

In 2009, Kelvin Jones started teaching at West Feliciana High School in St. Francisville, Louisiana, which has a town population of slightly over 1,700. Four years later, he turned a marching-focused band of 22 students into a music program with an 80-piece concert band, jazz ensemble, percussion ensemble, and chamber music. Here is how he built the program and earned the support of the entire community.

Building the Concert Band

When I arrived in St. Francisville, the program's focus was on marching band. They went to concert band contests a few times, but did not score well, and there was little enthusiasm for concert band when I took over. That first year I had four flutes, five clarinets, one alto sax, three trumpets, one trombone, two baritones, a tuba, and five percussionists. I had to rewrite many parts and be creative with the music I chose to make everything work.

I had to sell students on some things right away. The trombonist played a marching valve trombone, and I had to teach him slide positions. I showed the student and his parents what bands were doing across the country (using slide trombones), and then I put the weight on them by saying, "If you are really serious about performing at a high level or beyond high school, this instrument is not the best for you."

With other students, I suggested they switch because of their physiological makeup. At first there was reluctance, but once a student has an easier time making a good sound with a new instrument, it becomes an easy sell. Every student wants to do well; tasting success on a new instrument is a better situation than having a student who works very hard at his instrument but just cannot seem to make progress.

I told students from the beginning that they had the opportunity to be a part of something special.

The Music Explosion A



After a while, they understood the seriousness of it. In concert band, we put in a substantial amount of work on the fundamentals of musicianship, then at the concert band festival that year, we received all first-division ratings. This was when they realized that I was right. They saw how much they were learning and could tell they were better. After they saw that the work we put in on fundamentals had paid off, there was more enthusiasm about it. The score at festival that first year also set the standard for the following year. The mindset of the students was “this is what we do now, and we have to maintain that level.”

Places for Beginners

I recruited high school students to join band for the first time. At West Feliciana, band was split into three classes during the day. I tried to block off class periods to get high-school-aged beginners together, but this is difficult to do in a small school.



t West Feliciana High

Within all three class periods there were students who would have been a better fit with a different group, but scheduling difficulties made that impossible. If students had a required class during the period I wanted to see them, they had to be put with another group of students. All of my classes seemed to have a mix of beginners and more experienced players. If I had a beginning trombone player, I at least tried to get her in the same class as the trombone section leader. During that class period, I would have them work one-on-one in a practice room. It was like a small private lesson and accelerated the progress of new players.

For beginning high school players in marching band, I rewrote their parts into whole notes or something equally simple that fit the music so they could contribute. Often these parts would be block chords, and I called these students the Super Thirds, an idea I got from another director. They were contributing to the sound and the show, and the beginning players took pride in what they were doing. It kept them engaged.

Chamber Music Challenge

Chamber groups were started to expose students to more difficult literature. I had a brass quintet, woodwind choir, clarinet choir, and flute trio. I spent little time rehearsing these groups; mostly I just gave them the music and some basic concepts to practice. There is a website called free-

scores.com that offers a wealth of literature for solo and ensemble; it is a place for composers to release music they want played.

On Fridays during rehearsals, we set aside ten minutes for chamber groups to play in front of their peers. The group scheduled to perform on a particular Friday would be excused from warmups to run through its piece in a practice room, then after warmups, the group would perform for the rest of the band. At the end of class I would pull the chamber group that had played that week into my office for three to five minutes to ask how they thought it went and offer some suggestions.

All the chamber groups performed their pieces at the solo and ensemble festival. To motivate students, I announced that the top-scoring three or four solo and ensemble performances would open our spring concert.

Training Percussionists

When I came to the school, the percussionists were only used to playing cadences and drumline pieces. I asked one student what he played, and he said cymbals. I started a percussion ensemble, because I wanted to have percussionists, not just drummers. I found a book called *Percussion Time* by Quincy Hilliard and Joseph D'Alicandro that had percussion methods and arrangements for unorthodox instrumentation. There were parts for xylophone, snare drum, and bass drum, but



also for spoons, pots and pans, and trash cans. The arrangements ranged from grades 1 to 3 and were great for getting the group going. During the spring semester of my first year, we met once a week after school to work on balance, musicianship, dynamics, and phrasing. Even though students were playing on spoons and trash can lids, these things are still possible.

The second year, I was fortunate to add a percussion class during the school day. After some fundraising, we bought bell kits, allowing us to work on melodic playing. The percussionists saw what new options were available to them now that they could play mallet instruments, and the group took off from there. The percussionists started considering themselves a separate ensemble within the band. My last year there, the percussion ensemble opened for a university percussion ensemble concert, playing grade 4 and 5 literature. We reached this point after starting with spoons and pots and pans.

Jazz for Everyone

I wanted to introduce students to a wide variety of music, especially jazz, given that this was Louisiana. After football season, I put up a sign-up

sheet for jazz band and opened it to anyone regardless of instrument. The first jazz band included flutes, clarinets, and horns. I found some jazz arrangements with flexible instrumentation but still had to rewrite some parts. From there, I built up the program from within by having a couple students switch instruments. A flutist switched to guitar, and a hornist learned to play alto saxophone. By my third year, the jazz band had fairly standard instrumentation and met once per week in fall and twice per week in spring.

Showing Off the Program

I titled our spring concert the Spring Music Explosion. I wanted to prove to the community that concert and jazz band were important, and one good way to do that was to diversify the concert program. The Spring Music Explosion featured the chosen soloists and ensembles, the jazz group, and the percussion ensemble, with the concert band at the end. This concert was my way to show what a music program should be. I included something for everyone. The jazz band played standard tunes, but we also played the theme from *Family Guy* and some Ray Charles.

The concert band played its festival pieces and also a *Pirates of the Caribbean* medley. Nothing is wrong with marching band, but to have a comprehensive program and give students a fighting chance to keep playing after high school, these other ensembles were just as important. A secondary aim of this concert was to show the community and administration that the students were talented. If we push them and support them, they can do wonderful things.

The Importance of Leaving Town

I have two different concepts of trips. There are big trips, which in our case were Memphis, Tennessee to perform at the AutoZone Liberty Bowl Music Festival and in Washington, D.C. for the 2013 United States National Presidential Inauguration Music Festival. Both of these were arranged through tour companies. We recieved first place honors in Washington and second place honors in Memphis. One benefit of such trips is getting students outside of their area to see things they have never seen before.

I learned the importance of this during my first year in St. Francisville. I convinced stronger students to audition for area honor bands to offer them some competitiveness. My tuba player made the district honor band and was third chair; he was the first person in 30 years from the school to make



that honor band. We traveled to a university where the student would stay overnight and play in the honor band before returning home.

As we were traveling, he noticed the green signs that tell how many miles to the next town. The sign said "Hammond 28," and he asked what the 28 meant. He had never left St. Francisville before and thus had never seen such a sign. That trip

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marked the first time he ate at Wendy's, Raising Cane's, IHOP, and Taco Bell. It was also his first time staying in a hotel.

Every time students made an honor band or went on a trip, I asked them write a one-paragraph paper on what they experienced. This tuba player wrote, "Mr. Jones, if not for that trip, I would not try to pursue college." Neither of his parents attended college; one did not graduate from high school. His original goal after high school was to stay in St. Francisville and work on a farm. Through that experience, his perspective changed on what music is. That tuba player who had never seen a distance sign before went to college on a full ride scholarship.

Once we traveled to New Orleans for a football game. On the way back, we could see the Superdome on the right. I have been to New Orleans plenty of times and didn't think anything about passing it, so when a percussionist got excited and called out "Hey, Mr. Jones, look!" my first thought was that there was a problem on the bus. I turned around, and he pointed out the Superdome, exclaiming that he had never seen it before. Taking students to Washington can certainly change their lives, but sometimes taking them down the street can do even more. This percussionist is also in college, and he still talks about when he saw the Superdome.

Such trips help with recruiting and retention. Students tell each other about the exciting things they saw. As for the Superdome, all we did was pass the building, but students talked about it as if Saints' quarterback Drew Brees had given them a tour of the stadium. Students want to experience such things for themselves, and it gives them the motivation to work even harder so they can get to go the next time. Students go on a trip, then share their excitement with the next group, which eventually follows in their footsteps; it becomes a self-perpetuating cycle.

The Importance of Bringing People to Town

I wrote a grant to bring in the Marine Corps band from New Orleans to perform in St. Francisville. I worked it out with the Marines for some of my students to perform with the group for its final piece, *Stars and Stripes Forever*. The band came in January, and honor band auditions were in December, so I told students that anyone who made the All-Parish Honor Band would be invited to perform onstage with the Marines. This lit a big fire under students.

I also set it up for the Marines to come early enough to give masterclasses to each section. That year, one of our marches was *King Cotton*, so the Marines worked with my students on that for an hour, then came together for a run-through with the Marines sitting next to the students. We ran through our pieces, and then the Marines went on

stage to run through their pieces. They brought a concert band, a jazz combo, a brass band, and a rock band. It created a huge buzz in the city and fit my philosophy of trying to show the community and students a diverse experience beyond what happens on Friday night.

We used grant money to bring the wind faculty from LSU in a similar set-up. A woodwind quintet and a brass quintet came early and held a masterclass for every section. They performed a concert, and the director of bands at LSU did a clinic with my concert band, with the woodwind and brass faculty sitting with my students. All I had to do was write a grant and schedule a day.

I have seen free festivals for local high schools to perform music as a run-up to band contests. Our area didn't have one, so in keeping with my philosophy of bringing people to our school, I contacted a college friend who had a band in Jackson, Mississippi. We set up an exchange program where every year one band traveled to the other school to perform for one another and play a joint concert. The first year we did it at my school. Each band played the music it was going to perform at festival, and we also brought sightreading for the other school. It gave students an opportunity to hear another group perform, it was an extra runthrough of the contest music, and students got to make new friends over a meal while the director and I critiqued each other.

St. Francisville is 26 miles east of two universities. I contacted studio professors and asked them to recommend undergraduate music education majors who would be willing to teach private lessons.

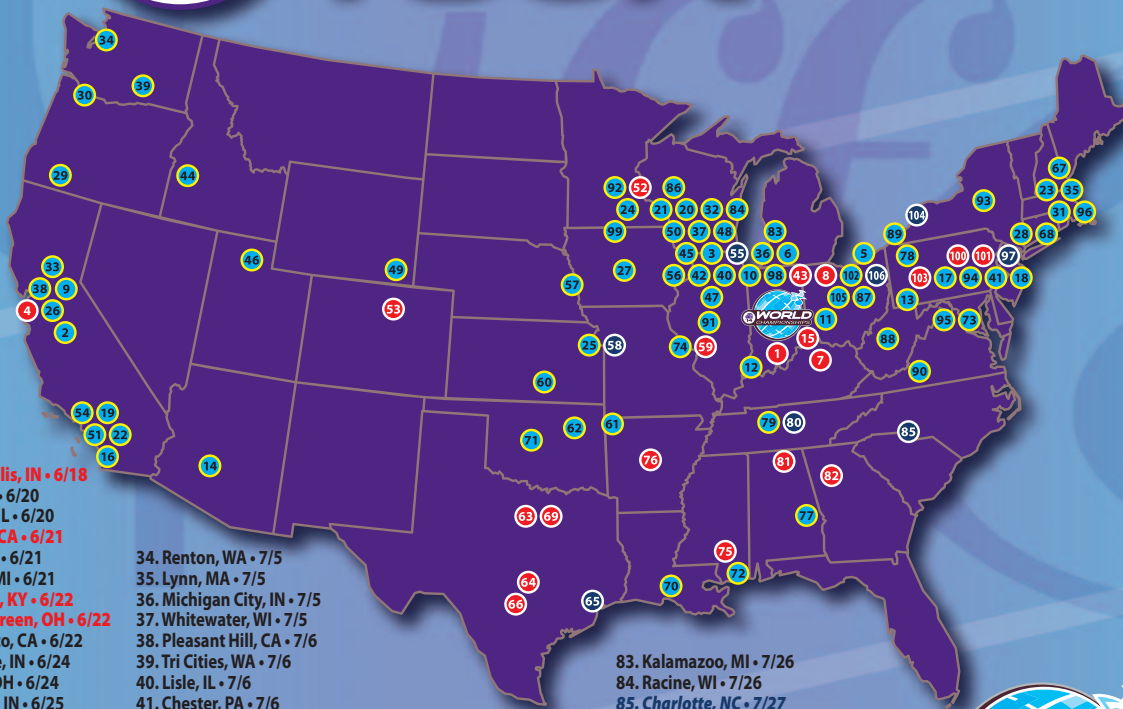
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Kelvin Jones is pursuing a doctorate in music education at Louisiana State University, where he is a graduate teaching assistant with the music education and band departments. While at West Feliciana High School, he received numerous awards and accolades, among them being the recipient of the 2013 Baton Rouge Symphony Orchestra's Teacher of Distinction and the prestigious Louisiana Music Educators Association's Young Music Educator of the Year Award in 2011. He earned a bachelor's degree from Jackson State University and a master's degree from Louisiana State.





SUMMER TOUR



1. Indianapolis, IN • 6/18
2. Clovis, CA • 6/20
3. Rockford, IL • 6/20
4. Stanford, CA • 6/21
5. Akron, OH • 6/21
6. Paw Paw, MI • 6/21
7. Lexington, KY • 6/22
8. Bowling Green, OH • 6/22
9. Sacramento, CA • 6/22
10. Merrillville, IN • 6/24
11. Fairfield, OH • 6/24
12. Evansville, IN • 6/25
13. Pittsburgh, PA • 6/25
14. Mesa, AZ • 6/26
15. Muncie, IN • 6/27
16. Oceanside, CA • 6/27
17. Chambersburg, PA • 6/27
18. Jackson, NJ • 6/28
19. Glendora, CA • 6/28
20. Madison, WI • 6/28
21. Rochester, MN • 6/29
22. Riverside, CA • 6/29
23. Lawrence, MA • 6/29
24. Mankato, MN • 6/30
25. Kansas City, KS • 7/1
26. Santa Clara, CA • 7/1
27. Waukegan, IL • 7/2
28. New Haven, CT • 7/2
29. Medford, OR • 7/2
30. Portland, OR • 7/3
31. Bristol, RI • 7/3
32. Cedarburg, WI • 7/3
33. Sacramento, CA • 7/5

34. Renton, WA • 7/5
35. Lynn, MA • 7/5
36. Michigan City, IN • 7/5
37. Whitewater, WI • 7/5
38. Pleasant Hill, CA • 7/6
39. Tri Cities, WA • 7/6
40. Lisle, IL • 7/6
41. Chester, PA • 7/6
42. Dixon, IL • 7/6
43. Ft. Wayne, IN • 7/8
44. Boise, ID • 7/8
45. Dubuque, IA • 7/8
46. Ogden, UT • 7/9
47. Metamora, IL • 7/9
48. Salem, WI • 7/10
49. Cheyenne, WY • 7/11
50. La Crosse, WI • 7/11
51. Laguna Hills, CA • 7/12
52. Minneapolis, MN • 7/12
53. Denver, CO • 7/12
54. Bellflower, CA • 7/13
55. DeKalb, IL • 7/13
56. Muscatine, IA • 7/13
57. Omaha, NE • 7/14
58. Warrensburg, MO • 7/14
59. Lebanon, IL • 7/14
60. Wichita, KS • 7/15
61. Bentonville, AR • 7/15
62. Broken Arrow, OK • 7/16

63. Denton, TX • 7/17
64. Round Rock, TX • 7/17
65. Houston, TX • 7/18
66. San Antonio, TX • 7/19
67. Manchester, NH • 7/19
68. Groton, CT • 7/20
69. Dallas, TX • 7/21
70. Lafayette, LA • 7/21
71. Mustang, OK • 7/22
72. Ocean Springs, MS • 7/22
73. Washington, DC • 7/22
74. St. Louis, MO • 7/23
75. Hattiesburg, MS • 7/23
76. Little Rock, AR • 7/23
77. Opelika, AL • 7/24
78. Johnsonburg, PA • 7/24
79. Nashville, TN • 7/24
80. Murfreesboro, TN • 7/25
81. Huntsville, AL • 7/25
82. Atlanta, GA • 7/26

83. Kalamazoo, MI • 7/26
84. Racine, WI • 7/26
85. Charlotte, NC • 7/27
86. Rice Lake, WI • 7/28
87. Dublin, OH • 7/28
88. Charleston, WV • 7/28
89. Erie, PA • 7/29
90. Salem, VA • 7/29
91. Springfield, IL • 7/29
92. Minneapolis, MN • 7/30
93. Rome, NY • 7/30
94. West Chester, PA • 7/30
95. Warrenton, VA • 7/30
96. Quincy, MA • 7/31
97. NY/NJ area • 7/31
98. Valparaiso, IN • 7/31
99. Forest City, IA • 8/1
100. Allentown, PA • 8/1
101. Allentown, PA • 8/2
102. Avon Lake, OH • 8/2
103. Pittsburgh, PA • 8/3
104. Buffalo, NY • 8/3
105. Centerville, OH • 8/4
106. Massillon, OH • 8/4



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Winning Over the Community

Part of my strategy for convincing the community of the importance of a high-quality music education was to publicize every band accomplishment. The band staff was just me, which meant that I was in charge of public relations and marketing. I emailed administrators and school board members, community leaders and figures, and we also sent out a bi-weekly newsletter to parents. I learned we had free postage at my school as long as anything mailed out was in a school envelope, so we started mailing newsletters to local businesses and politicians. I knew we would eventually want to solicit financial support from them, so before that time came I made sure they knew why we were worth supporting. By the time we were ready to ask for donations, everyone knew what the band was up to.

In small areas, everybody knows everybody, so you want people on your side, because a time will come when you need help. I had boosters who were neighbors to the superintendent and school board president. As the program grew, we needed more instruments. Because I had made a point of publicizing how well band students had done, when it came time to ask for more instruments, I had the clout to point out that the football team got new jerseys every year and classes didn't use books or computers from the 1960s, but we were playing on instruments that old.

My first year there, I knew I wanted to take a big trip the second year. To be able to set up that trip to Memphis, I needed the administration firmly in my corner. At the Spring Music

Explosion, I had the principal conduct, and I advertised this heavily. All we did was play the fight song, something students already knew. This way, regardless of what the principal did, the students could stay together. At the end of the concert, I gave the principal a long introduction, and when we got through the fight song, and the place went crazy. It was a way to get the principal to buy into the program, and he loved the goodwill he built with the band students and parents. This will work with anybody influential that you might need support from down the line. Success breeds success. Once people see something great happening, the school and the community will want to promote it and support it to keep it going.

Fundraising

Rehearsal-thons were an idea I borrowed from another teacher. He would have students get pledges of an amount of money per hour of rehearsal. Each student was responsible for getting pledges totaling at least \$10 per hour. He did this in fall during marching season, and once all the pledges came in, he held a marching rehearsal from 6:00 p.m. to midnight, meaning that each student would raise at least \$60 for the night. This gave the director the opportunity to earn money for the program by doing nothing more than having an extended marching rehearsal.

We did this in the spring with our concert band and brought in a guest conductor to work with students early in the evening. Another option would be to bring in the studio faculty from the local university to pull students out and give masterclasses and clinics. However it is planned, this fundraiser provides some extended rehearsal time while making money for the program.

Here in Louisiana, people love food, so we would have a jambalaya sale. We asked for donations of ingredients. The only thing we bought was \$100 worth of rice. Band parents made jambalaya, and each student brought a side dish, dessert, or utensils. We sold it on a Friday and raised \$3,200, with our only expense being the rice.

A 50/50 raffle works well. We brought raffle tickets and announced that however much money we raised selling the tickets, half would go to the winner. We averaged \$150 per football game at every home game.

Business donation letters also proved successful for the program. At the end of the year we compiled a list of everything music students had

accomplished. We wrote a letter listing these along with a note saying that if a business donated \$50-\$100, we would put their name on the back of next year's band shirt or the website. We noticed that many of the people who ran donating businesses were neighbors or relatives of band students. It was a matter of connections. The first year we raised \$2,800 from donation letters. We got a business card with a logo from each company and made a screen for the shirts. It cost \$40, which was our only expense. All it took was creativity to write a letter and time to mail it.

Band on a Budget

In every state there are surplus property agencies that resell equipment to non-profits and schools for an extremely discounted price. Our school used it to buy tables and chairs, but I learned that Property Surplus, the Louisiana Agency, also had instruments. Many of these instruments came from the military groups. I bought a Buffet clarinet worth \$3,000 for \$250. The only thing missing was the barrel. We bought a barrel and had an orchestral-quality instrument. We bought a Bach Stradavarius trumpet for \$25. A vehicle had run over the bell, which we got fixed for \$75. For \$100 we got a professional trumpet. This was how I beefed up my concert band instrumentation. We bought an oboe, a bass trombone, and a baritone saxophone, all for very little money. When I discovered something new at the warehouse I would find out what the blemish was and get a quote from the local repair shop. If it was worth it, I would buy. There is some paperwork that has to be filled out before Property Surplus can be used, but our school was already buying from them, so this was no problem. To find a state agency for surplus property in your state, visit <http://www.gsa.gov/portal/content/100851>.

Professional Development

Directors should find ways to develop their musicianship as well. I went to as many masterclasses as I could find. Louisiana State University offered a free conducting symposium. I got to conduct the LSU symphonic winds and be critiqued by Michael Haithcock for free. Many college studios offer instrument days as well, so I took advantage of those. Attend local conferences and district band meetings. Observe honor bands even if you do not have any students in the

group. It is amazing what you can learn just watching a clinician work with students.

Frequently, professional development at school had little to do with the teaching in my band room. I met with the principal and got permission to observe other band directors. I visited two high schools and a middle school in the area, observing rehearsals and discussing teaching techniques with the other directors. It cost no money, I earned credit for professional development, and it was time well spent. Later, some of those directors came to my school to observe.

Find someone who you consider an outstanding teacher in your district or area. Music educators are willing to share anything, but you have to ask. New directors are sometimes afraid to ask questions for fear of showing ignorance, but the only way to learn is to

ask. Invite a teacher to work your group and record the rehearsal, or go to their school and observe. I want my students to perform extremely well consistently, so when I see a group with this quality, I find out what that director is doing.

Some programs might be in worse shape than others, but all music programs should be salvageable. It will be like a puzzle; you have to figure out how to move certain things to make it work. I inherited a program without much tradition and history. Through creativity, hard work, and strong mentors, I was able to create something special and get the community to appreciate all aspects of the program. It takes quite a bit of time, but there are many things that cost little money. It is possible to build an outstanding band in a small school. □

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