

**ETM: The Podcast**  
**Episode 12: The Case for Modern Band**  
**TRANSCRIPT**

**Noah:** You are listening to Education Through Music, the podcast. As always, I'm your host, Noah, and for this episode of ETM the Podcast, I had the privilege of sitting down with a few members from the All Hallows High School Modern Band, as well as their teacher, Alfredo Hernandez, the director of arts and advocacy at All Hallows, Paul Fontana, and the school's principal, Nick Corrado. You might recognize Alfredo from episodes one and five of the show. Anyway, the title of this episode is the Case for Modern Band, because what became clear to me over the course of these conversations, and I think will become clear to you as well, is that modern band can be a tremendously popular and educative music offering, especially for a new music program. And with that, and in the interest of leaving it to the student musicians and their teachers to explain, I'll pass the mic to my guests.

**Jaden:** My name is Jaden. I play guitar for the band. Other than playing guitar, I mainly, you know, go home practice even more, play a couple of video games in the middle of college stuff and whatnot. I also like watching anime and reading manga, so that takes up a lot of my time as well.

**All Hallows Band Member:** Well, I attend All Hallows. I'm a 16-year-old. I've lived here my whole life in the Bronx. I've lived here my whole life in the Bronx. I mean hobby-wise, obviously. I enjoy music, as we're here right now, and I enjoy food. That's one of my bigger qualities. Going out to the city, I prefer going to Chinatown and whatnot and Grand Street and just getting a nice quick, cheap something to eat.

**Gabriel:** My name is Gabriel. I'm a senior here at All Hallows, um, a little bit about me. I'm a lead vocalist as well as an instrument player for the modern band here.

Noah: Cool, what instrument do you play in addition to your voice?

**Gabriel:** um, well, growing up I was like learning how to play the keyboard. So I've always had a keyboard at home, so I've always been super passionate about piano, but as well as I've learned how to play the drums as well as the bass, and now I'm learning how to play guitar in the band. So I've always had this certain goal, ever since the band started last year to learn every single instrument we have in there by the end of this year.

**Justin:** I'm Justin. I'm Dominican, I'm a student at All Hallows High School, I was born and raised in the Bronx and I am 17 years of age.

**Paul Fontana:** I'm Paul Fontana. I'm the Director of Arts and Advocacy here at All Hallows.

**Nicholas Corrado:** Nicholas Corrado, principal of All Hallows High School, located in the South Bronx. Been involved in education in some capacity since 2005. Began work at All Hallows in 2015 and have been the principal now two and a half years.

**Jaden:** I started playing for the Modern Band around like last year in junior year. When the band first started I was interested somewhat, but I wasn't really planning to join until I saw that some of my friends were going. So I was like you know what, might as well go. And then I ended up staying there learning guitar and whatnot.

**Noah:** Where was the transition point where you realized that this was something you really wanted to be doing and not just something you were doing because your friends were there?

**Jaden:** I think it kind of started when we started practicing our first song and when I started practicing guitar for the band, like seriously, I was like wait, this is actually pretty cool and I'm a big fan of the guitar, so I think I might stay here and continue. And then we had a couple of shows and I'm like, yeah, this is the place where I want to be.

**Noah:** What was the first song that you practiced with your group?

**Jaden:** The first song I actually practiced was Faster Car by Love and Caliber, and I remember listening to it like outside of school kind of, and I was like, hmm, this would be really cool on guitar. And then the opportunity came for me to play guitar and I was like I want to learn this song.

**All Hallows Band Member:** I saw the poster of it because Mr Hernandez posted like flyers for it. I'm like, all right, you know what? Uh, I might as well try it out. I was like roped into it but like two people that also want to join, they didn't end up joining. I was the only people from that group that ended up joining but they did rope me into it. So I checked out the first meeting and, yeah, that's, that's how it started

**Noah:** What was it like in the very beginning?

**All Hallows Band Member:** um, so the first meeting was just setting up bass, like seeing how it would function, him explaining how it would proceed, how the meetings would go, and I think they also picked out like a couple songs that they were interested in and whatnot. I was kind of flustered because I was like, okay, I gotta let you know I have no experience playing an instrument, I'm just going to play the bass, and they're like oh yeah, so you can just learn this song, that song. I'm like wait, wait, hold on. I got to clarify here. I don't know anything about the bass, I'm just saying oh, yeah, you'll be fine, you'll be fine. And yeah, I was like, I was indeed fine. It was just around like three chords, the first song I learned, and I was like oh yeah you know what, I was fine. It wasn't that difficult, for the first song

**Justin:** I ended up in the modern band um, pretty much last year. Uh, Mr. Hernandez had sent out an email. He put up posters around the school pretty much saying like, if you're interested,

come after school. And so I came after school one day and I was just, like you know, I had a guitar at home so I was interested in like pretty much learning how to use it, because before prior I didn't know really what I was doing. So I saw it as, like you know, he could guide me to to be better at it you know.

**Noah:** And is that, is that what happened? Have you gotten better at guitar?

**Justin:** Oh, definitely

Noah: What was that, how has the the process? What was it like at first?

**Justin:** At first it was a little bit stressful because it was like I had to learn tabs and how to read music and I also had to learn, you know, strumming patterns. I had to learn pretty much how to do anything on the guitar.

**Noah:** So, you know, I'm I'm hearing a sort of a literacy component in this where, uh, tabs that's short for tablature, which is a form of written music for the guitar, um, that's, that's something that you have to or that you can read in order to play guitar music. So was that, was that a big focus in the early stages of playing in the modern band?

**Justin:** Oh, definitely, because, um, if I wasn't in the building with Mr. Hernandez, like, and him telling me you know it's this chord or this chord, I would have to pretty much just go home. Uh, either email him and if I couldn't like contact him, I'll just have to look it up on the internet somehow.

**Noah:** Right, so, so then, the tablature was a way for you to be a little bit more independent in your musical practice. That's great. You're only a student for so long, and then you're, you're out of All Hallows. And then what are you going to do? It's um, in setting you up to play, or in setting yourself up to play independently of a teacher. You're in really great shape to have the guitar be a part of your life for as long as you want it to be.

**Justin:** That was really like the biggest thing for me, like learning the fundamentals, the basics, so that way, when I didn't have the guidance, I could go and take the initiative myself and actually put it to practice, not because I have to, but because I really do want to get better and enjoy other types of music.

**Noah:** Awesome, very cool. How would you describe the All Hallows Modern Band to someone who hasn't heard you perform yet?

**Jaden:** A big motto of the school is brotherhood and whatnot in all of that. And brotherhood can be felt in the band room. Everyone is close to each other, everyone is pushing each other to be better. I can go out of school and I might not be having the bestest day and then one of the bassists his name is Sergio he usually talks to me like hey, how are you doing? Would you like

to practice? And I'm like sure, sure, why not? And it's just, everyone is really connected and I would. It's a really nice place to be in and it makes you feel really comfortable.

**Noah:** what's it like practicing at home? What is your, what is your practice routine entail?

**All Hallows Band Member:** um, I don't have a routine. Uh, I'm not. I'm not at that level yet, but it's. I guess it's. There's. Like in the same way, someone like goes home and says, oh, I'm bored, I want to play some video games. It's like the same thing for me, but instead of video games just playing the bass because I just like look up oh okay, this is a cool song, like let me see if it has tab notations. For me, like I know, like other band members use like websites that just have the notations without the background music to it, For me, I think what works best is just like looking up on youtube itself and looking up, someone did a tab notation cover of it with like the notes itself and I just try playing along with it. Usually it's like I get impatient, so I just try blasting through it and like mess up the entire thing and then like, okay, now I know which part I'm somewhat decent at some parts that I cannot completely do, so I just I just take it slow and then I just like split up the video into parts and then I tried going to a lower speed, because you can change the speed setting on YouTube, so I either have speed or 0.75 speed and I do it. Then I do a full run of the song and I do the full song with the normal tempo and that's that's how I try learning a song that's a.

**Noah:** That's a great practice, a set of practice strategies for for working on a new piece of music is. Is that something that you've kind of come up with through trial and error, or did you get some help from Mr. Hernandez?

**All Hallows Band Member:** um, I mean, he was pretty much like saying oh, can you just look up videos on tab notations? Because, oh, from at least what I noticed that for guitar tab notation or covers they have like a few people who actually just do in-depth covers, like taking it step by step and it's like eight minute videos. But there aren't that many actual videos on just tab notations for different songs. But at least the the songs I listen to and I'm looking at or I have to do for the band actual like rehearsal and whatnot there's like a lot of actual people who do covers and the tab notations for it. They don't do in-depth videos like 10 minutes or nothing, it's just the whole song and that's what I got used to. So that's what I was. It's like that's what I first did and it's been working. So that's what I continue doing pretty much.

**Gabriel:** Great. Well, I have a specific memory from the first ever performance we had. I don't know what the school was called. I think it was called Sacred Heart. It's a Catholic middle school, but I was like really surprised because the students there were like really like energetic and alive, like I never expected such a crowd, like they were getting out of their seats and just it was just incredible to me and just to see that, as well as the band, yeah, I just feel like it's really amazing.

**Noah:** This reminds me of how I first got involved in playing instrumental music. I was in an elementary school and the local middle school came through and put on a string orchestra

concert and I saw it and thought that is exactly what I want to be doing next year when I get to the sixth grade. And I think that there's something very valuable about sending student ensembles to play for other students. When you see a student group come and perform and you know that, like some of those students were at your school the year before and then they moved up to middle school and started playing in this group, that doesn't seem like quite as insurmountable a barrier. Student ensembles like yours can provide to other students, because it sort of closes that divide between non-performer and performer, makes it seem possible.

**Gabriel:** Yeah.

**Noah:** You guys do a lot of gigging in this group. What is that experience like? What are some things that you have found surprising in that process?

**Justin:** Most surprising is how stressful it can be leading up and how like anxiety really really takes over, like until the very moment you're on that stage performing.

**Noah:** So you find that the anxiety dissipates when you start playing or when the gig is over.

**Justin:** Definitely when I start playing. I feel like once I start playing, I'm more like locked in. I'm focused, I'm doing what I know I can do and what I've been drilling for, however long

**Noah:** Interesting. I suppose that is what happens when you rehearse enough, right? If you've done enough rehearsing, then as you perform, you're just doing, you can sort of go on to a sort of autopilot setting I guess

**Justin:** it's like practice, but in front of people,

**Noah:** Right yeah, and doing the same thing you've done over and over again, um, until you can't make a mistake anymore

**All Hallows Band Member:** I guess if you've never played instrument before, I guess just try it. I think it's like I don't. I didn't think I would like be that invested in it as I am now, but it's just like you, one thing is because this is another Star Contracts, I've felt One thing is playing it with tab notations and playing along with the song in a YouTube video, because it's like the same thing over and over again. Like you pick up oh, I know, at like minute 1:25, it's going to do this one fill. So I know I can transition to this one. But when you're playing with a band, it's like, oh, someone might be a little slower, someone might be off. So it feels like it feels a lot more fun and active to like get it, get it right with a with a band rehearsal. Then, like you get it right with a cover solution. And I sometimes was like, okay, yeah, I know this song, I, I got this, Mr. Hernandez, and I go to the cover, do it with the band. I'm like man, why am I so off right now? So I think that's it, if you want to like, one thing is playing by yourself in a cover, which is fine, but it's just a completely different ballpark and actually a lot more enjoyable to play like rehearse with a band.

**Noah:** Yeah I would agree with that.

**Gabriel:** If I were to meet myself, a few years back, my past self, and tell him that, I'm doing a podcast as a vocalist, I don't think I'd ever, I don't think I'd believe myself. I think I was going crazy, but just to think about the things I've done, it's just incredible.

**Noah:** Yeah, and it's only just the beginning.

**Jaden:** We are one big family, right, and it's not just music stuff that we are one big family about. Like there's also like if you have any personal issues, there's a lot of people who will come in and be like, hey, do you need help? And a lot of people give advice. Like there was a situation, um, back in may, uh, with one of the band members and like everyone was involved with that, saying like, hey, do you need help, are you okay? So it's really not just a familial feel with music, but in general, like with life and everything. We're all in this together and we're all taking it step by step.

**Paul Fontana:** In the 1970s a lot of schools got rid of their music programs and All Hallows was one of them and there hadn't really been any kind of formal music program here at the school in probably 40 years and part of my mandate and my position was to bring music back into the curriculum, into the daily schedule. We had had pickup bands and concerts and stuff, but never anything formal. So I was happy to look for a partner to work with and was able to find ETM.

**Noah:** Could you tell me a little bit about what the modern band ensemble means to the culture at All Hallows?

**Nicholas Corrado:** It basically is the culture. It's completely changed the dynamics and atmosphere of the school. To think about where we were two years ago to this date, there was zero music in this building in any capacity. To have to throw guys out of here at the end of the day because they just want to be down there hanging out jamming away uh, it's permeated throughout the entire building in a positive way. The culture has been changed for the positive

**Paul Fontana:** Alfredo started part-time uh working uh directly for ETM and using their curriculum here at the school and uh, subsequently, um, we increased how many days he was on staff in the building and somehow last year, when he was only here part-time in October of last year, he was able to assemble a bunch of kids who were able to be really excited about playing music together. Some of them had never touched instruments before. Some of them had a little bit of experience and so over the course of last year their talents grew, their camaraderie grew, their service to the school grew as part of our daily school culture and they were loud and people were like what is all this music all of a sudden? And now they have their own cool wing of the building. This year we were able to bring Alfredo in full time, which is a blessing to us, and to have the ETM curriculum still what we're following, but also to have him here every day. He has a band elective which is just the kids who work together, that extra 40 minutes a day during the school day just to perform together. It's awesome, and the experience for the boys has been eye-opening, heart-opening. They've played gigs for dignitaries and

baseball fans and they were asked to play a prom in a grade school recently, which is funny. I don't know if they'll do it or not, but it's really been for them just a huge now part of their lives, and for us it's just now, it's as if it was always meant to be. I can't imagine the school anymore without the band, without music every day.

**Nicholas Corrado:** Last week they performed at the PAC Center down at the World Trade Center, took the house down. Last June they sang the national anthem at Yankee Stadium. They opened up for Josh Groban in his annual gala and they were a part of ETM's annual gala last year at the Zixal Ballroom.

**Noah:** So this is your third appearance on the show, right?

**Alfredo Hernandez:** You're right. Yes, Because I did. Yeah, that's been my main motivation.

**Noah:** So you're full-time here at All Hallows. Now How's that going?

**Alfredo Hernandez:** Great. It's. What I felt like I was missing last year is all the time. It was weird I was here only three times a week but I did so much in that time. Now I'm here five days a week and I'm doing like equal amounts. I guess what's changed is like the after hours stuff, but yeah, it just feels like everything's coming a lot more naturally than trying to fit it all in into a three-day work week. You know I still get all, the big thing about working at the school that I love from the very beginning is the, the trust that was given to me. It's kind of like I ran away with that and I've been able to do a lot because of it and you know, both me and the school have seen like great results because of it. So it feels really good and even now, like you know, I have the slightest idea and I mention it they're like that sounds great, go for it. So it's been really cool. I like it a lot. Um, I see that this school has ruined the possibility of me teaching anywhere else because if I ever go somewhere else, it's gonna be like oh, but yeah.

**Noah:** That's great, yeah, but your students, who I've talked to today, have spoken a lot about how brotherhood is like a big part of the school's ethos and also what they bring to their, to their music. What are some concrete ways that you have helped to facilitate this? Here? It's an all boys school, I suppose Brotherhood wouldn't be the word for, you know, a regular public school or something like that, but that, that sort of feeling.

**Alfredo Hernandez:** So I guess it kind of fit naturally with the idea of like doing, like the band you know the music technology courses helps itself out, because they'll, you know, run ideas past each other. But especially with the band, which is like what we've been pushing these last two years um, that idea of brotherhood has, like really just it found its home so naturally, uh, within our like little group, um, from like like, for example, they're there, we have a group chat and they're all talking about how they're going to a teen party at the brooklyn, at the new york public library on Saturday, and that's something that you know, like they weren't doing a year before. I think they did it last year with like two people and now they're going as a one big group, which is awesome, you know, and that's from the hours that we spent together. They look out for

each other and a lot of it. And when it comes to the music, it's because they want each other to sound good, you know, and they're always like um, pushing each other to be better or reinforcing the fact that they sound good, because those teenage years could be like, either you're really confident or you have that lack of confidence, so they're always pushing each other to be on the same level in terms of confidence and just feeling good. But yeah, it's been great that idea of brotherhood within the school. They're known as the band guys and they're coming around and yeah, it's fun to see.

**Noah:** And it's cool that this is a school where being the band guys is a cool thing as opposed to sort of an isolating thing.

**Alfredo Hernandez:** Yeah, it's definitely not isolating. I think the school has done a great job of having so many um activities and different outlets for different students. You know, if you're not as, uh, willing to get on the stage, maybe you want to garden and there's gardening. Maybe you want to just focus on study stuff there's ways for you to study after school. Um, the fact that I was able to give these guys a resource, a place to be to explore music, I think really helped them. You know, and this year I'm starting to see a lot of people start gravitating towards us, a lot of the younger crowds, so that's been really cool. And you know I'll get kids saying, hey, like, do I need to know how to play an instrument to join? I'm like, no, you don't. Actually, that's why we work so well, because we're all learning. But yeah, it's. You know, I wouldn't say they're like the jocks of the school, because there's no jocks right in this day and age. But yeah, I think it's just being able to provide a home away from home for anyone who might need it. It's really cool. Anyone who might need it, it's really cool. So when I coach the kids, I tell them like you could be as good as a high school band and you'll get your mandatory claps after the performance. You know parents will say good job, or you could be as good as a performing band. That isn't. People aren't obligated to clap for, you know, and you guys are at that skill level. So when I want to describe them, I describe them as an actual band. You know, um, they're performing at that level. I push them to perform at that level and like we don't, we push to not make silly mistakes that could be avoided. Right, and them just picking up that habit of being professional musicians on stage has really helped us and, like, level up each of our performances. So they're a group of kids who are performing at a professional level and really setting the stage for what is capable of high school students. They're playing modern hits that they choose. I stay out of the song selection for the most part. They're really in charge of a lot of it and I'm just here to tell them that's a good idea or that's a bad idea and throw in the technical stuff here and there. But yeah, no, I'm amazed at how great they are and how much I can do with them because of how great they are. This last performance at the PAX. They came off like a band that you would find just open in for another band and it really came off like that. So that that's what I shoot for. Another thing that that I do with these guys is that that room downstairs is theirs. You know like I facilitate the room. We have a little couch in there, we have a fridge. They hang out in there, they put their belongings in there and I think that is super important to the workflow of a band. You know they know where they go to work, they know where everything goes, they know that they need to keep it clean and that stuff is borderline theirs. So you know, I had that in high school and I know I felt comfortable enough to like keep learning, uh, after hours. So, definitely, being able to provide them a space that they could feel comfortable enough to even kick their shoes off, um,



it's super important and it really um provides like a space for them to like reach that, that, that professional level. Yeah, that's that's, that's what I got.

**Noah:** Well uh, Mr. Hernandez, Alfredo, thanks so much for taking the time to talk to me, and to share your experience.

**Alfredo Hernandez:** Thank you. Thank you,

**Jaden:** No problem. Thank you for inviting me.

**Noah:** Of course.

**Gabriel:** Thank you for having me

**Nicholas Corrado:** It was our honor and our pleasure.