



SPRING 2018

# Music Achievement Program: LEARNING THE LANGUAGE OF MUSIC TOGETHER

**D**id you study a language at school for many years, and then visited a country to use the language and felt like you still had not been appropriately prepared to read or converse? Music is a language, and like any language, to be fluent you need to be able to do more than merely read aloud. You need to be able to speak, listen, and communicate. Here at CCM, we aspire to grow well-rounded musicians. Well-rounded musicians not only can play the music but understand the theory and meaning behind it. Like any language, learning music and music theory is a long process that takes time, dedication, and community which for many of the busy students of CCM, can be hard criteria to meet.

Parents may, understandably, believe that private lessons are enough to reach this goal as this is a traditional style of music education, but at CCM we are working to push the

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The Concord Conservatory of Music

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# Faculty Highlight:

## RASA VITKAUSKAITE'S INSPIRED TOUCH DEVELOPS WELL-ROUNDED MUSICIANS

By Holly Lobowitz Rossi



**B**enjamin Hitzrot has been taking piano lessons at CCM for half of his young life. Now a 14-year-old who is applying to private high schools, he faced an essay question about an influential person who had shaped his life.

The choice was obvious—he wrote about Rasa Vitkauskaite, his beloved piano teacher.

Benjamin is not alone in his close relationship with Vitkauskaite, who was born in Lithuania and has taught at CCM since 2010. “Rasa is special,” said Kate Yoder, CCM’s founder and executive director. “She exemplifies the superb private instruction all our teachers provide—but she also stands out for the deep connections she is able to cultivate with her students.”

“As a parent, I can say it’s just been a terrific match,” said Karen Ford, Benjamin’s mother. She knew the relationship would be successful early on, when her son took out some frustration on his sheet music.

“I thought, ‘he’s not going to go back to this,’” said Ford, “but Rasa just sat with him, started again, and got through that initial difficulty.”

“She has the right distance with him, she knows exactly the right place to be. When you find an adult who does that with your kid, it’s really special to watch,” she added.

Vitkauskaite’s credentials are top-notch. A graduate of the United World College of the Adriatic and the Boston Conservatory, she has performed in more than two dozen countries, has recorded four commercially available CDs, and has collaborated with artists including the Metropolitan Opera, GRAMMY nominees, the Berlin Philharmonic, and the Cleveland Orchestra.

Her kind, inspiring manner translates to her organizational prowess, which helps her students feel supported and on a steady path.

“One of the most important aspects of successful musical education is being consistent,” said Vitkauskaite.

Consistency is a top value, even when she travels to perform abroad. She works creatively with her students to stay connected, inviting them to send her recordings of their assignments online, and following up promptly with feedback and suggestions. “I am fortunate to work at CCM, which allows me flexibility,” she says. Providing structure in those moments enables her students to stay on track: “Students make the most progress when they know that they won’t go too long without supervision.”

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*“My students are very appreciative, enthusiastic, and kind... Teaching at CCM is a very rewarding experience.”*

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Vitkauskaite’s creative spirit also inspires her to organize off-site performances for her students; they have performed at senior living facilities, libraries, and competitions hosted by the Massachusetts Music Teachers Association.

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*Music Achievement Program, continued from first page:*

boundaries on music education to give our students the most comprehensive education possible. As CCM trumpet instructor and Ensemble & Community Coordinator Margaret Romero explains, "In a weekly lesson, as little as 30 minutes, a student is learning a new language and a new instrument. It is an incredible amount of information for young students to absorb, and there is not enough time to address theory, performance, and extended techniques in each lesson."

At our spring 2017 meeting, faculty engaged in a lively discussion of how to imbue students with a solid foundation for, and appreciation of, music. The result: the Music Achievement Program, or MAP, which has now completed its first year. Free for CCM private lesson students, MAP joins together existing offerings to further the musical development of our students, and strengthen ties within our CCM community of students and their families.

MAP's inaugural checklist for students was ambitious: participate in a performance workshop and then play in a recital (or two), master scales and arpeggios, attend a faculty

concert, and participate in a Musicale. Margaret and Executive Director Kate Yoder organized the program into levels based on students' ages and experience, so each could be appropriately challenged.

To sharpen students' understanding of music, Kate enlisted Peter Evans to teach four-week music theory workshops. Our youngest students worked on identifying note names and understanding "the dot" (included proudly in CCM's logo). For

the more experienced students, Peter covered topics ranging from intervals and triads to chord progressions.

CCM piano instructor Rasa Vitkauskaitė says:

"Our students have greatly benefited from MAP theory workshops. Some discovered the close parallels between math and music; some learned new clefs of which they were previously unaware, as in piano we use only treble and bass. While growing up in Lithuania, I was required to take theory lessons twice a week in addition to my private piano lessons. Although that type of system may be impractical in this country, I surely hope that learning music

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*"Music is a language, and like any language, to be fluent you need to do more than merely read aloud ..."*

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No treble makers in this class while Peter Evans lays down the basics of music theory.

*Music Achievement Program, continued:*

theory inspires students to be more inquisitive about what they see in the score and helps them to learn music more rapidly by recognizing how the notes, phrases, harmonies, and sections relate to one another."

wasn't always easy, but because of her dedication, Bonnie improved faster in her pieces. Practicing every day helped her get more used to them, and she didn't "mess up" as much.

Finally, the social nature inherent in most MAP activities has facilitated connections between students and families here at CCM. Ha Richmond shared about her daughter Mai's experience, "Two of her soccer teammates study at CCM, but we had no idea before they were in the Theory Workshop together. Music can feel like a solo pursuit when private lessons are your primary musical activity. It was nice for Mai to connect with others."

We have come to the end of our pilot year of the MAP, which has seen some successes. For one, we have taken great strides in improving student accountability. Kids love "checking off" their accomplishments on the charts in our upstairs hallway—who would have thought? Furthermore, students apply what they have learned to

The first year of the MAP has allowed us to learn more about our student's needs and how we communicate with the families. Perhaps the most important lesson we learned is that our kids are busy. With each family's packed schedule, it was not always possible for all of the students to complete the program. We look forward to putting all of our experiences, whether learned from or loved, towards a new year full of success and the continued fostering of music appreciation in our students and families.



CCM charts students' progress towards completing MAP.

Another accomplishment to check off – practice 30 days in one month in the fall and spring practice challenges. Kids joined their fellow MAP students in pizza and ice cream parties at the end of each month to celebrate their success. The practice challenges call for planning and a general stick-to-itiveness that can serve students in their lessons and beyond. Violin student Mia Lipson found it helpful to "make it seem like it was homework that had to get done every day." The effect was clear. "Practicing every day prepared me more, so that I could learn new things and keep improving. My teachers are pleased when I practice and improve, and it gives me a boost to keep at it." Piano student Bonnie Li, who worked hard to balance practicing the piano with her swimming and homework commitments says: "On days when I had a lot of homework I might have gone to sleep a bit later." Finding time to practice

their private lessons, and progress as full musicians. More than merely being able to play music, students can understand the language and reasoning behind each note and line.



MAP Gold Achievers—they completed everything on the checklist!

*Faculty Highlight, continued from page 2:*

Ford, who also takes private lessons with Vitkauskaite, appreciates her clear—and high—expectations for students of any age; she communicates regularly with parents regarding repertoire choices, goals, and expectations. Ford notes that Vitkauskaite “has gotten the best” out of her son.

Benjamin’s admissions essay touched on this very point, her ability to have high expectations while remaining caring and responsive. He wrote, “Rasa is one of the kindest adults I have met throughout my life, if not the most inspiring.”



The dynamic duo of Ben Hirtzot and Rasa Vitkauskaite has been working together for more than seven years.

## Meet the Grown-Ups:

# ADULT GROUP CLASSES ARE A LEADING EDGE AT CCM

By Holly Lobowitz Rossi

Research tells us what students of all ages already know—musical learning carries significant benefits like improved brain health and emotional wellness. At CCM, we believe fundamentally that music provides an opportunity for lifelong learning, and our expanded slate of adult-focused classes invite students to pursue both breadth and depth in music’s place in their lives.

More than 60 adults are enrolled in group classes at CCM this year, making adult learners the fastest-growing segment of the school community. The courses are varied and vibrant, many emerging from the new American Roots program that launched last year.

“CCM is not just for kids—we welcome adults who are returning to music education, having their first musical experiences, or simply finding themselves interested in the joy

and connection that comes from making music with others,” said Kate Yoder, CCM’s founder and executive director.

Adult learners can choose from a lively menu of courses: “Adventures in Guitar and Mandolin,” “Beginning Bluegrass Guitar and Mandolin Soloing,” “Ukulele Crash Course,” “Ukulele Club,” “Beginning Banjo,” and “World Hand Drumming.”

Tony Watt, whose banjo and bluegrass guitar and mandolin classes are followed by “Bluegrass Jam” sessions each

Thursday evening, says his students are eager to learn the fundamentals of the bluegrass form so they can make music together.

“Jamming together is so much more fun than almost anything else in music, and therefore they are much more motivated than

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*“Jamming together is so much more fun than almost anything else in music”*

*— Tony Watt*

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*Meet the Grown-Ups, continued:*

students who just take lessons or group classes,” he said. “They have a special bond and confidence when they play with each other.”

The offerings allow students to start as beginners, and then grow in their learning. The ukulele classes taught by Phil Sargent are intended to be progressive, with “Crash Course” students advancing to the “Club,” where they are rewarded with the social and communal aspects of playing and singing together.

Sargent’s approach opens up solo skills as well as chord progressions. “I’ll show them a scale that works for a song, and everybody takes a turn soloing over an 8-bar phrase,” said Sargent, “It turns out to be a fun jam with a social aspect. They’re all really open-minded, and it’s just a blast,” said Sargent.

Nothing captures the spirit of lifelong learning more than the “Music Appreciation” course Keith Kirchoff has led for eight years—17 consecutive semesters—at the Concord Council on Aging, in partnership with that organization.

The group “is really engaged, really interested and curious, has such good questions, comments, and feedback, and has such a quest to learn more about music,” said Kirchoff. As the semesters have progressed—and so have the students—the topics have built on questions and discussions from previous semesters. This semester, for example, is called “Understanding Modernism,” exploring a shared vocabulary of modernism that could apply to current music or, in its own context, centuries-old music.

Yoder expects CCM’s adult learning community to grow more, especially as the American Roots program expands at the school.

“We know adults are looking for opportunities to learn and play music together,” she said, “and we know we can meet their needs by creating even more opportunities here at CCM.”



*“CCM is not just for kids — we welcome adults who are returning to music education, having their first musical experiences, or simply finding themselves interested in the joy and connection that comes from making music with others.”*

*—Kate Yoder, CCM’s Founder & Executive Director*



# American Roots: NOT JUST BBQ, BLUEGRASS, & BOURBON

On March 3, in a warm evening glow under the exposed wooden beams of the Concord Scout House, CCM's friends and family gathered for the annual winter party. Over family-style dinner of cornbread and brisket, across tables decked with red gingham and yellow sunflowers, the community came out for an all-American evening. Faculty member Tony Watt and his band, Southeast Expressway, performed their take on modern bluegrass, while guests sampled bourbon or enjoyed an Old Fashioned alongside their BBQ.

The evening's entertainment also included a performance by String Thing 2, a student ensemble made up of Jason Gee on cello, Leah Greenberg on violin, Alexandra Taylor on viola, and Anthony Valeri on violin. They performed Mozart's "Eine kleine Nachtmusik," then brought it back to the roots with "Red Haired Boy." Anthony Valeri, all of 10 years old, followed them up with Clebanoff's "Millionaire's Hoedown."

Auctioneer Ailie Byers, sporting a cowboy hat and Southern drawl, led the lively live auction. The party raised \$73,000 in support of CCM, its programming, and its students. Every year, about \$20,000 of financial aid goes to students and their instrument rentals, helping CCM achieve its goal to create musical opportunities for people of all ages, backgrounds, and abilities throughout Concord and 15 surrounding towns.



Always a highlight of the evening, our CCM students performing with the band.

Special thanks go to Ian Goldstein, the evening's emcee, plus the sponsors, Enterprise Bank, Middlesex Savings Bank, Monument Group Companies, and Salem Five Charitable Foundation, as well as the many volunteers who made the evening possible, from the Benefit Committee to the student volunteers. We truly couldn't do what we do without all of you.



Tina and Steve Mylon along with Todd Brady and Andrea Darling enjoyed a night of Bourbon and BBQ while helping CCM raise \$73,000 in support of financial assistance and music education.



CCM parent, Carmela Gee with Mary Jo Libertino enjoying a night out to bring more music education to our community.

# CCM Summer Workshops

## CCM Guitar Workshop - for ages 8 to 13

July 16–20, 9:00am–12:00pm

Chill out this summer and play guitar with your friends at CCM. Over the week you'll learn essential techniques and some familiar rock, pop, jazz and folk songs to play with your friends.

## All Together Now, Kids - for grades 6 through 9

July 16–20, 1:00pm–2:30pm

Attention budding guitar players: let's get a handle on those chords and play some blues, rock, folk, and other genre tunes in the round.

## All Together Now, Adults - for teens and adults

Tuesdays, July 10–31, 7:15pm–8:45pm

If you play some basic chords already but would like to up your game while playing songs with friends, this is the course for you. We're sure you'll like it and be good at it too!

## Beginning Harmony Singing for Acoustic Musicians - for teens and adults

Thursdays, June 7, 28, July 12, 26, August 2, 9, 16, 7:00pm–8:00pm

Ever want to sing the harmony along with a group or band but don't know how? Join this workshop and we'll have you singing harmony naturally and intuitively!

## Saxophone and Woodwind Ensemble - for grades 6 through 9

Tuesdays and Thursdays

1st Session: 7/5, 7/10, 7/12, 7/17, 7/19

2nd Session: 8/9, 8/14, 8/16, 8/21, 8/23

Groups are determined by ability:

Group I: 10:30am–12:00pm

Group II: 12:00pm–1:30pm

Summer is the perfect time to take your playing to the next level. Join students in an ensemble setting, and get ready to make great strides and have fun!

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The mission of the Concord Conservatory of Music is to foster a sense of community through music by providing accessible, high-quality music education and performance opportunities for people of all ages, backgrounds, and skill levels.

Located in the West Concord Union Church, our offerings include group classes and private music lessons for children and adults, from beginners to advanced. We also host the CCM Concert Series.

We welcome you to explore our programs online at [www.ConcordConservatory.org](http://www.ConcordConservatory.org), or give us a call at (978) 369-0010.

1317 Main Street  
P.O. Box 1258  
Concord MA, 01742



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