

# Upbeat

## CCM Offers Free Ukulele Lessons to the Boys & Girls Club of Assabet Valley

**Music is a form of connection. When young students learn to play an instrument, they tap into that connection and form new relationships. They connect with their instructors. They connect with other students. They connect across cultures—and across generations—with fellow musicians.**

Most importantly, they connect with a part of themselves that they might not even have known was there. "You can see that universal excitement in the kids' faces when they realize music is something that you can actually perform, not just listen to," says CCM ukulele instructor and Community Partnership faculty leader Cathy Marks. "Knowing that they are able to actively create music can make a huge difference in their lives. Unfortunately, some children never have the opportunity to discover that innate connection and nurture it through music education."

That's the whole idea behind CCM's Community Partnership program with the Boys & Girls Club of Assabet Valley (BGCAV) in Maynard. "It makes free music education accessible to all children, regardless of income or any other challenges

they may have," Cathy says. "We welcome students from all different backgrounds."

### **Educating the Educator**

Cathy's own background illustrates how important an early involvement in music can be. "I was in kindergarten in Connecticut when I taught myself 'Happy Birthday' on the piano. Who knows if it actually it sounded like 'Happy Birthday,' but in my head it did," she says with a laugh. "And that's when my parents looked at each other and said, 'We need to get her lessons.'"

Years of piano lessons and singing in the school choir nurtured Cathy's love of music and set her along the path to her chosen career. She received a B.M. in Music Education,

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# TAKING ROOTS

## THE CONCORD OPEN BLUEGRASS JAM HAS CAUGHT ON IN A BIG WAY

If you want to find roots, you've got to do some digging. But with just a little effort, you'll find that the roots music scene—bluegrass in particular—is well established throughout Greater Boston and becoming more popular all the time.

As evidence, look no further than the Concord Conservatory Open Bluegrass Jam. Since its reintroduction following a pandemic shutdown, the Thursday night Bluegrass Jam held in the Sanctuary at CCM has become a mecca for area musicians eager to learn new songs with new people performing in new combinations.

The sessions are open to vocalists and acoustic musicians at all levels to jam on fiddle, mandolin, guitar, banjo, dobro, bass, cello, harmonica—anything that fits the vibe. In that same spirit, the term “Open Bluegrass Jam” is a big umbrella that includes everything from old-time to classic country and western to blues—even swing. Labels don't really matter—the point is to provide a space for area musicians to get together, throw off their inhibitions, and discover new avenues and outlets of expression.

“That urge to create music with other people—that's what attracted me to

bluegrass music in the first place and helped me fall in love with it,” says CCM Mandolin, Fiddle, and Guitar Instructor Maxfield Anderson, who leads the sessions. “Community was at the center of it.”

### Showing Up for Each Other

What has made the CCM Open Bluegrass Jam so popular? “I think the growth comes from a few sources,” Max said. “First, these jams wouldn't be possible if folks didn't show up every week, bringing their instruments, voices, songs, and a willingness to try something new. Second is Boston's love for music—specifically traditional music, and our willingness to foster those scenes. This is a huge feat that involves so many people.”

Max notes that the CCM Open Bluegrass Jam is part of a grassroots community effort that requires collaboration not only from the artists, but also from venues ranging from farmer's



markets to clubs to theaters to festivals to brunch jams to late-night bar sessions. It also depends on support from the patrons, the technicians, the teachers, and so many more.

CCM is happy to do our part. "I'm endlessly thankful to CCM for recognizing a need for more roots music outlets in the area," Max said. "They dedicate their time, space, and funding to creating new courses, public events, and concert programming to bring together the local music community."

## Those Roots Run Deep

Max has been thrilled by the Concord Conservatory's Open Bluegrass Jam's post-pandemic resurgence. "It's been humbling to see people showing up week after week because they care about something you've helped build," he said.

It's also further evidence of bluegrass music's solid support in the region. "The roots community in and around Boston is absolutely incredible," Max says. "The musicians all know each other, and all play with each other."

Cambridge's Bluegrass Tuesdays have been a Central Square tradition for 30 years, creating a direct link between New England and bluegrass strongholds such as Kentucky and Tennessee. That tradition continues at places like Lily P's, The Burren, Club Passim, and The Druid.

## Bringing It Home

CCM recognizes the importance of connecting to the local music scene—and events like the Concord Open Bluegrass Jam are an integral part of that effort. "Having a weekly gathering is absolutely necessary to help us connect with our surrounding communities," Max said.

In addition to the weekly sessions, over the past year Max has taught a three-part series of group classes called Let's Pick—Intro to Bluegrass Jamming, Bluegrass Solo Workshop, and Bluegrass Harmony Workshop—"all conveniently scheduled right before the weekly jam," Max noted. "It has been wonderful to see how the classes and jam session feed into one another. The jam helps us find musicians interested in studying these subjects, and the classes increase the confidence and technical ability of folks in the jam."

Max said it's vital to keep the "Concord" in Concord Open Bluegrass Jam. "At the end of the day, the most important aspect is creating a space where community members can connect with one another, make music socially, create new friendships, and grow as musicians."

# ROOTS



*The Concord Open Bluegrass Jam runs every Thursday night (except July 20) in the Sanctuary from 7:30 - 9:00 p.m. through August 17). The Jam is open to the public (suggested donation: \$10).*





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cum laude, from Temple University in Philadelphia and a M.M. in Music Education from West Chester University. After graduating, she remained in Pennsylvania, where her experiences ranged from teaching music in elementary schools, to performing with the Philadelphia Singers, to piano accompanying for two Regina Academies. "That all gave me a great base to build from," Cathy says.

Of particular importance were the student-teaching opportunities she got through Temple University. It was an ideal training ground for CCM's Community Partnership Program. Cathy taught in schools in the city center as well as the suburbs, which gave her experience with students of different backgrounds. "The way the instructor, Susan DiFlorio, developed the program, she tried to instill a love of music in the kids as well as an understanding of it," Cathy says. "So it wasn't just, 'Can you play a G chord?' It was also, 'Music is something that can enrich your life.' That was huge for me to see that."

### Applying Those Lessons

One way that Cathy instills that love of music in her BGCAV students is to make the process of creating music accessible. It starts with her

choice of instrument. "The ukulele has such a beautiful tone and inviting sound," she says. "Often in a school setting students will start on an instrument like the recorder based on cost rather than quality."

In addition, because they're played by mouth, the recorder and other woodwind instruments (as well as brass) don't allow kids the opportunity to sing as they play. "That secondary level of engagement is very important," Cathy says.

Finally, the ukulele is a very accessible instrument for a young student. "With just the four strings and a smaller body, kids are comfortable with it," Cathy says. "They can use just one finger to make the C chord. Before they know it, they're playing songs and making music. So the ukulele's size, its versatility and the fact that you can sing along with it make it an ideal instrument for a beginning student."

But the cost of ukuleles makes them prohibitively expensive for many elementary school students and music departments. That's one of the reasons that CCM's Community Partnership Program makes them available free of charge to BGCAV.

### Music to Their Ears (and for Their Ears)

With so many other activities competing for kids' attention, it's important to help them discover their inner love of music as quickly and easily as possible. Cathy helps her BGCAV students make the connection by playing music that they recognize. "We use some folk or children's music as a foundation," she says, "but most of it is pop tunes and other music kids can relate to."

There are many parallels between teaching young students music and teaching them languages. In each case, the earlier the introduction, the better. "Music aptitude—a child's ability to learn music—stabilizes around age nine," Cathy says. "Before that, the more musical instruction they get, and the better the quality of the music instruction that they get, the greater their chances of becoming accomplished musicians and maintaining a lifelong love of music-making."

Also, the basic hierarchy of learning music and language is the same. "You immerse yourself in hearing it first," Cathy says. "Then you learn the individual pieces. With language, you learn the words before the sentences and the sentences before paragraphs. Reading comes last—you don't know how to read the language until you can speak it."

"We do the same with music learning. Kids start by learning the musical patterns—rhythm and melody—before they put it all together."

### Hidden Benefits

Beyond developing kids' love of music, CCM's Community Partnership Program with BGCAV instills discipline and a sense of purpose. "A lot of these children are giving up time with their friends after school or recess or other opportunities," Cathy says. "And some of the parents have been asking about purchasing their own ukuleles to give to their kids as gifts. That's one of the biggest compliments we can get because that means the child wants to pursue ukulele outside of the class."

Cathy sees the positive impact on kids' lives inside class as well—particularly when it comes to developing confidence and self-esteem. Often, the last thing students want is



to be singled out in front of their classmates. Performing in a group is comforting. "We often have half the class play and half the class sing, and then they switch," Cathy says.

But she also offers an opportunity for individual students to solo on the ukulele while the rest of the class sings. "The solos are volunteer-based," Cathy says. "And when I ask if anyone wants a solo, just about every student puts their hand up. That shows it's an environment where they feel comfortable."

Others have noticed this too. "We have seen the ukulele lessons draw out feelings of pride, self-confidence and pure enjoyment," said Annalisa Campaneli, Executive Director of Boys & Girls Club of Assabet Valley. "Our partnership with CCM has been wonderful."

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*This music program is made possible with the generous support from the Ramsey McClusky Foundation and the Cambridge Savings Bank Foundation. The Boys & Girls Club of Assabet Valley (located in Maynard) offers after-school, summer, and recreational programs to youth in the Maynard community. CCM's Community Partnership Program, part of our Community Connections outreach, augments this effort by providing weekly ukulele classes on Thursday afternoons. These sessions, available free of charge for BGCAV kids ages 6 - 11, focus on developing the core foundational skills of music education. CCM's goal is to develop more such programs through Community Partnerships, which is supported by grants, community donations and contributions from our partners. To learn more, please contact Kate Yoder at [Kyoder@ConcordConservatory.org](mailto:Kyoder@ConcordConservatory.org).*



## CCM Board Welcomes **STEVE CAMP**

By Steve Camp

Having seen CCM in action over the past five years with our two children, Elise and Alex, and with a deep love for music and a strong appreciation for the value of music education, I'm thrilled to be joining CCM's board. I'm grateful for what Kate Yoder has built in our community here in Concord—and for our kids' wonderful teacher, Chieko Loy.

I grew up in a musical family. My grandmother, father, aunts, and uncles would gather at the beach for an annual family vacation, the evenings would often end in a family jam session and sing-along. Among my most cherished memories are the nights when we'd ask my grandmother Gigi to sing Summertime, from Porgy and Bess, out on the deck with the waves crashing in the distance.

Gigi was a gifted singer. As a teen she was already singing at a high level—taking classes at the prestigious Chautauqua Institute summer events and on one occasion even singing with the Philadelphia Orchestra under Eugene Ormandy. She eventually went on to The Juilliard School after two years at Penn. She had an extraordinary and rare ability to sing in both the classical bel canto style and in the jazz medium.

My family experience has given me a profound appreciation for music. I think of music first and foremost as a gift that we give to our kids—it truly is a "superpower"—even for those like myself whose passion exceeds their talent. Music is something our kids can carry with them throughout their lives as a source of both pleasure (jamming with family and friends at the beach house) and reflection (alone with an instrument after a tough day).



Equally, I value music education for the life skills it brings—the basic experience of practicing music. I believe that music education in the early years is first and foremost a test for parents rather than the kids. I doubt many kids at all enjoy practicing, any more than doing homework or cleaning their rooms. It's hard, and the early rewards are scarce. But patiently waiting out those tough evenings pays dividends.

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***Steve Camp** is a Partner and Managing Director at Needham & Company, a New York based investment bank focused on the technology and life sciences industries. Outside of work, Steve is a member of the Leadership Council of PeacePlayers International, a non-profit organization which uses the game of basketball to unite and educate children and their communities in the US and globally. Steve lives in Concord, Massachusetts with his wife K.C., and two children. Steve graduated with honors from the University of Cincinnati where he studied Finance and Accounting.*



# PERFORMANCES AT CCM



CCM presented **more than 40 performances** this year, showcasing students, faculty, and visiting musicians. Many of the concerts featured collaborations with local organizations drawing a connection between music and the cosmos, and closer to home, the intersection of music and water, exploring our local river system. From CCM's talented teaching artists to jazz legend Ra-Kalam Bob Moses to CCM students and Bluegrass amateur bands, the breadth of high-quality performances brought many standing ovations.







Music & Cosmos - Guest speakers, Observational Astrophysicist Erin Kara of MIT, and Brad Wells of the Grammy Award-winning *Roomful of Teeth* explored the intersection of music and space and its sounds with a chamber music concert performed by the talented Concord Conservatory of Music faculty.



Parents and kids alike danced in the aisles when we welcomed back the Okee Dokee Brothers. The fun and ever-popular American bluegrass and American roots children's music duo, the GRAMMY® Award-winning Okee Dokee Brothers, blend their passion for the outdoors with Americana Folk music.



The Music & Water concert was a dynamic and inspiring musical journey from the immersive to the delightful as CCM faculty performers presented works by Debussy, Takemitsu, Burtner, and Schubert, pieces that illustrate water in all of its miraculous forms. CCM presented this concert in collaboration with OARS and The Sudbury, Assabet and Concord Wild & Scenic River Stewardship Council. Guest speaker Alison Field-Juma of OARS guided us through topics about our local rivers.



Boston Jazz Wisdom - Jazz percussion legend Ra-Kalam Bob Moses leads this all-star jazz concert with Dave Bryant on piano, Bruno Raberg on bass, and Concord Conservatory's Tsuyoshi Honjo on saxophone for an evening of lively free-spirited jazz.







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Concord Conservatory of Music is a nonprofit music school serving Concord, MA, and 15 surrounding communities. We are a creative and supportive community of musicians of all ages and levels. Our mission 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, 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](http://www.ConcordConservatory.org), or give us a call at 978-369-0010

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