

Education Outlook

# PRIVATE SCHOOLS

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Q&A WITH TED MESSERSCHMIDT  
Director of Music, the Oakwood Friends School

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# conversationcorner Q&A

**TED MESSERSCHMIDT**  
Director of Music  
at Oakwood Friends School



By Barbara Moroch

*Ted Messerschmidt is the Director of Music at Oakwood Friends School in Poughkeepsie, NY. A resident of the Hudson Valley for 10 years, he is originally from the Washington DC area and spent most of his young years in Woodbridge, VA. He earned his B.A. in Music and German Literature from the College of William and Mary, completed his Master of Music in Music Composition at George Mason University, and recently earned a doctorate in Music Education from Boston University. In addition to his role at Oakwood, Dr. Messerschmidt also serves as Director of the Marist College Orchestra, in addition to performing with such notable groups as The Lynchburg Symphony Orchestra, the Northern*

*Dutchess Symphony Orchestra, the Maryland Choral Society. He is the recipient of numerous awards including the Marist College Student Government Association Adjunct Faculty Member of the Year 2009-2010, and the Marist College Office of Special Services: Award for Outstanding Service to Individuals with Disabilities 2008-2009. He has also published several original compositions with Cimarron Music Press:*

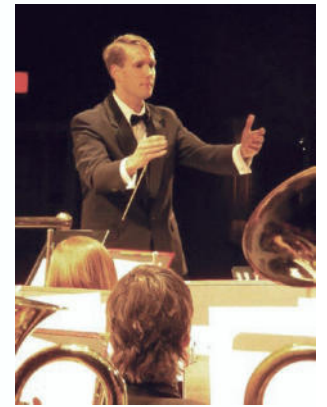
**Q: What does being Oakwood's Director of Music entail?**

I'm currently in my fifth year as Director of Music, which includes teaching a variety of classes and private lessons. I also co-direct the annual musical production with the drama teacher, Melissa Matthews. The music courses

at Oakwood cover different musical styles from classical (Orchestra, Composition, and music history offerings) to jazz (Improvisation) to pop/rock, hip-hop and beyond (Guitar for Beginners, and Songwriting). In addition, middle school students and freshmen are required to take general music classes, which give them the opportunity to perform while also learning how to read music and explore different music cultures.

**Q: What do you find rewarding about teaching music to students?**

Teaching in my field is a lot of fun, because almost everyone likes some kind of music. Even when I'm teaching a style some of the students aren't particularly interested in, I can usually find a way to connect with



Dr. Messerschmidt conducting the Marist College Symphonic Band at the 2012 Association of Concert Bands national convention.

those kids and their musical preferences. And sometimes students' tastes expand in the process, which is great because it means that there are more things they can enjoy moving forward. I find it especially rewarding to help students realize that making music isn't something only a select few can do; just about

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anyone can learn to make music to some extent. Of course, I also love working with exceptional students who have the potential to become professional musicians. But there's nothing quite like the joyful look on the faces of students who've overcome the belief that they'd never be able to make music.

**Q: Can you talk about your "Service Learning Through the Arts" curriculum?**

I started this class three years ago, which gives students the chance to serve others by doing what they love. We've performed at a retirement home, a school for children with special needs, a community lunch event, and several fundraising dinners. Aside from their work in the wider community, students have also served on the Oakwood

campus in various ways: some have performed music at school assemblies to commemorate events like Martin Luther King Jr. Day, and others have even helped out by tuning and maintaining the middle school ukuleles.

**Q: How and why did you forge a partnership with the youth correctional facility in Red Hook?**

In my first year teaching the Community Service through the Arts class, I thought it would be great for my students to perform at a juvenile detention center. At the time, I was writing my dissertation on music education in correctional facilities, and having discovered the good that those programs can do, I decided to see if I could get Oakwood involved. At that point, I contacted the Red



Dr. Messerschmidt accompanying a quartet of wind players in the music room at Oakwood.

Hook Residential Center. Although their staff members were initially excited about the possibility, the idea didn't work out for a variety of logistical reasons. But this year I realized that we could overcome some of the obstacles we faced in the past by exchanging creative projects digitally through email. We've decided to call it "The

Arts Exchange of Red Hook and Oakwood" (AERO), however legal issues are still being worked out before the program can move forward.

**Q: What does this partnership strive to do?**

The goal is to give students at both schools the chance to create meaningful art projects and to widen their sense of community in the process.

I think a sense of alienation contributes to a lot of problems in society—depression, heart disease, crime, and more—and I believe the arts can play a healing role by connecting people and giving them a shared sense of purpose.

**Q: How did your role as conductor for Marist College come about?**

I was initially hired as an adjunct lecturer to teach music history courses and to work with the bands at Marist College. After a few years, the Orchestra Director position opened up as well, and I was thrilled when the administration offered me the job. We usually have between three and six performances per year. Aside from the concerts at Marist, our performances have also included off-campus events such as the annual

Lessons and Carols service and springtime performances at the historic Bardavon Opera House in Poughkeepsie.

**Q: What do you hope your students at Oakwood will get out of their learning experience with you?**

I want my students to know that making music isn't something only a few "talented" people can do. I want them to feel empowered to play music because it's such an enriching experience. It can be a way to relieve stress, establish and maintain social connections, commemorate cultural and religious events, serve the community, exercise multiple regions of the brain, and so much more. •



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