execution of course content (Friesen & Su, 2023). Elements of **instrumental music pedagogy** include teaching and reinforcing correct embouchure, posture, hand position, breathing, and articulation, resulting in good tone, technique, range, flexibility, and musicality. Teaching students to read, interpret, and perform musical notation results in musical performance and the study of music literature (Lafferty, 2002).

Professional development in educational practice encompasses formal and informal discipline-specific learning that enhances practice and deepens and extends teachers' professional competence, through gaining new knowledge, strengthening beliefs, and directing self-regulatory skills (Richter et al., 2011). Examples of formal professional development opportunities include structured learning environments with a specified curriculum (e.g.: graduate courses, conferences, and mandated staff development). Informal professional development opportunities are generally not mandated (reading books, classroom observations,

collaborative activities such as conversations with colleagues and parents, mentoring activities, teacher networks and study groups) (Desimone, 2009). Listening to podcasts would fall into the category of informal professional development.

A **podcast** is a digital audio file that can be downloaded or listened to over the Internet, also known as streaming. Podcasts are an extremely popular form of audio entertainment. Many podcasts are presented as a series created by a host and then published episode-by-episode online, where subscribers can then download and listen to each episode when it is released (Hadad, 2024). **Podcasting** is the act of creating a podcast.

Access to **social media** allows anyone with an internet connection to read, write, and participate in interactions with others online (Bernard, et al., 2018). *Take a Cue* maintains a space on YouTube, Facebook Pages, Spotify, Apple Podcasts, and Instagram to promote the podcast and facilitate collaborative discussions between the hosts, listeners, and the wider community of music educators.

Chapter II: Review of the Literature

Introduction to literature review

In this literature review, sources of information relating to podcasts, teachers' needs, and related podcasts are reviewed. Examining relevant sources helps create a context for understanding the significance of the podcast medium and its possibilities for providing professional development for music educators.

History and Future of Podcast Technology

The term 'podcast' was first proposed by journalist Ben Hammersley in a February 2004 article of *The Guardian* (Copley, 2007). It is a word which blends 'iPod' and 'broadcast.' Podcasting, then, is the process and method by which recorded material in the form of a digital media file, or a series of files is distributed over the internet for playback on portable media players, such as iPods or personal computers. Podcasts can be considered a "push technology" because users can subscribe to a podcast and episodes are delivered (pushed) directly to their devices once they are released (Lazzari, 2009). *Take a Cue* listeners can subscribe to the podcast for automatic downloads or notifications about new episodes from several different podcast hosting sites. Unlike blogs or videos, where audiences must have time to actively read or watch content, podcasts can be consumed on the go (Larson, 2021).

Podcasting became popular starting in 2004-05 and has been increasingly used by individuals and organizations ever since. Apple's support for podcasts within iTunes resulted in a significant boost in listenership in 2005 (Henderson, 2021). From 2007-2021, iTunes offered iTunes U, making educational podcasts searchable. Students and teachers could search and download podcasts from universities, museums, and educators all over the world (On Tam,

2012). After 2021, Apple moved podcasts to a new platform called Apple Podcasts, thereby providing podcasts with their own dedicated application which can be searched by category, author, title, and language.

To understand the process of creating and distributing a podcast, it is necessary to have a basic understanding of the technical infrastructure underlying the podcasting ecosystem (Thomas, 2019). Podcasts are primarily produced in the open standard MP3 or MP4 format, which allows the audio to be compressed to a small size with acceptable sound quality to the source material, thus saving bandwidth usage to users who either download or stream the files. There are numerous guides to making a podcast (Morris, et al., 2007; Green, 2015; Buehner & Justice, 2018; NPR 2018; Henderson, 2021; Larson, 2021). While podcasts are relatively easy to produce using the hardware provided in an ordinary cell phone or computer and free software, production quality has tended to improve as podcasters gain experience (Henderson, 2021).

As an evolving on-demand audio platform, the definition of podcast has changed over time and been used in various contexts. One may now see podcasts in the form of digital audio files distributed via Really Simple Syndication (RSS), downloadable radio available on the internet or streaming platforms, downloadable audio programs that have aired through broadcast radio, video podcast “vodcasts”, and more (Bottomley, 2015).

Podcasts as a Tool for Sharing Knowledge

Podcasts have widely evolved as a popular tool for communication, contributing to the spread of information in fields like education, science, and healthcare by sharing research findings (DeMarco, 2022). Podcasts present opportunities for “fostering new avenues of research dissemination” (Llinares, et al., 2018). There are many unique features that make podcasts a helpful tool for acquiring knowledge and disseminating research (Weimer, 2021).

One of the captivating aspects of podcast consumption, when compared to traditional lectures, is the ability to interact with diverse perspectives and ideas, ensuring an engaging and continuous flow of information. For example, Nancy Marshall (2023) has produced more than 220 episodes of *The PR Maven Podcast*, which talks about public relations, marketing, and other topics for a wide range of listeners.

Podcasting is a way for people like me to have meaningful conversations with others that can then be shared with a target audience. It's a fun, unique way to ask questions of interesting people and learn more about them through their answers. And they're not just people; they are experts, influencers and thought leaders in their respective fields (p.2). Marshall suggests that the best podcasters build connections with the people around them (guests and listeners). These connections empower "thought leaders" to reach audiences they never imagined would be possible. "That's the best part about podcasting: A typical listener can learn from a black belt in Brazilian jiu-jitsu just as easily as they can learn from the CEO of Goldman Sachs or the head of a PR agency" (p. 3).

The ethical standards and credibility of information shared in podcasts remain a significant area of interest for researchers. Although podcasts have a wide-reaching audience and are a well-established medium, there is a lack of defined ethical guidelines or professional standards across different podcast genres (Whipple, 2023). Kelsey Whipple and colleagues examine the level of trust listeners place in podcasts as a news source and how they assess their journalistic credibility. They found that while acknowledging podcasts as a form of journalism, listeners tend to view them with more skepticism compared to traditional news outlets. In all fields, when advancements in communication technologies are made, they present opportunities

and challenges that ‘require continued critical reflection to inform and progress our work (Scriven, 2022).

Music Teachers’ Need for Professional Development and Environmental Support

For music educators, the podcast format often enables the melding of two of the pillars of music education – pedagogy and musicianship. Podcasts can use the medium to convey a rich presentation of both the practical and personal narrative. In this context, *Take a Cue*, the podcast highlighted in this study, aims to offer insights into teaching instrumental music that are practical, beneficial for educators, and address current issues in music education. Specifically, in the "Starting Off Right" series, guests are invited to share their experiences and expertise regarding teaching students beginning to play an instrument. While not every statement made on *Take a Cue* is backed by peer-reviewed research, experts appearing on the show bring years of practical experience utilizing innovative techniques to augment instrumental music pedagogy.

Many professional music organizations and teacher educators advocate for participation in professional development activities by in-service and preservice teachers. In his case study examining the support systems in place for music teachers and how they contribute to teacher retention and attrition, Clifford Madsen (2002) suggests that “Perhaps these opportunities for professional dialogue and collegiality have a more profound influence on music teachers than previously thought” (p.15). Patti Krueger (2000) notes that various support issues combined with feelings of isolation influence both job satisfaction and teacher attrition, especially for new teachers. Connecting with other music teachers and pedagogues at workshops and conventions may provide “some type of therapeutic service for music educators” (p.15). An exciting aspect of listening to podcasts is that podcasts can address professional development and at the same time

alleviate feelings of isolation for music teachers. Podcasts often include personal narratives, making the listening experience more intimate.

When participants call podcasts intimate, they are describing relationships within the network of the podcast (hosts, guests, listeners, and social media participants).

Intimacy is not an innocuous descriptor borne from the overwhelming distinctiveness of podcasting's closeness. Instead, it is a culturally precedented conversation that draws on, reproduces, and repurposes established discourses in order to define the parameters of podcasting mediation. (Euritt, 2023)

Euritt goes on to say that podcasting uses intimacy to describe how it affects the people and stories that pass through it. He states that there is a sense of closeness that happens when listening to podcasts. That closeness extends to how podcasting builds its network through constructing different kinds of communities, including the fans of specific podcasts – the members of the community that podcasts hope to build.

Music teachers are not only responsible for teaching the technical aspects of music making but are also responsible for infusing lessons with artistry. This puts a unique burden on the music teacher especially as the teaching profession has always been regarded as a “dedication profession” (Yang, 2020). The future of music education relies on a committed and driven cohort of teachers, capable of handling and minimizing the pressures that affect the teaching of the music (McLain, 2005). Therefore, in this stage of modern education an attempt is made to explore the psychological state of (music) teachers and the methods to alleviate their work pressure (Yang, 2020).

Much research has been done about “teacher burnout” as a contributing factor to teacher attrition rates and struggles with job satisfaction (Madsen, 2002; McLain, 2005, Randall, 2005;

Chang, 2009; Freeman, 2016; Hamann & Gordon, 2000; Yang, 2020; Hanson, 2021). Lack of adequate training, and poor administrative support are known to lead to burnout among music teachers (Hamann & Gordon, 2000; McLain, 2005). A lack of adequate training contributes to burnout when school districts with tight class schedules and budget constraints lean on music teachers to take on teaching assignments that drift outside their area of specialization. Many music teachers inevitably feel overwhelmed in this situation (Hamann & Gordon, 2000). In addition, music educators often mention various factors at the school level that contribute to burnout, such as feeling unsupported, facing scheduling challenges, experiencing conflicts in their roles, and lacking a sense of control in local decision making (McLain, 2005).

While podcast listening cannot change the working conditions of a teacher, podcasts and their accompanying social media spaces can be a source of inspiration and practical information that supports teachers in situations which have been shown to lead to burnout. It is the goal of *Take a Cue* and this action research paper to provide music educators with professional development specific to their content area, and a safe space to communicate with other music educators about teaching and learning.

Related Podcasts

There are a wide variety of podcasts tailored to instrumental music teachers, each offering a unique approach and format. This section offers a sampling of podcasts that may be of interest to musicians and educators. As a listener, it is important to examine several podcasts to find a program that presents information in a format that resonates with you and covers the topics that you are eager to explore. Here are some examples of Podcasts marketed to instrumental directors available on Spotify and Apple Podcasts.

After Sectionals Podcast by Kaleidoscope Adventures

The podcast *After Sectionals* is sponsored by Kaleidoscope Adventures group tour company. The Kaleidoscope Adventures website suggests music educators listen to podcasts because

Band programs are a year-round commitment, so you may not have time to attend conferences or seminars. But you can listen to a podcast on your schedule – while you’re commuting to work, running errands, or during rare moments of downtime (it’s possible!!) (Venture, 2023).

Episode topics from *After Sectionals* vary from classroom management, motivation, festival preparation, pedagogy, and “staph” development. The show uses a casual conversation style and a teacher centered approach to instrumental music instruction to peak listeners’ interests. *After Sectionals* is hosted by three band directors from Stiles Middle School in Leander, Texas, USA. Hosts Darcy Williams, Jenna Yee and Alex Ortega make a point to talk openly about the challenges and successes of their own programs. Like *Take a Cue*, they offer some “instrument specific” episodes. However, the *After Sectionals* “Instrument Specific” series focuses on the whole scope of teaching the instrument rather than the first lesson (Williams & Yee, 2022).

Band Director Bootcamp: Productivity and Wellness Tips for Busy Band Directors

Host Lesley Moffat invites listeners into her “... special haven where we march towards sustainable teaching and healthier living, in harmony, note by note” on her podcast, *Band Director Boot Camp*. The show is presently in its second season of production. Most episodes are twenty minutes in length or less to accommodate the lifestyle of “busy band directors” (Moffat, 2022). Several episodes include guest speakers including band directors, composers, authors, and

public speakers. While most of the episodes are focused on enhancing a band director's both mental and physical wellness, Moffat delves into the technical aspects of teaching band when the tips benefit the listener in a way that can help streamline tasks, improve productivity, and increase mindfulness in the classroom (Moffat, 2022).

As an example, in season 1, episode 55 "Unconventional Planning: How Eric Combs Transformed his Band Program", guest Eric Combs shares his innovative approach to lesson planning that allowed his band program to flourish. Combs shares his struggles during his first years before developing his lesson planning system, and the success that followed implementing that system (Moffat, 2024). The listener is often invited to pause their listening and reflect on how they can relate to the guest and implement his techniques in their own program. This special moment of mindfulness sets *Band Director Boot Camp* apart from other podcasts and makes tuning in a real experience for the listener.

The MuTeD Network

The Music Teacher Development Podcast Network (MuTeD) represents a collection of podcasts united by the shared objective of offering assistance to music educators through podcast programming specific to the field. A banner on their website states their motto as, "All music teachers face similar challenges, and we should never feel alone" (The MuTeD Network, 2021). There are five podcasts presented by the MuTeD Network. The *MusEd: A Music Educator's Podcast* is geared toward teachers in the first five years in the field. The *Everything Band Podcast* offers in-depth discussions and interviews with conductors, composers, and performers. While the *Jazz Chat Podcast* with Ron Sikes focuses on best practice for band directors who teach jazz. The MuTeD Network is a valuable resource for music teachers in any situation and at any stage of their career.

The Cult of Pedagogy

The Cult of Pedagogy podcast is a valuable resource for educators, covering a wide array of topics related to teaching, including teaching strategies, classroom management, education reform, and educational technology. Host Jennifer Gonzalez puts in extensive effort to make each episode informative and practical for teachers, conducting thorough research, preparing insightful questions for guests, and ensuring a smooth interview process. This podcast stands out because of the inclusion of detailed show notes and transcripts, and the organized layout of the website for easy access to past episodes and blog posts.

The podcast features interviews with various stakeholders in education, offering a glimpse into the psychological and social dynamics of schools, sharing trade secrets, and exploring unconventional aspects of teaching not typically discussed in traditional workshops about education. Additionally, Gonzalez posts solo episodes with advice on enhancing teaching effectiveness and how to enjoy your time in the classroom. The podcast's diverse content, engaging interviews, and actionable advice make it valuable for educators seeking to improve their teaching practices, stay informed about the latest trends in education, and connect with the wider education community.

One notable element of this podcast is the yearly episode and accompanying blog post about new educational technologies called “Teacher’s Guide to Tech” (Gonzalez, 2023). Gonzalez’s website states that “The Teacher’s Guide to Tech is the home for a suite of useful products that will make your relationship with educational technology so much better.” Not only is she discussing the latest technologies on her podcast, but she is providing information about how to put new technologies into action.

Chapter III: Methodology

The Power of Personal Narrative

In the context of this research project, a personal narrative is the most effective way to communicate the goals of the podcast. By incorporating personal narratives into an action research paper, researchers are able to provide context, insight, and a unique perspective that can enrich the overall study (Mertova and Webster, 2019). The use of personal narrative in this paper allows the reader to immerse themselves in the complex processes involved in crafting and distributing our podcast while exploring the podcast's benefits as well as opportunities for refinement and enhancement all while keeping the hosts' voice intact.

The Recording Process

In the Spring of 2022, my colleague Erik Donough approached me with the idea of starting a podcast about teaching instrumental music. At the time, we both had over fifteen years of experience in the field and had taught band at various levels in several school districts. As we were both new to the process of podcasting, we approached the project in a very relaxed way. The plan was to get together, pick a topic, discuss the topic, record our discussion, and hope that something that was said would be helpful to other band directors. The content creation goal was to release an episode every other week.

In its infancy, *Take a Cue* was recorded face-to-face in Erik's home studio as an audio podcast. It quickly became apparent that recording in our own spaces was necessary to keep up with the planned content roll out timeline. We began using online platforms like Anchor.fm and Riverside to record in our own homes. This also made it easier to invite guests from beyond our

local sphere of educators and performers. Soon, due to the nature of the content, it was necessary to also produce a video version of *Take a Cue*, consumable on Spotify and YouTube.

We discovered that quality recording equipment (video and audio) is essential to the presentation of an educational podcast about music. For audio recording, I started with a Samson USB condenser microphone, but recently upgraded to a Yeti multi-pattern USB condenser microphone that plugs into my MacBook Air with a USB connection, and the improvement in sound quality is noticeable. Erik uses an AKG P120 large diaphragm microphone through a Focusrite Scarlet 18i20 audio interface. He also uses a pop screen to filter, which offers protection for the microphone from the fast-moving air from speech. The pop filter also reduces harsh sounds from words with hard consonants like “p” and “s.” As we moved to a video format published on YouTube, we added ring lights to help brighten the backdrops in our home studios.

We also upgraded our backdrops to include some personal touches. Erik’s home studio has a sign that viewers can see that says, “Public School Made Me.” While my backdrop includes a poster from the Summer Wind Jazz Festival and art made by my husband’s kindergarten teacher. These personal touches not only make our podcast more visually appealing but also created a more relatable and inviting space for our audience to connect with us on a more personal level. (Donough and Wise, Eo.24, January 2024)

Another personal touch to the look of our social media pages is our color scheme and logo. Erik and I reached out to Arooj, an artist who specializes in creating custom marketing packages. Arooj took our own photos and created the stylized images that make up our profile pictures, backgrounds, and banners. While developing the logo, we underwent multiple revisions to find the version and color palette that most effectively conveyed the image we aimed to project to the public (Arooj, 2022).

Figure 1

Take a Cue logo



Once episodes are recorded, Erik makes preliminary edits and cuts in Riverside and shares it with me. Then, once I give it the “OK”, he loads it into Davinci Resolve – a free audio/video editing software where he tweaks the look and sound of the program. At this point he also adds our background music and logo to the screen.

Next, we reach the point in the process where Erik and I must make decisions about what content should be included in the episode. Ultimately, it is our decision what ends up being published to the listener. After a recording session, we frequently debrief about what was said in the episode and discuss what length the final cut should be. This is a critical point in the project that involves reflection on our own teaching and a discussion about what might be most beneficial to our listeners. The introduction is then recorded to ensure that the introduction reflects what is to come in the rest of the episode.

Key Episodes

As the journey of crafting content for *Take A Cue* is still unfolding, certain episodes emerge as pivotal in shaping the direction of the program. These episodes not only provided valuable insights into what Erik and I bring to the table as hosts, but they also act as a compass, guiding the direction of future episodes.

Episode 001: Turning Down 2 Job Offers to Find the Right One with Jen Wise

The first and most listened to episode in our podcast has been the episode where I tell the story of how I got into teaching band, my first job hunt after college, and how my husband and I balance our home and professional lives. This is an important episode to the podcast because it helps the listener connect to my back story. We outlined this episode in a way that made sense chronologically but also touched on key moments that shaped my philosophy of music education. The episode has a more intimate feel to it even though it was only recorded in audio format because this episode was recorded in person in Erik's home studio. The feedback from this episode led to other topics we chose to discuss such as *Episode 006: Teaching With a Chronic Illness for 15 Years* and *Episodes 018 and 019* which are about applying for and landing your first teaching job.

Episode 009: Freestyle Friday w/ CJ Margolis: Firewood in the Third Row

Our "Freestyle Friday" episodes are a fun and more casual part of *Take a Cue*. The recordings of our first few episodes were coming out over an hour long. We felt this was too long for listeners to stay engaged so, we decided to put out a second episode every month (Freestyle Friday) where we discussed what was going on in our programs and personal lives rather than discussing a specific topic.

In Episode 009, we welcomed bassoonist and former student, C.J. Margolis who had recently started sophomore year as an undergraduate in music education at The College of New Jersey (TCNJ). C.J.'s presence on the podcast was refreshing and helped us connect with a wider audience of pre-service music teachers. Topics of this episode varied from pedagogical to personal and include C.J.'s backstory, how their college ensembles were progressing, college auditions, big budget requests, working with administrators, balancing ensembles, practice logs, District Band Day, a few bassoon jokes, and, of course, our Thanksgiving food plans.

Episode 014: NJMEA Conference Preview

The idea for the NJMEA Conference Preview episode was to make an episode that was published approximately one month before the New Jersey Music Educators Association (NJMEA) State Convention. We hoped to engage new listeners who were planning to present workshops at the event and at the same time highlight some workshops in which attendees might be interested. Erik and I went through the Guidebook for the convention and reached out to several presenters to share a 3–5-minute video about what they planned to present at the convention.

By offering a glimpse into the diverse range of workshops and presentations scheduled for the NJMEA State Convention, our episode served as a valuable resource for attendees looking to make the most of their convention experience. Our collaborative effort to curate and present these insightful videos demonstrated our commitment to delivering engaging and informative content to our audience, making the NJMEA Conference Preview episode a highlight of our podcasting journey.

Episode 025: Balance: Success, Sacrifice, and SANITY!

In September 2023, Erik and I were invited to present a lecture at The College of New Jersey for pre-service music education majors. Despite the challenges of juggling work, childcare, and traffic, we arrived just in time to kick off an insightful discussion. We setup recording devices that would allow us to record audio from the presentation and release it later as an episode of the podcast.

Our invitation to speak at The College of New Jersey came from CJ Margolis, a previous guest on our show and former student. It was a privilege to engage with undergraduate music majors, addressing their questions and concerns about navigating the demands of academic life and musicianship while maintaining a sense of purpose and fulfillment. Erik and I highlighted the importance of finding a balance between personal life and professional aspirations, sharing our own experiences and strategies for creating a fulfilling career in the field of music education. Many of their questions were concerned with getting burned out and disillusioned with the profession. As we shared anecdotes and practical advice on achieving a practical balance between personal and professional pursuits, we also encouraged the aspiring educators in the audience to reflect on their own values and goals in shaping their future careers in music education.

For *Take a Cue*, this was a pivotal episode for us because it was our first speaking engagement that stemmed from the podcast. This episode was also special to us because we experimented with producing an episode that was recorded live. This was different from our usual format because we could not go back and repeat anything for clarity. Everything had to be said correctly the first time in front of the audience of students. Some of the students in the audience have since reached out to us with more questions about the podcast and our programs in

our schools. This speaking engagement and the resulting episode helped us fulfill one of the main goals of *Take a Cue* which is to reach pre-service educators as well as teachers currently in the field.

Distribution of the Podcast Through Social Media

Social media plays a large role in the distribution of the podcast and in engaging our listeners in conversations about teaching. As mentioned before, listeners can subscribe to *Take a Cue* on the app they use most frequently, but it is the responsibility of us as hosts to publish social media content that is eye-catching and engages our audience. *Take a Cue* has a presence on several social media outlets (Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube), and music streaming sites (Spotify, Apple Podcasts). In this context, social media is approached with the intent to “leverage human tendencies” such as networking, connecting, and interacting (Webster, 2015, p. 153). If we as hosts can create a social media space that is engaging and welcoming, then our listeners will have a place to interact with us and each other, while simultaneously engaging with new content published by *Take a Cue*.

When developing social media content, the question, “How can we leverage the power of social media to generate conversation and pique interest in our podcast?” comes to the fore. Podcasts and their space on social media present possibilities for engaging in dialogue between voices of master teachers/performing artists and music educators. This is a time to engage all parties, even those who may not agree with our stance on the subject.

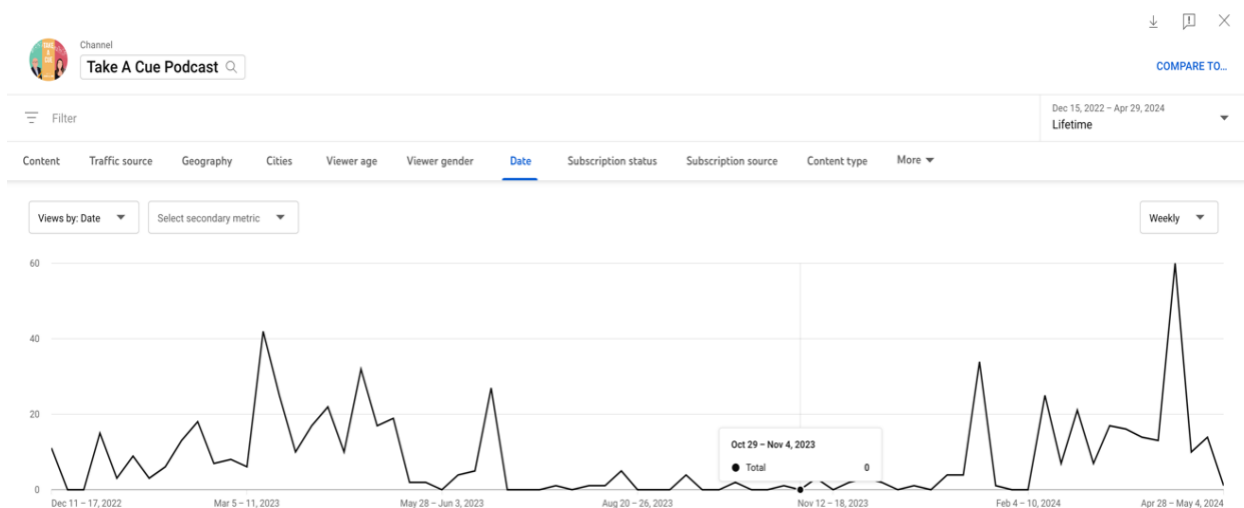
The data from podcast hosting sites such as Spotify can be analyzed at any stage once a podcast is posted. We use this data to impact our decisions, such as which topics or guests we may want to highlight in the future, or what time of year generates the most downloads to concentrate efforts in certain months (DeMarco, 2022). For example, in the fall, we choose to

discuss topics such as best practices for marching band directors and preparing for the first weeks of school. In the spring, we have published episodes about job hunting and how to conclude the school year in a way that prepares students and teachers for the following year. As instrumental music teachers in New Jersey, the school year follows the seasons, thus informing the timing of our podcast development, episode release dates and more. For example, we begin the school year in the early fall, when we meet our students for the first time. Winter concerts are held in December and January. The spring can be quite rigorous, as bands participate in festivals and end-of-year concert performances. Schools close for the summer break in late June, reopening in August for marching band camps and the start of the new school year. In light of this annual timeline, and through data gathered from Spotify, it is clear that *Take a Cue's* listener base follows the shape of the school year, with the highest listenership during the more intense parts of the academic year and a lull in listener engagement during the summer months.

As can be seen in Figure 2 below, the data from Spotify for Podcasters and YouTube from August 2022 to May 2024 indicated that listenership obtained was the highest in March and April of both seasons of the podcast and lower from June through August. These numbers can guide how we want to concentrate our efforts to take into account lower listenership, as one might expect, in the summer as well as at the start of a new school year.

Figure 2

Listener data from YouTube, December 2022 – May 2024



Social media comments are voluntary, qualitative indicators of listener engagement. They do not tell the whole story, as they do not always indicate who actually listened to each episode. Instead, they generally reflect our listeners’ perception of us and our show.

One significant example of our social media presence was a post from March 29, 2023, where we asked members of the “Band Directors” Facebook group “What’s your WHY?”. See figure 3.

Figure 3

Screenshot from 'Band Directors' Facebook Group, March 29, 2023

Erik S. Donough
March 29, 2023 · 🌐

What's Your Why?

On an upcoming episode of the podcast 🎧 **Take A Cue**, we'll be having a pretty frank discussion on why we teach music. [Jen Wise](#) and I would love to feature your Why as well!

We're asking you to be 100% honest -- no "interview perfect" answers -- and respond to this post if you feel comfortable doing so. We will not be using anyone's name or personally identifiable information, though, obviously, your colleagues who are members of the BDG can see your answer in this group.

Thanks for joining the discussion!

👍 You, Meredith Sullivan Boyan and 1 other 16 comments

👍 Like 💬 Comment 📄 Send

At the time of the post, the Band Directors group had approximately thirty thousand members. There was a healthy response with sixteen thoughtful and honest contributions from the group. Some of the responses are from teachers who are within our circle of professional connections, but many were not. A sampling of some of the responses can be seen in Figure 4.0 and 4.1 that were used in the episode called “What’s Your Why?” (Wise, J., Donough, E., episode #020).

Figure 4.0

Screenshot of responses from the 'Band Directors' Facebook Group, March 29, 2023

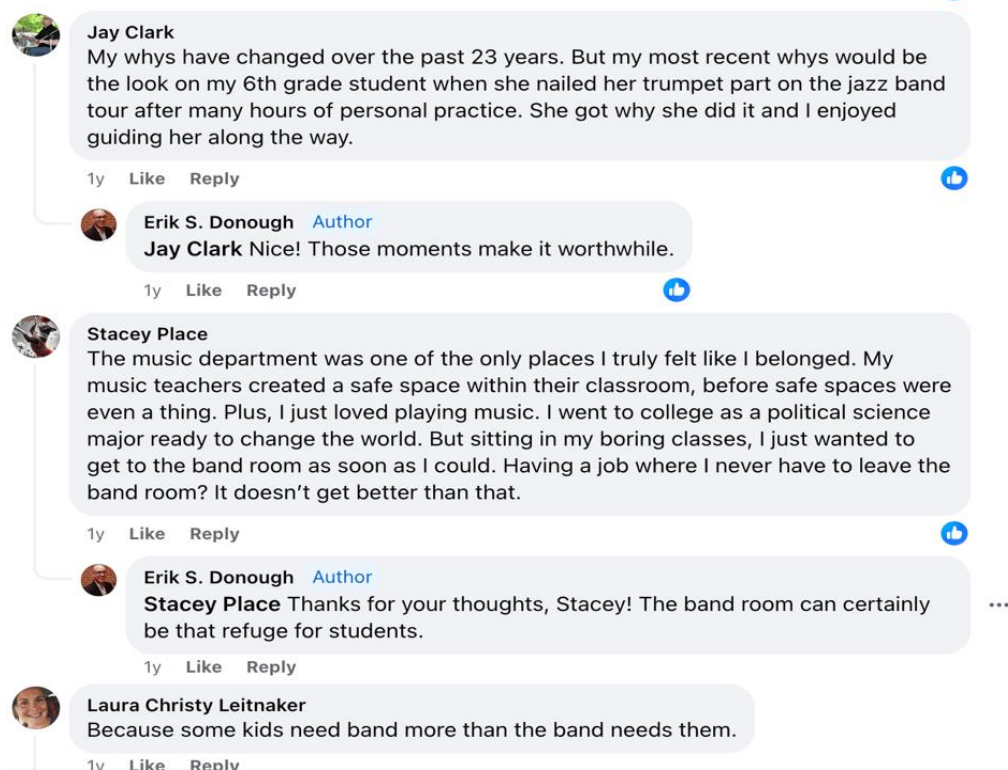
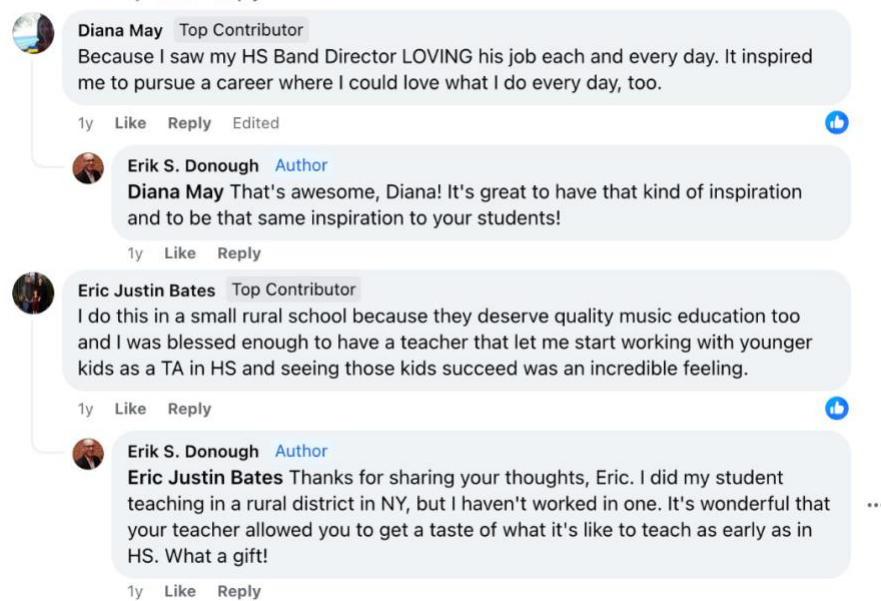


Figure 4.1

Screenshot of responses from the 'Band Directors' Facebook Group, March 29, 2023



This discussion was an important one because it allowed members of the Band Director Group to share something with us before listening to the podcast. There was an underlying motive to gain new listeners from the post, but Erik and I were genuinely curious if any of the educators from the group shared the same reasons for getting into teaching and staying in education as we did. Erik gave thoughtful comments on every response. This was an important moment that helped build the sense of community around *Take a Cue* for which we were striving (Donough and Wise, Eo. 20, 2023).

The responses to the “What’s your Why?” question varied greatly based on the commenter’s previous experiences and current teaching assignment. Some chose to comment on why they began teaching while some chose to comment on what keeps them motivated now. As we reflected on the answers and compiled them into content for Episode #020, it allowed us to be more authentic with ourselves about why we do what we do. The Facebook responses also empowered us to share our most honest answers because we knew that there may be another teacher in the group that could relate to our experiences.

Chapter IV: The “Starting off Right” Series

Planning and Recording

A decision was made to begin a series of episodes titled the “Starting Off Right” —a series of episodes devoted to teaching the first lesson on band instruments — as part of season two of *Take a Cue* podcast. Reflections on *Take a Cue* through the “Starting Off Right” series will illustrate the process of creating a podcast in order to reinforce the teaching methodologies and pedagogical knowledge involved in teaching the first lesson to beginner band students.

I approached the development of the “Starting Off Right” series as I would any other research endeavor within my teaching practice. This involved engagement with fellow educators and reflecting on my own teaching of instrumental music. After reflecting on our own teaching, speaking with colleagues, and examining other podcasts similar to *Take a Cue*, Erik and I discussed the need for an instrumental methods review. We noticed a lack of resources that addressed teaching the first band lessons, where the teacher introduces the foundations a student will need in order to learn the instrument. We considered the need for this series both in the context of our local professional development opportunities and the podcasts we were listening to at the time. We agreed that the first instrument lesson is a seminal point in a student’s experience in band, and we decided to dedicate the “Starting Off Right” series to those extremely important first lessons.

The goal of the “Starting off Right” series is to present listeners with information about best practices in teaching the first lesson on many of the beginning band instruments including flute, oboe, clarinet, saxophone, trumpet, trombone, and baritone/euphonium. We developed a prescribed format for each episode which included our show introduction, important materials

needed for the lesson, an introduction to embouchure/stick grip, introduction to tonguing, and practice techniques. Despite the specialized subject matter, the planning process for this series of episodes closely aligned with our established production methods, as discussed in the previous chapter.

First, we invited guests to speak about their primary instruments. We curated the selection of guests carefully, based on their dual expertise as excellent performing musicians and experienced music educators. Each of the guests has some connection to me or Erik as a colleague or a private teacher of some of our students at school. After setting the date to record, Erik and I created online shared planning documents to dictate a flow for the dialogue. We included the guests on the document pertaining to their featured episode. Hosts and guests each posed questions in the document to be answered during the recording session. In preparation for each interview, Erik and I made notes of elements of our teaching that we wished to discuss, and habits we see in our students that we wanted to examine. Figure 5 is an example of a planning document.

Figure 5

Show Notes from *Take a Cue*, Episode 034, "Starting Off Right": Oboe

TAC Recording - oboe | TAC - Beginning Oboe Episode

Attendees: Erik Donough Jennifer Wise

meredythcoleman@gmail.com

Meredyth's Notes:

TOPICS:

- Instrument & reed selection
- Embouchure formation|
- Breathing properly
- Assembly
- Correct thumb and finger position
- The first notes
- Reed cases
- Method book selection
- Dealing with leftover air

Erik's Notes:

- Should oboe be started with all of the other instruments? Better to transfer from other woodwinds? What are the signs that a student is ready for the oboe?
- What to do if the reed is too open or too closed
- Crowing - what is it? Is it necessary? How to do it?
- How do I get my kids to not sound like ducks?
- Reed selection - what kind, what to avoid, how many?
- Instrument selection - oboes come with different key configurations, what is a MUST and what is unnecessary for beginners? (ie. left F key, etc.)
- Method books - recommendations?
- Other resources for teachers who may be nervous about starting beginners?
- What if the reed is too tight? Grease? Biting?
- How to deal with left-over air during breathing?

Jen's Notes:

- Thumb position and wrist placement? How do you explain it?
- Are you a fan of neck straps or other assistive devices?
- Are there any materials you have your students purchase? Like a silk swab or Reed case?
- ERIK stole my question lol!

Take a Cue, Episode 034, “Starting Off Right”: Oboe

Episode 034 of *Take a Cue* focuses on the first lesson on the oboe with guest Meredyth Coleman. This episode follows the prescribed format for the “Starting Off Right” series. In this conversation, oboe teacher Meredyth Coleman shares her background and experience as an oboist and as a teacher. She discusses her own musical journey, how she discovered the oboe, her training, and education. Additionally, she addresses the benefits and challenges of performing and teaching oboe. Transcript of this episode can be found as Appendix A (Donough and Wise, 2024, 00:25.66).

The conversation then turns to the technical aspects of teaching the first oboe lesson. Meredyth highlights the importance of choosing a high-quality oboe and reeds, describing the difference between handmade reeds and plastic reeds. She emphasizes that proper equipment can make a large difference in the experience during the first lessons for beginner oboists. This topic is revisited several times throughout the conversation (Donough and Wise, 2024, 09:22.61, 27:58.19, 12:42.55).

Meredyth then discusses the importance of proper fingering technique and helping students hold the instrument for the first time. She goes on to discuss how to introduce hand position and finger placement, the proper oboe angle and breath direction, sound production and embouchure, wetting the reed, and “the crow” (Donough and Wise, 2024, 27:58, 32:46, 42:30). As a next step, she recommends method books and resources, breathing techniques, and the importance of scales in the development of fingering technique (Donough and Wise, 2024, 48:12.43).

The conversation concludes with Meredyth mentioning the impact of these first lessons on the overall growth of the student over time. Adding a more personal tone to the discussion,

Meredyth laments how much remediation often needs to be done in private lessons due to a lack of accurate teaching of the fundamentals. Meredyth concludes by encouraging teachers to reach out to professional oboists for guidance and support and offers her own contact information so that they can do so (Donough and Wise, 2024, 50:40.07).

The following table shows important topics discussed in the oboe episode.

Table 1

Topics discussed in Take a Cue, Episode 034, "Starting Off Right": Oboe

<i>Timestamp</i>	
09:22.61, 27:58.19, 12:42.55	Choosing the right instrument and reeds is crucial for beginners, with the Yamaha oboe and handmade reeds being recommended.
24:41.054	Starting on the oboe is preferred (rather than transitioning from another instrument) if the student can reach the keys and has patience to learn.
18:47.43	The embouchure and breathing techniques are essential in the first lesson.
18:47.43, 20:39.326	Use of the crowing exercise – The crow is used to check the reed's functionality and practice proper breathing.
27:58, 32:46, 42:30	Proper fingerings and hand placement are important for beginners, and the thumb position on the thumb rest can affect finger placement. Proper hand position and finger placement are crucial for playing the oboe effectively.
34:45.42, 50:12.14	The oboe should be held at a 45-degree angle, with the head looking straight ahead.
36:01.91	Sound production on the oboe requires building strength in the embouchure muscles and learning to control the breath.
38:04.63	Wetting the reed before playing depends on the reed style, but generally, soaking for 3-5 minutes is recommended.
44:37.66, 46:52.56, 48:12.43	Recommended method books for beginners include the Standard of Excellence book and the Barrett oboe method.
40:40.51, 41:30.75	Reed fitting and removal can be done by using gentle bites or indentations from pliers on the cork of the reed or using a t-shirt for grip.
17:06.88, 36:01.91, 46:52.56	Breathing techniques, such as breathing out before taking a breath, are important to the development of sound.
48:12.43	Scales and practice materials, such as the Barrett book, are essential for the development of fingering technique.

50:40.07	Teachers can and should reach out to professional oboists for guidance and support when teaching the oboe to beginners.
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As someone who teaches beginning oboists myself, I found the information that Ms. Coleman shared both detailed and helpful. Many band teachers learned to play and teach the oboe during a methods course at the university level, where many preservice educators have only a semester dedicated to woodwinds, brass, percussion, and strings. When she spoke about the best reed brands and methods for beginners, our conversation made me reflect on what brands were available when I completed my woodwinds methods course in college. There were different brands of oboes available at the time, and some of the method books mentioned were not published yet. Some instrumental teachers may not have considered the best reed brands and instruments for their beginners but after listening to this discussion they may take a closer look at what equipment to recommend for their students.

One aspect of my own teaching that I will reconsider after this discussion is Meredyth Coleman's assertion that starting oboists on the instrument from the beginning of their time in band is preferred, rather than starting on another woodwind instrument and transitioning to the oboe, which is highly debated pedagogical approach among instrumental music educators (Schwartz, 2014.; Rath, 2021). Meredyth makes a case for beginning students on the oboe in order to avoid having to break habits from the original instrument (Donough and Wise, 2024, 24:41.054). Currently, I have some beginning oboists in my bands but more often switch students to oboe after a year or two on a different instrument. I will reexamine this and attempt to have students who are interested in playing the oboe start there.

Chapter V: Findings and Implications for Future Research

Findings

As stated earlier, the main goal of *Take a Cue* is to offer brief, high-quality professional development opportunities for busy music teachers. Social media engagement and personal comments from listeners provide qualitative evidence supporting the beneficial impact of podcasts on our audience of music educators.

While it is not possible to list every social media comment in this paper, in general, social media comments fall into nine categories. The categories that occurred most frequently were encouragement for the hosts and personal connections to the content and guests. These comments provide insight to listeners' individual experiences and perspectives. By exploring comments from social media, we can continue to refine our content in order to better tailor professional development for our listeners. In analyzing social media, comments from the *Take a Cue* Facebook and Instagram pages can be divided into nine main categories, which are coded as follows.

Table 2

Categories of Facebook/Instagram Posts

<i>Code</i>	<i>Description</i>
E	Encouragement for hosts
PST	Preservice Teachers - would benefit preservice teachers or any mention of preservice teachers
TR	Teaching reflection
F	"Following"
AV	Audio and video – mention of the production
BP	Band parent
S	"Share"
G	Gratitude

PC	Personal connection to the episode
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Here is a sampling of comments from our various social media pages. “You're an inspiration Jen! And I listened to the podcast. So brave (of) you to share your story. And a very unique perspective that I'm sure will help others in our field [heart emoji]” (@shelly121, 2022). This comment was in response to an Instagram post promoting *Episode 006 – Teaching With a Chronic Illness for 15 years*. This comment is one of encouragement for the hosts. The comment from @shelly121 affirmed the importance for me to share more about my first days teaching instrumental music and how chronic illness affected them.

In a Facebook comment, coded “Teaching Reflection” (TR) from user @Ken Adessa, he reflects on his own groups after listening to *Episode 008: Chamber (Music) of Secrets in Band*.

My best groups I've ever had play together and start together and change together (on something like a fermata scale) without any conductor direction. I just hand it over to them (Adessa, 2022).

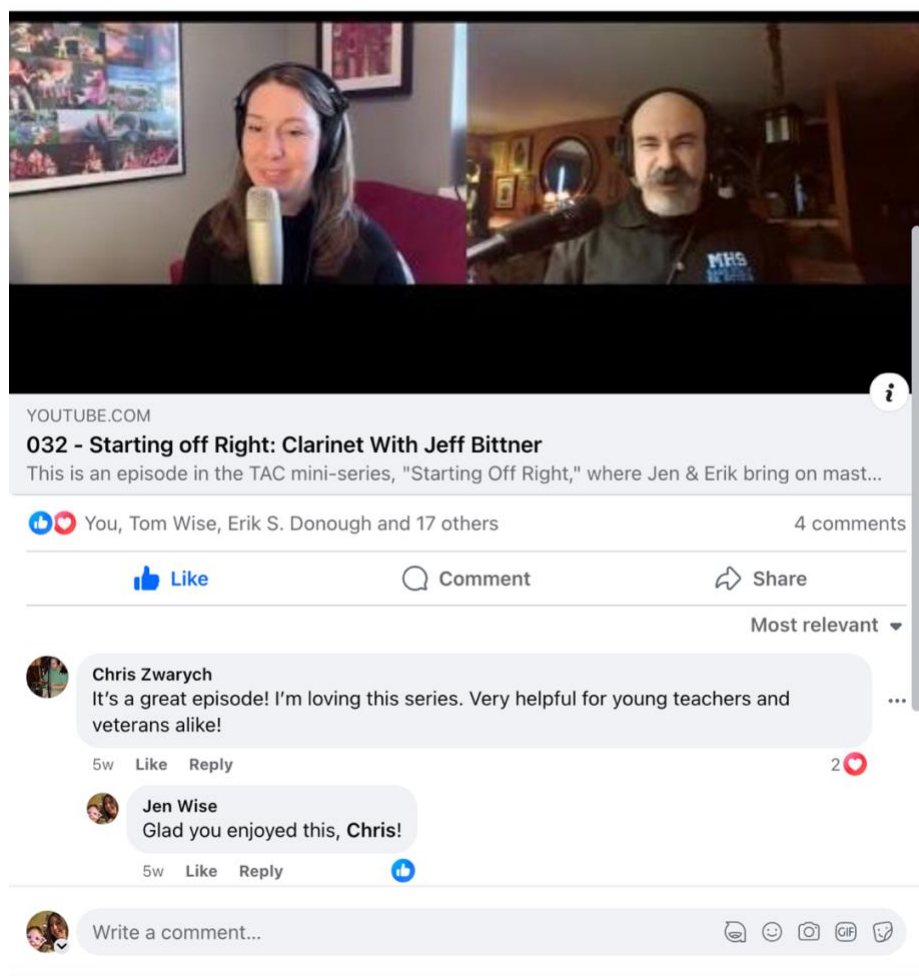
@John Palatucci’s post exemplifies a “Personal Connection” (PC) to another guest on the show, John Leister, from *Episode 019: Getting to the Interview and Getting the Job with John Leister*. “I loved walking into John's principal office and being met by his MA diploma from Juilliard hanging on the wall. [drum emoji] (Palatucci, 2 Apr. 2023).”

User @madeline81118 left feedback on our Apple Podcasts page to comment on their enjoyment of the program and the production. They say “The audio is great, the advice even better. One of my favorite band podcasts and so responsive [responsive] online too!” (@madeline8118, 5 Feb. 2024). Responding to comments from listeners is crucial to the development of a sense of community around the podcast.

Responding to social media comments is a common practice for producers of content promoted on social media. Comments that mention preservice teachers lead us to believe that we are producing content that fulfills our goal to provide information that will help teachers at any stage in their career. Listener @Chris Zwarych said “It’s a great episode! I’m loving this series. Very helpful for young teachers and veterans alike!” (Zwarych, 23 Mar. 2024). See Figure 6.

Figure 6

Facebook comments about Episode 032, “Starting off Right”: Clarinet



Challenges

One of the primary motivations for presenting this information in podcast format also proved to be a challenge and a limiting factor to the final product. The planning and execution of

each episode was constrained by the demanding schedules of the hosts and guests themselves. There were several instances where more attention to detail, follow-up questions, and more research into additional resources would have produced a more substantive program for the listener. Unfortunately for me and many of our guests, this amount of time is not available while teaching and managing our own music programs full-time. This frustrated our ability to produce a richer product and provide a broader experience for our listeners.

Another challenge in this project was the attempt to keep episodes short for easy consumption for busy music educators. The proposed format was to have each instrument fill a podcast episode under 30 minutes in length. As hosts, we struggled to find a balance between encouraging our guests to keep their comments succinct and giving them space to elaborate on their ideas. This led to all but one guest speaking about the first lesson on their instrument for over an hour. Often, the topic drifted to more advanced techniques which then led to significant cuts to the material in post-production as we were trying to focus on the first lessons only. We feel that this failure was the product of guests' enthusiasm for their instrument, married with the urgency to have students feel successful after the first lesson on their instrument. Our findings indicated that it is necessary to record much more material than what would end up being in the final edit of each episode.

Furthermore, we identified constraints in the distribution of the podcast. Which hindered the ability to reach the intended audience. Erik and I are experienced music teachers, but we have very little training in the realms of marketing, self-promotion, and producing social media content. We attempted to enhance the distribution of the podcast by tagging our guests and sharing each episode with an eye-catching photo. This worked to a degree, but we could do more to further promote the podcast. I would consider using some of the AI tools imbedded in the

Riverside platform to construct social media posts. In the future we may consider reaching out to Arooj, the artist who helped us with our original promotional materials or someone with experience in this type of media.

However, there were some surprises regarding who we were able to engage via social media. One of the unexpected bonuses of inviting guests onto the show is that they then could share their appearance on the podcast with their own followers. This broadened our audience and brought in some listeners that we may not have been able to reach otherwise. This was the case with one of the guests who is the private teacher of several of my own students. Once he shared his episode on social media, some of the parents of his students reached out to say they were now aware of the podcast. One parent said she had listened to a few episodes to learn more about what her child was doing in band. This parent also offered to distribute the podcast on the parent's group for the high school in our district. When we started *Take a Cue*, I imagined my principal or other school administrators stumbling upon it, but did not consider that parents of my students would be tuning in. Hearing from a parent was inspiring as it allowed me to imagine reaching a new audience that might benefit from our podcast.

Implications for Future Research

Exploring the potential of podcasts, social media, and instrumental music education can open exciting avenues for future research and professional growth in the field. In the future, it would benefit us and our audience to further explore how *Take a Cue* can best support music teachers. Continuing to take feedback from listeners can give us insight into what topics we should cover next and what episodes most resonated with our listeners. Erik and I can use this feedback to assess what we are presenting in the podcast each month and better tailor our episodes to the needs of our listeners.

Additionally, investigating the correlation between social media engagement and podcast consumption among music educators could shed light on the effectiveness of utilizing social platforms to promote professional growth and collaboration. This type of investigation can identify patterns and trends in how music educators utilize these platforms for professional development. Examining the role of social media engagement in fostering a supportive community of music educators through podcast discussions and knowledge sharing could pave the way for new collaborative opportunities.

Another area for further study would be to examine resources that support parents who have children entering an instrumental music program. Supporting a child while they are learning an instrument is often a new experience for many parents, especially if the parents do not or have not played an instrument themselves. A study such as this could inform the creation of a podcast whose purpose is to support parents who have children involved in school music programs. This proposed podcast could be helpful for parents and band directors alike as parents would have a better understanding of what their child is doing in music. Topics for episodes could include picking quality instruments, the importance of private lessons, helping your child prepare for auditions, and the ins and outs of marching band.

Creating a research survey of other podcast hosts whose programs focus on teaching instrumental music could inform our production process and possibly shed light on some solutions to the challenges we faced during production. Questions would address the delicate balance between time allocation for teaching and crafting podcast content. Additionally, understanding the tools and methods utilized by other programs for effective planning could offer valuable insight into organization and productivity. Do other programs have many stakeholders involved in the creation of these podcasts beyond the hosts themselves? This area of

future research could shed light on the network of support and collaboration used to develop other podcast programs.

As for the future of *Take a Cue*, the plans for season three are already underway. Regular guest, CJ Margolis will be entering their senior year as a music education major. We will be following them through student teaching and offering our listeners some insight into the student teaching experience. There is also a plan to produce a follow-up to the “Starting Off Right” series. Earlier we stated that one of the challenges of the series was keeping the show to a length that was easily consumed by busy educators. We plan to complete a series addressing the more advanced techniques on each instrument to benefit secondary teachers. This idea for a follow-up series comes from the encouraging responses to the “Starting off Right” series. Deeply examining the process of producing this podcast and reflecting on its value for other music educators has nourished a special enthusiasm for the medium that I hope to continue in seasons to come.

Conclusions

In conclusion, this action research thesis examined the innovative realm of podcasting as a powerful tool in presenting instrumental music pedagogy. *Take a Cue*, the dedicated podcast examined here, aims to bridge the gap between current research in music teaching methodologies and practical insights from experienced music educators. By incorporating interviews with expert musicians, demonstrations by master teachers, and insights from various reliable sources, the podcast series offers best practices for teaching beginning band instruments. Through reflecting on the process of producing this podcast, the hosts have examined their own teaching, the needs of their students, and the needs of the wider community of music educators.

Furthermore, active listener feedback and engagement via social media channels plays an essential role in shaping the content of the podcast and enhancing the overall professional development of pre-service and current music educators. Through this research journey, educators can glean valuable insights into the benefits of podcast consumption in music education and adopt innovative approaches in the presentation of instrumental music pedagogy.

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APPENDICES

A – PODCAST TRANSCRIPT

Transcript of Take a Cue, Episode 034, “Starting Off Right”: Oboe

Transcription of Show Introduction

Recorded: 3/22/2024

Transcribed: 4/4/2024

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|--------------------------|--|
| Jen Wise (00:03.382) | This is Take a Cue, season two, episode 10. |
| Erik Donough (00:24.213) | Welcome to season two of Take a Cue. I'm Erik Donough, eighth grade band and jazz band director. |
| Jen Wise (00:29.714) | and I'm Jen Wise, fourth and fifth grade instrumental music teacher. |
| Erik Donough (00:33.429) | We are two veteran educators with over 35 years of experience teaching music in New Jersey Public Schools between the two of us, and we're excited to bring teaching experiences and insights to you. |
| Jen Wise (00:45.522) | So-Oboe excited! Whether you're just starting out in your teaching career, or you've been teaching longer than we have, this show will help you grow with new ideas and perspectives about music education and teaching. |
| Erik Donough (00:57.773) | We hope you'll be just as inspired as we are every time you listen. Before we begin, if you enjoy our podcast, please help us out by doing a few super easy things. |
| Jen Wise (01:09.154) | First, subscribe on your favorite podcast app. |
| Erik Donough (01:12.225) | Then make sure you rate the podcast and leave a review. |
| Jen Wise (01:16.434) | It helps people find our show who haven't yet, and we really appreciate it. |

- Erik (01:20.841) If you find that you get a lot out of our episodes, we'd be grateful if you considered becoming a monthly supporter to help us grow the podcast.
- Jen Wise (01:29.462) You could sign up to make a secure monthly payment using the link in our show notes or on our Spotify for podcasters site.
- Erik Donough (01:45.373) Also, if you have questions or comments about anything you hear in the episode, come and interact with us on social media we areTake a Cue podcast on Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube.
- Erik Donough (01:59.958) It's oboe day, Jen!
- Jen Wise (02:01.798) I'm so excited for oboe day. I'm so excited to get my mind blown about the oboe because I could use some help. I feel like we could all use some help with starting out our oboists. So yeah.
- Erik Donough (02:14.869) Yes, yes, it is one of those things like, you know, it's out there, you know, you, you know, you want to do it and still at the same time, it's definitely, you know, a very unique, unique animal. Our episode today was an awesome chat with Meredyth Coleman, a professional oboist and teacher here in Northern New Jersey And, and I learned a lot.
- Jen Wise (02:41.342) I did too. And I'm so excited for you all to get these great takeaways from her about teaching oboe. And if you're wondering why your oboists sound like ducks, she's going to tell you why. And she's going to make you feel OK about it. And I love that. So yeah, this is so good. I'm so excited. We all get to share this today.
- Erik Donough (02:59.873) That's right. Yes, Meredyth had some great tips about how to put the instrument together, what to do with your reeds, what type of reeds she recommends and what type of instrument she recommends, how to get kids breathing correctly, holding the instrument correctly, working on tone production, working on hand position. And we also asked her some slightly more advanced questions.
- Jen Wise (03:39.854) So here we go, let's hear it right from Meredyth.

Interview with Meredyth Coleman

Jen Wise (00:04.268) Welcome, Meredyth. We're so excited to have you today. Thank you so much for being here on Take a Cue to talk Oboe with us. This is great.

Meredyth Coleman (00:07.903) Hi.

Meredyth Coleman (00:13.695) Of course, I'm happy to be here.

Jen Wise (00:15.616) Oh, this is so good. So would you tell us a little bit about yourself, a little bit about your background and your experience with oboe and teaching?

Meredyth Coleman (00:25.666) Sure. So I have been a musician for most of my life. And I'll tell you how I started, cause that kind of helps to explain how I got to oboe. My mother, I had a wonderful mother who exposed me to all these things. And when I was 22 months old, I started Suzuki violin. And I played violin for many, many years. And then the district where I went to school in Lee's Summit, Missouri, started band at fifth grade. And I wanted to play an instrument that nobody else played because I was always in this large sea of violins. And so my mother helped me research, this was way before Google, and found that no one really played the oboe. So, I went to my band teacher and said, I wanted to play the oboe. And he said he thought he had one in the closet.

It was tucked away with dust, cobwebs, everything. So he went and got it, and I honked my way through my first year. And actually, I didn't have a teacher until eighth grade, a private teacher. So I played for a couple of years just on my own and stuck with it. I actually would not recommend doing that, but that's how it was back in the days.

And so that's how I got to oboe. So I started oboe when I was 10. So I've been playing oboe for a very long time. And I always say I really started to play the oboe the summer before my ninth grade year because that is when I found my first real oboe teacher. I had one prior that was okay. Marion Kuzik was her name. She was the principal of the Kansas City Symphony. She is now principal of the LA Phil.

She's amazing. Well, she's been at the LA Phil for years. She left and went to LA when I left to go to college. So she was my, what I call my first real teacher, wonderful teacher and turned me really

into an oboe player. And I actually started teaching some students when I was a junior in high school. So I've actually been teaching even private students for a very long time. And I...

I played in three orchestras when I was in high school, and one of them was a professional orchestra called the Northland Symphony. I was associate principal. So I was a mate, like a big into orchestra when I was in high school. And then I went to the University of Illinois for my undergrad, big music school, and also did orchestra there. The main orchestra split. Twice each year into smaller groups, a chamber orchestra and an opera orchestra. And I found I really loved that even more. And really was kind of, you know, gravitating towards the smaller groups.

Then I went to the Hart School of Music for my master's and studied with Burt Lucarelli, who was probably the greatest oboe teacher to live. Unfortunately, he passed away in August. And he really...I credit him so much for who I am today as a player, as a teacher, because he was a wonderful teacher. He didn't just tell us what to do. He kind of planted seeds. So that way we would take ideas and take them into like a tree, but that many branches off of that one idea. So that's why I love, I love that I got to work with him.

And then, I also worked with Ronnie Roseman, who was a wonderful teacher and oboist. And then I, after my masters, I went to the Hart, excuse me, the Manus College of Music in New York City and did a degree on English horn with Tom Stacey. While I was at the Hart School, I also was taking with Tom Stacey on English horn. So I actually worked with him for four years

Erik Donough (04:32.195) I didn't know you could do a single degree just on English horn. That's awesome.

Jen Wise (04:36.872) Oh wow, that's so cool.

Meredyth Coleman (04:39.262)

Yes, that was the only place you could do it. So. And Tom had really never had a student do it, and he wanted me to, and I had already had two degrees on oboe. Because they really don't like people coming in there and doing their undergrad on English horn, because they want you established on the oboe. So that was fun. So I got to do that degree with him, and he unfortunately passed away last May. We're losing a lot of our wonderful legends in the oboe world, just because they have reached an older age.

So that's kind of my background. I moved to this area when I went to the Hart School. I was in Connecticut. And then when I was at Manis, my second year I lived in New Jersey. So that's where I kind of landed was in New Jersey. So I've been here for 22 years. My husband, Erik knows, is also is a flute player, an amazing flute player. And he and I met at Manis and that's where we formed our trios. =

while we were still in school. So I am a chamber musician. And that love of the smaller groups at Illinois kind of started showing me that. And then the Hart School was such a small school, chamber music was really critical there. And I loved it. So I've been in New Jersey for, as I said, 21, 22 years. So I've always had a pretty large oboe studio, sometimes becomes too large, but that's okay. I make it work. And...

Erik Donough (06:05.443) Well, we always say whenever I talk to any of my colleagues who know you, Meredyth, everybody says if you want your kid to learn oboe in Northern New Jersey, Meredyth is the one you call.

Meredyth Coleman (06:13.794) Oh, that's very kind. I try. You know, I'm very fortunate. I literally had the best group of teachers, combination of teachers, I think. And so I have all of their thoughts and their teachings, and then I have mine. And these, and I always think these children are so lucky because they're getting all of this stuff at such an early age. And it's really, really wonderful.

Jen Wise (06:13.901) Mm.

Meredyth Coleman (06:40.37) So that's me, I guess in a nutshell, but I perform. Do you want to talk to me and talk about my performing or just the students teaching? I perform all the time and I think that helps me be a great private teacher as well because when my students have their performances and their auditions, I can speak with them about what I've gone through and what's happened with me in those. And I explain to them, look, you just have to do them. They're very odd things. Auditions are very odd things. Performing is fun. And you just kind of have to go through them and just see what they're about. But I do give them tips and I reassure them that odd things will happen and they've happened to all of us. We've all been there when our thumb rests, you know, screws have come undone and just is hanging there, or key falls off, or pad falls out, or your reed cracks. And so we've all been there. So I think that it is very beneficial for them that I perform all the time. At least. You know, two or three times a week. Last week I had, I think, five performances, so.

Erik Donough (07:43.587) So it was a light week this week. And full disclosure, Jen, Meredyth is also Maggie's oboe teacher. So so I get to hear all the I get to hear all the fruits of both of their labors every week, which is awesome.

Meredyth Coleman (08:01.533) She's gonna be a star, she's amazing.

Erik Donough (08:03.575) Hehehehehehe

Jen Wise (08:03.712) That's so cool. I've heard great things about, you know, the recitals with you and some of my students study with you as well. So that is so cool. We'll have to have that conversation after. So, but that's so great. We're so lucky to have you, you know, here in North Jersey. And we have a lot to talk about because I know as soon as I get my oboists to a certain point, I'm like exactly like you said, time for a private teacher. Let's, you know, let's get to the next.

Meredyth Coleman (08:10.686) Oh, that's why you sound familiar. Yeah. OK.

Jen Wise (08:34.307)s step, you need to study with an oboist. So we're happy to have that expertise today. So.

Meredyth Coleman (08:40.998) And that's very smart. I mean it is unfortunately it is and I'm even proof of that, you know, my fifth sixth and seventh grade year, I really just You know, I learned the notes I did all that but my tone and all that and my pitch was good because I played Music my most of my life, but you know, there's just some things you just have to have an oboe teacher to really You know, that's why I said Marion really started me on oboe You know, I've been playing for three and a half years before I got to her

Jen Wise (09:12.78) So where should we start before they get to you? What should we do in those first lessons to give our kids the best setup and the best start?

Meredyth Coleman (09:22.614) Sure. I personally think the best setup to start with is obviously the materials. I know it can be difficult, but the really the only beginner oboe I would recommend is the Yamaha, and I am not sponsored by Yamaha. There are so many makers of instruments now, especially cheap instruments. And I don't have a lot of experience with other instruments, but I know for the oboes, the materials are just very junky. And you know, beginner kids, they're usually on the younger side, they're not very careful, and those oboes can just go out of adjustment all the time. And if they're even working properly in the beginning. So a lot of times when

kids are starting, the oboe is not even working properly, and then they think it's them. and it's already a struggle.

So the Yamaha, it used to be the 411, I think it's now called the 441, if I remember correctly. Or no, sorry, 4211, and now it's the 241. The intermediate's the 441. So the beginner is the 241. That's the beginner oboe I recommend because the pitch scale is also good. A lot of the cheaper instruments you may not have heard of, they...the pitch scale can be very, very off. So that's the oboe I recommend when you're first starting.

Okay. And then the other thing is the reeds. It's very important. Unfortunately with oboe reeds right now, even the machine ones have become very expensive. So it's a struggle when you're a beginner oboist because you can break reeds.

Jen Wise (10:54.924)

Okay, that's great.

Meredyth Coleman (11:16.422) I know this is a little controversial, but I really do not recommend the plastic reeds. And there's a couple of reasons why. I understand why people recommend them because they are pretty indestructible. The problem with the plastic reeds is they're actually a little bit wider, so your embouchure can't be, you know, correct. And the sound is, I find, terrible. And the pitch can also be a little off and there's nothing you can do to fix them.

So I don't really recommend the plastic reeds. I would recommend more having them be on a good machine made reed. And I'll tell you which brands I recommend. And just they might break a couple. But usually, to be honest, they stop breaking them pretty quickly. Because that's something we talk about as well, is how to care for your reed, how to be careful with your reed. So that's something you can speak with them about as well. But I do think.

Erik Donough (12:13.707)

I did notice, you know, as far as the prices, it's actually kind of a good thing. It has been for me that like even Jones reeds are like 18 bucks a reed now because I go to my kid, my kids in eighth grade and I say, look, you can spend \$18 on a Jones reed or you can spend \$18 on this handmade reed. Why don't you go buy these handmade reeds instead? And they're like, oh, okay, sure. So now I think every kid is playing on handmade reeds. All six of my oboists in eighth grade.

Meredyth Coleman (12:33.87) I know!

Jen Wise (12:38.576)

Yeah.

Meredyth Coleman (12:42.558) I know, I know. I know the machine-made reed, you used to be able to buy an Emerald reed for \$6. So that gap was much bigger. So I used to recommend the Emerald reed first, get an Emerald medium soft. And then when they got like pretty good about that reed, then go up to the Marlin Lesher. That's the next machine-made reed I recommend. They usually come pretty consistent. They usually come not leaking and somewhat in tune.

Meredyth Coleman (13:09.994) Then from then on, then you go onto a handmade reed. And you have to find one. My friend, Alyssa, who Maggie orders from and all my students, DoubleReedGirl.com. Yep, DoubleReedGirl.com. Now her reeds are abnormally a little bit in the lower price range. A lot of handmade reeds are in the \$35, \$40 range. But hers are more affordable and they're good. They're pretty consistently good, to be quite honest, because that's also a struggle. So that's what I recommend is starting on Emerald.

Erik Donough (13:18.419) I order from her too now.

Meredyth Coleman (13:40.89) medium soft, reed soft is usually too soft and medium is usually too hard and then go to the Marlin Lesher medium soft and then you go to like double reed girl com her handmade reed the standard reed now one thing I have had a couple of I just want to say one more thing about reeds because I've had a couple of students come to me with medium hard

Jen Wise (13:57.624) Great. Yeah, I use the Marlin Lescher.

Meredyth Coleman (14:07.026) and hard reed, I think there's a misconception that the stronger the students getting, the harder the reed they play on. And that's actually not true. I actually play on very easy, flexible reeds because I need to be able to do a lot with them. So really, nobody should be above a medium, soft or medium. Nobody should be. So.

Jen Wise (14:28.813) That's good to know.

Erik Donough (14:30.187) I suppose maybe if they have somebody who's like, who's like working on the reeds, maybe right? I mean, but even then, yeah.

Meredyth Coleman (14:37.237) I still wouldn't go above a medium.

I mean if they do, they could order medium hard to leave some cane on there for their teacher to adjust it. I mean there is a philosophy you could do that, a thought process in that.

- Jen Wise (14:41.45) That's good.
- Erik Donough (14:41.849) Makes sense.
- Erik (14:53.227) So they've got the instrument. They've got the they've got the Yamaha. They've got the Emerald Reed or several Emerald Reeds in those plastic in those plastic tubes. And and you know, they're coming in for their first lesson. And so what does that look like what you know, I don't I don't know. Have you done much with like group lessons for beginners or mostly one-on-one? I imagine it would be very similar either way. \
- Meredyth Coleman (14:55.246)Mm-hmm. Yes. That's right. Mm-hmm.
- Meredyth Coleman (15:11.47)Sure.
- Meredyth Coleman (15:20.458)It's very similar. I actually, I do group lessons at a school that I am the oboe teacher for, that I am brought in to whenever they start the beginning of the year, their intro to band. And I'm always given the oboes. And this year we had four young boy oboe players. It was fabulous, sixth graders. So we did have a group of four. And you know what I must say? They didn't break many of their reeds. And that was impressive. ha!
- Erik Donough (15:51.473) That is a win right there.
- Meredyth Coleman (15:52.786)It was and I was very proud of them. So the first thing I recommend is just starting with the reed and getting their embouchure set. Cause the embouchure for Oboe, to be honest, it's not that tricky. And if you explain it in detail and it's not even gonna take that long, I think they really get it. And then your job is just to kind of watch it in the first about month, just keep reminding them of the things.
- Usually what I have everybody do is we talk about, so there's a lower lip, upper lip, and your corners. Those are the three things.
- And the corners, a really good way to show where they go is to have people try to whistle. And they don't actually have to whistle, but pretend like they're gonna whistle. Because your corners go right where they need to go. And even your upper lip is kind of where it needs to be. So then what I have them do is they put the reed halfway up their lower lip. Okay, and I tell them to glue it to it. not to push down. Sure.

Erik Donough (16:51.203) Meredyth, I'm just going to pause. I'm just going to stop you right here for one sec. Listeners, if you're listening on like Spotify or your favorite podcast app, you may want to like stop and head on over to YouTube because Meredyth is demonstrating here and definitely want to see what she's doing.

Meredyth Coleman (17:06.882) So you want to put your reed on your lower lip and you glue it to it. That's what I tell them. And then they're going to roll their lower lip in. And as they do that, those corners need to come in like a whistle. You can also have them try to do fish face. You know, another really good trick. You have to tell them to be very careful. But even if they break the reed, it's kind of worth it. Is have them turn the reed the wrong way. So vertically and you have them put it here.

Roll it in because that gets their corners right where it needs to go and have them pretend to blow. And then they have they turn it the right way and then they blow. So these are three tricks. So you can the whistle, the fish face and turning the reed vertically. Now upper lip. If you tell a young child to just bring their upper lip down, they will tuck it just the right amount. That's kind of a mistake that a lot of people make. But I've taught thousands of young children how to play the oboe.

And I finally even started realizing several years ago, if I just say, bring your upper lip down, they literally, because they naturally tuck it a little bit. But if you tell them to tuck their upper lip, you get the whole tuck. And then we end up with a smile, which you don't want. So that's a good way to explain the embouchure. So have them all, I would try the whistle first. You know, whistling. And then just glue it halfway up their lip. And as they roll in,

Literally quarters in upper lip just comes down Okay now breathing I actually start talking about breathing right at the beginning, so I don't know if you want me to mention tha

Erik Donough (18:44.955) Absolutely. This is kind of like, yeah, this is we want to know what it's like having a beginning lesson from you.

Meredyth Coleman (18:47.43) Okay, sure. Because I do it right in the beginning. And they, you know, they may not grasp and understand all of this at once, but these are things you talk about for the next three or four or five, six weeks in a row. So the breathing, as they're putting it on their lower lip and they're rolling their lip in, you want to tell them to take a breath through their toes, above the reed. It needs to be silent.

And then once they feel like they've taken that breath, then they need to support like they're going to the bathroom. Tighten that muscle and just push it in. Like you tighten it like this. And I originally explained it as a water balloon because most fourth and fifth graders have held a water balloon. So we talk about a water balloon fills up from the bottom up and then you tie it off. So that's your breathing, that's your air intake. Is that water filling up?

Then you tie it off and if I were to squeeze the bottom of that water balloon, what would happen? And I remind them it's tied. And so they don't say it pops, you know, the, the air, the water all goes up. So the water all goes up and it creates this pressure. And that's how we play the oboe. So I usually talk about the water balloon. Then I show them the embouchure and we start with crowing first. And I know you had a question about crowing.

So we start with the crow and that's a good way for them to practice their embouchure and taking that deep breath. and then they crow. So there was a question about the crow. Do you want me to go out and answer that?

Erik Donough (20:22.795) Sure. My question was like, where do they put their lips in order to get the crow because I've heard two different schools of thought and one of those I'm sure you've heard them both and one of those is all the way into the to the string. And the other one is just where you would play the reed. normally. So what do you recommend?

Meredyth Coleman (20:29.186)Mm-hmm.

Meredyth Coleman (20:39.326)do it where you would play the reed normally. Yes, in this country, in America, there are two big schools of how to play the oboe and they're quite opposite from each other. And there are some things that are similar but there are a lot of things that are very opposite. So you will hear two very separate ways on how to play the oboe. So I do it as if you were playing. And the crow, you know, the crow does tell us a decent amount of the reed, of what's going on. I use it to be honest more for...

just seeing if the reeds vibrating and if it's going to work in the way I think it's going to. For a young child, you know, they're not going to really know much about what to do with a crow and I wouldn't really focus too much on the crow. It would be more to tell them if their reed is working. I wouldn't go too in depth with the crow. I would start with is it working? Because if you blow, nothing's coming out. That's gonna tell you either the reed is broken or they're clamping down on the reed. Because if you

clamp on that, your mouth on the reed, then your sound's not gonna come out. And you just remind them, we have to create the whistle because we're trying to create an oval with your embouchure. And then you could talk about pitch with the crow to see if the pitch is sitting. You know, I usually crow my reeds at a B. Some people now are crowing at C. It's tending to creep up.

But if it crows really, really flat, the reeds might be kind of flat if they're blowing properly. But it is good to start them with just crowing first before you put the reed into the oboe. That way they can practice the breathing and the embouchure. Okay. Now there was one.

Erik Donough (22:26.296) Jen did you have a question?

Jen Wise (22:28.789) No, no, that's great. I mean, yeah, like I mention the crow, I mention to check it, and we do, yeah, we practice the embouchure with it. Yeah, totally get it. Yeah.

Meredyth Coleman (22:40.047)Mm-hmm. Yeah, so the embouchure is basically lower lip in, corners in, like if you wanna create the oval, upper lip just down.

Erik Donough (22:47.163) So I'm kind of curious, what if you know you have a kid and you said, you know, it's to make sure the reeds working. What if the reeds not, you know, they've soaked the reed, they've putting it in their mouth, either they're blowing air through and it's far too open or they're blowing. They can't get any air through at all because it's too closed. Do you worry about like, is that something that usually happens during the first lesson or is that something that doesn't usually, you know, isn't something that is usually worried about at that point?

Meredyth Coleman (22:59.862)Mm-hmm.

Meredyth Coleman (23:13.982)If you get one of those two brands of reeds, it's probably gonna be okay. And that's one reason why I like Emeralds first, because they tend to be not too open. And if a reed is too open, you have to be a little careful when they're young, but you can make sure it's wet and you can hold the tip, the very tip closed. You don't smash it, you just gently hold it closed. And that will help the reed play a little bit more true to itself.

Because when they get to the handmade reed, odds are usually pretty good they usually come with a decent opening. But I would rather deal with a reed that's too open than a reed that's very closed. A reed that's very closed is a little bit harder to fix. You can

soak it in warm water for a good five to seven minutes. That will help. Some people like to open them with pliers. And you need to be a little careful with that, because you can, I don't do that.

I know I've heard people doing that because you could open them way too much and then they're destroyed. Okay, if I wouldn't tell children to do that, that would just be more advantageous to do that. Yeah, yeah, let's see people do it.

There was one question I do want to address, the first one. Should you start be started on oboe or on another instrument? And I just want to address this because where I grew up you started on whatever instrument you wanted to start on. You weren't transferred.

Erik Donough (24:19.755) Yeah, I'm gonna stick. I'm gonna stay away from the pliers with the kids. Yeah.

Jen Wise (24:22.436) Yeah, I think I am too.

Meredyth Coleman (24:41.054) And so when I came to New Jersey, I kept getting all these sixth and seventh and eighth and ninth graders that were coming from other instruments. So I had to quickly learn what the typical problems were gonna be when someone came from flute, what the typical problems were gonna be when someone came from clarinet or came from saxophone. It tended to be those three. And now again, not everybody who came from flute had the same problems, but there were similar problems I kept seeing showing up.

I personally think you should start kids on oboe. All of my students that have started on oboe, I don't have to undo anything. We just start and it's like fresh and we just go. Erik's daughter is proof of that. I have one of my seniors start as a fourth grader on oboe. As long as they can reach the keys and they have the patience and they have everything working, I think they can start on the OVO.

Erik Donough (25:40.855) Yeah, all six of my. Yeah, all six of my oboists all have played since fourth grade and they're all doing very well.

Meredyth Coleman (25:40.946) In fact, I prefer it actually.

Meredyth Coleman (25:47.442) Yeah, great. No, that's great.

Jen Wise (25:49.32) I was going to say in fourth grade is okay.

Meredyth Coleman (25:52.066) Completely. Yeah, as long as they're big enough to reach I wouldn't do anything younger than third grade But as long as they're able to reach the keys, it's okay Because they're gonna be on easy reeds anyway, there's no Problem with blow, you know reeds being too hard

Erik Donough (26:09.38) So we've got the reed, they're making a nice sound, they've got everything working, then what?

Meredyth Coleman (26:11.31) Mm-hmm. Yes. We put it into the oboe. Now, putting into the oboe, I thought there was a question about oboe. No. Okay. I mean the re-getting into the oboe. Is there a question about that? A reed's too tight.

Erik Donough (26:30.059) Yeah, I thought we could get into that maybe later. Yeah.

Jen Wise (26:30.337) Oh yeah.

Meredyth Coleman (26:31.798) later. So then they would put the reed into the oboe. First, I always show them how to put the oboe together. And what I recommend is the bell and what we call the middle joint go on first. And I recommend putting it on a little bit and then we grab where there are no keys hanging off the side, none of our pinky keys. And then we use our hip and we push, push

Then the top because the tricky thing with Oboe are these connector keys and they can get where they are like this and kids are pushing and then they get bent. And then the A flat, there's a little A flat, bent key right here that can get bent and the pad can get a little scraped if they're not careful. They're doing a lot of like big twisting so I always recommend lining it up.

Let me show you like this and then pushing it on like this from the top. Okay, so we, we talk about that, how you need to put your oboe together. And then at the end, we talk about how to take the oboe apart. So.

Erik Donough (27:46.207) Now we've had a couple woodwind episodes here and the teachers have said that they'll go through the oboes ahead of time, the new oboes and make sure that all the corks are greased and everything like that. Agreed? Yeah.

Meredyth Coleman (27:58.19) smart. And if you can make any kind of noise on the oboe, I would try them as well. Cause a lot of times from the shops they're coming, they don't, they're not working. I had somebody go to pick up a new Yamaha that was sent to the store for them. And I always

tell my students, take your reeds, try it at the store. They listened, they did that and the oboe didn't work. So otherwise they go home. The next day they try the oboe, doesn't work. And now we're in the same situation.

So that's smart. Put the cork grease. Yes. And if the corks are very tight, then you can show them how to do that as well.

Okay. So what do we do first? All right. Put the reed in. I always talk with them about once the reed is in and they're looking at their hands, be careful because they like to like sometimes they can, you know, hit their shoulder with the reed. First, we talk about how left hand goes on the top.

right hand goes on the bottom and I check where their thumb is on the thumb rest to make sure thumb rest really goes kind of right. I always check that because where their thumb is sitting on that instrument really kind of controls where the fingers are going. So we don't want it's about 60% of the thumb rest on the skin 40% on the nail. If you want to think of it that way. And I think it takes I think it is good to take a couple of minutes to check every kid and where their thumb is. I think it'll save you a lot in the long run.

And then we talk about how the oboe, there are six main keys. And we talk one, two, three, one, two, three, as far as the fingerings go. And the pinkies. And what we talk about the keys, the right pinky plays these, left pinky, I don't go into what the key names are quite yet, because we don't need to know that in the first lesson. So.

I strive for in the first lesson, talk about the embouchure, the breathing, how to put the instrument together, and we then try to learn, I start with middle C on oboe. Middle C, so one and one. And then we go to B, and then A, and then G, and if they're catching it on really quickly, then we do go to F sharp, that's usually where it stops for the first lesson.

Meredyth Coleman (30:19.886) Because once you cross F sharp, you start getting into low notes and we have to talk about what's going on inside of our mouth for that sometimes. So I always start with middle C and I start from the beginning talking about how, you know, they want to keep their fingers close to the keys. I start that right at the beginning. So they're not playing like this and doing this. And it's tricky. That's probably one of the trickiest things to get them to do is keep their fingers close to the keys. But I still try.

Erik Donough (30:46.699) Yeah. Now if they're having a little trouble holding the instrument still, especially like on a C where you know, they've got their thumb and they've got one finger on each hand. You know, what are your suggestions for students who may be having a little trouble just kind of navigating holding the instrument at first?

Meredyth Coleman (30:49.474)Hahaha

Meredyth Coleman (31:06.994)Why I just really recommend checking where their thumb is because it really is crucial. You know, if there's if it's way too far over like this, their fingers and they're trying to, you know, that's when you start getting this kind of stuff going on. So it's much more crucial than people think where the thumb is positioned. So I would highly recommend that band teachers really and educators look at this because it's, you know, not really thought of, I think, really because if you have too little thumb, first of all, the instrument can fall off and then your fingers

Jen Wise (31:30.333) I have... I have...

Meredyth Coleman (31:37.698)So, and it's not a perfect system, you know, sometimes they just have to get used to having the instrument in their hand and you have to go with what the child is grasping. Some of them just, it just fits their hands naturally. Some they have to really think about where the, you know, where their hand is sitting and but sometimes if I see somebody struggling I will start with B, you know, this hand can just hold, you know, practice holding B and then we'll go to A and then we'll go to G and then we'll add this for F sharp. Then we'll go back and see.

Jen Wise (32:08.629) I have some students that the side key at the very top, underneath the first finger, they'll end up on the left hand. They'll end up bumping that quite a bit. And I'm like, what kind of language, what do you tell them to how to, the one at the top of the instrument? Yeah. And yeah.

Meredyth Coleman (32:13.046)Mm-hmm.

Meredyth Coleman (32:23.831)You mean that the one... Oh, this one? Oh, really? Usually this one they hit. Okay.

Jen Wise (32:30.64) And yeah, and I thought, you know, I'd start to talk to them about like, it's always the wrist, right? It's like, I feel like sometimes it's like their wrist is in a funny spot, or, you know, their thumb is hovering funny in the back. And like, how do you describe how to not hit that key?

Meredyth Coleman (32:39.691) Yes.

Meredyth Coleman (32:46.114) Well, you know, another thing that will help them is their left thumb, it should rest on the instrument right below that first octave. So we talk about it, you put that there, and that should help with some balance as well. Sometimes you'll see kids that are doing this, well, it's like, just put it right underneath there. And that helps. I've talked to students about creating tunnels, you know, here on these first fingers, so that way they can see light through them if they look down.

So it's a little hard to see this way, but so if you're holding your oboe like this, they should be able to see light, like a tunnel. So they're seeing light through here. So that way, there's no way it's on the key because if they're resting on the keys, there's no light or you can't, you could say drive a car, can you drive a car through it? Can you push something through there? Can you see the light? And usually that does it.

I don't know if that helps. I've also, this is the one I usually see more problems with, the right A flat key, and I'll tell them, pretend like it's hot. Don't touch it. Or if I see them touching, I'll go, it's hot, you know.

Jen Wise (33:44.02) It does, yeah. Okay.

Erik Donough (33:56.061) I like that.

Meredyth Coleman (33:57.122) So, I mean, I can do that with a group of three or four. I don't know if I could do that with, you know, I haven't tried it with five or six yet, so you can try it and see. But yeah, I think the tunnel thing really works. And to be honest, you know, the oboe hands should almost be like piano hands, a bit like this. You know, each, and they're not perfectly straight. Each finger is kind of a different angle, but they are curved. So hands are actually incredibly crucial on oboe, but we don't, you know, we don't go too in depth at the first lesson. It's more, it's more the thumb.

Jen Wise (34:02.889) Mm-hmm.

Meredyth Coleman (34:27.234) But...

Erik Donough (34:27.451) Can you talk about the angle of the oboe and the direction of the breath? Because I know right off the bat, kids a lot of times want to play it like really low, like a clarinet. So can you talk a little bit about that?

Meredyth Coleman (34:39.542) You mean like posture or like how the oboe is sitting or?

Erik Donough (34:43.039) Yeah, how far out from the body is it? Is it straight down? Is it straight out? Obviously, I know the answer, but it's neither of those.

Meredyth Coleman (34:45.422) Sure. No, no. No, I don't. No, it really matters because, you know, I'll talk to my students about the angles of everything. A lot of times they play with their chins down. So I always say, pretend like we could put a pencil here. You know, and somebody have it play like this. I threaten to put a pencil here. Like, I'm gonna put a pencil right there if you don't put your chin up. So we talk about chin up, and then it's about a 45 degree angle. Not 90 and it's not like clarinet. So about 45 degrees.

You could start, you could shoot for 45 degree. You know everybody's a little bit built differently so you just have to like adjust that sometimes but it's you could start with 45 degrees that could be a good trying to aim for that.

Erik Donough (35:28.687) So 45 degrees, but the head is straight ahead.

Meredyth Coleman (35:31.362) Head is looking straight ahead. I always say like you're having a conversation with somebody Looking them in the eyes We're trying to put a pencil here like I do sometimes Yeah, just right straight ahead, okay

Erik Donough (35:36.39) Awesome. Yes.

Jen Wise (35:46.292) So I saw a question on Erik's list of questions. So we've said all of these things. We've done all these things. We practiced all these things. And they're still sounding like ducks sometimes! Why do they sound like a duck? And how do we fix it?

Meredyth Coleman (36:01.91) Sure. You know, to be honest, when kids start oboe, it's always so loud and it's this or that, and the parents are looking at me like... and I say, I promise you it's supposed to sound like this. It's actually supposed to sound like this. And the reason is, you know, our embouchure is, you know, we're a double reed. We're not a single reed that has some stability with, you know, a reed against a mouthpiece. So we are having to create all of that ourselves. And so these muscles around our embouchure in our face right here are so tiny and they have to really, really build up strength.

So if it's taught properly, it will actually take a little bit of time because they have to build those muscles and where they're sitting

and the strength and how to hold that reed. And you don't want it to almost happen so quickly because that means they're clamping and holding onto that reed with their embouchure when it should be more of a cushion may do hold on but it should be thought of more pulling a drawstring or cushioning that reed not clamping on that reed.

So it does it can take a little bit of time And you know the higher level they get the more Their sound is going to be built into what they're doing inside their mouth and that's really high level details that you know They can be taught once they have an embouchure that's pretty set and their breathing is proper.

You might make sure they're using nice reeds because if they have a good instrument and nice reeds the younger they are that helps with the sound because they are not capable of helping their sound if the reed is a little bit bright or ducky. I don't know if that helps and answers the question.

Jen Wise (37:55.413)

That's great.

Erik Donough (37:56.135)

One thing that I don't think we touched on is how to and how much to wet the reed before they play.

Meredyth Coleman (38:04.63) You know, a lot of it depends on the reed style. My reeds are more open reeds. I actually don't need to really wet them at all. You'll just see me kind of lick them and then they're good to go. But mine are more open style reed. The Emeralds are reeds that need to be soaked, I would say three to five minutes. If a reed is more on the closed side, then you could soak it even five to seven, even to 10. If it's from the middle of winter and it's really closed.

DoubleReedGirl, hers, you know, are, I would say, are more closed reed compared to mine. So they usually do need some soaking. But usually about three, excuse me, three to five minutes.

Erik Donough (38:45.463)

And is that every time or is that just for kind of the newer reed?

Meredyth Coleman (38:49.31)

It can be every time depending on what the opening of the reed like. But usually I'll tell my students, you know, before they go to a competition or performance or whatever, soak them at home and then just put them in the case. And then by the time you get there, you know, they're not getting wet for the first time, so they're a little bit more manageable.

Erik Donough (38:52.078)

Okay.

Erik Donough (39:07.415) Yeah, that's always one of the things that always more than any of the other reed instruments for me with my middle schoolers is like, you know, we've got a 35 minute lesson and, you know, clarinetists can like soak their reed for, you know, 60 seconds and be fine. But I got oboists whose reeds are closing up and, you know, who really, you know, need to have that time. So I don't know if you had any tricks. And I like that one of like wedding it at home. Yeah.

Meredyth Coleman (39:23.17) Yeah.

Meredyth Coleman (39:26.515) Mm-hmm.

Meredyth Coleman (39:31.542) At home, yeah, have them do at home if you can get them to remember to do that. Have them do that at home. You can also, if they have a reed case, I don't have one, but there's a really good reed case on Amazon. It's \$15. It's a wooden box. It's covered with silk. It's like that pretty. There's like a blue, green, and the other one, one of my students found it years ago. And it's only \$15, which is very inexpensive for a reed case.

One thing I recommend to my students that have reed cases which most of them do I don't think I have it here is I put my reed case in a ziplock bag so once they have a reed case they can put it in a ziplock bag I don't seal it it's just in the ziplock bag and that kind of helps especially in the wintertime so it'll keep there it won't let the reeds you know get ridiculously dry but it also won't mold them if you if you just don't shut it

Erik Donough (40:26.803) Yeah, that's great. That's a great tip.

Meredyth Coleman (40:29.367) Okay, so that's a tip that, you know, all my students do, most of them, and so even the younger ones are capable of doing that, once they have a reed case.

Erik Donough (40:37.519) How do you deal with the reed not fitting in the opening or if it's really tight, especially if it's really tight, what do you recommend?

Meredyth Coleman (40:40.514) Sure. Yeah. What I recommend, I don't recommend cork grease because then it becomes very difficult to get out because then it's really slippery. So a really good trick and it's a visual trick. So hopefully people can see, but if you turn the reed the wrong way, put the cork in your mouth and you wanna go up about halfway and you do these little tiny bites and you turn the reed. You don't

wanna bite too hard because you will crush the tube. Little tiny itch like this.

and trying to reed or you can even use your fingernail and do, you know, just put in little indentions all the way around. I would try that first before you record.

Jen Wise (41:14.986)

Mm-hmm.

Jen Wise (41:18.26)

My students hate that. I'm always like, close your eyes. And I bite on it. And then I'm like, here you go. It works now. But I tell them, I'm like, close your eyes. Don't look. Magic.

Meredyth Coleman (41:21.787) I know. Yeah.

Erik Donough (41:26.476) Oh, you bite it for them. You're like the mama bird.

Meredyth Coleman (41:30.759) If she's the mama bird. You're brave. I don't put that in my... Yeah, I know. You can use your fingernail to... I mean, you can take your... I'm just doing like little with my thumbnail, just pushing like little... Yeah, indents. You can do that too. And then you get little indents. The problem with the cork grease is then it becomes really slippery and then it's hard to get out. But you can... I've taught students how to use their t-shirts.

Erik Donough (41:35.294) Ehh

Jen Wise (41:42.936) Yeah, I'll have to do that. Yeah. Okay, I'll do that, yeah.

Meredyth Coleman (41:58.538) I use your t-shirt to kind of put here and turn. I teach them how this hand goes this way and that hand goes that way. And you turn and pull. So, but now it's tricky. You can break a reed trying to get it out if you're not careful.

Jen Wise (42:16.348) Cool. I had a question on there about any assistive things that you find helpful, like a neck strap or anything that goes on the thumb rest to help students be more comfortable. Do you recommend or think any of that's necessary? OK.

Meredyth Coleman (42:30.211) Sure. Yeah, I don't recommend neck straps to be honest because it puts the oboe at a really weird angle, I think. And then they end up with kind of doing odd things here. But if the oboe comes with nothing here, then yes, I would definitely put something here. You know, you could even put some cork. They make little thumb rests that you can, I mean, little like those rubber things that you can stick on. As long as they're not moving around too much, you

wanna make sure they're the ones that fit pretty tight. Because if they're moving a lot, then they're, you know.

There's not stability there. But I like putting just some cork there.

Jen Wise (43:09.228)

Thanks.

Erik Donough (43:10.419)

So we've got the we've got like the first lesson down. I love this I'm assuming taking the instrument apart is kind of like the backwards version of putting it together Okay

Meredyth Coleman (43:18.29)

Exactly. I start with the bell. Start with the bell. And again, don't grab in between keys that are hanging off. One little tip that I have used, I'll say really quick for keys. Like if I have, sometimes I'll have kids come to me and their fingers are sliding. They're playing the keys like this. I will cut a little piece of bandaaid and I'll put it on this side of the key so they have something to feel for. You know.

Jen Wise (43:46.022)

and grip.

Meredyth Coleman (43:46.094)

or just something like a sticker, just something that has like a rough, because that's nice too. Sometimes they just need to feel something there. Yes, taking off and then we take the bell off first. And then I show them how when they do the middle and the top joint, just to do very little turns and pull up as you're doing the little tiny turns. Because when they do really big turns, that's when they can start ripping that A flat pad. Okay.

Erik Donough (44:13.943)

Yeah. So a question that I was wondering here. What are some recommendations or recommendation that you have for method books, especially for maybe a new teacher who's coming into a district and has the opportunity to change possibly what they're using or if they're deciding for the first time what their what their students should use? What do you recommend?

Meredyth Coleman (44:37.666)

So for oboe, I recommend, and I don't know how it applies to all the other instruments and what the notes, the starting notes in the book are, but I recommend the Standard for Excellence book, because it starts the oboes with my favorite starting notes, which is the B natural, the A, the G, the C, then it moves to F sharp, then it moves to E. There was another book out there, I can't remember what it's called, but I have seen a couple times from a couple of my students that started at the half hole.

It was half full D to E flat to forked up with your thumb. And that's, you know, that's something you don't want to be starting. That's like learning how to drive a stick shift first. Your first time to go drive a car. So that book I don't care for, but I can't remember the name of it because I don't have it. But yeah, I don't know how it started. The other instruments. Maybe it only started the oboe kind of badly, but it worked well for everybody else. I don't know. But the standard of excellence.

Erik Donough (45:17.552) Yeah.

Meredyth Coleman (45:35.286)by Bruce Pearson is the book I really love.

Erik Donough (45:39.391) Also the method we use in Livingston. Yay, Jen, we do it right here.

Jen Wise (45:41.468) It is, yay. Yay. That's right. Good, good, good.

Meredyth Coleman (45:41.826)Fabulous. Good. Oboe person's happy.

Meredyth Coleman (45:56.05)Oh, the left, do you want to talk about leftover air? Because that is important, because I start that young. Do you want to talk about that? Because the, okay, because leftover air, so because we play a lot with mainly pressure, you know, if you don't breathe out, you will start to feel a little strangled because you just keep taking air in, because we don't actually let a lot of air out technically. We're like going back to the water balloon analogy. You know, we are playing with all that pressure. Some air does go out, so that's why we do have to take air in.

Jen Wise (46:01.176) Sure. Yeah.

Erik Donough (46:02.171) Absolutely.

Meredyth Coleman (46:25.738)But I teach my students from the very beginning. When they have to stop to breathe, they breathe out first. Then they breathe back in. So as soon as they stop playing, breathe out first. It might be a little time consuming, but you'll end up with much better situation in the long run with your Oboe players. So teach them to breathe out as well.

Erik (46:46.775) Yeah, I still do that when I'm playing oboe in a show. I rarely am able to get rid of all the air that's still in your lungs, yeah.

Meredyth Coleman (46:52.566) No, you have to breathe out. And then when my students get higher level, we talk about, you know, the reason I start them with that, and even when they're doing their longer exercises, I say, I don't care how long it takes you to do that. Breathe out, we talk about it has to be silent and calm. Breathe out and then breathe back in. Take your time, because eventually when they become very, very advanced, I'm starting the foundation for them to be able to breathe out and in an eighth rest. You know, be able to go, like that. Or to be able to breathe out, play a couple notes and even breathe out again, play a couple notes and then be able to take a good breath in. That's something else we talk about, but not at the beginning level. But you could start at the beginning level even just having them breathe out as soon as they stop.

So, you know, in this Standard of Excellence book, usually there's breath marks like every second, every other, like there's two measures, breath mark, and then it goes to three and then four, I think. So even at that two measure mark, in the very beginning, have them breathe out. Start it from the beginning. So you can handle it.

Erik Donough (47:54.034) Jen, do you want to ask about resources?

Jen Wise (47:56.436) Yeah, so at the end of their first lesson, they go home with the method book. Are there any other resources, either online or anything you give them to help with practice after these first couple lessons?

Meredyth Coleman (48:12.43) I really, I dive right into scales. And their first scale that they, well, scale that they learn is G-A-B-C. And I have them do G-A-B-C, C-B-A-G. And that's usually what they do the first week. And then depending on how they're doing, we extend that. And it's a little odd, but you know, we'll do F sharp, then we'll do E, and then we'll do D, and then we'll see if we can get a low C out. And if they can get that low C out, I actually let them play that C scale with that F sharp in there just for a little bit. Then we transition to what I call banana F, which is the regular F natural. Okay. But yeah, I'm a big component of scales.

And what I do once they get a couple scales under their belt, I get them into the Barrett book pretty fast, which is the Barrett oboe method which is kind of our book. So I use the standard of excellence and then the Barrett book scales. And then I do a lot of my teaching through pieces. I don't use a lot of, I don't use a lot of etude books. When I have, I have, they are using etude books that my, once you do the Barrett book, we go into the Farreling book,

we go into the Pristini book. There are books we use, but I don't do the Rubank or anything like that. I do a lot of teaching through actual pieces.

Erik Donough (49:39.683) Got it. Now, as far as resources on the other end for teachers who may be nervous about starting beginner oboes who may not be oboists themselves or possibly not even would win players. Do you have any resources that you would recommend where they can, for lack of better terms, stay a lesson ahead of the kids, you know, some ideas where they can turn if they have questions or really want to, you know, get their get their over players playing even better.

Meredyth Coleman (49:44.182)Mm-hmm.

Meredyth Coleman (50:12.142)I mean, the beginning of the, you know, the Standard of Excellence book, it really is, I mean, even the preparing to play, what it says, curve your fingers, keep your wrists straight, hold your body about a 45 degree angle. I mean, it's all right. It's all right there, to be honest. And then I would say, don't hesitate to reach out to someone like me. We will help you because we will have to be fixing stuff later if we don't.

Erik Donough (50:28.327) Sure, sure, sure.

Jen Wise (50:29.462) Mm-hmm.

Meredyth Coleman (50:40.07)And I have fixed some very odd things. So I would help any band director that emails me or music educator. So that's, I don't know if that's the great answer, but that's what I would recommend. It is reaching out to oboe teachers.

Erik (50:53.699) No, that's, that's great. Speaking, speaking of getting in touch, what would be the best way to get in touch with you if some of one of our listeners had a question?

Meredyth Coleman (51:04.027)Sure, email is usually a good way to email me. My simplest email is just meredythc@hotmail.com. So Meredythc@hotmail.com. Yes, that's the easiest one. But yes, that's what I recommend is just reaching out to professional oboist.

Erik (51:19.035) and we'll put that in the show notes too. Awesome.

Meredyth Coleman (51:29.366)I've had people reach out to me asking questions and I happily answer them. Sure.

- Erik Donough (51:33.943) Nice. Did you have any other questions?
- Jen Wise (51:36.241) Oh, I don't think so. I mean, you shed some light on these first lessons for us. And that's so great. Yeah, yeah. Because, Erik, you're right. There are some teachers that are like, oh, two reeds. No way. So I think this is going to be really helpful for us.
- So thank you, Meredyth. Thank you again for coming on and sharing all this with us. I think it's going to help a lot of people get a good start out there for their students. So.
- Meredyth Coleman (51:43.314) Okay, I hope so. Thank you. Thank you for having me because you know we need young oboes out there. We don't want them afraid of the instrument. You don't have to be afraid of it. It's actually, to be honest, it's actually not a hard instrument if you have the right equipment and you have health.
- Erik Donough (52:13.047) Yeah, and I think I think some teachers are also, you know, kind of scared of doing it because maybe they didn't have it in a methods class or, you know, they didn't have a great reed when they were learning it for that, you know, half a semester and then moved on to something else. Yeah, so that's great.
- Meredyth Coleman (52:31.406) Mm-hmm. Completely. And the most important thing is just having the right equipment in the beginning. That's the most important thing. So I think is that.
- Erik (52:43.147) Awesome. Well, what's that, Jen?
- Jen Wise (52:44.216) That's great. Oh, nothing. I said that. Thank you. Yeah, that's great.
- Erik Donough (52:49.871) So to our listeners, if you really enjoyed today's episode, don't forget to subscribe to our podcast. You're already listening on something. You might as well just hit that subscribe button. If you are, if you're listening on YouTube, make sure that you hit that subscribe button and hit the bell icon. So you get notified every time that we release a new episode.
- Jen Wise (53:43.5) We would love to hear from you on social media You know come out there and ask some questions make your own comments about The oboe and you know your experience with it. We'd love to hear it We love it when you come out and interact with us on our social

media sites Facebook Instagram and of course YouTube Tune in on YouTube for this one for sure

Erik Donough (54:09.475) And if you really liked it, don't forget to consider becoming a monthly supporter. The link is in the show notes. It's pretty easy to take care of that.

If you have questions for me or you'd like to reach out, my name's Erik Donough and my email address is pretty easy. Erik EriK @ Donough, D O N O U G H .net.

Jen Wise (54:26.296) And I'm Jen Wise and you can find me at JenWiseMusic. That's my email at Gmail and also on Facebook and Instagram. So.

Erik Donough (54:36.459) Awesome. So, Meredyth, we do have a catch phrase at the end of every episode, and that is that's actually it's right here. Get out there and great. Make some great music. So you want to you want to take us out?

Meredyth Coleman (54:42.304)

Okay. Ah, get out there and create some great music. Especially on the oboe. Thank you. Okay, bye.

Erik Donough (54:54.253) I like it.

Jen Wise (54:57.154))That's so good.

Erik Donough (54:57.815) Awesome. Thanks so much, Meredyth. Alright, so we're going to let it roll here for a sec. And because there's usually some music at the end when we cut our voices, but it's weird just to cut our faces off. Jen sometimes dances.

Jen Wise (55:10.716) Yeah. I do. Or I pretend that Erik said something so funny and I'm like, Oh, wow. So yeah. Oh, that's good.

Erik Donough (55:19.192) Ha ha ha!