

Upbeat

WORKING TOGETHER TO CREATE A SONG OF THEIR OWN.

A Unique Experience for CCM's Girls Chorus

This past spring, instructor Micah Christian directed the Concord Conservatory Girls Chorus for the first time. The chorus did all their usual activities—learning to sing and perform with a group—and try something new and exciting. They composed and performed their very own song. “I knew I was going to enjoy the experience, but I really, really deeply enjoyed working with the students. There’s something extraordinary about getting to share something you’re passionate about with others who are also passionate about it,” says Christian.

Christian had wanted to use his experiences with singing, performing, and recording and turn it into something his students could learn and grow from and build on going forward. He wanted to do something new and exciting—to break the mold from the traditional chorus experience and give his students an opportunity that they might not have had before.

CCM student Sadie Constable says she had written songs in her free time before but improved her skills since joining the chorus. She believes that “writing music is a great way to express creativity and emotions, especially if there is a message you want to convey through your work.” Even though she sings

and writes songs in her free time, Sadie says that CCM’s Girls Chorus is her favorite place to sing and is a great way to feel comfortable about singing with other people.

When Christian proposed the idea of writing their own song to the girls, he was met with overwhelming enthusiasm. This left him with the question of how to wrangle all that enthusiasm and all those ideas into something productive and tangible. First, Christian had the girls work together to brainstorm some possible themes for their song. According to Sadie, this was the most challenging part of the songwriting process. “By the time we decided the song was to be about a journey,

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TAKING OWNERSHIP OF YOUR MUSIC



I want our students to take ownership of their music. Taking ownership of our music means we take pride in it and make it our own. When you take ownership of something, you like it better, enjoy it more, and are more willing to invest effort into improving it.

How do we take ownership of our music? We use our creativity to take what we have learned and extend it further.

As well as being the Executive Director, I am also a student at CCM and have been learning to play the mandolin under CCM faculty Maxfield Anderson for several years. Like all students, I have spent many hours learning my scales and rhythms and learning to play by ear (flexing that memory muscle). However, I don't spend every lesson learning songs by simply reading the music and repeating what I'm shown. Max has me get creative and push myself to try new things. For instance, if I'm learning a song in a specific key, we'll review the scale and then have me create my own eight bars in that key, often using a rhythm pattern. I can practice new rhythms and learn where notes are in relation to each other, all while practicing improvisation.

This process of using what we are shown to create new things is how we practice our creativity. It might sound silly, but creativity must be practiced just like any other skill. We can think of skills in two categories. First are the tangible, external skills like reading music or playing an instrument with good posture, fingering, breathing, etc. Second are the internal, creative skills like feeling the rhythm, hearing a melody, and developing relative pitch. Without even realizing it, our students practice many of these skills every time they sit down to play.

But, we also want to be intentional about developing our creative skills. We want to give our students a space in which they feel comfortable expressing their creativity and make sure they have the tools they need to make their ideas come to life. This past spring, the Girls Chorus showed us how creative processes like songwriting are excellent vehicles for self-expression. Through programs like our songwriting and improvisation workshops, we give students permission to make the music their own. When our students have the opportunity to express themselves through their music is when they truly thrive.

As we look towards a new and exciting year, I urge every student and faculty member to consider how we express creativity in our music and how we as individuals and a community can push the boundaries of our ideas and abilities even further.

Kate You



BUILDING CONNECTIONS WITH MUSIC

"Musicians are like painters; if you want to create something, you need the right tools," says CCM's newest addition to the faculty Ira Klein.

Behind Klein sits a wall of different instruments, including multiple guitars, a banjo, and an electronic keyboard. Klein quickly pulls out two different guitars and explains, "these are the same instrument, but they don't sound the same. Over time a musician creates a personal collection [of instruments], and their work should inspire that collection." Klein has played the guitar for a very long time, but when he became interested in playing traditional American folk, he realized he would have to learn the banjo to truly understand the music. "You can't paint a Rothko with a pencil," he says.

Similar to how he doesn't try to make one instrument fit every genre of music, Klein doesn't try to make a one-size-fits-all strategy for teaching his students. "My strategy is to have clear ideas about what I want to achieve." Klein's teaching philosophy is focused on three things: curiosity, connecting with your body, and having fun.

According to Klein, "progress is a function of curiosity." He teaches by asking his students questions so that they can realize things for themselves, with his guidance. His second focus, connection to the body, is all about being aware of what happens to oneself when doing something. This is related to breathing and mentality, as well as the physical state of one's body. Klein explains that in playing guitar, for example, many people lean forward with their whole upper body, making it harder to play. Some tension is good and necessary, but when you're stiff and holding your breath, you can't play well.

Lastly, and perhaps the most important focus, is to have fun. Klein says, "When we are curious and slightly challenged, we are having a lot of fun. If we are too challenged, it is not fun anymore. As an educator, I have to gauge when a person is feeling comfortable."

In addition to his role as a CCM instructor for private and group lessons, Klein is CCM's American Roots program coordinator. Klein explains American Roots as a cooperative style of music passed down within American communities and families. There are many different genres—from kitchen music in Louisiana, traditional fiddle in Texas, and old-time and bluegrass in the Southeast. Klein says, "Because it grew in communities and families, it is a highly collaborative group of music where people learn without a score. They learn everything by ear. An eight-year-old can play with a master. There's a sense of unity." Group classes are essential for teaching American Roots music due to its highly collaborative nature.

Klein is also coordinating a new masterclass series at CCM with some of today's leading American Roots musicians. Each masterclass will be followed by a concert by the guest artist and will be open to the general public. Klein says the concerts will be an excellent opportunity to "engage the local community with roots music of outstanding quality." The masterclasses will be an exciting and unique chance for CCM students to learn from incredible guest artists and also include new students from the greater area. Klein's goal for CCM's American Roots program is to grow an American Roots community informed by the same values—the inclusivity and collaboration—that gave rise to the many genres of American Roots.



WORKING TOGETHER TO CREATE A SONG OF THEIR OWN.

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we had a whole new set of questions and ideas. We had to continue brainstorming until we finally came up with the idea that worked for all of us," says Sadie.

Christian asked the girls to write their verse or chorus independently once they were on the same page about the song's subject. It was important to give the girls a chance to think and express their creativity without being influenced by everyone else's ideas. The group came back together to share their creations, and from those, Christian played potential arrangements on the piano for the girls to choose between.

Now that they had all these fantastic ideas for verses and the chorus and knew what

kind of feel their song should have, it was time for Christian to call in some extra help. Synthesizing a piece of music out of the ideas of so many people is no small task, but luckily Isabel Miller, a professional songwriter, was happy to help bring all the girls' ideas together into a cohesive story. Miller is a Cape Cod based songwriter who has written for many artists, including singer-songwriter David Archuleta. Miller polished the piece into a brilliant creation that the girls were thrilled to sing and perform.

The Girls Chorus performed twice during the spring semester. The first was for a Celebration of Black Composers Concert where they sang "Lift Every Voice and Sing" by James Johnson. Their second virtual performance was at the spring CCM recital, where the chorus sang both "A Million Dreams" by Hugh Jackman, Michelle Williams, and Ziv Zaifman, and their very own composition titled "A Seeker of Dreams." When asked about her chorus experience, Maelle McWhinney said, "I love being in a chorus because it gives me a place that I can go every week where I can just be myself and sing."

Christian is an accomplished singer and songwriter himself but said that he "learned a lot about [his] own technique and own processes" from the experience of guiding the girls through the songwriting process. He's interested in experimenting with songwriting again in future CCM chorus classes and potentially refining the songwriting process with such a large group. Micah is the lead vocalist for the musical group Sons of Serendip. He's been seen on the popular television show America's Got Talent as a finalist and performed on the Creative Arts Emmy Awards, Boston Pops 4th of July Extravaganza, and Oprah Winfrey's 2020 Vision Tour closing celebration.

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CCM BOARD WELCOMES JODI GERNON

After time away from Concord, Jodi and her family returned to town in 2010 and were first exposed to CCM at the annual open house for the first time. She decided to go back to her musical interests that she left long ago and took up the piano for the first time.

When asked about the role of music education in our daily lives, she responded, "music in our community is a great way to bring people together through a common appreciation of beautiful sounds. With so much strife and divisiveness in the world, we can begin to bridge that divide by common experiences such as listening to a piano concerto or hearing a new rock band, or listening to an amazing singer." She added, "so much of life today is spent online. There is such a push to learn technical skills that the arts are getting a bit lost in the shuffle and sometimes pushed aside. I feel strongly that music education is even more important than ever and should be supported to its fullest extent. After all,

where would we get all these amazing rock stars and pop divas from if we didn't support music in the early years?"

Jodi wants people to know CCM is more than just a music school. It is a place where an unparalleled slate of world-class musicians teach anyone interested in learning music. "While it may seem daunting to be called a conservatory, its doors are always open to those who want to try something new and build a skill that they can enjoy for the rest of their lives."

Jodi is the Director of the Arthur Rock Center for Entrepreneurship at Harvard Business School. She has an MBA from Harvard Business School and a BS in Electrical and Biomedical Engineering from WPI. Jodi is an advisory board member for Harvard's Office of Tech Development and WPI's Fosse Innovation Center, the Nantucket Conference (The premier East Coast Forum for scaling founders), and Focus Maine (Dedicated to bringing Life Science companies to Maine) and is an advisor to several startups. Jodi lives in Concord with her husband and has three children off in college.

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A photograph of a man and a young boy playing double basses in a music room. The man, on the left, is wearing a light blue shirt and is looking intently at the instrument. The boy, on the right, is wearing a red polo shirt and is also focused on his playing. They are both seated, and their instruments are large and dark wood. The background shows a bright room with windows and a wooden door.

MAKING A DIFFERENCE IN 2021

Like everything else in our community, we entered the year with the hope that as time passed, we'd revert back to normal onsite operations. We learned that providing music education under the restrictions of Covid became the new normal, and for now, it is here to stay. What didn't change is CCM's commitment to the highest quality of music instruction and learning experiences we provide for our families and the larger community. In the fall of 2020, we welcomed back one-third of the students and faculty to onsite instruction, with the balance of the students and faculty participating online.

We became even more adept at hosting livestream events as a school when we brought our new lecture series online. Recitals rebounded when we welcomed groups of students to live-streamed recitals, offering a platform to share impressive musical accomplishments and proud performances with family and friends, near and far. We will continue offering livestreamed performances even when we're back on site so that we can continue to stay accessible and connected with our friends from afar.

We are grateful for our steadfast donors' support and generosity. Along with our dedicated faculty and staff, your support ensured our mission continues and that we could keep students motivated and engaged.

THANK YOU to the generous individuals, companies, and foundations whose financial support to our Annual Fund and Financial Assistance Fund play a crucial role in allowing CCM to serve our community.

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Located in the West Concord Union Church, CCM's community-based programming invites others to experience and appreciate not just the music but also the joy of creating it.

We welcome you to explore our programs online at www.ConcordConservatory.org, or give us a call at 978-369-0010

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