



## Interviews with California High School Music Educators Casting a Wider Net – Defining a Movement

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One of the reasons we attend music education conferences is to create new, or improved musical worlds for our students. Perhaps there are other reasons – to network with each other, see old friends and find new ones, discuss the craziness of the world, and compare, with each other, the lives we as music education professionals experience. But conferences are important places to develop leadership ideas and skills, understand more about the community we work in, learn new things that our peers teach, and to participate in the accolades being given to those in the profession of music teaching and learning.

When defining the phrase “casting a wider net,” several ideas surface. One, inclusion of more students in music programs, is paramount and finding new areas, such as special learners or experiential activity and creativity constructs such as composing, songwriting, music production, digital apps for music creation, and modern band as part of music education is another. For this new Casting a Wider Net music education conference in California, these two ideas intersect.\*

“Movements” is also a word to clarify. We often think about this word in political terms as a group of people with shared ideas to be advanced. Effectively, this is what Casting a Wider Net wanted to do. Through artistic movements in music education, these have the potential to re-channel both music teaching and learning. While some may contend that a new conference does not equal a political movement, I might submit that aspects of Casting a Wider Net are part of a movement in music education globally. Let me tell you how and why.

My dad, Dr. Darrell Crawford, a choral director and music supervisor in Modesto where I grew up and his great friend and fellow instrumental music teacher, Mr. Earl Smith (who later became the next music supervisor), taught music for the

early part of my life through the sixties and seventies. During these decades there were three types of ensembles, band, orchestra, and choir. Learning music, with repertoire selected by the music director, was based on students’ grade level and musical preferences of teachers. During the eighties and nineties, for the most part band, orchestra, and choir programs continued, but with some reduction of education programs in California related to Proposition 13 (<http://www.kpbs.org/news/2010/mar/26/prop-13s-impact-schools/>). But, overall, this music education process, including competitive festivals, has continued throughout the past decades and, is still current in 2017.

Of course, music programs and music teacher preparation programs continued and in 1994, MENC (now NAfME) presented the National Standards for music education. Of all things, these included standards for composition, arranging, and improvisation in K–12 music education. Now, more than twenty years later, the National Core Arts Standards (2014) include more focus on creativity and active learning – asking music educators to teach students toward four areas: creating, presenting/performing/producing, responding, and connecting. In this same space of time, new ensembles have evolved. Inclusion of students with special needs and language learners are supported throughout the state in new ways. Diversity has compelled new ensembles, and popular music is considered with greater emphasis.

Dr. Alexander Koops, CMEA Southwestern Section President and the host of Casting a Wider Net at Azusa Pacific University says: “Music programs consisting of world music ensembles, mariachi bands, composition classes, modern band, ‘stomp’ ensembles, and commercial styles groups are each important and often directly related to the community and cultural background of a particular district.”



Mission Vista High School Steel Drum 2 Ensemble directed by Anne Fennell





Dr. Robert Duke presented his keynote address titled "Beautiful."



A drumming circle led by John Fitzgerald of Remo.

Each of these types of ensembles exist throughout California and students and teachers involved in these programs are collaborating through composing, arranging, and improvising. Simultaneously, the music industry is changing, digital devices have taken the focus of most of us, and the Broadway musical *Hamilton*, with its hip-hop and rap at the core, was just nominated for an extraordinary number of accolades over the past year. This, in itself, reflects perhaps more than a small change in what is valued through a formal musical focus of Western culture. I would like to think, for music teaching and learning, this also reflects the informal, formal, and non-formal movements of making music together in groups as the purpose and approach for learning music.

The Casting a Wider Net committee was selected following a conversation between Russ Sperling, (director of VAPA in San Diego USD, and NAFME Western Division President) and Anne Fennell, (Grammy-nominated high school music educator) and included Kris Alexander, Lisa Crawford, John Fitzgerald, Angela Holmes, and Alexander Koops. This team met weekly to design the conference, develop sponsors, initiate submissions from session presenters, and plan the program. Dr. Robert Duke agreed to our request to present the keynote address.

April 22, 2017, the inaugural Casting a Wider Net conference was presented at Azusa Pacific University to almost 100 music educators in Southern California. Students, teachers and administrators attended opportunities to make music together in a drumming circle led by John Fitzgerald of Remo, ukulele group with Jessica Baron, and to hear the remarkable steel drum band of the Mission Vista High School Steel Drum 2 Ensemble directed by Anne Fennell. CMEA President Scott Hedgecock and Russ Sperling gave opening remarks and welcomed attendees to Casting a Wider Net.

### Keynote

Dr. Robert Duke, professor of music and human learning and director for the Center for Music Learning at the University of Texas, presented his keynote address titled "Beautiful." Somehow the word itself stuck with us throughout the day - reminding us to consider a greater idea of music education through listening to beauty. Stopping, and listening. Students and veteran music educators alike discussed the importance of his words throughout the day and in comments in the survey following the conference.

### Schedule and Presenters

We chose to develop a schedule that was interactive and allowed for longer passing time without a hurried atmosphere. Two session times included the following choices:



*Writing Music for Favorite Stories: Themes, Underscoring, and Songs*

- Dr. Lisa Crawford

*New Standards: A Wider Net!* - Armalyn De La O

*Drumming and Stories: A Recipe for Pre-K to Grade 2 Success!* -

Melissa Blum

*Bridging the Gap: Bringing Informal Learning Practices into the Classroom* - Willow Manspeaker

*Teaching the Ten-Week Wheel Class: Method and Materials* - Dr. John L. Whitener

*Engaging and Interactive Ensemble Rehearsals* - Anne Fennell, M.Ed.

"Do You Belong Here?" - Julie Duty and David Starnes

*Sing, Play and Create Using the Ukulele: K-5 Activities* - Juanda Marshall and Jessica Baron;

*Towards Inclusion: Music for All* - Dr. Diana Hollinger

*Interactive Strings, Thinking Outside the Book* - Jesus Florido

*Using Popular Songwriting to Ignite Creativity in Music Students* - Dr. Scott Jeppesen

*Popular Music Education and Modern Band* - Scott Burstein

*Beat the Odds: Social and Emotional Skill Building Delivered in a Framework of Drumming* - Ping Ho;

*Deepening Our Understanding of the Chinese Culture through Experiencing the Regional Music of China* - Lily Chen-Hafteck, Zhihong Ren and Xiaoning Qin

### Facilitated Conversation

Russ Sperling presented a facilitated conversation with questions defining several important elements in thinking about music teaching and learning. Students, teachers, and professors of music sat side by side in conversational discussions subjects important to our field.

The following pre-questions to tables of three to eight attendees included:

- How do you connect with your students to know what and how they like to learn or be actively involved in music education?
- What types of music education programs do you have, or have you seen that include a large percentage of the school population? Why is that? Describe.
- How do you begin a new pathway in music education at your school, if only a traditional program is in place? How do you address the cultural or mind shift that might need to take place?

Questions for discussion at each table included:

- How do we get the other 80% of students involved in music?
- How do you engage your students in your school?
- What is it about our programs that need to shift?
- How do our students learn in this generation and how do we connect to this in music?
- What students might not have a voice or participate in programs, why?
- How do we reach out to underrepresented students?
- What cultural barriers can we anticipate from students?
- How mindful am I about inclusion?
- What is the role of the parent in music education?
- What resources do I have in my school that support underrepresented students?
- What are the challenges to inclusion?

### Industry Sponsors

Industry sponsors were generous and also involved in the process



Casting a Wider Net Committee 2017 (From top left): Russ Sperling, Lisa A. Crawford, Kristine Alexander, Alexander Koops, John Fitzgerald, Angela Holmes, and Anne Fennell (in the foreground).

of organizing the experience for attendees. Casting a Wider Net was fortunate to have: CMEA, NafME Western Division, Azusa Pacific University, The California Arts Project, REMO, J.W. Pepper, SoundTrap, NAMM Foundation, West Music, TI:ME-Technology in Music Education, and Kala Brand Music.

### The Future of Casting a Wider Net is You

We can't always know how or why a different tone is set through a new conference such as what occurred for this one. My students from the music education program at Cal Poly Pomona were enthusiastic about this conference. Music teachers said they would return. Surveys suggested that Casting a Wider Net was more than what was expected by attendees, that it created an atmosphere of inclusion, and felt wonderful to be in attendance.

For all who joined us this first year, we would like to express our thanks and gratitude for a new conference you actually helped to create that supports the movement of twenty-first century music education – making music. We hope you will submit that proposal to offer a session about the way in which you teach music, that may describe how you include students in a new way, and present the broad diversity of the students in our state whom you work with in your community. You might wish to present about how your experiences have supported different student types, or how your musicality affects students with special learning needs. Whatever your unique topic is, we look forward to the future of Casting a Wider Net with you. As Dr. Duke reminded us, focus on "beautiful."