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Welcome to the New Providence Music and Performing Arts Department!

Greetings! Since this is a year like no other, our staff will share anecdotes from their adventures in distance and hybrid learning in this newsletter. I would like to thank our tremendous performing arts teachers for all their hard work and ingenuity, as well as our administration and board of education for their consistent support. Enormous gratitude also goes to our Music Boosters officers, including the amazing Natalie McPoland for her work as treasurer, Katie Lippman our incredible secretary who will move into the president position, and to our talented webmaster, Kay Lee, for redesigning our beautiful website. I would encourage you all to join our Music Boosters organization to support our students and staff (nmpmusicboosters.org), volunteer, and/or become an officer. Included in this newsletter is also a music staff trivia game. See how well you do!

If someone would have told us last fall what learning would look like this year, we would have said they were crazy...
We started the year like this...
...and by April, it looked like this...

We’re All In This Together!

Photo credit: Michael Niedziejko
Regardless of how it looks, great instruction is happening to give our students the skills to create, perform, respond to and connect with music and the performing arts. Here are some fun anecdotes from our staff regarding our distance and hybrid learning adventure so far. Enjoy!

Sincerely,

Kenneth Hess, Department Head of Music Education and Performing Arts
Miss Pamela Crockett - Salt Brook School - Vocal Music

To try and make the best of the situation, I created “Mollie's Corner” on my first and second grade webpage during the spring. I made music videos with my puppy, Mollie, dancing along with some of our songs we had worked on throughout the year. I started getting comments from 3rd...4th...5th...and 6th graders that were visiting the page to see Mollie perform as word of the videos got out :) 

I have enjoyed finding new ways to use technology to engage my “zoomies” and my “roomies”. While I will not take everything with me when we return to normalcy, I will have a new set of resources up my sleeve to help enhance my instruction.

Mr. Don Baker - Salt Brook School - Band and Recorders

When we were Zooming from home my son PJ (he's 2) came into my office to see what all the noise was about. I was teaching trombonists how to have a good solid attack. PJ saw all the instruments in the room and immediately wanted to play with everything so I showed him how the trombone worked. He actually made a sound right away and it was LOUD! I turned back to the trombone players and said "see like that". They had a very good laugh and now all I have to say is should I bring my 2 year old to show you how to do it. That usually gets them up and running right away.
Mr. Egil Rostad - Allen W. Roberts and Salt Brook Schools - Strings

I remember one class last year when all of the students were playing through some of the songs they played earlier in the year. One of the songs was “Twinkle Twinkle Little Star,” and as it so happened, my two year old daughter was going through a Twinkle phase. After playing it through for the zoom rehearsal and talking about it, I started playing it with the class again. This time Suki started singing loudly with me as I played it. I didn’t realize it at first, I just saw the bows on the screen stop moving. Then I heard her joyfully singing away with me. The children loved it.

One really interesting aspect of remote learning for orchestra is how much individual playing comes to the forefront. As teachers we always make an effort to hear each child individually, but that is because we actively make that effort. Now, since the combined rehearsal sound has been broken up into its constituent parts, each child’s individual playing is the top layer. Each child makes a recording to be part of the musical dialogue.

Mrs. Jennifer Starr-Talsmat - Allen W. Roberts & Salt Brook Schools - Vocal Music

During the spring it seemed like everyone was taking on some unusual house projects. For our family, we got chickens! We built the coop ourselves and even had baby chicks! During our 1st and 2nd grade Sing-Alongs on Zoom, kids would share their pets with the class. My son would bring out the chickens and show them up close to the camera. I think the special part about remote learning is getting to share your life with the students. The kids always love to see your home, family, pets and special instruments. One time I taught my Zoom Sing-Along from my children’s bedroom because it was the quietest room I could find. My students loved it!
Mrs. Celeste Zazzali - Allen W. Roberts School - Band and Recorders

My favorite part of Zoom is getting to meet everyone’s pets! New Providence has some of
the most adorable cats and dogs around. They are lucky to have a musician in the house
to serenade them.

One of the best things to come out of Zoom lessons is the ability to take a really close
look at the instruments. If there’s ever a question, it’s easy to show the techniques on the
camera. Everyone has a front row seat when they’re on Zoom!

Mr. Kenneth Hess - Allen W. Roberts School - Vocal Music

I vividly remember an important Zoom meeting last spring with multiple department heads and
building principals during which my very hairy cat jumped on my lap, walked up my stomach
and chest, and attempted to sit on my face. One of the other attendees called out, “A badger is
attacking Mr. Hess.”

With heavier reliance on music listening activities I have expanded the variety of representative
styles and cultures. During a one month period my students had guided listening activities
using choral and orchestral classics, 60s and 70s pop music, traditional instrumental music
from Brazil and folk music from various parts of the world. Great stuff!
TRIVIA GAME: In last year’s newsletter our staff members shared the following. Can you guess who they are? *Answers on page 13

1. Whose favorite TV show is The Sopranos, enjoys watching soccer, and would love to visit Prague?
2. Whose favorite ice cream flavor is butter pecan, favorite sports team is the Philadelphia Eagles, and favorite quote is “Whether you think you can, or think you can’t, you’re right”?
3. Whose favorite musical is Sweeney Todd, favorite color is green, and enjoys Thai food?
4. Who enjoys running and baking, vacations in Cape Cod, and is a fan of the NY Rangers?
5. Who would love to visit Iceland, is originally from Pennsylvania, and counts as their favorite quote this gem from the TV show, 30 Rock: “Never go with a hippie to a second location”?
6. Whose favorite vegetable is ginger, favorite musical is Wicked, and is a yoga enthusiast?
7. Who enjoys chicken parm, counts blue as a favorite color and is originally from Fanwood?
8. Whose favorite ice cream flavor is coffee, favorite composer is Beethoven and would love to visit Hawaii?
9. Who says brussel sprouts is a favorite vegetable, enjoys the music of Pink, Black Sabbath and Queen, and owns a Great Dane?
10. Whose favorite meal is a burger and fries, favorite ice cream is vanilla, and favorite quote is “Excuses lead to failure”?
11. Who enjoys rock climbing and kayaking, counts U2 as a favorite band and is originally from California?
12. Whose favorite color is purple, enjoys running and meditation, and owns two dogs?
Mr. Stephen Voelker - Middle School - Bands and Mods

I am very impressed with how well we all have adapted to our new normal this past month, and have had some great music making opportunities with my students!

One of the best aspects of our new normal is the relationship building happening in our pull-out lesson program! Usually our lesson program is in groups of likewise instruments, with at least six students per group. This year, I have had the opportunity to work with each member of our concert band on an individual basis, and am so fortunate for the opportunity to get to connect with each and every member of the band, and be able to help them with any issues they may be having!

Ms. Catherine Flynn - Allen W. Roberts and Middle Schools - Vocal Music

It is said in theater, “Never share the stage with children or pets. They will always upstage you.” As several of my colleagues have mentioned, pets made Zoom more fun. The first time I zoomed in my quiet dining room/classroom, the cats ran away and hid for several hours, but over time, they became the stars of my sessions and my google classroom. At first I was worried, but soon realized that Rosie and Rico were actually the main draw. (Hey, if it gets the kids there, I’ll take it:-)

While I look forward to seeing the children live and in real time, there are several activities and platforms that I’ve added to my bag of tricks that will serve us well post COVID. Group singing is usually emphasized during choir rehearsals, but I’ve really enjoyed hearing individual voices via Zoom and Flipgrid.
Mr. Benjamin Ruben-Schnirman - Middle and High Schools - Strings

The orchestra was able to start playing on Monday, September 14th with a combination of in-person and Zoom. It has been an experiment the entire time, but we have been able to sync up well. The sound quality was improved through enabling original sound and the visual is clear enough for people to see the conducting. We’ve been able to work on music for three weeks and are still able to play together, which we did not know we would be able to do! A lot of people have said that it’s working well from their end and they’re able to hear and play together with the group, even though they are at home.

Mr. Craig Duke - Middle and High Schools - Drama

Last spring our house was an interesting experiment in education. Our daughter Natalie was in 8th grade at Chatham, my wife teaches in Berkeley Heights, and of course, I’m here at NPHS/MS. There were usually three different Zoom sessions happening simultaneously, with all three of us, as well as the various pets, all teaching, learning, barking, meowing, and tripping over one another as we tried to navigate through our separate, but shared virtual realities. It was a bit overwhelming at times. However, amid the chaos, I saw some really great activities Natalie’s teachers were sharing with her and I heard the enthusiastic and eager voices of my wife’s students in the next room. For several months, we got an up-close look at how all three of our schools approached this new challenge, and I feel lucky to have learned so much that I can bring back to my students this year.
Ms. Susan Kirkland - High School - Vocal Music

I have been so amazed at what we have all been able to figure out with so little time and prior understanding. It is a testament to the commitment, skill, and resourcefulness of everyone involved. I am really proud of my students and my colleagues! Some of our spring highlights included: the choirs creating a virtual audio recording for the NP Memorial Day Parade Video, putting together a virtual spring voice recital on Flipgrid, and the seniors singing live at graduation. A personal highlight was gathering NPHS Alumni to sing Omnia Sol to our seniors and present them with the flowers they would have received at our concert. 😊

Mr. Michael Niedziejko - High School - Bands and Music Theory

I had a few surprises along the way on Zoom. Probably the biggest surprise (and yet embarrassing) was the students all had arranged to make their virtual background a congratulatory message regarding my high school teacher of the year recognition. I started the zoom session and almost the entire band was there split screened with this white and yellow background. I was so humbled.

I am using the time to get to know students more personally through Zoom and gaining an appreciation for how best to help each student in the way that they need.
TRIVIA GAME - ANSWERS

1. Mr. Ruben-Schnirman
2. Ms. Flynn
3. Mr. Hess
4. Miss Crockett
5. Ms. Kirkland
6. Mr. Rostad
7. Mr. Voelker
8. Mr. Niedziejko
9. Mrs. Starr-Talsmat
10. Mr. Baker
11. Mr. Duke
12. Mrs. Zazzali
Thank you to the NP Music Boosters for your DONATIONS FROM THE 2019-2020 school year, including:

- iOS compatible microphones for HS music classes
- Shelving for HS and elementary storage
- Digital Piano castors for HS
- Cellos and covers for MS/HS
- Percussion equipment for MS and SB bands
- Teaching instruments for elementary strings
- Classroom instruments for elementary general music classes

The NP Music and Performing Arts staff is truly grateful!

PURCHASING GOALS 2021:
Due to the unusual nature of this school year, purchasing goals will evolve throughout the year as unique needs arise. Currently our goals include:

- Humidity system for MS/HS strings
- Wall plaques for HS awards
- Virtual visiting artist funds
- Bass Clarinet for AWR
- Replacement portable sound system for HS
How can you support your music and performing arts students through Music Boosters?

- Join online! Npmusicboosters.org
- Volunteer
- Become an officer
- Cheer on our kids in all their performing arts studies!

NEW PROVIDENCE MUSIC BOOSTERS OFFICERS 2020-2021
President: Katie Lippman
Vice President: Open
Treasurer: Natalie McPoland
Secretary: Open
Webmaster: Kay Lee
Department Head/Faculty Liaison: Kenneth Hess
Let's have a great year!

Photo credit: William Chapleau