



The Music Academy  
226 South Second Street  
P.O. Box 4545  
Rockford, IL 61104  
Www.MusicAcademyInRockford.com

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Rockford, IL



# The Music Academy

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815.986.0037 · www.MusicAcademyInRockford.com

## Newsletter Winter 2022

### RANDY SABIEN: ROCKFORD ROOTS

Randy's upbringing in Rockford and participation in the public school's orchestra program connects him to The Music Academy! As a violinist in the Guilford High School Orchestra, he learned with a number of other Rockford musicians who are now associated with The Music Academy:

- Jim Epperson is an active violinist, a Music Academy Foundation board member, and a current Music Academy student.
- Mary Kuchenmeister served as a Music Academy violin faculty from 1985-2013.
- Sara Lieb is an active violinist and sister of former Music Academy Director, Marti Frantz.

Sara Lieb shares this anecdote about being in the Guilford High School Orchestra with Randy:

*"It was interesting to share a stand with Randy. I [Sara] had years of violin training and learned music by reading it but Randy was new to the violin and learned music much more by ear. He rarely played exactly what was written in the music but he had the ability to think ahead and make something happen that enhanced the music - though it may not have been what was printed on the page - something special always came out of his violin!"*

Mr. Sabien is a prominent performer, effective educator, and example of the excellence in music education in Rockford. Our students will absorb so much by hearing him, performing with him, and having him as a workshop guest teacher. Learning improvisation from an expert is sure to stretch our students' minds and skills. We hope that you'll join us.

For more thoughts on improvisation, please see the interview with Music Academy Piano Faculty, David Newman on page 3.

Randy's visit is in collaboration with the Mendelssohn Performing Arts Center, the Rockford Area Music Industry, and made possible by a generous grant from the Kjellstrom Family Foundation.

The Music Academy is thrilled to host Jazz Violinist, Randy Sabien for our Winter Workshop on Saturday, December 10th. Mr. Sabien will present a concert featuring Music Academy students in collaboration with the Mendelssohn Performing Arts Center and to which all Music Academy families can attend at no cost. He will also provide improvisation workshops for all of our students – Suzuki and Traditional students should plan on attending! All events will take place at Loreen Hall and First Lutheran Church (225 S. 3rd Street):

- Wednesday, December 7<sup>th</sup>; 5pm-6:30pm: Donors invited to an Open Rehearsal. First Lutheran Church Sanctuary
- Friday, December 9<sup>th</sup>; 7:30pm: Randy Sabien Concert featuring MA students. All MA students and families attend FREE. First Lutheran Church Sanctuary
- Saturday, December 10<sup>th</sup>; 8:30am-12pm: Winter Workshop with Randy Sabien. Loreen Hall and First Lutheran Church

Randy Sabien is a sought-after jazz violinist and educator who grew up in Rockford, IL. His musical collaborations have included performances with Bela Fleck and Corky Siegel and he has recorded a number of self-titled albums featuring original tunes. At the age of 21, he founded the Alternative Strings Program at Berklee College of Music and has published a series of jazz method books for string orchestra.



1972 Guilford High School Orchestra: Randy Sabien is circled.

### BEST WISHES JANICE

Our long-time Business Manager, Janice Bartik officially retired at the end of October after nine years of service to The Music Academy:

Janice, Thanks always for supporting our team and our work at The Music Academy with your constant positivity, encouragement and consistent hard work. We could always count on you to make sure we were considering the points of view of all those we serve.

We wish you countless happy hours with your family. Enjoy the opportunity to have your finger on the pulse of your (soon-to-be four) grand girls as they grow. They will now benefit even more from what we know to be your good hands and good heart. Have fun. Keep in touch and enjoy your retirement. Marti Frantz

### WELCOME NICOLETTE!

We are thrilled to introduce our new Business Manager, Nicolette Theotikos! Originally from Addison, IL Nicolette grew up playing the trumpet in her school band program. She majored in Psychology with a minor in Business at the University of Illinois Champaign-Urbana where she worked as a research assistant at their Infant Cognition Lab before getting a job with a Chicago-based marketing company. Nicolette moved to Rockford with her husband this spring. Motivated by her lifelong love of music, Nicolette is very excited to utilize her background in both marketing and early childhood learning to take on her new role here at The Music Academy!

### SUPPORT AT ANY LEVEL

#### Giving Tuesday

Every Giving Tuesday donation to The Music Academy will be MATCHED by The Music Academy Foundation Board up to \$5,000! Your donation will be doubled until December 10th! Follow us on Facebook and donate on our Website #GIVINGTUESDAY. Thank you!

#### Sponsor a Student

Fund all or part of a student's annual tuition at The Music Academy. You choose the parameters; we choose the student. Call for more information: 815-986-0037.

#### Website

Our website is an easy and fast way to donate any amount.

#### Amazon

Remember to support The Music Academy by shopping at [www.smile.amazon.com](http://www.smile.amazon.com).

#### Donuts

Purchasing a donut on Saturday mornings supports our students, too!



Music Academy Students Elowen & Griffin Lamm, and Isabelle Olson.

**Holiday Break: December 20th — January 2nd**

#### Faculty & Staff

Mary Ann Anderson\* - violin  
Michael Beert\* - cello  
Valerie Blair\* - piano  
Lauren Canitia-Viel\* - Prelude/violin/viola  
Ella Caswell\*\* - piano/violin  
Debra Dew - piano  
Laura Eakman\*\* - Executive Director  
Shannon Englert\*\* - violin  
Richard Evans - cello  
Lillian Gonzalez - Piano/Prelude  
Rachel Handlin\* - violin/ String Program Director  
Lauren Hart\* - Music Lab/Prelude  
Patricia Jeske\* - piano  
Brandon Lamm\*\* - violin/viola  
Don Larson - clarinet/saxophone  
Candy Lovan\* - piano/Prelude  
Kerena Moeller - cello  
Dave Nelson - guitar  
Anne Olson\* - piano program assistant  
Jacques Saint-Cyr - flute  
Kathryn Siegel-violin/Prelude/Piano Director  
Nicolette Theotikos - Office Manager

#### School Board

Hope Collins\*  
Marti Frantz\* Emerita  
Colleen McDonald  
Jon Rozman\*\*  
Janice Westlund - Chair  
Christopher Wrate\*\*

#### Foundation Board

Monique Aduddell  
Janice Bartik  
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Liz Dickinson\*  
Jim Epperson\*  
Laura Eakman\*\*  
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Rachel Handlin\*  
Saman Hanif\*  
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Jonathan Lapworth  
Jeffery Marrs  
Alexander Mezny\*  
Jessica Piske\*  
Leanna Reidy  
Jonathan Rozman  
Gayle Scheuer  
Mary Stephenson\*  
Christine Swanberg  
Millard Washington

#### Artistic Advisory Board

Rachel Barton-Pine  
Margaret Batjer\*\*  
Michael Beert\*  
Ben Geller\*\*  
Catherine McMichael  
Rick Nielsen  
Joel Ross

#### Parent Board

Julia Anderson  
Natalie Brunson  
Cindy Fischer  
Kristin McClethron  
Aoi Runne

\* Music Academy Parent  
\*\* Music Academy Alum



## UPCOMING SATURDAY, DECEMBER 10TH WINTER WORKSHOP

Check out the full lineup of classes offered at this year's Winter Workshop. Students will be assigned to classes based on teacher recommendation:

**Jazz Improvisation** with Randy Sabien: Randy will show students how to make any melody sound like "jazz." All students will participate in these classes separated by level.

**Music and Movement** with Valerie Blair: a Dalcroze-inspired class for beginners; students connect musical expression with physical movements; for students who are newest to their instrument.

**Beginner's Open Mic.:** beginning students will perform for each other in an informal and supportive format; for students who are newest to their instrument.

**Orff Improvisation** with Susan Mocarski: students will use Orff instruments for a unique introduction to improvisation; for all students not yet in a large ensemble.

**Guitar & Piano Group Lessons:** special group lessons for our more advanced piano and guitar students.

**Orchestra:** orchestra rehearsal for all students in a large ensemble.

**Crafts and Snacks:** crafts and snacks for all students to enjoy throughout the day.

## 2022 FALL HIGHLIGHTS

### THE MUSIC ACADEMY Fall 2022 At a Glance

51 New Students

6 Privately Sponsored Scholarships

\$17,568 Scholarships Awarded

120 Suzuki Students  
Students who attend Saturday Group Lessons

249 All Students  
Suzuki and Traditional Students Combined

7 Performance Opportunities this Semester

8 months Our Youngest Student

The Music Academy has had a busy Fall! We have already welcomed 51 new students into The Music Academy and have disbursed over \$17,000 in scholarships. Saturday lessons are going strong and our teachers are staying busy with full private lesson studios.

We have embarked on new projects including a collaboration with the orchestra program at Marshall Middle School. Thanks to a generous grant from the Rockford Area Arts Council our string faculty is able to provide pedagogical support as requested by the program's director, George Espino. So far, we have led sectionals, taught private lessons, and guest conducted. The orchestra sounds great and we're having a blast!

We are once again working with the Rockford Symphony Orchestra to bring Music Academy families free tickets to RSO concerts. We also provided an instrument petting zoo for attendees of the RSO's open rehearsal on September 24th. Our Music Academy students volunteered to help children try instruments for the first time; it was inspiring to see our students helping others experience the magic of music!

Finally, we held our first Potluck and Play-in! Approximately 75 traditional and Suzuki students joined us for our kick-off group

lesson event on Saturday, September 10<sup>th</sup>. All families enjoyed breakfast together before we gathered together to play Queen's *We Will Rock You* in addition to doing a body percussion "play-along" to *Happy* and *Can't Stop the Feeling*. We accomplished our mission of building community and setting-up a joyful atmosphere for group lessons.

"It was new and very exciting for us!" Thorin and Kamyra Brunson (cello and bass students)



Music Academy faculty and students dancing at the Potluck and Play-in.

## DONUTS ARE BACK

The Parent Organization has returned after a Covid hiatus which means that donuts are back!

The sale of donuts on Saturday mornings help the Parent Organization support our students in a variety of ways. This year they will be providing students with healthy snacks at our Winter Workshop and offering financial aid for summer institutes.

The next time you're here on a Saturday morning, buy a donut—it's for a good cause!



Music Academy student, Eliora Schlueter helps with Petting Zoo

## IMPROVISATION WITH MUSIC ACADEMY INSTRUCTOR DAVID NEWMAN

If you *google* "the benefits of improvisation," you will find an endless list of reasons to try musical improvisation including scholarly articles supporting its neurological benefits. Researchers have devoted significant energy into studying the brains of dedicated musical improvisers and have found substantial results; most notably, musical improvisation can deactivate parts of the brain associated with inhibition and activate parts of the brain responsible for self-expression including memory retrieval. If practiced regularly, improvisation can enhance our musical performances by helping us to be more present: while improvising, a musician is able to inhibit critical self-talk while accessing creative ideas more readily - both of which pave the way for more positive performance experiences. Even if we're not always improvising on stage, our performances benefit from the practice of it.

Trying to improvise can be difficult; we spend a great deal of time repeating passages in search of consistency and control. In order to try this skill, we must trust that our teachers will create a safe and encouraging space to do so. That's why we're excited to have heard that there's a bit of improvising going on in one of our teacher's studios: David Newman. We decided to ask him about it in order to help our students prepare for Randy Sabien's upcoming improvisation workshops.

### What is your experience with improvisation?

Most of my improvisation occurs during the church services I play. All of the "in between" music is improvised, as are the prelude and postlude. I play the hymns from the score, but they get embellished a lot.

### Many teachers don't teach improvisation in private lessons. What do you find valuable about teaching improvisation in a private lesson setting?

I think the value of letting students improvise is that they get to be right for a change. Even the kindest, gentlest suggestions we may give students are still heard within the context that they must be, in some way, wrong. Otherwise, why would someone need any instruction at all? Improvising provides a short intermission from a student's music education odyssey.

### How do you approach teaching improvisation in lessons? Is there a method?

I tell my students that they can play anything they want - as long as it's a black key. The black keys form a pentatonic scale so no matter what someone plays, it will sound tonal. I make up a chord progression down below while they play up top. They bang, they're inaudible, they play as fast as humanly possible, they play single notes, they play chords, some are thoughtful, some just pound - which is something they usually aren't allowed to do.

"Improvisation means coming to the situation without rigid expectations or preconceptions. The key to improvisation is motion - you keep going forward, fearful or not, living from moment to moment. That's how life is." - Bobby McFerrin



Music Academy Piano Faculty David Newman

### Do all of your students enjoy improvising? Any anecdotes?

Of course! It's not that often that kids get to do whatever they want. I don't know if I have any anecdotes, but I can say that the students aren't the only ones benefiting from these exercises; I get something out of the deal, too. After doing this exercise a few times, I sense that the students have decided that I'm not there to make their life completely miserable after all.

### Do you have any advice for students or musicians new to improvising?

Go to a place where no one can hear you. Play. Don't set any goals. Don't worry if it doesn't sound good. I'm sure it won't. Just accept that you're going to sound terrible - foolish even. Mistakes don't exist in improvising land. Imagine that you're breaking through that barrier that's been holding you back. No one is grading you. Do it again tomorrow.

David Newman teaches piano at The Music Academy. He has earned advanced degrees from Rutgers and the Guildhall School of Music and Drama in London, England. Newman recorded for the Steppenwolf Theater Company's production of *Another Time*, starring Albert Finney, and could frequently be heard on WFMT. He served as staff accompanist in the studios of members of the Chicago Symphony, and performed at the University of Chicago, Northwestern University, DePaul University, the Chicago Cultural Center, and others. Now a resident of Wisconsin, he is a founding member of *Zephyr*, a chamber group dedicated to performing works written for piano and winds.