

ETM: The Podcast
Episode 20: Inside the Modern Band Movement
TRANSCRIPT

Noah: You are listening to Education Through Music, the podcast. As always, I'm your host, Noah, and it is my honor to bring you a panel discussion on Modern Band with four dynamic music educators with decades of experience between them. They are Dr. Scott Burstein, Dr. Tom Zlabinger, Alfredo Hernandez, and Dr. Joe Demarco. I'll let them introduce themselves presently

Dr. Scott Burstein: My name is Dr Scott Burstein. I am the Director of Professional Development in Higher Education with the non-profit Music Will.

Dr. Tom Zlabinger: My name is Dr. Tom Zlabinger. I am Associate Professor of Music at York College in Jamaica, queens. That's one of the CUNY campuses. I also serve as the president of Mianice, the Music Educators Association of New York City, which is an association that supports teachers all throughout the city and also students. We run two festivals, one for middle school and one for high school, to feature these honor students and then we support teachers in their work.

Alfredo Hernandez: I'm Alfredo Hernandez, I'm born and raised in Brooklyn. I am currently the music director over at All Hallows High School. It is a Catholic school up in the Bronx. I'm like a block and a half away from Yankee Stadium.

Dr. Joe Demarco: I'm Joe DeMarco. This is my third year teaching in Northern Queens Middle School 419, otherwise known as the Tommy LAG Educational Facility who was one of the 1969 Miracle Mets, and Alfredo's a block and a half away from Yankee Stadium, I'm actually a block and a half away from Citi Field, so that's pretty cool.

Noah: Let's go ahead and take turns answering this first question of what drew you to teaching music and, in particular, teaching modern band. Scott, do you want to go first?

Dr. Scott Burstein: To be honest, I didn't start off thinking I wanted to be a music teacher. I didn't take any education courses, I literally fell into teaching. While I was waiting to hear back from law schools, I ran into my old band director on the beach playing volleyball and he said hey, there's a job open. You got nothing to do this year and did it for a year and loved it. And I think that my experience is pretty unique because when I got to school because I hadn't done any background in education, I was on an emergency credential. I didn't realize there were things you were supposed to do. So I just was like I'm a guitar player, I've done other kinds of music, for sure, but I'm like I want to make sure I have a guitar class and that turned into modern band. So, um, in the 12 years I taught, I did teach concert band and marching band and all those other kinds of ensembles. But you know, the the guitar program, um, which turned into the modern band program, just grew and grew and, you know, went from 20 kids and a couple of guitars and chairing to eventually having about a hundred guitars in my classroom and about,

you know, 250 kids signed up for the class and and kids waiting and you know the drum kit and we had full audio. It was great, it was really an exciting thing to be able to use to impact my program and I found that a lot of those students then eventually went on to join all the other classes. You know it was, you know half my marching band were kids that started in my guitar class. So it was pretty exciting and fun and I'm glad that now I've managed to turn this into my current job, which is getting to train other teachers to teach modern band, which I've done now for the last 12 to 13 years.

Alfredo Hernandez: I always wanted to teach. I knew that. I think I went into high school thinking I was going to teach history at one point and then along the way I just realized, oh, I like music a little bit more than my classmates and, yeah, I even cut out lunch from my schedule altogether to have two music classes. I had to get my parents' signature to approve that. That's how dedicated I was at the beginning. What led me to teach modern band was based off what we had. We're a Catholic school, not the hugest school. We just had to make do with whatever instruments we had available and I think Modern Band just fit the footprint of the school so well and it really took off. We're in our third year and I feel like it's the flagship course and group over at the school.

Dr. Joe Demarco:: So I mean, I'll be honest, I never really thought that I was going to, uh, uh, be a public school teacher. I mean, I always, like you know, toyed around with the possibility, um, but it wasn't my ultimate goal. You know, I went the more performance route, um, throughout college. You know, I went to school to play drums, to play percussion, and I did the whole get your bachelor's, get your master's, get your doctorate, hopefully get a job teaching at a university. So that was kind of the path that I saw for myself. But what no one tells you is there's not really a whole lot to choose from right after you get your doctorate. You know, that's the great thing about ETM too. You know they take people who don't necessarily have all the proper credentials to jump into, you know, a public school teaching situation and they give you that platform to you know, find your strengths and you know, see how you do in that situation and see, give you that platform to find your strengths and see how you do in that situation and see if you can really grow as an educator that way. And for me, that's exactly my story. I took the job with ETM. This is my first placement and, yeah, everything's going great. I got the rock band club going. The kids are stoked and yeah, it's going great. I got the rock band club going. Kids are stoked and yeah, it's been pretty cool so far.

Dr. Tom Zlabinger: In full disclosure, I'm a second generation educator. Both my parents were teachers. They're still alive. My father was a college professor and my mother was a high school English teacher. So I've always been surrounded by teaching, but not teaching music. Music was always a part of my life. I was wiggling, you know, as an infant. I was given piano lessons when I was three, but I had a little bit of a bumpy road because I didn't stay on the same instrument for very long and finally I found the bass and bass felt like home and so I went to school for bass. I got a master's at Queens College and then I got a doctorate in ethnomusicology and then I landed basically what I thought was my dream job at the time was teaching jazz at York College and I was very happy leading two big bands and teaching jazz history and all that sort of stuff. And then things changed. During the pandemic I had time to

reflect on what I was doing and what I more importantly, what I was not doing. Was I serving our students at York College the best I could? And then I found APME, the Association for the Popular Music Education, and, by extension, the Modern Band Summit, and I was given the language and the peoples to really focus in on what I should be doing, and we shifted from a jazz-centered curriculum to a modern band curriculum. So that's why I got into modern band out of student need.

Noah: So cool that it's been such a recent thing too like you know, four years ago is is when a lot of things kind of changed in education out of necessity, but some really cool things have happened as a result of that necessity as well. What are some of the challenges of teaching music in New York city schools in particular, and what tools does modern band offer for addressing them? I think that that dovetails nicely with what Tom was saying about recognizing the need and sort of seeing how APME and the summit sort of offered the tools and brought the tools into a context in which it could be acceptable in an academic setting to make these changes.

Dr. Joe Demarco: I would say the fight for constant engagement, the fight for how do I make this fun for people that maybe don't even want to be in this room right now? You know, and trying to find, I found that you know you try to be the teacher that the world expects you to be and you try and you fail, you edit, you try, you fail, you edit, etc. etc., you just kind of go that route for a little while. But I think the biggest thing was don't fight the kids. You know, don't push back. You know, don't try to meet them here and then go this way. You know, try to see where they're going, see what their interests are and just kind of like plot along that path there and you can eventually find out where they're going and you can see what musical interests they have. And you know there's they're listening to plenty of music. There's plenty to learn from the music that they're currently listening to. I've found that as soon as I started, you know, kind of going that direction, I started having a lot more success. The classroom started being a lot more chill. You have a lot more opportunities to form relationships with these people, figure out where they're going and how can you guide them in a cool direction. Modern bands specifically, I mean, dude, I remember when I was in middle school I got my first drum kit when I was in the sixth grade. I wanted to be Keith Moon. I got my hair cut like him. I idolized these people and I didn't have that classical musical upbringing and the kids that we see these days, for the most part, largely, are not going to have that typical musical upbringing of, they already come into middle school having a bunch of music lessons and a main instrument. You know what I mean. So how am I going to convince this kid the importance of classical music and obviously it's very important to our culture and what we are, who we are, what we do but how am I going to be like, no, you need to do this because it's important. No, they want to rock. Right, I wanted to rock. You know like we're, we're very similar in that regard. I was just like well, let me, you know, let me come here and play to my strengths. You know, let me see what I can do. This is what I know. Let me just go full bore into this and see what happens and um, and I've seen a lot of uh success, just kind of trying to, you know, take it step by step and just kind of go that direction with it.

Dr. Scott Burstein: You know, speaking kind of towards that thought and I can't speak exactly to New York, I'm not in New York, I haven't taught in New York, I was from Los Angeles. But you know we work with teachers nationwide, and I think that you know the deeper we've gone into the whole modern band movement, I think we found a lot of things that we could recognize from our own childhood. Joe, I'm similar to you, you know, like I got a guitar and wanted to play Guns and Roses and went to my middle school teacher and told him that, and he said, nope, not here. And the only reason I got involved in music at all was I joined the marching band to avoid doing the mile, to avoid physical activity, because I didn't have to do PE if I did marching band, and it's just kind of silly looking back on it now. I think that you know, one of the things that we find, though, is that you know, at least in my program, the kids, they were like, they became like me, where the more music they learn, the more music they wanted to learn. If we started at a place of what they bring into the classroom, they get excited about other things. I think that you know like, my absolute favorite is Bach. I'm a huge jazz Bach guy. I love playing Bach's music, listening to it, whatever. And if in my first guitar lesson at 12 years old my teacher sat me down and said, check out this really cool piece by Bach, I would have quit immediately and wouldn't like Bach now. So you know, growth happens and I think that you know, kind of touching into one of the other things you mentioned, which is really really the key here is there is so much depth to all music. Right, we've chosen that some parts of music are valuable if you're looking from a Western art tradition. But there's, you know, there's the production value. The way that they're using sounds, instrumentation and timbres are very different. Like there's any piece of music I can make into a great lesson if I do the work and learn it. But oftentimes what we do is we start and say we've done all this studying ourselves and now we're going to have these kids and we're going to make them learn what we know, instead of us taking what they know and finding good lessons to make them better musicians with that as a starting point, and I think that a lot of times that's what we find some of the challenges in the classroom are teachers that recognize this but don't know where to begin, don't know how to do that, they're not pop musicians necessarily.

Dr. Tom Zlabinger: I couldn't agree with what you're saying more. It's so amazing to work with students and meet them where they are and trust them, and our pedagogy systems are not built for that, yet, it's changing, it's slowly changing, and I say this as a good ethnomusicologist. You know there are traditions like classical music and jazz, large ensemble jazz, where we have the score that can be conducted, we know what instrumentation needs to be on the stage, et cetera, et cetera, with choirs too, you know, and wind ensembles. And because rock and pop are so new, they haven't had a chance to marinate and create a pedagogy. And we've adopted pedagogies from other spaces to try to teach pop and rock and some of it works, but a lot of it doesn't. And I think it's an exciting time as we develop these new pedagogies of how to convey what we know to these younger musicians in a meaningful way and not just, you know, a very simplistic way but a very advanced way so they can play things like Stairway to Heaven, you know, that they can really get into the stuff. And all those students, even though they've not had a lesson, have some relationship with music. Right, they have, and maybe wildly different than ours. They don't have a main instrument and they don't read music, maybe, but they have a deep relationship. In some ways, they may have a deeper relationship than we do. So, yes, we need to be eternal students and continue to learn from who we are teaching. We also want to be

able to give them things that are going to make them more themselves and activate them in a way so they can reach the goals that they want to reach. And I'll just give you a quick example. Since the pandemic, instead of me saying, oh, we're going to do this show, we're going to do like a Dizzy Gillespie or Stevie Wonder show, every first rehearsal I asked my students what do you want to play? It was a big, big trust exercise. The first time I did it. I never had that. I never had a teacher come up and say what do you want to do? And they love it. Oh, let's do this tune, let's do this tune. So I just, you know, pull up my laptop and start writing down the name of tunes, and if I don't know the tunes, I write the artist's name and I collect, you know, four or five tunes from the students that I then whittle around and turn it back and suggest well, we could make this tune sound good with the people in the room. You know this is a little too advanced or maybe we could shake this up. And we do it. It's more you've heard this phrase before. It's more guide on the side instead of sage on the stage. And it's just amazing. The music making at York College since the pandemic has been transformed because we've put the students maybe not in the driver's seat, but they're at least sitting, they're not sitting in the back anymore. We're not dragging them forward. They're saying let's go here, let's go here. I know a shorter way and it'll help them. But then they'll find new destinations that you are so thrilled to get to. Some tunes that we've done I would have never heard of. And you're still teaching the fundamentals. You're still teaching harmony, melody, rhythm, timbre, all this stuff is still being taught.

Alfredo Hernandez: I want to add to that because I'm like you, kind of like light that fuse for a lot of students, like when they uh, I think my favorite thing is seeing them like reverse engineer stuff they've learned, like they come in, like you said, playing stairway to heaven, I'm like you know what you're playing and then, like when we get down the line, they've realized I've been playing music theory all along. I just didn't know how to communicate that. I think, like just recently I had a two hispanic students. They they were um, in lieu of their midterm they decided to perform for our winter concert and it turns out that they had been performing at like car meets, uh, mexican, uh, rehinad music, and the the kid could play acoustic guitar really well and the other kids slapping acoustic bass and uh, and I just I'm like let me just hear what you're playing, because I'm like I don't listen to that music. Let me see what it is exactly you're doing. He's like oh, I don't know what chords I'm playing, I'm just hitting these areas of the guitar and it was amazing to just see them get up on stage and perform it and then, kind of like, even now they're, they're just coming in during lunch and rehearsing because they have the bug to perform in front of people. But yeah, no, it's, and you know, I gave them that space to perform music they want to perform. Yeah, I don't know. I can't tell you how many kids are turned away in New York from thinking that music is this stuffy, I have to learn these traditional songs that I don't hear outside of the classroom. You know, I have kids coming in saying, hey, my dad said we should play this song because they, they, they heard that we're doing music like this. Oh my god, that sounds awesome. Uh, yeah, it's just anything you could do to you know, keep that that put on the pedal for them is great.

Noah: There's something a lot more impactful about students recognizing that they are in need of a word to describe something that they're already using, that they've already sort of embodied, but they need a word for it, and then you can offer them a word from your own

musical background that, I think, sinks in a lot deeper than if you start with here's a word, here's a definition.

Dr. Tom Zlabinger: Yeah, I was going to say, instead of talking about word definitions, I would talk about word spellings. Right, they play these scales and you give them names, or chords, and you give them names, and we learn to speak before we learn to write. Right, we all did that. So why are we talking about things like theory and you know, or teaching them to read before we let them really, really play? So, as long as we can fulfill that you know need and feel that desire to just play and play and play, they'll ask some of the greatest questions.

Noah: I think we've already sort of gotten into a little bit of general success stories from classrooms, but do we have some specific success stories that we want to share from classrooms?

Dr. Joe Demarco: In my placement in my school at 419, I realized pretty quickly it was going to be show, don't ask, sort of thing to get what I need, to get what I want for my program. Because I remember going to admin and being like this is something I want to do. And it's like, okay, yeah, that's cool that you want to do that. Cool. And so in the beginning we didn't really have a whole lot. I had a bunch of buckets and so I started like a 15-minute lunch club where I would go down and pick up some kids that were super interested from the class time we had together. And I just put together like a bucket drumming ensemble and we played an awesome show at the you know tail end of the year. And then the next year was like, all right, well, you get a bucket drumming club. And then I got an hour after school for that. And then I was like, okay, well, now, let's really see what I can do. Hey, guys, I want to do a rock band club. Okay, sweet, that sounds expensive, right. And so I had to jump through a bunch of hoops and, um and uh, I had to do some extra stuff. Finally got my hands on a drum kit, got one bass, one guitar, one piano, um, but I didn't really have a whole lot of time to get this thing together. So I had a really strong class and I was like, all right, you, you, you, you, you, we're going to form a band and here's some songs that you can easily put together and they were like cool, we want to do this one. I was like sweet. And then at the end of the year I was like, hey, I put together this rock band, we're doing this Festival of the Arts, let's have them play. They played, they killed it. And then today it's like all right, well, you get a two-hour club and anything you want. Give us a list of whatever you need. And so now I've got the whole setup. The next step now is getting enough gear for an entire classroom. So I recently just spoke to my principal about getting 35 nylon string acoustic guitars so I can actually start a class-based full-class guitar, modern band sort of situation here. But at the moment we got three basses, four electric guitars, we got a few keyboards, still only one drum set, we have a couple electrics coming in the way and I put together this rock band club, that's two hours every Monday, and here's a win 70 kids signed up right away. And what was sad about that was I can't facilitate 70 kids in two hours. You know, like, like dude, I have one drum set, you know, um, so so I was you know, I had to tell a lot of people like you know, uh, you know, let me see if I can get another day. You know, at this rate I'm gonna need like an after-school club every single day. Let me see if I can get another day, let me see if I can get more gear. I have kids asking me every single day like, hey, what's the deal with that, what's the deal with that? Like, working on it? You know it takes a while to get

things. Anyway, besides the point, um, that's a huge win to have that many kids be like I want to do this, but it's also sad to say, okay, well some of us are going to have to wait. Yeah, some, yeah, some of us are gonna have to wait and it's too bad about that.

Dr. Scott Burstein: Once you have 70, and you can do 70, you're going to have 140.

Dr. Joe Demarco: Yeah, no, yeah, totally, and that's that's just how it's going to be, but that's awesome. Whenever these kids ask they, they love asking the question are we going to perform for these people? Are we going to perform for all the grades? Are we going to perform for parents? Are we going to take a trip and go perform in Manhattan? And every single time I say yes because the answer is yes to all that stuff. They're stoked, they're smiling, twinkle in the eye, the whole deal. It's easy to be nervous about performing for people, but once they get one cool performance as a rock band under their belt, it's like let's keep doing this, let's keep doing this. I'm like you guys are going to be very busy.

Dr. Scott Burstein: uh, well, the performances are so different too, like I just to kind of tie that into one of the vignettes I was thinking about like you know, like you start performing, you know I'll get my concert band out there and I'll have, you know, 50 parents struggle to sit through a set of some of my favorite music. You know we're going to do Holst 2, guys, here we go. The second. I have kids on stage that are playing Red Hot Chili Peppers. We're from California. It's illegal to not play the Chili Peppers or Metallica or whatever. The parents are like so excited, um, and actually one of the best things we started doing is we started doing kind of like a battle of the bands, where I'd have like 10 of the different groups in the classroom or out of the classroom come and play and, and you know it was packed. It was, you know, the first year. We were like, all right, everyone can come for free. Next year we're charging admission and we kept doubling it. We got to the point. I was very proud of the fact that we got to the point where we were, um, our principal located us having a mosh pit. And we literally had a flam pit in our auditorium and I told him it would be fine and it was fine and the school police were like I can't believe this worked out so well. We were free to do things like make sure kids are being safe. But then my principal gave me the best compliment I've ever had. She didn't give me very many, but at this one she said you know, like we need to find more people that can do what Scott does with the modern band program. You know those are kids that aren't going to join any of the clubs at school. They're not going to school dances, not going to the football game. They're the kids failing many of their classes and are in danger of dropping out. And they all show up to go to these concerts and they all show up to be in his class or doing well there, like it speaks to to them. So I think that's like a really important feature is that you know it really changes the community, changes the parents. It changes, you know, the school notices the administration, and the last quick thing I'll say is so for my dissertation I did a study of students 10 years after graduating from my program and it was a specific class I did. That was this modern band with 40 kids. It was really unique how we have the class, because I broke them into eight groups and every five weeks they'd have to perform two songs and then they'd switch bands and they couldn't perform the same people twice. We did different genres of music each time, they chose the song they had to do everything and it was super fun and really engaging and it was really unique.

We you know our final project that they performed at the whiskey the go go on sunset strip here and and, like they had to, they had to book it, they had to sell the tickets, they had to get a bus to get people there if they wanted an audience. It was. It was great. But when I interviewed them 10 years later, the thing that I didn't realize that was super engaging was like my class was filled with two types of kids. There was definitely the guitar kid. Right, you know these kids are failing a lot of classes. They're kind of social outcasts. They're most of them playing in, you know, the progressive death metal bands in their spare time in in downtown LA., and there was tons of kids that were into that. And then you had all these kids. Many of them were in their foreign language magnet from the school, many of them were AP students doing really well. So it's just split these kids that were like the popular, smart, doing really well, you know, societally, you know like school smarts kind of stuff. Um, and they talked about one of the one of the students specifically talked about the fact that she went in there thinking, wow, you know, I'm here with all these guys I'm kind of scared of, they don't do well. And like, within a couple of weeks, every one of those AP kids are looking up to those other kids. They become the coolest kids in class. They were asking them where their gigs were and showing up to their gigs on the weekend and it was complete cultural juxtaposition of what happened. You know these honors and AP kids, all of a sudden they didn't know what to do. They couldn't leave the instruction because they're like just give me some paper I can read and play what's on the page. And the other kids are like no, no, no, here's how we do things. And they led it and they put together and they and they all got along so well, they're all still friends. So I thought that was like a really unique thing. There's a place for everybody. You know, when you, when you're doing it and you're listening to what they want, what their needs are, there's a place for them. And rather than turning kids away that are, you know, like in ninth grade I didn't get music instruction. What can I be? And they're like well, sorry, there's no room for you in the music program at the school. You know.

Alfredo Hernandez: Yeah, that's huge. Cause, like I, I come from that, so that. So I, I grew up in New York where, like I, didn't have music class until high school and even then it was like the beginning of a music program. So I, I all the music came from the essential elements, books, um, and when I got to college and I started doing music in college, all the like I remember, like the how jarring was to like get a jazz stand and put in front of you and all the kids are excited to play it and I'm like I've never heard this song in my life. I don't. So, like you know, giving them the head start in a way that isn't necessarily like drilling something into their head that they don't listen to naturally, uh, I think, like you know, it's been a pleasure for me. I have kids who graduated uh, my inaugural modern band graduated last may, um, and like two of them have gone to major, they're majored in music upstate. I forget the colleges, but like they'll write me messages about how their guitar lessons are going or what new scales they're practicing and how their jazz, uh, combo, is going, and I'm like you know that I think that's my success story, seeing. So, my inaugural band we started three years ago and they graduated last year but they had done so much for our school and for education and music that I knew like halfway through. I'm like this has to keep going after this and we were able to raise funds to send the 10 members of the inaugural band with their own guitars and basses and drum sets you know like solid instruments that you know like, because they got to the point, I think halfway through the first year where they outgrew those first act guitars that you know cut your hands when you slide

down the fretboard. Now you see them walking around with their gig bags and you know their practice guitars. It's great, I think that's what. Yeah, I did a lot with my group. We went on tour of middle schools. We performed a couple times in some cool places. Tom got to see them over at the World Trade Center, they're performers you know.

Dr. Tom Zlabinger: And once you get that engagement, you know that engagement becomes ownership, right, these students are doing things they want to do, and those students who are telling those other students oh, this is how we do it, they get to be the person who has the wisdom, right, they get to be the expert, right. And so that's a nice thing for them, and it's also a nice thing for the other students who are humble enough to ask for help, right, and it's something that they're, it's not written on a page, you're gonna be okay, we're still gonna make sound. And I love when we see students really take the music and push it inside themselves and it becomes, instead of it being on a sheet of music, on a music stand, and they're like, uh, uh, you know it's, they're shining almost, the stuff is just shining out of them and that's a beautiful, beautiful thing

Nick: We've talked about some of the uh advantages that starting a modern band program, uh will offer in a given setting, but what are some of the challenges in starting this kind of program and what advice would you offer to teachers who are thinking of doing the same thing?

Alfredo Hernandez: I think it's a lot like what Joe talked about beginning. It's like music, especially in New York city, is like considered that break for every other teacher. You know, like there's a big fight to legitimize music club you and then you throw in pop music or rock music that isn't considered, you know it's not considered a stuffy thing, you know, right away you get looks right when they hear that you're doing music, that's not considered like very educational. So at the beginning of it I feel like it's like it's a 50-50, right. Like if you start this program and you don't make headway at a decent enough speed you could lose all traction. You know, like if Joe didn't do such a good job of his group he didn't get that hookup from his school. You know, same thing for me. I tried to move as fast as I could as soon as I started that group. You know, donated a lot of my time to just ensure the success, because I knew if I didn't do that it would just be another after school club that kind of just got waved off you know.

Dr. Tom Zlabinger: The student engagement is oxygen. That's what keeps things going. And so you, and that's gonna change what the students are into is going to change, sometimes very quickly, and you can't just rely on Beethoven and Duke Ellington, et cetera, et cetera. And if you're going to do it right, if you're going to make this stuff, dare I say, sexy, if you're going to make it have mojo, to me it all starts with the drums. You don't want to be like, yeah, we've got modern band and it sounds like poo, right. So you know, one of the challenges for me is getting drummers up to speed and getting them locked into the back, that back beat right. Give it that, because you know that. Get it that, just that glorious thing that we all love going, and then you can build that stuff on top of it. And I know I'm hypersensitive to it as a bass player, but people in the audience are gonna know if the stuff doesn't feel right, and so we're talking more about feel than anything, and getting our students to talk about music that way is not that hard. How does it feel? It feels good, it feels weak, it feels strong. But to translate that into actionable items, if

you will like, okay, what do we need to fix? That's when we come in, those of us who've been doing this for a long time we need to fix that there, we need to fix that there, we need to fix that there. And then you tweak it and it slowly rises over time. But developing that foundation to build on to me is the hardest thing. Otherwise it's just, it's just always wobbly or it falls back down, and so I spent a lot of time working with our drummers to give us the rails of the train.

Dr. Joe Demarco: Something I do often is I actually open with these questions of like, how does it feel? Okay, and they'll, they'll tell you. They'll give you the correct answer and we'll say, okay, well, let's, I'll be like, let's analyze this. You know what, what about it feels this way and you know, without pointing fingers and calling names, they'll give you the correct answer. And then I say, well, how can we fix this? And you know that that question is either met with a bunch of suggestions or radio silence, and either one of those answers are totally fine, because what that does is open the floor for discussion for them to have amongst themselves. And if they can't have that discussion just yet, it's a totally teachable moment for us, because that's what we're good at, that's playing to our strengths. That's when we can step in. They've already analyzed the problems themselves. They just don't have the solution. Well, guess, who does? You know we can, from experience, we can show you and tell you how we can fix these minor problems and then, just like that, everything sounds a whole lot better. As people who grew up with this music, as people who love this music, I think playing to our strengths is kind of everything. And I think we're in this unique situation where, like I mean, let's be honest, every single one of us, how much have we really grown up since middle school? Do you know what I mean? You know what I mean. Like we become who we are in those years. I still feel like the same person. I still like the same things, still have the same crazy sense of humor, and you know. So. This is. We're dealing with age groups that we can relate to in that way. You know what I mean and and they feed off that energy. You know it's not hard to get stoked about something you love, you know, and that energy is contagious.

Dr. Scott Burstein: It's funny you say that because, like I think about, you know, and that energy is contagious. It's funny you say that because, like I think about, uh, you know where I taught all these kids were into heavy metal. That's so weird. I didn't tell them that I was in the heavy metal, but also they were. And then meanwhile I can know other teachers that are like singer songwriters, like all my kids love singer songwriter music and I'm like we, we do like rub off on them because their personality comes out. Um it just to kind of answer the question from a little bit more of a holistic kind of um, where, you know, being a little bit out of the box and being in the role I've been for the last um decade or so, um, I think the thing that I find is the largest barrier for people, um, when they come in, is thinking that just because we're doing music kids like or popular music, it's going to fix everything. Like, oh, I'm having trouble, oh, I'm having trouble teaching orchestra and I'm having trouble teaching concert band, but if I teach the music kids like it's going to, it's yay, no, it's. You have to be a teacher. You still have to know basic, important teaching things. You have to have classroom control. So, like you know my class, I know that the most important thing for any teacher is to not be afraid to fail. Just fail and learn from the mistakes you make. Everything I talk about when I run workshops are all mistakes I made at some point in my own teaching career. So I think that one of the things that you know I've learned through a bunch of failing is you know, you can't just like walk in and be

like, all right, what do you guys want to do today? Okay, we'll do that. And unstructured time Like I'm learning. Okay, we're going to walk in, I've got something on the board. You guys are going to do this activity I'm going to take roll, okay, now we're going to review what we did before, now we're going to play a song a couple of times, We're going to work on it, it's not good enough just to play it we have to find out how we can make it better or ask their advice, use their ears. So once you kind of have structure like that, it makes it so much easier. But I do think that that kind of not being afraid to learn from your mistakes is important. Like, I know some teachers that were like man, despacito is the song and all the kids love it. We came back from summer, that's all they want to learn. Six weeks later. Well, we're going to play it in our concert in another five weeks, but the kids are sick of it, they don't want to do it anymore. And that's my entire syllabus. And I'm like well, have you thought about changing your syllabus? I can't. I passed it out. You can change it, you can do whatever you want to do. Keep on changing and growing. And I think, by that token, also when you think about just doing popular music, especially if your background isn't in it, the thing that I learned that was maybe the most valuable lesson is that music is in the eye of the beholder. There's no such thing as bad music and there's no such thing as good music. There is only music as the students love it. I know I had some students that used to come in. You know it was the early two thousands to be like hey Burstein, have you checked out this new band? They're called Slipknot. You're going to love them. They're so cool. I'm like that's trash man. Listen to Metallica. That's good music. And you know what's the lesson the kid's getting from that? The kid's getting the lesson that I don't care about what they like, and my taste probably stinks. So why should they listen to me? Because they love this, and you know it took me a long time to recognize. And, you know, eventually some kid brought in some band and I finally listened to it. I can still remember the band was Opeth, and I listened and I was like this is the most impressive thing I've ever heard. I love this. I'm going to. This is my life now and it just made me realize, like oh, their own opinions that sometimes they can teach me something. And it just changed everything about my class because they started respecting me more and because I respected them, and it just kind of grew to this place where I recognize, just because I've done all this studying of music in school for year after year, it doesn't mean that I have all the answers. That's not how music works. That's not the beauty of music. I spend most of my time now playing music I don't enjoy and I've learned that playing music I don't enjoy is way more fun for me than playing music I enjoy. Because when I play the music I enjoy, nobody cares. There'll be three guitar players out in the audience that are like I could do that better than you can, and that's like the only people there when I'm playing my crazy, weird stuff. But when I'm playing songs, other people are enjoying that, maybe I don't cause too pop-y or whatever, I have a blast, I can be free with it. I see the enjoyment, you feel the vibe of the audience. So that's been a big lesson for me, and so that's why I love teaching music I don't know. I learn it, I figure it out, and it just makes for a much better experience for the kids and for myself.

Noah: With that we conclude another episode of Education Through Music, the podcast. Thanks so much for listening. As always, we hope you'll review, subscribe and share so others can tune in. To become a supporter and ensure more children have access to music education. Please visit ETMonline.org.