

Fall 2022

# UMFCNAfME Newsletter

Edited by Kara Iwanowski



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*2022 Eboard (Left):*

*Janie Lobel (President-Elect), Kara Iwanowski (Secretary), Jose Prieto (President)  
Ben Gonczi (Treasurer), Emma Gladden (Historian)*

*2023 Eboard (Right):*

*Izzi Guzman (Historian), Jonah Schertz (President-Elect), Janie Lobel (President),  
Noah Booz (Treasurer), Sarah Dobens (Secretary)*

# Farewell from the President

Dear NAFME Family,

I'm at a loss for words on how to start this goodbye. I'm not sure there's anything I could say to encompass how I feel about you all and what we have done together, but here's my best attempt.

I want to start off by saying that I am immensely proud of the impact our chapter has had on the community. From volunteering at local schools and participating in advocacy efforts at the state and local level, to raising over \$1,000 in grants for music education in Miami-Dade Public Schools. Our chapter is truly a shining light in the music education community and that is due in no short measure to the work and dedication that you all have put in.

As I move forward in life and in our field of study, I promise you all that there will always be a place in my heart for you and our chapter. I know that as I embark on my path toward a career in music education, I am leaving behind a group of amazing people that are bound to do amazing things, and that is all I could ever want. Although this is goodbye for now, I am always a phone call or email away. All I ask is that you continue to be passionate, continue to grow and learn, and continue to teach and stand for music education.

With much love, gratitude, and a bit of sadness...

Farewell,

Your President, Jose Prieto

# Finding Joy Through Exhaustion

By Marina McLerran

Whether you find yourself at the beginning of your music education degree, or nearing the finish line, you are no doubt already exhausted, physically and mentally. We have all at some point experienced that moment, drowning in assignments, physically spent, and scrambling to find time to practice, when we pause and think, "What have I done? Why am I here?" Sometimes it feels like life would be easier if we had chosen a different path... but what would you be giving up? Who would you be instead?

The good news is that you are not alone or abnormal if you feel (or have felt) this way. Existing research has found that undergraduate music majors tend to self-report as significantly more anxious or depression-prone than their non-music peers (Kuebel, 2019; Payne, et. al., 2020; Wristen, 2013). ...The bad news is that there will still be periods of stress and exhaustion throughout your teaching career. Whether you become an elementary music educator or a high school band director, it will be necessary to get to school early (usually before 7am) and sometimes stay well past the end of the school day. There will be meetings to attend, inventory to manage, paperwork to submit, budgets to balance, Etc. To avoid burnout, it will be necessary in your professional career to make an intentional effort to prioritize your personal health, to find work-life balance, and to seek out daily opportunities for joy in your music-making. In your future role as music educator, you will no longer be responsible for just your personal motivation, but will have the power to directly affect the motivation/attitude of all of your music students as well. Imagine being the person who inspires someone else to try harder in school or to study music!

## Music Educator Health

You cannot be the best teacher or person you were meant to be if you are sick or absent. As the school year wears on, it becomes more of a challenge to prioritize one's health, especially with the late nights and weekends that come with working football games or attending competitions. Snacking becomes tempting with short lunch periods and there are typically lots of sweets hanging around the break room. It is common for music educators to struggle with their weight and with getting enough sleep. Especially in the periods of contest preparation, music educators must eat a healthy diet ("healthy" as in food that expires), stay hydrated (for your voice, too), and take extra vitamins. It can also be helpful to integrate fitness into your daily teaching routine if possible. For example, I used to race kids across the football field or back to the band hall multiple times a week.

## Finding Balance

When I asked my active MED friends what advice they would give to their past selves, “finding work-life balance” was the most common response. The events of recent years (particularly the COVID pandemic) have highlighted the monumental number of tasks that teachers perform for their schools beyond teaching the specific course content. To a degree, that is part of the job. Most teaching contracts will have an ambiguous, “and other related duties” item which is meant to encompass miscellaneous tasks like helping with the car drop-off line or with state testing days. However, it will be necessary to learn to discern when the ask is too much or when it takes away from your ability to serve your intended function as a music educator. There are a few important boundaries for music educators to consider: (1) don’t answer the phone or emails after hours – unless it’s life or death, (2) be planning at least two weeks ahead at all times to avoid surprises, (3) do things that are not work on your days off.

The second facet of finding balance is finding a way to commit fully to the job without letting it become all that you are. This is a common mistake of new music educators who tend to

perceive bad teaching days (or less than ideal contest results) as personal failures. However, as much as we would all like to feel good all of the time and have only good days, no degree plan or occupation is going to be completely without its learning curves or frustrations. As long as the good teaching days mostly outweigh the frustrating days (or even if the class periods within a day are mostly good), then you’re doing great. (And if not, then it might be time to ask for help).

### Why music education?

When you do begin to feel exhausted or overwhelmed, pause and ask yourself why you started down this path in the first place or what makes this job particularly worthwhile. One of the best pieces of advice I ever got was to keep a box of all of the kid presents over the year as a reminder of the positive impact that we have at work. On the particularly hard days, go to the box and dig through the “thank you” notes, the “best band teacher” cards, the “I love music” artwork... and know that your effort matters. Finally, a reminder that professional success does not happen overnight. I heard something in a workshop once that has always stuck with me, “If you can’t make a difference where you are right now, how do you expect to make a difference in a larger context?” Meaning, if you are an undergraduate music student currently, what steps are you taking to be the best undergraduate MED student possible? Daily effort is the key to success and all progress counts. You must commit to giving your best effort every day and find joy in the small victories.



# Miami Community Music Center

by Wendy Chen Gunther

The seed for the Miami Community Music Center was planted in the Spring of 2021. My friend and co-founder, Melissa Lesniak, approached me with the idea of starting a non-profit arts organization that was not performance oriented. We started chatting about the kinds of music programs we knew about in the area, what we perceived to be their limitations, and how we could provide new and different programming. We talked about our own individual areas of expertise and passion: mine is general music, hers is string education. As we chatted, we saw that our visions aligned and that we could work well together.

The building of the Miami Community Music Center was a slow process. After our brainstorming sessions, Melissa and I met regularly to discuss our vision and to develop a mission statement. We were both committed to serving the southwest portion of Miami-Dade County, as we felt that there was a dearth of affordable, high-quality music opportunities. We were also committed to building community and connections by providing music education for both children and adults. We had no idea if adults were interested, but we wanted to open the door for these individuals. Our next step was to decide what types of classes we would offer. We threw around many ideas and settled on four to begin with: a experiential music class for elementary aged students, an All-Ages Ukulele Club, an intermediate Strings Techniques class, and an Exploratory Strings Ensemble.

Our next set of tasks had little to do with music. We had to take care of the technical parts of creating a non-profit organization including filling out registration paperwork with the state and the IRS, inviting thoughtful individuals to be on the board of directors, holding board meetings, creating a logo, finding a location, negotiating rental agreements, creating promotional materials, and recruiting students. Melissa's experience as director of other non-profit music organizations, as well as her personal connections to local musicians and school music programs, was vital to the completion of these tasks.

Miami Community Music Center launched in Summer 2022 and held classes at the South-Dade Cultural Arts Center (now known as the Moss Cultural Arts Center). We had nearly 50 students of all ages participate and were encouraged by how well-received our classes were. Personally, I was excited to teach again and loved interacting with elementary students. But I discovered that I really enjoyed facilitating the intergenerational ukulele club. I liked seeing the Club members get to know each other and interact with each other. This took some time, of course, but there was a sense of community developing in this group.

In the Fall, we continued the Ukulele Club and the intermediate strings class, and launched new programming that included a beginning string class and a pilot of my Musical Storytelling curriculum. We also participated in Give Miami Day and were able to raise nearly \$5,000 for scholarships, materials, and opportunities for expansion.

As we look to the future, we strive to find a balance between encouraging participatory music-making and providing opportunities for low-pressure music performance. With this in mind, we are planning a Community Music Day that will include participatory music-making sessions (e.g., bucket drumming, introduction to GarageBand), mini-performances by our students, and workshops (e.g., improvisation).

This entire process of starting and building a non-profit music organization has been a rewarding experience. I have grown as an educator and discovered a passion for teaching adults and, more specifically, intergenerational classes. I see the power of music to bring people joy and to bring people together in community and I am reminded that music teaching and learning does not have to



happen in a school classroom. I would encourage you all to find alternate spaces where you can encourage others to participate in music, such as in community organizations,

park districts, senior centers, or religious congregations. The possibilities are endless. And if you ever need a little inspiration, grab a ukulele and come join us at the Miami Community Music Center. All are welcome.

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