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# Something's happening here: Popular music education in the United States

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# “Something’s Happening Here!”: Popular Music Education in the United States

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## Abstract

Although the number of opportunities to learn popular music in the United States continues to grow, popular music education (PME) programs remain exceptional at primary, secondary, and tertiary levels of institutionalized music education. This article provides insight into the unique characteristics of a number of PME initiatives currently operating in the United States. A historical background is established to provide context regarding the history of PME in the United States. Additionally, a focus on an expanding landscape for American PME is included, as is an examination of six specific initiatives that are particularly noteworthy. This review of popular music programs, initiatives, and institutions illustrates the rapid proliferation of PME programs in the United States that has occurred in the twenty-first century. As this brief snapshot of American institutions

and organizations demonstrates, PME in the United States is alive with possibilities and promise.

KEYWORDS: Popular music education, United States, music history, modern band, commercial music

## Historical Foundations

According to American music education historian Jere Humphreys (2004: 92), popular music has “been taught continuously in American schools from the beginning, arguably more so than in other countries. However, the American music education establishment did not formally acknowledge popular music as worthy of being taught until the ‘Tanglewood Declaration’ of 1968”. The academic discourse regarding the history of American PME often begins with the Tanglewood Declaration, the summary statement of a group of fifty musicians, music educators, sociologists, scientists, labor leaders, corporate executives, and government officials gathered together at a symposium sponsored by the Music Educators National Conference (MENC, the largest organization in the US representing music teachers, now known as NAFME, the National Association for Music Education) from July 23 - August 2, 1967 in Tanglewood, Massachusetts. In the Tanglewood Declaration, published in 1968, the group concluded that,

Music of all periods, styles, forms, and cultures belongs in the curriculum. The musical repertory should be expanded to involve music of our time in its rich variety, including currently popular teen-age music and avant-garde music, American folk music, and the music of other cultures. (Choate 1968: 139)

British music education scholar Gareth Dylan Smith (2014: 43) has observed, “‘Music education’ in higher education in the USA tends to refer to the teaching of music teachers, rather to the teaching of music as it does elsewhere in the world”. Using Smith’s broad definition of music education, PME in the United States can be traced back to the singing schools and tune-books of the Colonial Era.

During the course of the nineteenth century, popular music in the United States was buoyed by the growth of three music industry sectors: music publishing, concert promotion, and musical instrument manufacturing. The growing role of professional music educators helped to disseminate both classical and popular music repertoire and performance practices, serving a population interested in learning instrumental and vocal music. In fact, American music historian Richard Crawford (2000) viewed the development of music education as the foundation of the American music business. Singing schools led by itinerant music teachers continued to proliferate during the antebellum period but began to decline in the years leading up to the Civil War, following the introduction of formal music education into the Boston public schools by Lowell Mason in 1838.

In the latter half of the nineteenth century, cultural hierarchies began to be delineated, creating boundaries between the art music tradition, as promulgated

by the newly established conservatories, college music programs, orchestras, and elegant concert halls, and the popular music tradition, as exemplified by minstrel shows, vaudeville, and the songs of Tin Pan Alley. According to American historian Lawrence Levine (1988), the patronage of the art music tradition with its attendant extra-musical customs (such as dress and concert behavior), were used to distinguish the tastes of the emerging White Anglo-Saxon Protestant elite from the musical styles preferred by members of ethnic minorities.

The masterworks of the classic composers were to be performed in their entirety by highly trained musicians on programs free from the contamination of lesser works or lesser genres [...] audiences were to approach the masters and their works with proper respect and proper seriousness, for aesthetic and spiritual elevation rather than mere entertainment was the goal. (ibid.: 146)

While popular music styles such as ragtime flourished during the early years of the twentieth century, most American music educators were determined to uplift the musical level of the public. One result of this effort was the “music appreciation” movement, with teachers hoping to inculcate students with the ability to discern the inherent superior aesthetic properties of the European art music repertory (Mark 2007: 292-296). As technology, mass immigration, and urbanization transformed American culture, popular music became even more widely disseminated with sheet music sales mushrooming and new listening devices such as player pianos and phonographs becoming purveyors of the most current popular music (Sanjek 1996). Although most public school music educators avoided popular music as unworthy of serious study, private music schools were established to offer students the opportunity to study popular music. The Christensen School of Popular Music, founded in Chicago in 1903 by Axel Christensen, eventually served over 200,000 students in ninety-two branches nationwide (Edwards 2011). In addition to popular music schools, PME was expanded through the use of instructional books, magazines, and correspondence courses.

Even though it has not been well documented, popular music was included in a number of American high schools as early as the 1920s. At the Music Supervisors National Conference annual meeting held in Detroit in 1926, Clarence Byrn, the head of the music department at Detroit’s Cass Technical High School, described his popular music program, proclaiming,

Let me go on record as utterly opposed to this un-American attitude of many American school music teachers. Let me urge you all to study the musical needs and demands of our coming citizens before condemning them. Let us teach our music students how to earn a living and how to interpret the customs, longings and aspirations of our own generation, as well as those of the Troubadours and Meistersingers. (Byrn 1926: 243-4)

In Los Angeles, Samuel Browne, band director at Jefferson High School, incorporated current jazz styles in his program in the 1930s, and produced a generation of acclaimed jazz musicians, such as saxophonist Dexter Gordon,

drummer Chico Hamilton, trumpeter Art Farmer, and trombonist Horace Tapscott. During the Great Depression, dance bands and vocal groups dominated the American popular music landscape. With Hollywood becoming an important center for the film, radio, and recording industries, several junior colleges in the Los Angeles metropolitan area began to offer popular music courses aimed to prepare students for careers in these industries. Pasadena Junior College appears to be the first American post-secondary institution to offer a popular music course Practical Music Arranging in 1933. Led by band director Dwight Defty, Long Beach Junior College was the first institution to offer a popular music degree, Modern Music, in 1937, followed by Los Angeles City College with its Curricula for Dance Musicians in 1939. While jazz education historians have previously cited Los Angeles City College for its role in the postwar development of jazz education, current research identifies 1939 as the first year of the popular music degree program (“Curricula for Dance Musicians”). Course catalogs at Long Beach Junior College, Los Angeles Junior College, and Los Angeles Junior College, all included the qualifier “popular” music in their course descriptions (Krikun 2014).

At a roundtable discussion at the MENC national conference in 1938 in St. Louis, Fred Beidelman, a music professor at San Diego State Teachers College, noted the results of a survey, in which he discovered that seven junior colleges in California were offering courses in popular music. The music educators at the conference also discussed the appropriateness of teaching jazz and popular music in the curriculum (Krikun 2008). The eminent sociologist Max Kaplan, a music instructor at Pueblo Junior College in Colorado from 1938-1945, was a strong advocate for the modernization of the music curriculum. In a 1943 article, he observed,

Somehow, we have refused to pollute our Divine Mission by beginning from the assumption that music is something that permeates every nook and cranny of most of our lives [...]. If Johnny came into a harmony class with the object of learning how to arrange for his jazz band or to write popular music, we pulled out our old harmony texts with all their junk-heap of rules and more rules. (Kaplan 1943: 343)

Following World War II, the surge in college enrollment, the availability of tuition-free education under the G.I. Bill, and the musical education that veterans had received during their military service, combined to produce a pressing need for the education of musicians wishing to develop the skills necessary to pursue careers as professional musicians. In 1945, pianist, composer and arranger Lawrence Berk founded the Schillinger House (later to be known as the Berklee College of Music) in Boston, offering students a diploma in the Schillinger System of Arranging and Composition, consisting of dance band arranging, instrumental and vocal performance, and musicianship courses (Hazell 1995). The same year, educator Alvin L. Learned founded Westlake College of Music in Los Angeles in 1945 to prepare students for careers in the Hollywood studios (Spencer 2013). In 1946, Los Angeles City College inaugurated its “Commercial Music” program, led by former big band arranger Bob MacDonald, and North Texas State College established a dance

band curriculum under the direction of Gene Hall (Krikun 2014; Joyner 2013). These programs are often highlighted by jazz education historians as seminal to the history of American jazz education (Prouty 2012) but can be more aptly described as popular music programs due to their practical training and the central role of the dance band. During the 1950s and 1960s, existing and new programs began to differentiate into jazz studies and commercial music.

Following the publication of the Tanglewood Declaration in 1968, a number of music educators continued to advocate for the inclusion of popular music in the K-12 curriculum. The *Music Educators Journal*, published by MENC, first devoted a special issue to the topic in November 1969, titled "Youth Music: A Special Report". Over the following decades, other special issues and articles have discussed the role of popular music in the curriculum. Music educators David Hebert and Patricia Shehan Campbell (2000) have summarized and addressed these controversies in their article "Rock Music in American Schools: Positions and Practices Since the 1960s".

During the 1970s, several community colleges in the Southwest established music programs focusing on country and bluegrass music, often with the support of country music performers and country music industry executives. The Hank Thompson School of Country and Western Music was established at Oklahoma's Claremont Junior College (now Rogers State University) in 1973. South Plains College in Levelland, Texas, founded its Commercial Music program in 1975, specializing in country and bluegrass. In the following years, a number of community colleges and state college campuses in the Southern and Southwestern US began to offer country and bluegrass as part of the music curriculum.

Although popular music had become a staple in community college commercial music programs, it was in the fields of musicology and ethnomusicology that popular music gained entrance to the curricula of elite American research universities. Popular music studies, consisting of both interdisciplinary research as well as the emerging field of New Musicology, began to take root in American college and university music programs during the last two decades of the twentieth century. The International Association for the Study of Popular Music (IASPM) was founded in 1981 and soon established a chapter in the United States. Musicologists Jason Hanley and Susan Oehler, of the Rock Hall of Fame and Museum Education department, were instrumental in promoting music pedagogy as an IASPM initiative. In 2006, a Popular Music Pedagogy Committee was formed and the Popular Music Pedagogy Interest Group was established in the following year. Hanley and Oehler co-edited a *Journal of Popular Music Studies* special issue on popular music pedagogy in 2009.

## An Expanding Landscape: Popular Music Education in the US

Whereas the previous section of this article established historical background and context regarding PME in the United States, this section will focus on an expanding landscape for American PME. Although fully delineating that

landscape would require greater space than available in this article, this section should provide readers with an overview of noteworthy examples of PME programs that emerged from distinct fields of activity. A subsequent section of this article will focus, with greater detail, on select examples drawn from this overview.

Recent developments in the United States suggest that inclusion of popular music in American music education is increasing, that something is indeed happening here. Heretofore, popular music studies largely resided outside the quotidian offerings of music departments. In primary and secondary education, popular music courses often focused on history and could be found in social studies, history, English, and to lesser degrees general music curricula. In tertiary education, popular music studies has had a longer, more established history in disciplines such as communication, media studies, sociology and cultural studies than in music, with musicology and ethnomusicology serving sometimes as exceptions (Krikun 2010). Aspiring popular musicians could seek out private tuition from individual teachers or from teaching studios in music instrument retail shops but organized study of popular music was rare, especially study that included practical music making subjects such as performance or composition.

Today, wide-ranging options for the study of popular music exist for young musicians ages 4-18. Similarly, scores of vocational, college, and university programs have developed for various populations of students across the US. Although no national program for popular music exists in the US, institutional and regional PME initiatives have emerged, many in just the first two decades of the twenty-first century. Primary, secondary, and tertiary education institutions; for profit music education ventures; and non-profit or non-governmental organizations have driven the proliferation of such programs.

A program recently implemented in the Metro Nashville Public Schools (MNPS) might be among the most notable examples of PME in US public schools that are currently in operation. In 2012, The Metro Nashville Public Schools system (MNPS) in the state of Tennessee launched Music Makes Us (MMU), a joint venture between the public school administration, the Mayor of Nashville (the Honorable Karl Dean), and leaders from the city's music industry sector (Music Makes Us 2014). According to the Project's vision statement, MMU seeks to support traditional and contemporary music in public schools with an emphasis on participatory music making. The MMU program develops contemporary music ensembles in genres such as hip hop, rock, bluegrass, and country throughout Nashville public schools. Further, the program focuses on songwriting, audio production, and music industry education to help develop student musicianship, music participation, and cultural and media literacy. In addition to the MNPS and the Mayor of Nashville, sponsors, benefactors, and advisors are drawn from Nashville's formidable music industry and arts community. Notable supporters include Bonnaroo Works Fund, the Gibson Foundation, Warner Music Nashville, The Recording Academy's Producers and Engineers Wing, philanthropist Martha Ingram, and recording industry legend Mike Curb (MMU Facebook page 2014; Music Makes Us 2014).

A similar initiative is underway for the New York City Public School system. Known as Amp Up NYC, the program is spearheaded by Little Kids Rock, a non-profit charitable organization founded by public school music teacher David

Wish. Little Kids Rock have developed a Modern Band curriculum, consisting of guitar, keyboard, bass, drums, vocals, composition, and technology. Amp Up NYC is a joint venture between Little Kids Rock, the New York Department of Education, and the Berklee College of Music in Boston (About Amp Up 2014). Amp Up will help establish popular music programs in 600 New York City public schools (Tempera 2014). Music Makes US and Amp Up NYC are but two examples, noted here for their historically unprecedented scope, scale, and potential influence. Other examples abound, often started in schools by teachers who exhibit the intentionality to stand apart from prevailing music education practices (Pignato 2013: 9, 13).

In addition to public school programs, a number of organizations, for profit and not, have developed summer schools, campus, and afterschool programs for primary and secondary school aged musicians. Institutions such as the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in Cleveland, the Experience Music Project in Seattle, the Stax Music Academy in Memphis, and the Grammy Foundation in Los Angeles, have offered workshops and camps for both students and educators interested in popular music, since the 1990s. Summer camps featuring popular music instruction have also flourished in the past two decades. Oberlin Conservatory, which has long offered a prestigious secondary school summer program for classical music, launched Music for Everyone (MFE), a songwriting based popular music program, in 2009 (Oberlin 2014). Music for Everyone uses a songwriting based curriculum that features audio production training and a recording label for participants to publish their work (Oberlin 2014).

The emergence of non-governmental organizations dedicated to pop music instruction represents another, relatively new strand in PME in the United States. Organizations such as Little Kids Rock, Girls Rock, the Travelling Guitar Foundation, and The Rock and Roll Forever Foundation have offered programming, instruction, camps, afterschool programs, and curricula for use in and out of school music programs. Girls Rock Alliance, a non-profit organization that started in Portland, Oregon in 2007, runs summer camps for girls, all around the US and abroad. Girls Rock camps vary from location to location but share a commitment to and focus on developing the personal expression and self-esteem of participants by engaging them in popular music performance (Girls Rock 2014). Another non-profit organization, The Traveling Guitar Foundation, provides public schools with guitars and other instruments to supplement diminished music education programming (Traveling Guitar 2014). The Foundation travels to schools, particularly those schools that have suffered cuts in music education programs, and provides instruments, training for students and for music teachers, and ongoing support of fledgling popular music programs.

Perhaps the most ambitious of the non-profit initiatives is Rock and Roll: An American Story, a rock music history curriculum developed by Steven Van Zandt of Bruce Springsteen and the E Street Band. The project, an initiative of Van Zandt's Rock and Roll Forever Foundation, has attracted some major partners including the National Association for Music Education, the National Council for the Social Studies, The Grammy Foundation, and New York University. The initiative draws rich media from commercial partners such as ABC News and delivers materials to schools through Scholastic, the largest educational publisher in the US (Teach Rock 2014).



In addition to non-profit enterprises, a rising tide of private education ventures has provided American school aged musicians with opportunities to study outside of school in private tuition and in working bands that participate in battles, festivals, and even in regional tours. The largest brand among these programs is School of Rock, a commercial venture that uses a franchise model to develop for profit schools that offer private tuition, band participation, and afterschool programming in suburban and urban centers around the US. Founded by Paul Green in Philadelphia in 2002, the School of Rock now serves over 10,000 students in more than one hundred locations in thirty-one states.

Other examples of for profit popular music schools exist on the primary, secondary and even tertiary levels. Paul Green’s Rock Academy, started by the founder of School of Rock, the Woodstock Academy, and the Yo Yo School of Hip Hop offer programs for primary, middle, and secondary school aged children. Full Sail University, McNally Smith University, and Musicians Institute represent for profit programs that offer undergraduate and, in the case of McNally Smith, graduate degrees in popular music production or performance. In addition, students across the United States continue to receive their PME from private music teachers at makeshift schools housed as part of musical instrument retail stores, as well as from instructional books, magazines, videos, and websites.

As Music Makes Us and Little Kids Rock have done with primary and secondary education, a number of American undergraduate music and music education programs have incorporated popular music programs. Some of those programs have PME at their core, for example, in 2009, the University of Southern California’s Thornton School of Music launched a Bachelor of Music in Popular Music Studies program, one of the first to be offered in a conservatory style higher education context and the first comprehensive popular music major (specialist music degree) offered by an American liberal arts university system (Greenwald 2013). The USC Popular Music Studies program received approval from the National Association of Schools of Music (NASM) in 2010.

Similarly, the Bruce Hornsby Creative American Music Program at the University of Miami’s Frost School of Music (BHCAMP) offers songwriters and musicians interested in popular styles opportunities to work in cooperative groups via a project-based curriculum. The program’s offerings are available to all undergraduate music students at the University of Miami, no matter what their major and students from other majors throughout the University at large can take most of the courses (Bruce Hornsby 2014).

Other programs feature popular music as part of particularized majors such as the popular music offerings at the State University of New York, Oneonta (SUNY Oneonta). The SUNY Oneonta Music Industry program offers a number of popular music ensemble courses including jam bands, funk ensembles, a rock repertory ensemble, as well as songwriting and production courses focused on popular repertoire (SUNY Oneonta 2014). Still others, such as New Jersey’s Bergen Community College, offer popular music instruction in the context of two-year long vocational training programs or to prepare students for applications to four-year colleges and universities (Bergen Community College 2014). Some, such as Eastern Tennessee State University’s Bluegrass, Old Time,

and Country Music, straddle popular styles, folk styles, and traditional music (Eastern Tennessee State University 2014).

Many other such programs have emerged in the midst of otherwise traditional music education programs. Music teacher training programs represent a clear example of this phenomenon. Music teacher training programs in the US are somewhat restrictive with regard to the total number of credits students must complete. Required history, theory, and performance courses revolve around the European art music tradition and marginalize multicultural and popular music practices (Wang and Humphreys 2009). Further, music teacher training programs primarily focus on select institutions of US music education, such as concert and marching bands, orchestras, and choral music (Pignato 2010).

Nonetheless, a number of prominent music teacher education programs have developed popular music ensembles, songwriting, and audio production courses as part of their traditional pre-service teacher training programs. Examples include songwriting courses for music education majors at Michigan State University (MSU Songwriters 2014), songwriting and rock ensembles for music majors at the University of Nebraska, Lincoln (Richmond 2013), and an innovative popular music methods program, "Creative Performance Chamber Ensemble", implemented in the undergraduate music education programs at the University of South Florida (Randles 2011).

As one might surmise, the proliferation of popular music programs in primary and secondary education, at vocational schools and universities, and via non-profit and for profit ventures has captured the attention of scholars in music education research. Consequently, a number of scholarly gatherings focused on education and music learning have proliferated. Examples include the Show and Prove Conference on Hip Hop at NYU in 2012; the Suncoast Music Education Research Symposium in 2011; the Popular Music in Education Symposium convened at Kansas State University, Manhattan, KS, in June 2009; and a special panel at the American Educational Research Association in 2008. In 2007, Garth Alper, a jazz studies professor at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette, published a proposal for a Bachelor of Music in Popular Music Studies degree in the College Music Symposium.

Finally, in 2010, Chris Sampson, the director of the popular music program at the University of Southern California, chaired a new organization dedicated to the promotion and advancement of PME, the Association for Popular Music Education (APME). The charter members consisted of American colleges and universities with active popular music programs, including Belmont University, Berklee College of Music, Catawba College, Greenville College, McNally Smith College of Music, Middle Tennessee State University, New York University, University of Colorado Denver, University of Memphis, University of Miami, and the University of Southern California. In the following years, additional colleges including Bergen Community College and the State University of New York at Oneonta, joined the executive board. The organization has grown each year and has hosted annual conferences in Boston, Nashville, Minneapolis, and Los Angeles (APME About 2014). The APME, which hosted its fourth annual conference in Los Angeles in June of 2014 exists to "promote and advance popular music at all levels of education both in the classroom and beyond" (APME About 2014).

The cursory review of popular music programs, initiatives, and institutions provided in this section illustrates the rapid proliferation of PME programs in the United States that has occurred in the first two decades of the twenty-first century. The review is not comprehensive but rather a sampling of representative programs available to aspiring popular musicians in the United States. The following section of this article provides more in-depth consideration of select initiatives drawn from this review.

## Sample Popular Music Education Programs in the US

As Mantie (2013) highlighted, differences in popular music pedagogy discourse exist between the United States and international perspectives. These different discourses arise in part from the variety of contexts in which PME manifests itself in the US. Although there are several noteworthy institutions and organizations that are engaged in PME within the United States, we have chosen the following because they epitomize different classifications in the world of PME.

- University of Southern California (private research university school of music);
- State University of New York, Oneonta (state university college campus);
- Bergen Community College (public community college);
- McNally Smith College of Music (for profit – proprietary – college);
- Little Kids Rock (a non-profit organization);
- The Association for Popular Music Education (a professional organization for those engaged in PME).

The following section will include brief summaries of PME in these institutions and organizations in an attempt to provide a snapshot of the diversity of PME in the United States.

### *University of Southern California*

The University of Southern California (USC) is a private research university located in Los Angeles, California whose Contemporary Music department contains a Popular Music Performance program. This program, founded in 2009, seeks to meet the needs of students who would like to study music, but are not interested in traditional collegiate classical or jazz music offerings. USC's Bachelor of Music in Popular Music Performance degree offers students a broad range of musical experiences. In addition to music history, theory and songwriting, students also learn about aspects of the business including marketing, publicity, entertainment law, and record promotion. Another unique requirement of the Popular Music program at USC is that all students are required to complete a drum set proficiency course so that they can better understand the role of the rhythm section in popular music programs. In addition to the core requirements, students are also encouraged to take additional classes in music industry and music technology so they might supplement their musical learning.

In an interview with the *Los Angeles Times* in 2008, Chris Sampson, the Vice Dean of the Division of Contemporary Music and the Founding Director of Popular Music Program stated, "The whole idea is that we'll be bringing it all together under one umbrella [...]. We are building a network of people in different disciplines, whether in technology, business or law [...] and within a college atmosphere, students will have some room to experiment" (Lewis 2008).

Students interested in the Popular Music Program at USC must first go through a pre-screening audition, which requires a video submission to the department. The submissions are then winnowed down to a group of students who are then invited for a live audition at USC. For the 2014-2015 school year, USC received over 400 applications for twenty-five spots in the Popular Music program. While it might seem initially concerning that 94% of applicants that apply to USC are denied admission, USC provides a selective, conservatory-style PME for the top student applicants

### *State University of New York, Oneonta*

SUNY Oneonta is a member of the State University of New York system, one of the largest comprehensive systems of public higher education in the United States. The Music Department at SUNY Oneonta offers two majors one in Music and the other in Music Industry. The Music major offers a traditional course of study focused on the literature and history of Western art music. The Music Industry program differs considerably. Although Music Industry studies at Oneonta focus on the business aspects of music, media, and entertainment, popular music studies permeate the curriculum. The Music Industry program is one of the largest programs of this type in the country with approximately 350 Music Industry majors at this time of writing. To serve this population of students, the Music Department at SUNY Oneonta offers several performance ensembles that play popular music. Indeed, one of the stated objectives of the SUNY Oneonta music industry program is, "Students will perform in areas appropriate to their need and interest [...] and develop an ability to realize a variety of musical styles" (SUNY College at Oneonta Music Department 2014). The performance ensembles at SUNY Oneonta have included a jam band, a Frank Zappa repertory ensemble, several rock combos, a Latin jazz ensemble, a jazz big band, a jazz octet, two funk bands, an R&B band, and a New Orleans brass ensemble. Enrollments in these courses are open to all students, regardless of major. Participation in these popular music ensembles offers students the opportunity to perform off-campus in venues such as bars and clubs. This approach resembles Westerlund's (2006) observations that PME activities such as bar gigs might represent ways to increase student expertise by providing authentic performance opportunities outside of the classroom.

The SUNY Oneonta Music Department also offers a minor in audio production. The Department has an expansive set of recording facilities, linked via fiber optics, in which students record projects, bands, rehearsals, and live events. The audio production program exists to train sound engineers but also as a conduit to student work. Student performers work in tandem with student engineers to produce recordings that are then marketed by Music Industry Students who run the campus recording label. Students also develop outside the

formal curriculum through participation in music, production, and music industry clubs such as the Music Industry Club, the Songwriters and Producers Club, and the Audio Production and Engineering Club.

Introduction of popular music ensembles into the Music Industry major at SUNY Oneonta is a strong example of how popular music programs in higher education benefit institutions as well as students. Prior to the introduction of the Music Industry program in the 1980s, the music department at SUNY Oneonta had fewer than ten students who were music majors and only a few full-time faculty (staff). Among the earlier state schools in the United States to develop such a program, the core of Music Industry studies at SUNY Oneonta has always included popular music. That students can play their music, record their projects, and distribute and market their music has attracted applicants who might not fit into traditional tertiary music performance programs.

### *Bergen Community College*

Bergen Community College is a two-year public community college located in Paramus, New Jersey. Although higher education scholars have derided American community colleges with such negative epithets as "the anti-university" (Jenks and Riesman, 1968) and "the contradictory college," (Dougherty 1994) and its professors have been described as "honored but invisible," (Grubb 1999), two-year music programs at these colleges have played a significant role in the development of PME at the post-secondary level. Serving the local community, contemporary community college music programs have comprehensive missions: offering associate degrees for students who are planning to transfer into four-year college music programs at the junior level; preparing other students for immediate employment in the music industry; and offering a variety of music classes to non-music majors for general education and cultural enrichment.

In 2005, Bergen Community College introduced two courses focusing on popular music performance and composition, Pop/Rock Ensemble and Songwriting Workshop. These courses were supplemental to the traditional associate music degree programs in music business, music technology, and general music arts. Although historically community colleges have been able to introduce innovative popular music courses for the attainment of vocational degrees (Krikun 2014), PME programs in community college contexts come with unique challenges (Powell 2011). As an open admissions institution of higher learning aimed to provide increased access to underserved populations, community college music programs face specific pedagogical challenges. These include teaching students with diverse musical backgrounds and learning styles; balancing popular musicianship with issues related to classical and jazz musicianship (such as the role of notation); preparing students for auditions and advanced course work at four-year colleges; and an assortment of administrative issues.

Despite these challenges, the popular music programs at Bergen Community College have grown each year, both in the number of student participants and in the scale of performances and productions. After starting with an enrollment of eleven students in its first semester, the Pop/Rock Ensemble has grown to

regularly have twenty-five students on the course, and has spawned other outlets for musical creativity such as BPM (Business, Production and Music), a student run group dedicated to producing and promoting music events throughout Bergen County. BPM was an offshoot of another new curricular offering, Concert Promotion and Production, which has given students greater opportunities to both produce and perform in showcases and concerts.

American community colleges with vocational programs in music are eligible for federal grants for workplace development, and as in the case of Bergen Community College, feature state-of-the-art music technology in their facilities. In order to smooth the transition for students interested in pursuing popular music at the four-year college level, Bergen Community College has worked on articulation agreements with local colleges and universities with existing popular music programs, such as Ramapo College, William Paterson University, Mercy College, and New York University.

### *McNally Smith College of Music*

McNally Smith College of Music is a for-profit music college located in St. Paul, Minnesota. The college is unique in the USA in the range of degrees and certificates that they offer students; McNally Smith offers bachelors and masters degrees in a range of fields, as well as two-year associates programs and one-year diploma programs. The college offers areas of study that include music performance, music business, music technology, composition and songwriting, hip-hop studies, liberal arts and international studies. According to Cliff Wittstruck, the vice president and provost of McNally Smith, what makes the college unique is that they embrace PME while providing students with diverse musical experiences. In an interview with Wittstruck (2014), he explained that it is common at the college for music students across the college to work collaboratively on a project,

Often times you have a student write an original piece of music, and they might give it to other students who will arrange the piece for a larger ensemble. That ensemble will then go into one of the studios we have here on campus and work with the recording students. Once the song is recorded, the music business students get involved with marketing and promoting the song.

Wittstruck also explained that McNally Smith's for-profit status allows the school to respond quickly to update facilities, offer new courses, and best meet the needs of students. Despite recent growing sentiment that situates for-profit colleges as "inferior alternatives that cost too much, consume more than their fair share of federal student aid, and turn out unprepared graduates who default on their student loans" (Wilson 2010), McNally Smith has been able to avoid such descriptions by not following the typical for-profit college model. Unlike many for-profit institutions that are large conglomerates with shareholders and multiple locations across the United States, McNally Smith is a single institution, founded by Jack McNally and Doug Smith. According to Cliff Wittstruck, another difference between McNally Smith and other for-profit institutions is the focus on student admissions and student retention. Unlike for-profit colleges that have

no audition requirements, McNally Smith requires student auditions where students have to play and/or sing, or for the production and recording majors, students have to show a history of recording. Additionally, students are required to submit an application essay that outlines their career goals as a musician. As a result, Wittstruck touts the college's retention rates and student default rates as being inline with the national averages for all colleges, both for-profit and non-profit.

### *Little Kids Rock and Amp Up NYC*

Founded in 2002 by elementary school teacher David Wish, Little Kids Rock has grown to provide modern band programming to over 300,000 public school students throughout the United States. In addition to training teachers to implement Modern Band instruction in their classrooms, Little Kids Rock has donated over 46,000 instruments including guitars, basses, keyboards, and drum kits to inner-city public schools. Unlike similar for-profit organizations like School of Rock, Little Kids Rock is a non-profit program that offers teacher training, programmatic support, and a full class set of instruments, all at no cost to the teachers or their schools. The training and instruments provided by Little Kids Rock are in support of the inclusion of modern band into the music classroom. Little Kids Rock states that modern band teaches students to "perform, improvise and compose using the popular styles that they know and love including rock, pop, reggae, hip hop, R&B and other modern styles. modern band classes feature guitar, bass, keyboard, drums, vocals and computers" (Little Kids Rock 2014). Little Kids Rock promotes modern band as a new kind of school-based music program that includes several genres and approaches to making music, including traditional rock band instruments as well as electronic composition and beat creation.

In an effort to expand the presence of PME in the New York City Department of Education (the largest school district in the United States), Little Kids Rock and Berklee College of Music announced an initiative in 2013 called Amp Up NYC. This three-year initiative is in support of the New York City Department of Education's efforts to expand and advance modern music programming for students, with the goal of bringing free modern band programming to an additional 600 public schools serving 60,000 students from grades Kindergarten through to 12<sup>th</sup> grade (ages 5-18). According to Amp Up NYC's website, this partnership is based on the shared belief that contemporary, popular music is a central cultural asset that is greatly underutilized in public education. The Amp Up NYC initiative will include teacher training, classroom instruction, state-of-the-art online technology, large donations of instruments, access to Berklee's PULSE Music Method and modern band curricular resources (About Amp Up NYC 2014).

### *The Association for Popular Music Education*

Founded in 2010, the Association for Popular Music Education (APME) was founded by a group of twelve higher education institutions and music centered organizations, with the purpose of building a community of practitioners who were engaged in PME. The authors of this article are involved in the leadership

of APME. The mission of the organization is to promote and advance popular music at all levels of education, both in the classroom and beyond (APME About 2014). APME was created to advocate for PME and its advancement as a discipline. In the past four years, APME has worked to provide educational opportunities for teachers and students, primarily through their annual conference. Each year, the APME conference shares best practices in PME, showcases student popular music ensembles from K-12 and higher education, and brings together practitioners engaged in PME. At their June 2014 conference at the University of Southern California in Los Angeles, APME featured presentations, workshops, and panels from popular music educators, industry professionals, college students, and art administrators. The conference also featured contributions from public colleges, private universities, for-profit colleges, community colleges, for-profit organizations, and non-profit organizations all with the expressed goal to build community, identify best practices, and build advocacy for PME. The Association for Popular Music Education identifies its goals and objectives as:

1. To promote the education of popular music (advocacy);
2. To create educational opportunities for educators and students of popular music at all levels;
3. To identify, develop, and promote best practices in the teaching and learning of popular music;
4. To encourage a connection between the music industries and popular music education;
5. To foster collaboration among artists, teachers, scholars, and organizations to advance popular music.

## Conclusion

We hope this article provides insight into the unique characteristics of PME initiatives currently operating in the United States. We have tried to provide a sense of the history of PME programs in the United States, the breadth of those programs currently operating, and snapshots of six specific initiatives that are particularly noteworthy. Although the number of opportunities to learn popular music in the United States continues to grow, PME programs remain exceptional at primary, secondary, and tertiary levels of institutionalized music education. In fact, music teachers who develop PME programs often face formidable resistance (Pignato 2013). The participatory, collaborative ways in which popular musicians learn often conflicts with the social, cultural, and political forces embedded in United States institutional schooling.

As this survey of PME in the United States illustrates, each organization faces issues particularized to and emergent from its unique context. Such issues are too many to adequately cover in this survey. However, as Hebert (2011) has noted, some issues impact PME programs across contexts. Those issues include gender imbalance, canonization of repertoire, and standardization of accepted practices and pedigrees. An examination of these issues reveals the need for a



myriad of approaches toward popular music pedagogies. One such issue is the role of auditions and criteria for popular music participation. At Bergen Community College, all students are welcome to sign up for the Pop/Rock Ensemble, regardless of their musical ability. On the other side of the spectrum, USC accepted only 8% of the 400 applicants this past year onto their Popular Music Performance program. The selective entry process of many higher education institutions that teach popular music highlights the need for other PME institutions and organizations to offer opportunities for increased participation. As Carruthers (2006: 7) stated,

While other potential partners may be wholeheartedly committed to barrier-free access to lifelong learning, universities are only partly on board. Degree programs have, for a number of good reasons, selective intake [...]. This places universities at odds with current mainstream philosophies of lifelong learning where everyone is encouraged to participate to the best of one's ability.

Equal participation by all students in popular music ensembles regardless of ability or gender is a goal of Little Kids Rock, who seek through their methodological approach of *Music as a Second Language* to reach all students and encourage music making inside and outside of the classroom. While it is possible to argue the merits of audition-based ensembles and open-access ensembles, both approaches are useful within PME. It is beneficial to offer some aspiring popular musicians an opportunity to play at competitive levels that might only be possible in auditioned ensembles. Similarly, open-access ensembles, like those at BCC offer the opportunity for all students to participate and develop a love for music.

As mentioned previously in this article, PME in the United States has focused on historical, musicological, and cultural studies. Such study of popular music often fell outside the purview of music departments and their traditional curricula. More recently, music departments have started developing popular music performance ensembles and performance oriented curricula and degree programs. A dearth of popular music in music teacher education programs persists, however. Hebert (2011: 17) pointed out that while there has been progress in the inclusion of popular music in music education, "teacher education programs have generally tended to be the slowest domain of the educational sector to respond to new developments". This slow response is represented in the higher education schools represented in this study, as none of the featured schools focus on PME as it pertains to pre-service teacher education. It is for reasons such as these that the Association for Popular Music Education is so vital in the United States. As a practitioner-based organization, APME is helping to share methodologies, pedagogies, and practical approaches to the teaching of popular music, with a focus inclusive of K-12 PME programs. Although a US association, APME seeks to bring its members into an international community of popular music educators, musicians, and scholars who have been addressing similar issues in their research and practice.

The proliferation of PME in the United States has led to a variety of opportunities for students of all ages to create, perform, respond, and connect

with popular musics. As this brief snapshot of American institutions and organizations that are engaged in PME demonstrates, PME in the United States is alive with possibilities and promise.

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