

LEARNING MUSIC TOGETHER

By Jeff McGill

*A good musician is someone who says “how can I contribute?” –
that’s what music is about. – Yo-Yo Ma*

A student who studies a musical instrument develops their overall “musicianship” in several ways during their weekly lesson and daily practice. The process of becoming a skilled soloist can be realized through a balanced program of technique, sight-reading, theory and repertoire. There is also another aspect of a student’s musical growth – that of becoming a member of a performing group – which requires practice, experience and the learning of specific skills.

Instrumentalists can benefit greatly from being involved in a wide range of performing groups. School music programs often make available more than one playing situation for students. Whether it be an orchestra, concert band, stage band, jazz ensemble or marching band, each playing experience will offer its members an opportunity to develop their rhythmic skills, tone, and phrasing in ways that may be somewhat unique to the type of music that they are playing. The result can be a very well-rounded musician.

Learning music is an interactive process. A student who is involved in a performing group or ensemble will learn both from the instructor as well as his or her fellow students. The lessons of cooperation and teamwork can be a wonderful musical experience, as well as a valuable life experience.

Certain styles of music are best learned within a small group or ensemble. A student who is interested in jazz, for example, needs the chance to practice improvising with an instructor’s guidance and a supportive group of fellow musicians. While a jazz student may learn some of the skills needed to play in this style through private instruction, they must also have ample opportunity to exercise those skills with a group in order to “speak the language” with others. A string student who plays in an orchestra can learn both a new repertoire as well as a great deal about articulation by playing within a smaller chamber group. Piano students may find that a keyboard ensemble or group piano class can afford them many of these same benefits. Specific repertoire exists for flute ensembles, saxophone quartets and many other unique instrumental combinations.

Musical enrichment exists for students in as many different ways as there are students. Finding which combination of experience is right for the individual can be both a fun and rewarding journey.

Jeff McGill is director of the Music Learning Center in Danbury, where a variety of ensemble programs are offered. He has personally led numerous student performing groups as well as taught privately over the past twenty five years. For more information visit www.musiclearningcenter.org, or call (203) 748-1444.