

The Naval School of Music

Relevant Training for Real-World Musical Missions

Abstract: The Naval School of Music was founded in 1935 in response to the poor performance level of the U.S. Navy's bands at that time. The school evolved from an adjunct operation of the U.S. Navy Band into a tri-service institution serving the Army, Navy, and Marine Corps with dedicated facilities, courses for musicians and band leaders, and courses to meet contemporary needs such as arranging, jazz, pop/rock, and sound engineering. Today it serves the Navy and Marine Corps. The military bands for which the Naval School of Music trains its graduates provide direct feedback on the content and quality of its instruction.

Keywords: band, education ensemble, military, navy, training

One of the most challenging aspects to educating and training professional musicians is determining what they need to know and be able to do in order to be successful upon graduation. The military is in a unique position to design curricula and provide equipment, facilities, and faculty members with the expertise to teach precisely what its musicians need in order to perform their jobs in military bands. The longest-lasting and most successful such operation is the Naval School of Music at Joint Expeditionary Base Little Creek–Fort Story, Virginia.¹ It was founded eighty years ago at the Washington Navy Yard as an adjunct operation of the U.S. Navy Band and become a tri-service operation in 1951.² The Navy owns and operates the school, the Marine Corps has a detachment for

administrative purposes of Marine Corps personnel, and the Army runs a separate Army School of Music using the school's facilities, library, and some equipment.³

The school trains musicians for all of the Navy and Marine Corps fleet and field bands. It does not train musicians for those services' three premier bands: the U.S. Naval Academy Band, the U.S. Navy Band, or the U.S. Marine Band, of which the latter two are located in Washington, D.C. The school's job is to meet training needs identified by the bands, not the school's faculty. This feedback process happens via Human Performance Requirements Reviews (HPRR), which consist of a working group that reviews the school's curriculum and effectiveness. The working group includes leaders of the Navy and Marine Corps music

America's Naval School of Music offers a training model for other institutions preparing musicians and music educators for the real world.

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programs and members of Navy and Marine Corps bands. The group makes recommendations to the Center for Service Support, which reports to the Chief of Naval Education and Training (C-NET). If a recommendation is determined to be a valid training requirement, the school is tasked with providing it. C-NET directs the changes and monitors and reviews them.

Mission-Relevant Offerings

The school's curricula have evolved over the years to meet the changing needs of military bands, particularly popular music to entertain troops. Since it was founded during the Big Band era, swing and dance band music are a strong emphasis of the school in addition to concert, ceremonial, and marching music. Special arrangements of dance band music, called "Navy Specials," were produced by a staff of arrangers at the school who had worked for various radio networks and professional bands such as the Benny Goodman, Stan Kenton, and Glenn Miller bands. These arrangements were a signature of the Navy Band Program during and after World War II.

With the coming of the rock era, Navy Unit Bands began forming rock bands with names such as "New Sound," "Nuclear Reaction," and "Critical Mass" from within their ranks for years without training from the school, and the U.S. Navy Band founded a fourteen-piece jazz-rock band called Port Authority in 1971. Show, pop, and rock bands became the major focus of the Navy music program in the 1970s when the Navy instituted changes to modernize the lifestyle of sailors. Since the Navy Music Program added vocalists and stressed popular, rock, and "show" bands, the school began training vocalists in 1972 and added audio training in 1976 and a combo course in 1977. Additional courses over the years included an arranging course and a Ceremonial Conductor/Drum Major course. These courses were added to the offerings in concert, jazz, and ceremonial music that have been the mainstay of American military bands.



Building T-29, Anacostia Naval Receiving Station

Photo courtesy of the Navy Musicians Association

Launching the Navy School of Music

The Navy did not focus on training musicians in an organized fashion until the early 1900s when it established musician schools at Naval Training Stations on both coasts. These schools apparently did not provide the standardization needed to sustain a band program. Thus, the Navy needed a system of organizing, training, and equipping bands for an expanding Navy when the United States entered World War I. John Philip Sousa joined the Navy in 1917 and established a band training center at the Great Lakes Naval Training Station. This center sent complete bands to ships or stations, which was also the practice of at least one other Navy musician school at the time. The Navy closed its musician schools following World War I, and its band program fell into disarray. Therefore, the Navy School of Music was founded in 1935 to standardize band practices and improve the Navy Band program by training and assigning musicians to the fleet, serving as the control center for all Navy bands and as a way to attract musicians to join the Navy.⁴

The school has been housed in four buildings on three different bases over the years. It was originally in the Washington Navy Yard's Building #181. The school quickly outgrew Building #181 and was relocated to the third floor of Building #101 by the late 1930s. It contained an auditorium, five classrooms, a music library, an instrument issue room, and six private studios. The increase in musical activities due to World War II necessitated larger facilities and separation of the School of Music from the Navy Band. The School moved to Building T-29 at Anacostia Naval Receiving Station in January 1943. Building T-29 was designed for the school and included two auditoriums (one outfitted as a recording/broadcasting studio), forty individual practice rooms, six classrooms, a recording laboratory, an instrument repair shop, and libraries stocked with sheet music, books, and recordings. The school provided the students with professional model instruments, sheet music, and all necessary supplies, such as reeds and valve oil.⁵

Building T-29 was a temporary structure, and by 1959 the Navy began looking for a new site for the school.⁶ The school was relocated to its present

TABLE 1.**Composite Faculty-Staff and Student Quotas**

	1935	1936	1941	1944	1944	1945	1946	1947	1948	1949	
Faculty-staff	13	22	31	42	61	91	60	52	54	56	
Students	11–40	80	320	368	373						
	1952	1950s	1955	1960	1964	1966	1974	1977	1983	2001	2013
Faculty-staff	76	107	75	75	140	128	75	59	186	161	50
Students	365				300	771	351	500	533	664	135

Note. The numbers from 1950s to 2001 include Army personnel. Where no data are available, those spaces are left blank. The numbers for 2013 reflect only Navy and Marine Corps personnel because the Army has operated a separate school since 2010.

**Building 3602, J. D. McDonald Hall, 2001**

Photo courtesy of the Naval School of Music

home, J. D. McDonald Hall (Building 3602) at Joint Expeditionary Base Little Creek–Fort Story, Virginia in 1964.⁷ The school has also acquired Building 3503 for rehearsals and houses students in Scott Hall. The facilities in McDonald Hall include more than 100 studios for individual practice and instruction equipped with Wenger Virtual Acoustic Environment (VAE) technology. Eight of these studios are large enough for small bands and ensembles. There are also fifteen academic classrooms; seven rehearsal spaces for large bands and ensembles; a learning resource center with computer stations for ear training and theory drill; a library media center with books, recordings, solo music, and method books; a music library with over 40,000 pieces for ensemble performance;

an audio/visual facility; an instrument-repair facility; and 3,500 musical instruments for students to use during their training. Building 3503 includes four rehearsal rooms that are acoustically treated for ensembles. The two large rooms are approximately 2,300 square feet each, and the two medium rooms are approximately 750 square feet each.

Personnel

The original faculty in 1935 consisted of twelve musicians in the U.S. Navy Band who taught at the school as an extra duty. Full-time faculty members were eventually reassigned from various Navy Bands. The full-time faculty included graduates of accredited conservatories and universities and former members of the better

symphonies and bands throughout the country. In addition to faculty, the school maintained recording studio personnel, instrument repair technicians, a piano tuner, and a staff of dance band arrangers.⁸

Student, faculty, and staff quotas have fluctuated over the years and currently include instructors from the Navy and Marine Corps. Table 1 shows a rapid increase during the build-up and World War II, a decrease during the post-war demobilization, regrowth during the Korean War, a drawdown after the war, and a spike during Vietnam and again during the Reagan era build-up. The Army ceased training with the Navy and Marine Corps in 2010 and offers its own ten-week school. The Army had provided the majority of students since it has the most bands. Thus, numbers are greatly reduced for 2013 (see Table 1).

It was during the period at Anacostia that the Navy separated management of the band program from the school, integrated the school racially by closing the Negro Music School at Great Lakes Naval Training Center,⁹ and added students from the Marine Corps in 1947 and the Army and Women's Army Corps (WAC) in 1951.¹⁰ The Army was the only service to have retained a women's band following World War II.¹¹ Only 5 WACs attended the School in the 1950s, and women did not return to the School until 1973 when the Army integrated women into its bands and the Navy and Marine Corps opened musician positions to women.¹² Sergeant First Class Ruth Anderson graduated from



SFC Ruth Anderson (WAC) receiving her Graduation Certificate from Major General William E. Bergin, April 9, 1952

Photo courtesy of the Naval School of Music



Unit Band 8 (plus additional members) at the World's Fair, June 1939

Photo courtesy of the Navy Musicians Association

the Army Bandsman course on June 19, 1952. Anderson was probably the first woman to graduate from the Naval School of Music.¹³

Curricula

The original offerings included a two-year course of instruction for

instrumentalists, a one-year course for bandmasters, and a six-month course for soloists.¹⁴ All students were required to play at least two instruments and in a variety of styles such as symphonic works, patriotic pieces, martial music, Americana, and jazz.¹⁵ While students were admitted individually, they graduated as members of bands that served

aboard ship together as a single unit, known as a Unit Band. Unit Bands were formed from students in residence at the school. Most Unit Bands were a twenty-piece band plus an enlisted bandleader. Once formed at the school, the Unit Bands began rehearsing together under their bandmaster. Upon graduation, the band would be transferred to either ship or shore duty.¹⁶

The versatility of the twenty-one-member Unit Bands is evidenced by the equipment assigned to them. A 1939 equipment list indicates that each band had thirty-six band and orchestral stringed instruments, 1,100 music arrangements, and other equipment such as music stands and wind clips.¹⁷ Unit Bands were able to perform as a marching, ceremonial, concert, and dance band and as an orchestra. Band performances were an important component of morale aboard ship. Typical performances on an aircraft carrier, for example, included the concert band on the flight deck, the swing band in the hangar deck, and combos in the ready room. Musicians also performed ceremonies for special events, burials at sea, and as backup bands for USO entertainers. The effects of the bands on morale were remarkable. Even in as disastrous a situation as the attack on Pearl Harbor, bands played on deck once things settled down to help the morale of those cleaning up.¹⁸

Unit Bands were numbered consecutively as they left the school. Thus, the first band to leave the school, which was in 1936, was Unit Band 1.¹⁹ These bands would stay together for the remainder of their first enlistments. When a band's enlistment was over, the musicians were discharged and another band was sent from the school to replace them. Those who chose to reenlist were returned to the School of Music for a refresher course and assignment to another Unit Band that was being formed at the school.²⁰ Twenty-eight bands had been graduated by the outbreak of World War II, with 150 having graduated by 1949.²¹ This remained the practice of the Navy until it restructured its band program in 1970–71 with permanently stationed bands.

TABLE 2.**Course Lengths and College Credit Recommendations**

Music Basic			Unit Leader			Senior Musician		
Dates	Length	Credits	Dates	Length	Credits	Dates	Length	Credits
1935	104 weeks	n/a						
1938	72 weeks	n/a						
1941	52 weeks	n/a						
1946	52 weeks	30						
1947	12–24 weeks	n/a						
1949	52 weeks	n/a						
1952	26–36 weeks	n/a						
1954	52 weeks	30						
May 1968– December 1978	24–36 weeks	16	February 1970– July 1975	24 weeks	17 to 20	January 1968– December 1877	52 weeks	30
January 1979– December 1989	23 weeks	8 to 10	August 1975– December 1990	23 weeks	18 to 21	January 1978– December 1990	40 weeks	27
January 1990– September 1992	23 weeks	8 to 10	January 1991– June 1991	17 weeks	14 to 15	January 1991– June 1991	17 weeks	14 to 18
October 1992– May 2002	23 weeks	11 to 13	July 1991–August 1997	21 weeks	19 to 21	July 1991– September 1997	21 weeks	16 to 18
June 2002–present	21 weeks	9 to 11	September 1997– December 2005	20 weeks	24	October 1997– June 2004	20 weeks	15 to 17
			January 2006–present	30 weeks	24	July 2004–present	30 weeks	13 to 15

Note. Credit recommendations for all courses are provided by the American Council on Education and are published in ACE, “Guide to the Evaluation of Educational Experiences in the Armed Services,” American Council on Education, <http://www.acenet.edu/news-room/Pages/Military-Guide-Online.aspx>.

The school continues to provide beginner, intermediate, and advanced courses correlated to a musician’s career in the military. Today’s three courses are Music Basic, Music Unit Leader, and Senior Musician as well as a course in Sound Reinforcement.²²

Music Basic

The Music Basic course was originally a two-year program of study divided into four semesters. It was reduced over the years to today’s twenty-one-week offering, while the original refresher course was developed into the thirty-week Unit Leader course to prepare

midcareer musicians to serve as ceremonial conductors, drum majors, and leaders of small ensembles. Today’s Music Basic course consists of music theory (3 credits), ear training and sight-singing (1 credit), applied lessons (1–3 credits), jazz theory and improvisation (1 credit), and performance in concert band, jazz band, rock/pop band, and marching band (3 credits). Students must pass several auditions during their coursework and are required to practice individually at least fifteen hours per week. Keyboard and guitar students also receive instruction in MIDI (Musical Instrument Digital Interface).

An analysis of the college credit equivalency for these courses, as evaluated by the American Council on Education, is a fair and unbiased way to provide a comparison to civilian educational offerings. The lengths of the school’s three courses and the credit recommendations by the American Council on Education are listed in Table 2.

The first evaluation of the school was included in their 1946 credit evaluation guide. Succeeding evaluations show a correlation between the length of study and the number of credits recommended. As the Music Basic course was shortened, the number of recommended credits decreased.



A Unit Band on the USS *New Mexico* (BB40), June 29, 1944. The band entertained the crew before and after the shelling of the Saipan Islands

Photo courtesy of the Navy Musicians Association

Unit Leader

The intermediate-level course evolved over the years from a refresher course for Unit Band members between assignments to what is now called the Unit Leader Course. It is a thirty-week course for midcareer bandmen to prepare them to serve as ceremonial conductors, drum majors, and leaders of small ensembles. The Unit Leader Course today consists of music theory (8 credits), ear training (4 credits), applied lessons (6 credits), improvisation (2 credits), and conducting (4 credits).

Senior Musician

The original Bandmasters course has evolved into today's Senior Musician course. It is a thirty-week course designed to prepare advanced career bandmen to perform as Assistant Directors and Enlisted Bandmasters in Navy and Marine Corps bands. The content includes score study, conducting and rehearsal techniques for concert bands and jazz ensembles, instrumental performance, ear training, theory, counterpoint, history, form and analysis, and band scoring. The American Council on

Education recommends the following credit be awarded: advanced theory/harmony/ear training (6–8 credits), arranging (3 credits), and conducting (4 credits).

Global War on Terror

The post-9/11 Global War on Terror has resulted in bands from all of America's services deploying around the globe to offer morale boosting performances for American and allied troops in far-flung locations aboard ship, on foreign bases, and in desert forward operating locations; concerts and humanitarian outreach performances for civilians in countries where America has previously not had a presence; and for important ceremonial and diplomatic events for senior military leaders, foreign heads of state, ambassadors, and American presidents. These real-world missions are in addition to maintaining performances on bases at home and for the American public. The School of Music has played an important role in providing relevant training to musicians so they are prepared for these challenging and diverse musical missions, often in less than ideal performance conditions.

Specifically, the Naval School of Music has added classes to train Navy and Marine Corps musicians to perform in real-world settings that include pop and rock shows and performances in war-torn and developing countries. The pop/rock training happens through a curriculum called Popular Music Groups, where students learn to form bands of rhythm instruments, horns, and vocalists; transcribe current songs; work with sound equipment; and perform shows. The other innovation is a New Orleans style brass band to provide the ability to send small, mobile, acoustic groups to entertain audiences in difficult performance conditions. These bands consist of brass instruments, clarinets, saxophones, and marching percussion. Students learn to perform appropriate genres and develop specific skills, such as tuba players learning to read chord changes and play walking bass lines.

The largest impact of the Global War on Terror on the school has been that the faculty members have wartime deployment experience. They come to the school directly from the field and know what students will need to be able to do. Thus, the school doesn't simply wait passively for the next scheduled curriculum review (Human Performance Requirements Review) before making changes to the curriculum. The faculty members are in constant communication with the Navy and Marine Corps bands about these branches' needs and are continually updating the school's offerings in a fluid and dynamic process that includes changes in equipment, genres, ensembles, and operational concepts.

Lessons for Civilian Music Ed

The school's real world-oriented training approach can serve as a model for civilian institutions wanting to update their curricula to meet current marketplace demands rather than relying strictly on assumptions and values of the faculty members and guidelines from accrediting bodies and state departments of education. It takes imaginative thinking to envision whom potential employers might be who could provide



Marine Corps Drill Band Rehearsal at the Naval School of Music, 2013

Photo courtesy of the Naval School of Music



Popular Music Group Performance at the Naval School of Music, 2013

Photo courtesy of the Naval School of Music

input into curricular decisions. Working music teachers could provide feedback on music education curricula and early-career performers to advise what graduates need to know and be able to do to make a living in the current market. Composers and arrangers making a full-time living in these areas could provide valuable input into composition curricula. Recording professionals could provide feedback on sound recording skills needed. Music industry professionals could help universities

keep their music industry offerings current. This must be balanced with the need for faculty to lead as well as prepare students for careers. Whereas the Naval School of Music exists solely to train musicians for current needs of Navy and Marine Corps bands, universities have an additional responsibility to produce research, develop new methods and materials, and provide intellectual and theoretical leadership in addition to training students for current markets.

Educating music teachers for careers that can last forty or more years requires music teacher education programs to simultaneously prepare them for current market demands and to teach them to be adaptable throughout their careers. Because school music teachers, unlike the Naval School of Music, don't have employers of their graduates telling them what is needed to update their curricula, they must determine the musical needs of their schools and communities for themselves. Once they do so, they can make changes to their curricula and programs to address them. Music teacher education programs can prepare music teachers for this by equipping them with broad skill sets that include fluency in a variety of genres and technologies, as well as important abilities and dispositions to be responsive to their local work contexts. Such offerings might include ethnographic research and curriculum-design courses and workshops where preservice and in-service teachers learn to discover the local musical ecologies in which their schools are situated and then develop school offerings that complement them. This would help music teachers develop curricula and programs that are responsive to their local communities and the changing musical needs of their students throughout their careers in the same way the Naval School of Music has continually evolved to meet the changing musical needs of the military branches it serves.

NOTES

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