

“Banding Together” Podcast Transcription with Guest Kelly Clingan

Season 1 Episode 3

Series: The Goals of Beginning Band

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**Joe Sugrue:** Hello to all music educators, students, prospective teachers, family, friends, anyone who's listening and interested in music teaching, and welcome to the third episode of “Banding Together”. Today we're going to be specifically focusing on Beginning Band, what are the goals of Beginning Band class and are those the same goals or new goals from what music teachers have been striving for over the last few decades? My name is Joe Sugrue. I'm a music teacher and a graduate student in Music Education at the University of Washington and in the coming weeks, I'm really excited to talk to a number of fantastic music teachers from different places, and backgrounds and hear what their opinions are on this exact topic: the goals Beginning Band. For today's episode, we have the opportunity to talk with Kelly Clinga, who is a music educator, performer and the education director of Seattle jazz Ed, an awesome program right here in Seattle, Washington, which I'm sure we'll talk about. Kelly is also a co-host of the music education podcast, the Beth and Kelly Show. And so again, I find myself interviewing another fantastic interviewer, and that makes me very nervous...

**Kelly Clingan:** [laughs]

**Joe:** But really, just super glad you're here. And rather than me to continue to introduce you, how about you just tell us more about yourself, your experience with Beginning Band, jazz band, and thanks again so much for being here today.

**Kelly Clingan:** Yeah, that was one heck of a professional introduction.

**Joe:** [laughs]

**Kelly:** I really appreciate that. Yeah, my name is Kelly Clingan. I am Seattle born and, born and raised. I started playing trombone in fourth grade in Seattle Public Schools, and was a student at Washington Middle School and at Roosevelt High School, which were both then as they are now really massive music departments. And then I went to the University of Washington, where I was a Music Education major, and also a Women's Studies major. And my first teaching job out of college, I taught kindergarten through eighth grade general music, and musical theater, and the choir at two different Catholic schools. So lots of hymns and, and then, after that moved to Amsterdam for eight months, right after my daughter was born, and then came back from Amsterdam with an almost one year old, and accepted the band position at Washington Middle School, where I was once a student, and replaced my former band director when he retired--Bob

Knatt. And I taught there for eight years, 350 middle schoolers every day, and I taught Beginning Band, intermediate junior and senior band, so four concert bands, and then the jazz band. And that was my daily schedule. And when I was there, my orchestra teacher was Beth Fortune, who I do the podcast with. And we really made it our mission to change the landscape of that music department--for it to be one where orchestra, band and choir were valued equally by our community and, and also a music department that reflected that of the school demographic, which when I inherited the position, it did not. So

that, anyway, that that's a long conversation. And then I left after eight years, Washington Middle School, and went to become the education director at Seattle jazz Ed. And this is now my fifth year there. And all during that time, I've played trombone, and am one of the two trombonists in a tradition Mexican Banda that I've played in for 20 years. Every single weekend. 20 years. And that's Banda Vagos--la banda de los pobres. And so I figured out how to be a mother and a band director and a performing musician. And it's one, been a heck of a good time.

**Joe:** Awesome.

**Kelly:** And that lands us here, today!

**Joe:** Yeah, no, that's amazing. And later on, I think we'll talk a little bit more about, you know, what teaching under the pandemic has looked like and really recent things and all that. But before we move on too to the main question about, you know, these goals of a beginning class, band, jazz band. I'm wondering if you want to just talk a little bit more about Seattle jazz Ed and the work that you've done recently?

**Kelly:** Yeah, Jazz Ed is something that's been a part of my life since its inception. This is Jazz Ed's 10th year. And 10 years ago, I was teaching at Washington Middle School and my boss at Seattle Jazz Ed, the executive director Laurie to cook, 10 years ago, her youngest son Bergen was a student of mine at Washington. And she was my band booster president, and was launching Jazz Ed partially as a response to what was happening to the Washington Middle School Music Department. Which was, I guess, my second year at Washington Middle School, the Seattle Public Schools closed 12 schools and collapsed--anyway, it was very complex, but 12 schools closed, and they moved from an open enrollment plan for students to a neighborhood schools plan for students. And what happened is 60% of the Washington Middle School Music Department lived north of the ship canal, and were moved to a new middle school called Hamilton. And also about 60% of my students at Washington who thought they would be going to Garfield High School were now going to Franklin High School, which did not have a music department. So Lori's son, and then Wayne Horvitz--who's a professional musician in town and owner of the Royal Room--his son, Lowell was also a student. And so Bergen was going to Garfield. Lowell was going to Franklin. We had professional musicians sending their kids to

Washington so they could go to Garfield, and all of a sudden, they're going to the school with no music department. And so Laurie and Clarence Acox, who was teaching at Garfield at that time, they were on a bus ride to the Hampton Jazz Festival, talking about what was about to happen, and thought, what if we were able to have some way for all these kids to keep playing jazz music together? What would that look like? Sort of an all-city response. And so Jazz Ed started with three big bands, Clarence taught one Bob Knatt, who I replaced at Washington, taught another, and Wayne Horvitz taught the third. And, and that was the start of Jazz Ed. And so from there, very quickly came in some more responses, like starting things like Girl's Jazz Day--that's when I became involved at Jazz Ed as a teacher. Laurie came to me when I was still at Washington and said, "Wow, we've got these three bands going. And we're going to start this beginning class because there are a lot of kids who aren't having access to starting an instrument at their schools." But that response started in the second year of jazz Ed, it was the third year of jazz Ed where Laurie said, "Gosh, there just really aren't a lot of girls in our programs. Kelly, what do you think we could do about that?" So that was year three. And so I came in, in year five, and continued Jazz Ed's mission, which is to make music available to any kid that wants it regardless of if their school has a program or not. And so we started at that point getting into much more diverse programming as far as adding choirs and orchestras. Adding spaces for our--kids that we started our beginning students-- adding a place for them to continue to learn more, before they were ready for our big upper level big bands. And anyway, adding a lot of programming that I'm super proud of to try and continue to address--try and continue to address the problem, which is when you look around the Pacific Northwest at jazz bands, they are. I mean, anecdotal--I don't have obviously figures for all these--But, you know, I adjudicate a whole whole lot of festivals, and I'm out in the schools, and I can tell you that roughly 90% of the students in our jazz bands that are performing are white boys.

**Joe:** Yea.

**Kelly:** And what is up with that? And that's clearly a problem. And coming up with all sorts of ideas on how to address that. And that's my job. And it rules. [laughs]

**Joe:** Right. No, that's a--that's awesome. And I don't, it's awesome, and I don't think it's exclusive to the Pacific Northwest. You know?

**Kelly:** I know that you're right.

**Joe:** Yeah, yeah, of course. And I mean, I grew up in Connecticut, and I went to school in Boston, just did everything in New England up until I came here for grad school. And it's, it's very much the same or very, very similar, at least. So, and if we don't talk about it, and if we don't

do something about it, it's not gonna change. So that's really awesome work. And I would love to keep talking about it.

**Kelly:** Yeah!

**Joe:** I'm sure it'll come up in other ways, too.

**Kelly:** Yeah, totally. I mean, really, that is, the lens in which I have always taught is one of what we now call DEI [Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion], but the idea that music really needs to be for all of our students, and how can we make that happen? So, you know, that was a part of my teaching every day at Washington Middle School--continues to be of course at Jazz Ed. It's the mission, basically. And then, you know, in some of my, I guess, side hustle work, you could say, with the Beth and Kelly show. And then I sit on various committees for music education organizations, and I'm always on the equity team. And a real pain in the butt [laughs] of a lot of people because I am fairly militant about this work. It has been said.

**Joe:** As as we should be. So I think even before moving into the broad question of the goals of Beginning Band, just while we're on the topic, I'm thinking about how not only are there not enough, you know, girl students in jazz bands and things like that, but, just how instruments in general are so gendered--

**Kelly:** Are gendered? Yea.

**Joe:** Yeah. And how messed up that is, and unfortunate it is, and I've heard from people I know, who are older who say, "Oh, I would have played this instrument growing up, but I didn't feel like I could." So how do we as music educators, you know, when we're in a school system, and we're recruiting to our first year band or our second year band, how do you think we can push back against that? And, you know, not--as best as we can not have these influences of gendered instruments be a part of our program? And other issues, too, you know?

**Kelly:** [laughs] I'm, I'm gonna condense this information as much as I can. But there is research that shows that we absolutely gender instruments, and then students are doing that very young--before we ask them to pick instruments, they're gendering instruments. There are links to data around that at one of Jazz Ed's sister--it's our sister website. It's called Jazz Girl USA. And on that website, there are materials specific to work in getting more girls to play music. And we also know, through research, that students feel othered unless there's about 50% of people like them in a learning space. So if we don't want our students to feel othered--and we should want that--then that means half of our classroom at any given time, should be 50% girls, and 50% folks of color. And if we don't hit that mark, our students will feel othered. And this will be a

problem that continues. So knowing those two things, I think we can't deny that this question is extremely important. Because how can we help to have jazz bands where half of the numbers are brass players? How can we hope to have half girls in that group, if we're gendering brass instruments as male? The math doesn't work. And then you know, that's true in concert band and orchestra as well, and choir! You know, we gender choir as a female thing. And middle school teachers will tell you that. "It's hard to get boys to be in choir." So, this work needs to be done early and often by general music teachers, for sure. [dog barks] That's my dog. She feels passionately about this as well. Pinky, she/her."

**Joe:** [laughs] She's, she's applauding , she's cheering you on.

**Kelly:** Definitely more of a tuba player. So I'm gonna let her out to go to the park.

**Joe:** Sure.

**Kelly:** She's gonna go mix it up at the park and talk about this topic. Anyway, I actually--when I was at the UW, my thesis project for my Women's Studies degree was on this topic. And that was in 2004. And so I wrote a paper about gendering instruments. And then I hosted an all girl big band, which was my first--the first time I did all girl programming. And so I've been thinking about this topic since 2004. And what you'll see that we've implemented now at Jazz Ed--which I guess sort of as a culmination of all the different things I tried while at Washington Middle School--When we have our Meet Your Instrument Day, when we present instruments to students, we set up in like a gymnasium type thing, with tables around the room. And students have a half sheet entry ticket, in which they write their name. And there are three spots for their first, second, and third choice instrument. And then they're required to try and play each of the instruments and have like, they get like a little stamp from each of the teachers when they've finished it. And when they get a stamp for having tried each instrument, they take it to my boss, Laurie, and she gives them a pizza pizza. And then we take those half sheets, and process their first, second, and third choices. Girls, and kids of color--I go through those first. And they get their first choice. And, and then I go through all of the--everyone else--which is the white dudes--and plug them in. And what I found actually is that I've never had to give anyone less than their first choice.

**Joe:** Oh, wow.

**Kelly:** So, fascinatingly, although I'm not surprised, those groups end up being half girls and half kids of color. They are not gendering themselves. And I think it's because of how we're presenting the instruments. So the flute, at the flute table..

**Joe:** I was just gonna ask how [were you presenting the instruments]?

**Kelly:** There are two teachers presenting the flute and they're both men. At the clarinet table--a man and a woman. At the saxophone table--man and a woman. At the brass table--all women. At the bass table--all women. You get me?

**Joe:** Mhm.

**Kelly:** And the best I can to hit that mark. Also to have trans representatives, folks of color at each table, and it's a lot of work. Seattle is a not a very diverse place, a lot of work to pull off that event and to have there be representation that is other than what they would typically have thought. [laughs]

**Joe:** Right.

**Kelly:** And we obviously pay those teachers and they're there and they help the kids get their first notes. Parents come it's like this epic event.

**Joe:** Yeah! Sounds like a lot of fun. I really want to go!

**Kelly:** It's so fun! And then those kids come together for typically a camp experience. And it's a one week camp. And at the end of the camp, there's a concert and they are playing actual songs by rote with all of those teachers--who are of course the same people that presented the instruments who've been teaching them all week--and it is a festive--Hey, it's happening!

**Joe:** That is awesome.

**Kelly:** Parents are seeing what this ensemble looks like. The whole front row of flutes isn't all girls! [laughs] They're seeing these diverse group of teachers having fun playing music with students. And it is probably the greatest event of the entire year that we do. And then those kids join us the next school year and continue to play those instruments. That's the hope.

**Joe:** Wow. That's great.

**Kelly:** And that camp is free, I should add.

**Joe:** Oh, wow.

**Kelly:** That's like, a critical component.

**Joe:** That's amazing.

**Kelly:** Yeah!

**Joe:** So, I don't even want to move on. I have another question about this.

**Kelly:** Sure go ahead!

**Joe:** Because I do think it's so important. What, so I want to replicate something like that, or let's say teachers who might be in public schools, and maybe they don't have as much resources to bring in lots of teachers to be, you know, representative of these instruments and things and help in that process, which I think is crucial. Could it be as simple as--if I'm the only one putting on the Meet the Instruments Show, is it as simple as a conversation? Or we're just talking about...

**Kelly:** I think it can be as simple as showing a video of each instrument. Representation that way, for sure. And then, uh, yeah, I think that I mean, that's the free way to do it.

**Joe:** Sure.

**Kelly:** There are always culture bearers in every community who are often willing to give of their time. If you say up front, you know...

**Joe:** Yep. Yeah. And it's, and it's definitely, it's definitely one of those critical moments, not just in your school year, but potentially in that student's life in music, that you want to put resources and time and effort into. Yeah, so that makes sense to me.

**Kelly:** It's a real critical moment. Once you've picked your instrument, you are very unlikely to change.

**Joe:** Yeah. Yeah. I myself wanted to change instruments and stuff in school, and was probably easier for me to do for a variety of reasons, and was still given lots of pushback. [laughs] Wow. Yeah.

**Kelly:** And there also, you know, in a lot of cities, there are youth orchestras. And here in Seattle, SYSO--The Seattle Youth Symphony Orchestra--have a program, or at least they did when I was at Washington called the Endangered Instruments Program--EIP. And so they were trying to get more students playing endangered instruments,, which were oboe, bassoon, French horn, and viola, and trombone. They didn't--were having a really hard time filling those seats in there, you know, their youth orchestras. And so this program was developed, and they sent

coaches who would teach those instruments once a week for free. So what I would do is, funnel girls and kids of color to those instruments. And specifically a Washington Middle School students who I knew, you know, would really, really benefit from this free instruction. Um, I mean, think about scholarship opportunities. Those are the scholarship instruments right there. And no, this made it, this, this got--SYSO wasn't always thrilled with that, because these are also students who would have a hard time getting up to Shoreline on Saturdays for rehearsals, and they wanted them for that. And I was like, "Well, that kind of sounds like a you problem." [laughs] So I continued to do that for all of my time at Washington. None of those kids ever participated in SYSO, and I guess I maybe feel bad about that? But not really...I think some of those kids continued to play in high school. So that...you know?

**Joe:** Yep. No, that all makes sense. All right. So I mean, we've already covered a lot of, I think, what you could consider as some of the goals of Beginning Band. I mean, right now, we're even talking about what are the goals of before you even get students into a band program, right? That's even *more* of Beginning Band. So then what, in your opinion, too, should be the goals of Beginning Band or, you know, beginning jazz band, because I know that's a lot of what you're doing now? Yeah, it's a big question, but yeah.

**Kelly:** I mean, it's really the same thing.

**Joe:** Yea...

**Kelly:** I think...

**Joe:** But even *after* you get the students on the instruments and, yeah...

**Kelly:** Like that first year.

**Joe:** Yeah.

**Kelly:** The squeak and squawk fest.

**Joe:** The squeaking squawk fest--what are you saying when you walk in? You know, all right, by the end of month one, I want students knowing this, doing this, feeling this, playing this, whatever...?

**Kelly:** I feel like at the end of that first year of instruction, that students should be able to get a characteristic sound on that instrument. Should be able to read some very basic rhythms. Should have comfort learning simple melodies by ear.



**Joe:** Yep.

**Kelly:** You know, know the names of the notes and the fingerings on their instrument. You know? An octave, probably? And if the kids don't play a concert pitch instrument, they should know how to transpose. And basically, I mean, I don't have--I've never actually made a list--but basically, what are the things that my kids need to know so that they can more easily make music with other people?

**Joe:** Yes! [laughs]

**Kelly:** [laughs] Basically...

**Joe:** And I, yeah. Oh, no, you can go ahead [potentially interrupted]

**Kelly:** No, I have--one of my puppies. My puppy is on the loose. So I will be on a puppy recovery mission right now...

**Joe:** [laughs]

**Kelly:** As we continue to talk about this, because I like to talk and walk.

**Joe:** Yeah, no, that's fine!

**Kelly:** I think that the curriculum needs to change. I think it needs to be decolonized in the beginning music world. I think, you know, European folk songs...cool. But do they have to all be? [laughs] Ya know?

**Joe:** Right.

**Joe:** Okay, we are recording. So the last thing you said that right before things started to cut out--and I really do want to talk about--you said something along the lines of European folk songs?

**Kelly:** Oh, yeah, sure.

**Joe:** "Sure, maybe some? But why all?" You know, and, and then from there, you were starting to talk about some more things I maybe heard "learning by rote..." Yea.

**Kelly:** Yeah, sure. Not only do we have to deal with how we're presenting instruments, so that the kids themselves are diverse in each instrument group, but then we have to do better with what music they're learning to play. Why can't it be *C Jam Blues*? Why does it have to be *Hot Cross Buns*? You know, and plenty of teachers are thinking that. There are some minstrel songs that pop up in various method books. There are a lot of teachers who are skipping over those songs. But um, you know, maybe we need a better method book. Um, which I'm actually currently kind of maybe gonna be working on...I don't know. But, you know, maybe...maybe, yeah--we have to do better about what music the kids are playing. We have to do better with making a list of outcomes for that year be different than I think what most teachers have on their mind. Add in improvisation and learning by ear **for sure**.

**Joe:** I was gonna ask, when do you, when do you think we--I have my own, obviously, like thoughts about all of this--but I just want to hear from you. And all these great folks. So when do you think we introduce something like, yeah, when do we introduce improv--improvisation?

**Kelly:** Immediately.

**Joe:** Yea...?

**Kelly:** Immediately. There...there's clear evidence that, that it's harder to get girls, and often kids of color to be folks who want to stand up and take a solo. There are a lot of different reasons that that is. One is being othered already. You know, but all but for girls, we're really raised with this idea of needing to present ourselves perfectly to the world. And improvisation by nature is not perfect. And I think it benefits all of our students to be learning to be a little more brave, and willing to put themselves out there in a safe space, which should be our classroom.

**Joe:** Yeah.

**Kelly:** And that first year is so critical to plant those seeds and not to talk about it--we don't need to talk about it. We just need to **do** it. [laughs]

**Joe:** Right. Right! And I think that's so refreshing to hear too, because I think by being a--so I had a lot of informal instruction, or not informal instruction, just informal learning happening with music and music playing in my house all the time, and all kinds of different music. But even then, I'm not going to deny that I'm still a product, just as a person in school music, of school music teaching. And so when I did teach, just for one year, a Beginning Band course, with a really small band, I wasn't thinking much about improvisation. And I was so nervous about developing some sort of final product that was really grand and presentable anyway, that I didn't really think about, even though I improvise all kinds of music all the time. But I got in a

classroom, and I was the music teacher, and all of a sudden, I forgot about improvisation or something. And, and you only need one note to improvise, really.

**Kelly:** Absolutely.

**Joe:** So there's no need to say, "Oh, well, they need to know the blues scale first," or "they need to know the Dorian mode first" or anything like that.

**Kelly:** I would say let's not ever learn the blues scale.

**Joe:** Sure!

**Kelly:** It is totally, not cool. [laughs]

**Joe:** Can you explain that more?

**Kelly:** Yeah, I mean, well, we can introduce the blues scale, or I would say, let's introduce maybe blue notes. But what you start to hear is kids just playing up and down the blues scale

**Joe:** Totally

**Kelly:** and that's just really not. Um, it's just really...I don't think the best way to be teaching blues improvisation. I would much rather start with how the movement between thirds and sevenths, or just playing "you're only allowed to play the roots and blue notes." Or, you know, these types of things. The blue scale is so corny.

**Joe:** Yeah.

**Kelly:** Not in a good way. [laughs]

**Joe:** [laughs] It's actually I'm so glad you said that because I literally did think to myself, I wanted to ask you about the blues scale--I'm not even joking. Because I remember when you're in middle school...

**Kelly:** I mean, I just said a very controversial thing. That's very controversial when I think about...

**Joe:** Sure. So I won't necessarily say I'm like, I 100% agree or disagree or anything, but I think it's a really good point. And, and in my experience, I think I land more on the side of agreeing

with you right now anyway, because in my experience, I remember when we were learning the blues scale in middle school bands--so I was learning jazz and hearing jazz and playing it outside of school too--but I was still influenced by school and heard what other kids were doing. And in middle school, that sounds okay for a little while. But then what you end up having to is 90% of the students once they're sophomores, juniors, even seniors in high school, they really have only ever learned that.

**Kelly:** Right.

**Joe:** And a lot of us get stuck then in that scale or stuck in scales in general.

**Kelly:** I just don't think we're adding facility that's universally important. Like, understanding how to spell out a chord will be much more helpful in wanting to play in other sty--genres. With other humans. You know, chords that aren't in a blues? It's more helpful to learn how to arpeggiate a chord than to be able to play the blues scale in all 12 keys. I just think we're opening up, if we're gonna teach one method [laughs], I think we're opening up more doors, if we don't go the blues scale route. But that is, like I said, that's a very controversial, idea...[laughs]

**Joe:** Sure. And another thing I'm thinking about with improvisation, too, is if it's not as if people and students haven't already been exposed to improvisation their whole life.

**Kelly:** A conversation is improvisation.

**Joe:** Exactly, exactly! And everything we do--so why should it be any different when we have an instrument? And improvisation in our lives in--exactly--in simple things, like a conversation, but also, you know, in music too; people listen to music, with their families, in all different kinds of communities all the time where improvisation is taking place, and we are exposed to that. So then why do we have to wait until four years down the line to start doing it on our instrument?

**Kelly:** Well, I think part of it, teachers have to accept responsibility that by like, by saying things like "transcribe this solo and play it like Johnny Hodges"--if we go that route, of reverence, and almost worship, and ask our students to, you know, emulate, I think we shoot ourselves in the foot a little bit. Like, we're almost asking our students to be that virtuosic when they start. I think we ought to offer much more simple examples. I think, as teachers, we should put ourselves out there as the person improvising using only three notes. Much more common response, and just really, like demystify the whole thing. I think we've shot ourselves in the foot by expecting--our kids somehow think that we expect it to sound like these professional records, for us. But that's not what we should expect. Ya know? [laughs]

**Joe:** Yeah.

**Kelly:** I think having written solos in arrangements, I think it shows that too.

**Joe:** Sure.

**Kelly:** Like, “if you can't play something as good as this written solo, then you know, then you should play the written solo... You can use the chord changes, but only if it's gonna be better than this thing we wrote.” Well, the thing “you” wrote is hard to play! So what are you telling kids?!

**Joe:** [laughs] Right, oh, so you're so you're saying like,

**Kelly:** I say just have chord changes!

**Joe:** Yeah, I was thinking, I was thinking that as well. Yea

**Kelly:** Ya know?

**Joe:** Yeah, no. Yeah.

**Kelly:** Why don't we do that?

**Joe:** If you can't... Yeah, that's a really good point. Not to mention, it's just not how, if we're talking about jazz, it's just not how really the art form developed anyway. So...

**Kelly:** By institutionalizing jazz--which I still think is a fantastic thing that we've done--but it brought with it a lot of ideas that are not beneficial to kids, and they're not culturally responsive. Ya know? We spend a lot of time teaching parts. We spend, as jazz educators probably 95% of our time teaching parts. Like, what is your third trombonist walking away with?!

**Joe:** Right. [laughs]

**Kelly:** Other than the joy of playing music with other people...which you can get in so many other ways.

**Joe:** Right, exactly. And that's a great thing. But you can also provide *so many other* great things.

**Kelly:** Right.

**Joe:** Absolutely.

**Kelly:** But I think jazz itself is **the** most important tool that educators have. And I think we need to be teaching jazz to all of our students--orchestra, concert band. You know, we really need to be doing that. It's America's music. It's rooted in improvisation, and in individual voice! But also community voice, if we are able to, I think teach the way that we should be teaching, infusing history, bringing in, you know, collaboration with other subjects. I mean, we're really able to do that through jazz.

**Joe:** Yeah.

**Kelly:** But not "Edu jazz."

**Joe:** What's that?

**Kelly:** Education Jazz, these arrangements, of which there are millions, are almost all arranged by some white dude to make it accessible, and it's **not real!** It needs to get out of here.

**Joe:** Yea--Is that--I'm not even familiar with that. Is that like, a publishing company or something?

**Kelly:** "Edu Jazz?"

**Joe:** Yea.

**Kelly:** No. It's just my term for really lame educational jazz. [laughs]

**Joe:** Okay, fair enough. [laughs] No, and I'm very familiar with a lot of it. And I've seen it out there. I know...

**Kelly:** You know, if you go to JW Pepper, and you go to jazz arrangements--if it is not, like an original, like, "this is the one that Count Basie band played"--If it's not that, like, repertoire of the big band era--or the current big bands--you know, the Maria Schneider orchestra--those actual charts--let's learn those. Otherwise, all of the arrangements, I think *they gotta go*. [laughs]

**Joe:** Yeah, and I mean, you can...yeah. So, but then what would you do with, like, a middle school band that might not be as proficient and can't really play those charts yet? Do you just have them play standards? And...

**Kelly:** Yeah!

**Joe:** And improvise with those until they can play charts?

**Kelly:** Yes. I would teach out of a Real Book.

**Joe:** Yeah.

**Kelly:** “This is a head...We're gonna make up our own backgrounds.” You can create your own Big Band arrangement as a group and jeez now the kids are learning about arranging. You're able to talk about the choices you're making and maybe there's a style you're going for. I just think it's so much more exciting.

**Joe:** Yeah. Yeah. And I really appreciated what you said earlier--So what I've been talking about with a number of people who have who have come on to the podcast, is conversations I've had with people recently about how we really do, generally speaking, in the world of band education, Music Education--there might be differences--but generally speaking, we're teaching students how to be ensemble players, and so I think that's one of the reasons why--and *only* ensemble players--and *only* play your part and play it well--which is a skill that's useful--but it makes it so that, you know, let's say--I know a lot of people who, after high school band don't really play music anymore. Or they weren't provided with skills to even play outside of school, during school, if they weren't already doing that in their community, right?

**Kelly:** Totally.

**Joe:** And so I loved what you had to say earlier, one of the goals should be to provide students with skills and experiences and confidence is a big one and what you're talking about with, with representation...

**Kelly:** Enough facility to have confidence, and confidence that's grounded in facility. I mean they go together. But I don't just think that for Beginning Band, I mean, I think I'm not saying we get rid of ensembles, because learning to play an ensemble, like you said is important. And also just being a part of a really dynamic community, I think is what keeps keeps kids playing. But the way that we teach ensembles, I think needs to change dramatically. We all teach for the concert. If you teach for the performance, you're only teaching parts and how to play in an ensemble. And that is a massive disservice. So unless we allow teachers to maybe devalue performance or to have fewer performances, then of course, we're not really going to be able to achieve this as a teaching community. But I think it's really important.

**Joe:** I think it's so important too. I am thinking, what advice would you give someone like myself who plans on, or already is, teaching in a public school where I think there's a lot of pressure from administrators, from parents, to have those performances--How do you think we can balance, still doing that...?

**Kelly:** It's tough. I don't know that I have found a solution. But um...but then again, both, you know, the job at Washington was it's own beast--it had its own requirements and expectations. But, you know, that Seattle schools only expects two performances per ensemble per year. So that's what you're contractually obligated to do. And maybe you feel that your students really need more. I don't know that I agree. I mean, I think in a year, two performances, at you know, for families at the school, maybe one festival to hear other bands, and maybe one small travel experience, you know, just camp a couple of miles away? I mean, that's what we were doing at Washington, and I thought that was the right amount. But also, that's a whole lot of stuff to plan! And to execute. And of course, I was doing more than that, because the top concert band and the jazz band performed beyond what I just described. And performance is very important. And we learn--our students learn a lot from performance. But I think we've all gone a little too crazy, a little too crazy.

**Joe:** Yeah. Yeah, I've been even thinking, why don't we have more, open rehearsals, almost? You know, like...

**Kelly:** Sure, and we do that at Jazz Ed! You know, our December concert for our beginning students it's an open rehearsal.

**Joe:** Yeah, that's great!

**Kelly:** You know we're not doing outfits, we're not doing programs...

**Joe:** Right.

**Kelly:** It's just come, "this is what we're working on."

**Joe:** Right. And it's celebrating the process, not just the product.

**Kelly:** Yep. And, and you can, as the teacher, talk to the families. You know, "when we started it, we played it much slower, and we've been able to work it up to this tempo. I heard--I hope you've been hearing that at home..." You know, it can really become much more of a partnership I think that way. And you're slowly teaching families, I think, what a reasonable expectation is [laughs] for learning?



**Joe:** Right. Yea.

**Kelly:** Ya know? And I think you could get really creative with what performances look like. Why does it have to be an on stage concert? Maybe it's more, almost like a science fair might be at a school? What if you had little--what if you were doing a chamber group unit, and you just had little groups of kids scattered throughout the hallways in the evening? A stroll through [laughs] the chamber?

**Joe:** [laughs] Sure!

**Kelly:** But I think that would be dope!

**Joe:** That would be awesome! It would sound so cool.

**Kelly:** So cool!

**Joe:** Yeah.

**Kelly:** I think families would be enamored by that.

**Joe:** Yeah, me too.

**Kelly:** And I would argue that, like Beth and I did at Washington--but we were lucky enough to have parallel schedules--so when I had my Beginning Band, she had her Beginning Orchestra, etc.--but I would mix instrument groups too--I would have there be orchestra and band kids in each of those chamber groups. So that, you know, I would do all of that. [laughs] So that, it's just as dynamic as possible.

**Joe:** Wow. Well, this has already really just opened my mind to so many different possibilities.

**Kelly:** [laughs]

**Joe:** I'm loving this. And I think the last thing I wanted to ask about before we'll wrap up too is, what has your experience, what has Seattle jazz Ed's experience been, with COVID? With the pandemic, with sensitivity to that, but also teaching through that? What's your experience been like?

**Kelly:** Well, for me, personally, it's been very exciting time, because my job is to create programming and to make it happen. And so I've had to develop [laughs] all of the programming and make it happen. So it's been super exciting. It's been really fun because it's forced our hand as music teachers--it has forced us to get away from ensemble performance. And of course, this is why most of my colleagues are completely freaking out because that is what they and their students and families value the most and think of as music class, but for this crazy lady, that's not what I think of as music class, and so I have been able to develop programming and make it available to other teachers for free to basically push my agenda.

**Joe:** [laughs]

**Kelly:** And it has been so exciting, [laughs] I am like flourishing in this time as a thought leader, because I actually think it's **great** that we're forced to not teach to the concert. So I've been--love it.

**Joe:** What's an example of something you've done? I mean, that sounds awesome. I'm excited for you. But I want to, yea, hear an example.

**Kelly:** Yeah, sure! Over the summer, well, our immediate response was to launch a masterclass series, which we did right away, like a history of jazz kind of a thing, and a voice offering. And those were well attended and received. So we offered some more. And I also spent a lot of time thinking about, like, what do people need during a time of trauma? And like what has worked, and I was really inspired by the fireside chats that FDR did. Like I thought, what if there was this way that music could be helpful to families, and we developed this, these listening guides to kind of--and also to try and accomplish this idea that, like, a lot of people just say they don't "understand jazz." And I thought maybe we can get at both of those things. So we had teachers, go through entire albums, and talk about them with families, and those were all recorded. And then we created worksheets that went along with the master classes and the listening guides, so that teachers could play the video for their students in one class, and then the worksheet would be something that students could use to turn in. So that you know those types of things were the early response.

**Joe:** Sure, very cool.

**Kelly:** Like in the spring. And we also did some, like daily 20 minute warm up things. So kids can play along with our teachers for 20 minutes, just to like, really meditate on their instrument and to keep their chops fresh kind of thing.

**Joe:** Sure!

**Kelly:** And then over the summer, we did a jam of the week camp. So it was four weeks, and then a second four weeks. So some students took all eight weeks, and there was a beginning, level an intermediate, and an advanced level. And students learned charts a lot like what I described today. There were lead sheets, there were some recordings to play along with a backing track, and office hours for help with the teacher. And then on Friday, students would submit a recording of themselves playing the melody and improvising two choruses and would play it for the class and receive feedback from the teacher--positive feedback and next steps--and that was offered to teachers also for clock hours. So we had teachers taking the class and are now teaching those materials and those materials are available to teachers as like a learning kit right now. So that...and then[laughs]

**Joe:** That's awesome. Where can teachers find that? Is that on the website?

**Kelly:** It's on the Seattle Jazz Ed website.

**Joe:** Great.

**Kelly:** In the Educator's Store.

**Joe:** Great.

**Kelly:** And right now we are teaching--or in the fall and is continuing--we're teaching beginning instruments online and it's working. And I am teaching two big bands online, the Ellington groups, and we're teaching ukulele in a couple of schools. And in February, we are launching our protest songs curriculum.

**Joe:** Wow!

**Kelly:** A lot like jam of the week was, but like a flex score. So um, anyway, that's all on the website.

**Joe:** Yea!

**Kelly:** It's been so much fun!

**Joe:** Yea! It sounds like Seattle Jazz Ed has not slowed down. [laughs]

**Kelly:** No we're--I mean, I'm not speaking to the *financials*--but *educationally* we are thriving! And over the summer we had a student from France. We had a teacher in Africa download the teacher toolkit. I mean, the message that jazz is something that we should be teaching early and often is spreading and I have, I guess COVID to thank for that.

**Joe:** Wow...Wow, that's a lot to think about but... [laughs]

**Kelly:** [laughs]

**Joe:** But thank you so...

**Kelly:** Oh! We also--this is so exciting I know we're supposed to end but

**Joe:** No no no no no it's okay!

**Kelly:** Every February Jazz Ed goes out into the schools, elementary schools, for Black History Month jazz assembly. And we offer that for free to 20 schools. And then those kids are the ones invited to that beginning camp I was telling you about. But this year, we went into the studio, and we made a jazz assembly video.

**Joe:** No way!

**Kelly:** And it will be--I just watched the draft of it this morning. Ohhhh! It is amazeballs! And it's 30 minutes long. And it will be available for teachers to show and it's appropriate for kindergarten and up. It's very exciting.

**Joe:** Wow. That is amazing.

**Kelly:** [loud dog barking] And my dogs are super excited about it too!

**Joe:** They've been passionate about a lot today. [laughs]

**Kelly:** [laughs]

**Joe:** All right. Well, thank you so much, Kelly. I mean, this has just been fantastic and I'm learning so much. I can't wait to see--

**Kelly:** [dog barks] One second! Look at how much excitement they have for music...

**Joe:** [laughs]

**Kelly:** [laughs]

**Joe:** They don't want me to go--they're enjoying this.

**Kelly:** No they really don't. They've had a really fun time in this interview.

**Joe:** Right. Well, thank you so much.

**Kelly:** Yes!

**Joe:** And I've learned a ton. I can't wait to check out that website--I mean, I have checked it out before but--I have seen some of the resources, but you know, for people who haven't who are listening, they should go and check 'em out.

**Kelly:** We have so much stuff. And may I close with a thought?

**Joe:** Yes, please.

**Kelly:** Those resources are really something that all teachers are qualified to teach.

**Joe:** Mmm.

**Kelly:** If you can play your instrument enough to, you know, are confident enough to call yourself a teacher of music to kids--*you are qualified to be teaching jazz*. It is not for a special club. So please do access those materials, even if you are a classical oboist, you know what I mean?

**Joe:** Sure. That is so important.

**Kelly:** Like, this is the time to do it.

**Joe:** Right.

**Kelly:** When else are we gonna do it if we don't start doing it now?

**Joe:** Right. And that's huge that you've thought about that 'cause I think that is a real barrier to so many music educators.

**Kelly:** Totally, yes.

**Joe:** “Oh, I don't know jazz. I've never really improvised. I can't teach that.” Well, you *can* and check out these resources. [laughs]

**Kelly:** Yea, exactly.

**Joe:** Great. Well, thank you so much, Kelly.

**Kelly:** Sure!

**Joe:** And this was fantastic. And thanks to everybody who's been listening.

**Kelly:** Yes!

**Joe:** And until next time, talk to you soon.

**Kelly:** Adios!