



## OPUS November 2020

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# NEWS AT CCM

## **CCM Welcomes Sophia Garmey to the Board of Directors**

Sophia Garmey first came to know CCM when her children began music lessons at CCM in 2018. Besides bringing music into her kids' lives, she also started piano lessons this past year. They are well on their way to forming the Garmey band, with her 8-year-old son Nathaniel learning guitar, while her 7-year-old daughter Eleanor is learning both the piano and the ukulele. The lead vocalist might be Eleanor, who was also enjoying a group vocals class before the pandemic.

"Our studies at CCM had brought all of us closer to music and were a powerful constant last spring when everything else had to shut down. I'm so pleased to be joining this board at a time when increasing community visibility and outreach is a priority. One of the great things about living in Concord has been the cultural richness and diversity of what the town has to offer," Sophia explains. "CCM has so much to offer, and I look forward to helping increase the school's profile in years to come. I am also very interested in the therapeutic benefits of studying music and look forward to seeing where that element of CCM programming goes."

Sophia has a BA and MA in the Humanities from the University of Chicago and an MFA in fiction writing from the New School. She's spent over ten years writing, and working in communications and development for many cultural and educational organizations, most recently as the director of development for a Boston charter school. For the past seven years, Sophia has been a full-time parent and dedicates her spare time to volunteer work, writing, music, and painting.

## **CCM's Town-Wide Scavenger Hunt—*Visit Concord's Businesses & Support Our Community!***

The CCM Scavenger Hunt is the perfect, educational, fun-filled community activity to do with the entire family while supporting businesses around town! CCM and 15 Concord businesses are bringing our community together. The scavenger hunt runs from Monday, November 2 through Friday, November 20 at 5:00 pm to find 15 instruments hidden around Concord.

Participants will follow the clues to find instruments and musical terms. The bonus—they'll have a chance to win eight-weeks of free private lessons at the Concord Conservatory of Music. We encourage all participants also to consider supporting the businesses when

finding the clues! The musical scavenger hunt kicks off the year-long celebration of the Concord Conservatory of Music's 15<sup>th</sup> Anniversary. [Download clues](#) and the [scavenger hunt form](#).

### **Are you a CCM friend yet?**

Join us on [Instagram](#) and [Facebook](#) to be the first to learn CCM news and more! See what music videos we like, photos we post, practice tips and articles we suggest, and new music in the music world. Be sure to bookmark the [CCM Blog](#), so you never miss a new post.



With resources, recommendations, ideas, and performances to enjoy, we're making music education accessible and keeping our music community connected. If you'd like to receive our weekly sharing of music and resources by email, [simply sign-up](#).



## **RICH STILLMAN: LEARNING THE MUSIC, NOT JUST THE SONG**

Bluegrass is happy music; it can boost your mood or calm our nerves. It's reflective, energizing, and head-bobbing music. Most of all, it's a social music genre. Of course, that's why CCM faculty member [Rich Stillman](#) loves to play and teach bluegrass!

Interestingly enough, it wasn't the banjo that Rich first picked up. He first learned fingerstyle guitar and classical piano, but it wasn't until after college that he picked up the banjo. He also confessed to a disastrous stint playing flute in his high school orchestra, but we won't concentrate on that since he's compiled a stack of banjo awards, including two times as the New England Banjo Champion. He's taught banjo for years at various schools, and we're so fortunate to have him on our faculty.

Rich has been a member of many well-known New England bands, most recently with the bluegrass band [Southern Rail](#), and before that, he had founded Waystation, a band which played a hybrid of folk and blues music. Although [Southern Rail](#) shelved live performances, for the time being, Rich has been plenty busy with his [YouTube Banjo Tune for the day](#) and Southern Rail's upcoming pre-recorded online concert on [December 5, sponsored by the Rose Garden Coffeehouse](#).



Rich confessed that the music he listens to could dictate his playing at the moment. He says, “I listened to ragtime long before I played banjo, and I’ve adapted ragtime pieces like *The Entertainer* and *Ain’t Misbehaving*. I played classical piano at one time and have adapted pieces like [Bach’s Cello Suite #1](#) for banjo.”



Not one to back down from a musical challenge, Rich occasionally branches out to play a musical style that he may not usually choose. For instance, he was once asked to play Copland’s *Hoedown* with the Arlington High School symphony. But when asked what his favorite type of music is, Rich says, “Mostly I enjoy playing bluegrass. I love the music itself and the social aspect of the style – jams and festivals.”



Luckily, the pandemic didn't slow down Rich or his [Banjo II Group Class](#) students. His classes continue to meet online as Rich inspires them to master techniques and perfect their banjo sound.

[Music truly connects us](#), and learning an instrument in a group creates an ideal supportive environment to develop skills. Rich believes that group classes, where people are often at different levels, can be challenging but exceptionally rewarding. "I feel lucky that we've got a group of people who are more or less at the same point in their development. Even the people who joined the class in later semesters knew enough banjo to join in right from the start of their time with us. They learn from each other as well as from me, and I learn from them."

He makes sure students learn a sequence of tunes to teach specific playing techniques and musical concepts for beginners. He says, "Once those are in people's fingers, we move on to music that engages people in the class. I may nudge here and there, but we've been tackling tunes that have been requested by the students for quite a while. It's a great real-world experience, and it exposes all the students, at some point, to the music they might not have listened to otherwise."

Rich knows that it's not enough to know how to play bluegrass and the banjo. He says, "People have to be able to listen and respond to the other musicians around them. The pandemic has kept people from getting [practical experience playing with others](#), but when the time comes, they will be ready!"

Having taught the CCM banjo class for several years, and he's seen firsthand how his banjo students have progressed. "The primary objective from the start has been to teach music through the banjo and to teach the mechanics of the instrument, and it's been thrilling to watch the students turn into musicians as well as banjo players."

### **Banjo II Group Class Members Weigh-In**

To show how valuable a group class can be, we posed a few questions to two of his adult students.

**Nancy Cooper**, who played for 4 or 5 years, fell in love with the banjo one year during a bluegrass festival. She says, "I feel that it is a pretty forgiving instrument on some level, but getting good sure takes a lot of work and dedication."

### What's the one thing that stands out as the benefit of learning banjo in your CCM class?

I have enjoyed the group aspect of Rich's banjo class. Learning in a group has been fun. We all enjoy each other and gathering in person and now remotely each week. We learn from Rich and listen to each other and hear the different approaches we each bring to whatever song we are working on. It's a very supportive group, and I am learning to feel more comfortable playing in front of others.

“It has been a real thrill watching this class progress. I enjoy teaching partly because it challenges me to better understand what I do as a player.  
- Rich Stillman”

### How have you improved?

I have improved and have learned how to pick out melodies and put together banjo solos. This was something that I couldn't do before that is becoming easier as time goes on. I have recently found that hearing the melody of a song that I don't know well and then recall it enough to play it is more challenging than I realized. I'm working on my active listening!

### Your favorite part of the banjo class?

There are so many wonderful things about the class, from Rich's stories about [banjo history](#) and [banjo players](#) to learning new licks, playing up the neck, or Rich showing us how to develop or expand on a solo. It's always exciting to figure out how to play a song, then work on it, and create an interesting solo. We do this as a group and on our own during the week.

He is exceptionally patient, explains things well, and is genuinely committed to helping each of us. He approaches the class from many different angles and is open to working on something that we are interested in or songs that we like. He's always supportive and very giving of his time and attention. ***I feel fortunate to know and learn from him.***

**Steve Lillis** has been playing for about seven years. He told us that he had tried taking lessons before but always dropped out because he didn't find teachers who explained things as well as Rich does. Loving bluegrass music and the uniqueness of the banjo got him hooked.

### What's the one thing that stands out as the benefit of learning banjo in your CCM class?



I feel very comfortable with Rich and the other students in the group. We are all learning and trying to grow—I gain comfort watching us all improve. We encourage each other and also get good coaching and encouragement from Rich.

### **Your favorite part of the banjo class?**

My favorite part of the class is listening to Rich explain the different methods to play the same thing. Plus, the camaraderie with Rich and the others!



### **Phil Sargent, *Beyond Rock, and Jazz***

Do you know that incredible feeling when you turn on the radio and your favorite song is on? That's the feeling CCM guitar faculty [Phil Sargent](#) wants to inspire in his students. He says, "I don't care if it's Beyoncé or Metallica... I want [my students] to be psyched about whatever it is they are doing." His biggest fear as a teacher would be to have a student leave a lesson less inspired to play than when they came.



Sargent was initially drawn to guitar when he was 12 years old. He began playing by ear, mostly the hard-rock and heavy metal of the mid-eighties, and his playing and passion for music took off from there. “I would practice all day long; I was obsessed,” says Sargent. He finds his inspiration from everything, not just music. Phil says inspiration “could be a really great book...or a Shostakovich string quartet, or a great guitar solo”. He thinks of inspiration as having two parts: “there’s the intellectual, and then there’s the emotional, heart-strings part of it.” These days, Sargent performs largely jazz-inspired improvisational music.

Another little-known side of Phil’s music studies and ongoing interest is Balkan music, mostly Bulgarian. “I initially got introduced to the music through the “downtown avant-garde” movement out of NYC. Artists like Masada, Brad Shepik, Chris Speed, Pachora. I was fascinated with the odd meters used in the music, so for years, I would study the music of Brad Shepik (a guitarist for famous Bulgarian musicians Yuri Yunakov and Ivo Papasov) and eventually studied with him down in NYC.” Last year, Sargent performed with Czech violinist/vocalist/composer Iva Bittova and the MIT Symphony Orchestra, where they performed a pair of pieces by Czech female composers, including Bittova’s Zvon. Sargent played with a jazz combo, performing “all classical guitar with the odd Balkan meters, a mix of modern jazz and classical movements. It was very interesting!”

In addition to teaching private guitar lessons, Sargent instructs CCM’s Rock Lab ensembles. “It’s really easy for me to be pumped teaching [Rock Lab],” he says, “I remember being that age and that first time playing with a drummer in a band...and that was it for me”. He loves the energy that his students bring when they experience playing in a band for the first time themselves. “The kids just light up,” he says. Sargent works with three different Rock Lab groups, and he decides what they’ll play by the kids’ interests. His students come up with a list of songs that they are interested in, and from there, Sargent picks songs and arrangements that will push his students to improve technically. He makes sure to strike a balance between being technically challenging and fun to play to have all the excitement and energy of playing what interests them and improve as musicians.

Phil has been a member of CCM’s faculty for five years now, and he’s found that he’s really impressed by the CCM community. “My students have all been fantastic, and I like how the parents are involved, too,” says Sargent. Parent involvement is a huge part of a student’s success, especially for practicing at home, and Sargent has found that CCM’s parents are

“really personable.” Along with teaching private guitar lessons and the Rock Lab, Sargent also teaches group [ukulele classes for adults](#).



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