

Upbeat

Meeting a Need: CCM Offers an Adapted Music Class for Kids with Autism Spectrum Disorder

Community outreach is a high priority at CCM. And it often leads to wonderful connections that were just waiting to happen. Such was the case with our new “Tones of Fun” class designed specifically for kids diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD).

“A disability diagnosis should not be a barrier to engagement with and expression through music,” says instructor Kayla McLaughlin, whose adapted music class is tailored to fit the strengths and needs of students with an ASD diagnosis. “Adapted music classes are planned with flexibility in mind. Students and their caregivers can stand or sit anytime and leave the room to take a break as they please. We use visuals to complement our music-making so that students with varying levels of language and communication skills can participate effectively.”

Unfortunately, few public schools are equipped to offer adapted music classes. “And if an adapted music class is not offered,” Kayla says, “that [ASD] child’s music education stops there.”

Tones of Fun provides an opportunity for kids on the Autism Spectrum to not only continue with music education but to actively blossom. “When we looked into starting a new program specifically for these children with ASD, we knew we faced the challenge of making these classes at an affordable cost to families who are already burdened by significant out-of-pocket expenses related to supporting and educating a child with a developmental disability.” Explained Kate Yoder, CCM Executive Director. “And even more importantly, I knew that these classes must be taught by a qualified teacher who not only has a master’s in music education but who also has experience and training working with kids with ASD. It is a completely different skill set.”

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WHEN WE COLLABORATE

We are passionate about arts education and how it helps students in many ways, such as boosting their grades, closing the learning gap, and building friendships. These are a few of the many benefits that motivate CCM to seek new partnerships to expand and deepen our impact on our community through music. When we work together, we're stronger. By sharing our resources (staff, knowledge, networks, and financial support), we can address the needs of the whole community better. There are many different and valuable ways to work together. Through our programming and concerts, we identify the unmet needs and try to fill them.

At CCM, we believe that music education is a right, not a privilege, and we work hard to make it accessible to everyone, regardless of their background or circumstances. We partner with organizations to create educational and performance opportunities that foster new relationships, improve well-being, and inspire active participation in music-making. Our collaborative programs target youth, seniors, and under-resourced populations. Based on the data, the number of people living with disabilities in the 18 communities that CCM serves in the Metrowest region has risen by 17%. To address an important and widespread need in our communities, CCM has created opportunities to help children with learning differences achieve developmental milestones with our *Tones of Fun Developmental Music Class* in partnership with the Berklee Institute for Accessible Arts

Education. The families now have a class just for them. One that's affordable thanks to our partner funders' support, taught by experts in the field, where all children are welcomed and celebrated.

CCM has teamed up with the Boys & Girls Club of Assabet Valley in Maynard to provide, at no charge to the families or the BGCAV, ukulele and music enrichment classes tailored to the age of the kids - ensuring that they have access to a positive and fun environment to develop lifelong skills through music. We are grateful for the opportunity to collaborate with such a wonderful organization that shares our vision of empowering young people through arts education. The smiles on the kids and their parents' faces during their first performance for the other kids at the Club said it all. They were proud.

The Music & Concert Series explores the intersection of music with other topics, presenting concerts with guest speakers from partnering organizations and from the music perspective. CCM partnered with the River Stewardship Council and OARS to build upon our collective communities' reverence for the local rivers and appreciation for music and music education by presenting Music & Water. We learned about the challenges facing our local river system and enjoyed music inspired by water. This year, we will collaborate with the Concord Museum to explore the oral folk tradition of storytelling and music from different cultures and with the MIT Media Lab to learn more about music and invention.

I invite you to work with CCM to identify the needs of our community and bring positive change. Together, we can achieve more than we can alone.

Kate Yoder
Executive Director & Founder

OPEN EARS MAKE OPEN MINDS

Cello Instructor Stephen Marotto on the Benefits of CCM's Listening Project

As curator of CCM's Listening Project, cello instructor Stephen Marotto strives to choose pieces that will help musicians "discover new things about their instruments and themselves."

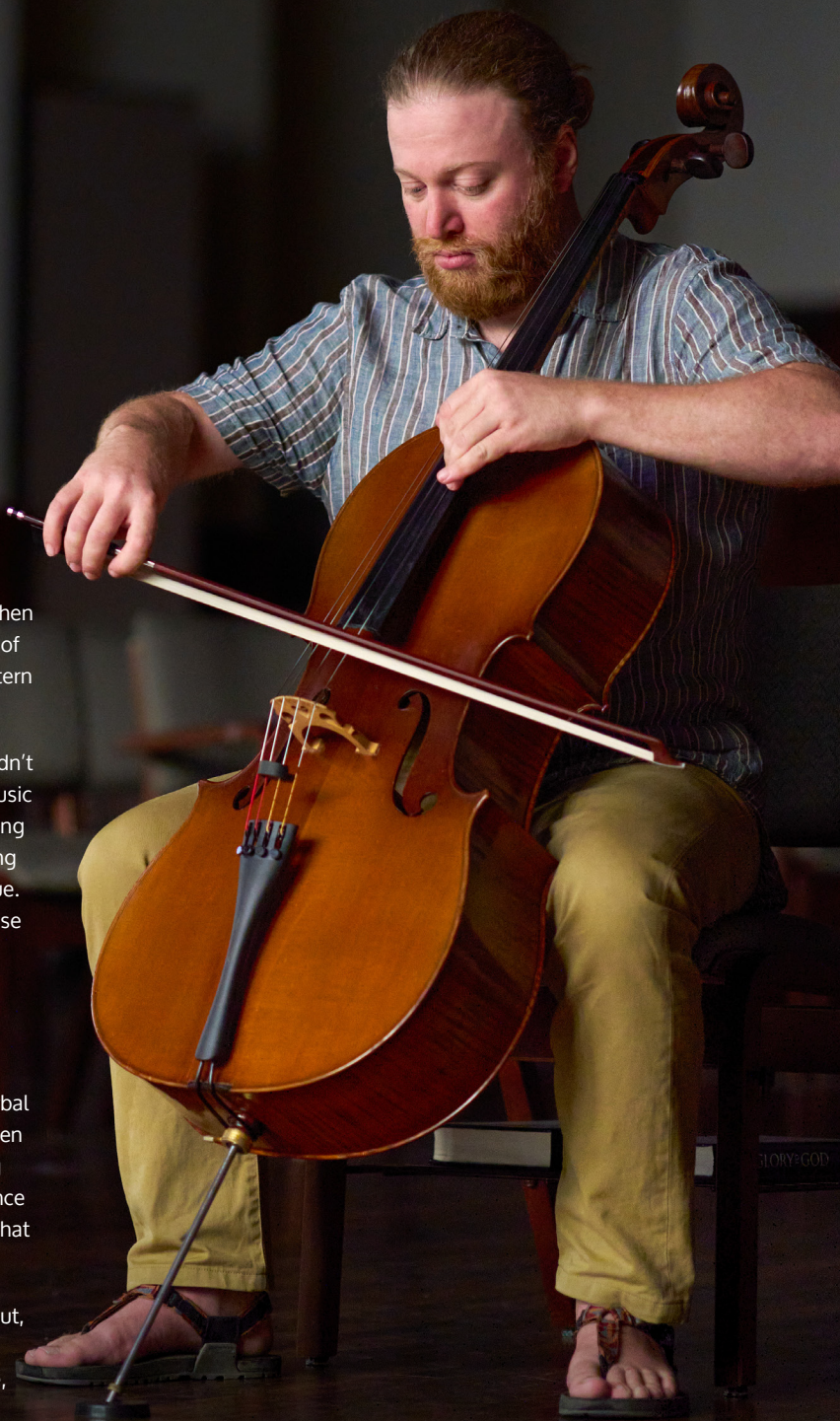
That sounds straightforward enough — until you consider that Stephen must make these selections from an impressive personal collection of about 1,500 vinyl albums, not to mention "the entire history of Western music" online.

In the end, his choices come down to a leap of faith. "As a kid, I couldn't quite put my finger on what it was that I was responding to in the music that I was hearing," Stephen says, "but it gave me an overall feeling of inspiration. So now I just choose pieces that I think are interesting and hopefully have some kind of educational, and inspirational, value. It's important to expose people to music that they wouldn't otherwise have heard."

A Language that Speaks to Both the Individual and the Collective

Music is often called a universal language. But because it's a nonverbal language, it's far more subject to individual interpretation than spoken language. Add the practical challenges that come with mastering different instruments—playing the flute is a much different experience than playing the drums—and you've got a form of communication that is widely shared yet deeply personal.

It worked that way with Stephen. Growing up in Norwalk, Connecticut, he felt "a sense of awe and wonder about connecting with music as a language." But when choosing an instrument to play in third grade,



"There's an entire generation that has never known life without a smartphone," Stephen says. "The idea of getting them to sit down and give their attention to a piece of music for 15 minutes is pretty much unheard-of."

he picked the cello simply because he could play it while sitting down. "So there was a randomness to it." Once he made that choice, however, he was all in. With a career in music as his goal and cello his instrument of choice, Stephen received a bachelor's degree with honors from the University of Connecticut and Master and Doctor of Musical Arts degrees from Boston University. In addition to becoming an instructor (he joined CCM in 2019), Stephen embraced numerous opportunities to perform live in various new concert series in Boston and beyond, mostly focusing on contemporary music.

And then Covid hit.

An Instrument of Survival

Like many others whose livelihood depended on personal interaction, Stephen felt isolated during the pandemic. "Things were looking as bleak as you could imagine," he says. "I thought my career as a cellist was over."

Another musical instrument provided salvation. Stephen had an old mandolin that he'd toyed with over the years, but during the pandemic he bought a new one and resolved to teach himself how to play it.

The experience was revelatory. First, learning the mandolin made him receptive to hearing different kinds of music that he was curious about but had never had time to explore, including folk and bluegrass. "I wouldn't say it has changed the way I listen to music per se," Stephen says, "but it opened my ears and helped me understand some non-classical idioms. And honestly, until then I had never been exposed to the world of classical mandolin music. So I guess for me that was the silver lining in the pandemic."

Another benefit of learning the mandolin was that it gave Stephen greater empathy for his students. "Becoming a beginner again was definitely a humbling experience," he says. "That helped me put myself in my students' shoes. Not so much the younger kids, but the older ones for sure. It made me appreciate that learning the cello as an adult is a really big challenge. You have to overcome the mental aspect of trying something from square one again."



Listen Up

Younger students present a different set of challenges. "There's an entire generation that has never known life without a smartphone," Stephen says. "The idea of getting them to sit down and give their attention to a piece of music for 15 minutes is pretty much unheard-of."

That's one of the primary goals of the Listening Project. "I hope in the end it gets them to think differently and think critically in a way they wouldn't have before," Stephen says.

He thinks playing selections on vinyl instead of using digital music services helps with that process. When you listen online, algorithms track your selections. That creates a feedback loop in which those algorithms offer recommendations for similar selections. Over time that narrows the listener's playlist to a specific genre and limits exposure to new types of music. "Listening offline means you're doing it with intention," Stephen says. "I just hope that younger people recognize that and grab onto it."

As for the internal algorithm Stephen uses to curate his Listening Project selections, he starts with a particular theme such as female composers or jazz virtuosos. Then he provides a prompt, asking students to focus on a specific instrument or an offbeat time signature or some other distinctive element in the piece. "I try to come up with universal prompt questions that will engage students of all ages," he says.

Going through life with open ears and an open mind offers enormous benefits. "Just as you can look at something without really seeing it, you can hear something without really listening," Stephen says. "When people take the time to really listen and engage, whether it's with music or conversation or any other form of communication, the results are very rewarding."



**Join Stephen Marotto each month
for the CCM Listening Project.**

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Perfect Timing

Tones of Fun is the result of a collaboration between CCM and the Berklee Institute for Accessible Arts Education (BIAAE). Initially, CCM invited BIAAE to conduct a faculty workshop on teaching kids who have a diagnosis. That began a symbiotic relationship in which BIAAE could expand its expertise to Metrowest while CCM could address a specific need in the community.

The timing could not have been better. In addition to serving as a Berklee instructor on weekends, Kayla McLaughlin teaches full-time in Concord—at the Thoreau Elementary School, home to the Concord school system's Bridge Program for kids with ASD. Kate also added that it all fell into place when generous donor support was secured to subsidize the classes and to have Kayla as the teacher.

Music Breaks Through Barriers

The proximity of a Berklee instructor who holds a master's in education with an autism concentration made the collaboration seamless. Some of Kayla's students from the Bridge Program transitioned to Tones of Fun at CCM. Even with a delay due to Covid, the CCM program has already expanded to accommodate two age groups (3–6 and 7–9).

Studies suggest that music programs offer kids with ASD therapeutic benefits (Rebecca M. Jones, "Music tunes the brain in autism," *Science Translational Medicine*, Vol. 10, Issue 466, Nov. 7, 2018). Moreover, "Preliminary findings also support the potential for music to assist in learning daily routines," according to Forbes (Jennifer Palumbo, "Why Music Is Positive for Autistic Individuals," Aug. 26, 2022). But to fully realize those benefits, ASD kids need classes tailored to their needs.

"Students with disabilities have amazing musical talents and skills, just like their typically developing peers," Kayla says. "Unfortunately, these aptitudes cannot always be seen and celebrated in a general music class setting."

With Tones of Fun, "Each class is individualized to the student's interests, instrument preference, genre of music and song preference, communication style, and learning profile," Kayla says. "We use different

Tones of Fun offers immeasurable benefits, including many that extend beyond music. "This class is so important to my family and me," says Maura Lyons, whose son, Daegan, is an enthusiastic participant. The program not only helps Daegan discover new songs and instruments, but also sharpens his focus, improves his ability to socialize with peers, and teaches him how to take turns as part of a group. "It's the highlight of our week," Maura says.



tools so that each student can participate in meaningful group music-making. Each class has five to eight different musical activities, and the frequent change helps to keep students engaged. Finally, we make music through singing, playing instruments, improvising songs, and both structured and unstructured movement activities. There is something in every class for every student."

Tones of Fun Helps the Whole Family

To participate in Tones of Fun, students must have a diagnosed disability. (No previous musical experience is necessary, however.) In addition, all students must be accompanied by an adult at every class. Students must also be able to participate effectively in classes and maintain an environment that is safe for themselves and others.

And he's not the only family member who benefits from the program. Daegan's two sisters, who also attend the class, have discovered that music is a great way to connect with their brother. "My daughters use skills from class and songs to interact, engage, and play with Daegan at home," Maura says. "Tones of Fun is an amazing program and is teaching us how to use music to bring a smile to Daegan's face. It is the only activity in town that Daegan can share with his siblings, myself, and his friends. It truly melts my heart to see him so focused on something he loves."

The Tones of Fun class meets weekly on Tuesday afternoons at CCM, supported by gifts from our community. Need-based tuition assistance is available to families that qualify.

BENEFACTOR AND BENEFICIARY:

PETER BLUM IS
A CCM BOARD
MEMBER, DONOR
— AND PIANO
STUDENT (NOT
NECESSARILY IN
THAT ORDER)



“Concord is a town that is rich in culture,” says Peter Blum, who sits on CCM’s Board of Directors. An investment banker, Peter lived in New York for three years and London for five before settling in Concord some 40 years ago. So he knows culture when he sees it.

He’s seen plenty in Concord. “It has wonderful cultural institutions,” he says. “There’s the Umbrella, there’s the Concord Players, there’s the Concord Museum, there’s the Concord Art Association.” He also cites Emerson Hospital and the 150-year-old Concord Free Public Library, with its classic Georgian architecture.

For years the one “glaring absence,” Peter says, was a focal point for the town’s many music lovers. So when he heard about his friend Kate Yoder’s vision for a music conservatory, he knew he had to get involved.

Since then, that vision has come into full focus. “CCM has become the musical thing in Concord,” Peter says. “We have more than 500 students and more than 35 faculty members. But it’s more than a school — it’s also a place that offers performance and recital opportunities. It’s a full menu of music.”

And there are new offerings all the time. Says Peter, “One of our goals is to make sure that whenever anybody thinks of music in Concord, the first thing they’ll think of is CCM.”

Lessons Learned

For Peter, the timing of CCM’s arrival was fortuitous. Although he had never studied music, he always loved it, and at age 60, he had been thinking about taking piano lessons. “I had always been an active guy — running and skiing and things like that,” he says. “But I knew at some point I would slow down physically. And I wanted a new pursuit into which I could channel some of that energy and focus.”

Piano lessons at Concord’s brand-new conservatory turned out to be the perfect solution. A dozen or so years on, Peter Blum, one of CCM’s first students, is still taking lessons from Lorna Henderson, one of CCM’s first instructors.

“She’s fantastic,” Peter says. “She always finds a way to convey the things I need to hear or learn or do—and she does it in a way that helps me make that connection quickly.”

Lorna, a proponent of consistent practice, says one of her goals is to teach her students to “rely on self-motivation for life.” That dovetailed perfectly with Peter’s approach. “It’s become an every-night thing for me,” he says. “I know if I showed up unpracticed for my lesson on Monday night, it would take Lorna about 20 seconds to figure that out. I’d be embarrassed and she’d be disappointed.”

'Be Quick, Don't Hurry'

Besides inspiring him to practice, Peter says, "Lorna has taught me that there's a difference between just learning all the right keys and the right notes and actually playing music."

In that sense, Lorna is similar to some of the great coaches Peter has had in various sports through the years. When he was a rower, for example, one of his coaches told him, "Be quick, don't hurry." Lorna has taught him to apply the same principle when he plays the piano. "Like speech, music has pauses for breath," Peter says. "She's taught me to use those pauses, and actually to hear what I'm playing."

He knows he's making progress when his eyes and my hands "are moving at the same pace. Then I can relax and stop agonizing over every note because I know it sounds OK."

Peter gives a self-deprecating laugh. "And I want to be clear—I sound OK when I play. I'm not a virtuoso by any means."

Building a Future

In his role as a donor and CCM's longest-tenured board member, Peter takes the same "Be quick, don't hurry" approach that he applies while practicing piano. He works tirelessly to help build CCM's network of donors and volunteers and supporters. At the same time, he takes necessary pauses for breath. "We need a permanent building," he says, "but we need to build up an endowment first. We're not there yet."

Yet—that's the operative word. Just give it time. "I believe in this institution," Peter says. "In the end, that's why I give. We're building a school with music as its mission—the teaching of music, the playing of music, the performance of music, the appreciation of music. That's our contribution to Concord. It's no longer missing music."



2023 – 2024

CONCERT & LECTURE SERIES



MUSIC & FOLKLORE

OCTOBER 27

7:30 PM

Explore the oral folk traditions of various cultures through music. In collaboration with the Concord Museum, you will hear musical tales and chamber music that reveal similarities and differences between diverse societies.

HARMOLODIC

MICROJAM

DECEMBER 1

7:30 PM

If you love jazz, you won't want to miss this amazing event that explores the boundaries of musical expression.

MILE TWELVE

JANUARY 20

7:00 PM

How does music inspire invention and vice versa? Join us for a special event with Tod Machover, a composer, inventor, and professor at the MIT Media Lab. The concert showcases the diversity and creativity of musical expression.



WARP TRIO

FEBRUARY 9

7:30 PM

Not your typical chamber music ensemble, Warp Trio is also a rock band and an art project, exploring new ways of music consumption through inter-disciplinary collaborations and eclectic programming.

MUSIC & INVENTION

MARCH 8

7:30 PM

How does music inspire invention and vice versa? Join us for a special event with Tod Machover, a composer, inventor, and professor at the MIT Media Lab. The concert showcases the diversity and creativity of musical expression.

THE RUTA BEGGARS

APRIL 27

7:00 PM

The Ruta Beggars combine bluegrass and early swing to create a timeless act filled with intricate vocal harmonies, fiery instrumentals, and plenty of fun.



MAKING A DIFFERENCE IN 2023

Despite a challenging start, 2023 was a remarkable year for our school, with a record number of students joining our group classes, which increased by more than 100%. We added the Program and Community Partnership Manager position and welcomed Anthea Kechley to the staff. She spearheaded our innovative Festival of Creativity workshops, curated a diverse and engaging concert series, and supported our private students with the free Music Achievement Program (MAP).

We are immensely grateful to our students and families for choosing CCM as their musical home. We also appreciate the staff, faculty, and board of directors who collaborated to broaden our impact and deliver excellent music education and performances. And we thank you, our generous friends, who value the arts and music education and who make the music possible at the Concord Conservatory of Music.

We are excited for the year ahead – one filled with music, community, and joy.

Your generosity makes music happen. As you browse this Upbeat edition, you will see how the Concord Conservatory of Music and our students are flourishing, bringing vitality to our community.

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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* CCM Monthly Promoters

A photograph of a man and a woman sitting and playing saxophones. The man on the left is wearing a dark blue polo shirt and glasses, smiling while playing a saxophone. The woman on the right is wearing a yellow polo shirt and glasses, also smiling while playing a saxophone. They are in a room with a window in the background and a music stand to the right.

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CONCORD
CONSERVATORY
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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, or give us a call at 978-369-0010

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**HEAR.
UNDERSTAND.
PLAY.
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Friends like you, who value thriving arts programs and music education, keep the music alive at the Concord Conservatory of Music. **Your generosity makes music happen. THANK YOU!**