

Greetings Everyone!

Mr. Gilbert here, looking to provide an update for the State of the Performing Arts at MCHS. The pandemic has truly thrown a curve ball at education, causing us to redefine the word “creative” as we find and develop effective and meaningful curriculum in the 2020-2021 Academic Year.

One of the departments with the toughest job this year is Performing Arts. **Due to protocols and restrictions laid out by the DOE, we are not allowed to sing or play wind instruments indoors, masked or not. Outdoor playing requires 14-foot separation and masks, a difficult set of protocols that will make playing wind instruments and singing at school near impossible.** As you can imagine, it makes the world of music very different for students this year, but knowing the students involved in our program, I can say I wholeheartedly believe that we will persevere.

It is difficult to replace the normal form and function of classes like Concert Band, Jazz Band, Concert Chorus and Chamber Singers where full group rehearsals are what we are accustomed to. As I seek to provide a quality music and art experience to students in both a remote and in-person environment, it is important to remember the motivations that drive us to create music. We make music for our own relaxation, for a sense of ownership and control over the magic we create. We make music to heal, overcome and share. We create.

I want to quickly give you all an update on the state of performing, playing and rehearsals as they currently stand. As the research and studies into aerosol projection and performing indoors are completed, protocols may change and allow us to play together again in person. This update is effective for the beginning of the 2020-2021 School Year.

Concert Band: Concert Band does not meet until the 2nd quarter, beginning November 9th. The current plan (subject to change) is to assign students work using the program “SmartMusic” for remote classes, and switch to a Theory/Percussion Ensemble model for in-person instruction. It is an incredible opportunity to engage students in a new way, and I’m really excited at the possibilities for this, especially the Percussion Ensemble, that could serve as our vehicle for a Winter Performance (recorded of course).

Concert Chorus: Concert Chorus does not meet until the 2nd quarter, beginning November 9th. The current plan (subject to change) is to assign students work that tackles the 4 major pillars of Choral “Understanding”: Music Theory, Music Analysis, Music Appreciation, Choral Technique. The silver lining due to restrictions on singing is that students taking this class can improve their understanding and relationship with music, setting up their future success in Choral performance. While singing has been restricted indoors, I have gotten approval for humming! This sounds a little odd, yes, but there are so many benefits to choral technique centered around humming. I’ve been preparing several tune to be performed entirely with humming, and I’m excited to see how the students take to them!

Chamber Singers: Chamber Singers will function very different this year (or at least the Fall) due to restrictions on singing and school activities. First of all, with the stress Hybrid learning and the pandemic are causing, the last thing I want to do as a teacher is contribute to students burning out. I’m here to support their mental health first and foremost. With that said, I’ve given each student in Chamber Singers 3 options for the year (subject to change if guidelines shift): Participate in Chamber through Performance, Participate in Chamber through non-performance, and sit out of Chamber this year. *Students in Chamber Singers have been emailed already about the changes, and will need to reply to inform me of their option for the Fall.*

Importantly, there will be no before school rehearsals for Chamber Singers to begin the school year. Any change to this will be clearly and quickly communicated to parents. Students that fully participate in Chamber Singers this Fall will be working on individual/small-group singing projects, largely done remotely. We have received permission to do small group meetings/rehearsals before school hours, as long as the group is no larger than 8, and the singing is distanced OUTSIDE. If the need arises, students and I will coordinate a before school rehearsal well in advance so transportation can be addressed.

Jazz Band: Similar to Chamber Singers, Jazz Band will function very differently. In order to maintain equity, students will be given similar options for Jazz Band: Participate Fully or Sit Out for the Year. Participating fully will entail weekly playing assignments in the program SmartMusic, where students will prepare repertoire that, if the opportunity arises, we will perform for a live concert.

Also like Chamber Singers, **there will be no before school rehearsals for Jazz Band to begin the school year. Any change to this will be clearly and quickly communicated to parents.** I have received permission to do individual instrumental lessons before school hours, with Wind Instruments being limited to outside playing and Non-Wind allowed inside, both with distancing. If the need arises, students and I will coordinate a before school rehearsal well in advance so transportation can be addressed.

Students have already been emailed about the change, and will need to get back to me as soon as they can on their decision.

Like many teachers, I am incredibly worried about the quality and effectiveness of the instruction your student will receive this year. There is nothing more that I would like than to be back to business as usual, and letting music fill our space once again. I promise as your student's Music Teacher to help aid them throughout this year, academically or mentally, as we face these uncertain times. And soon, we will be able to make incredible music again.

Perhaps more than in the past, I call upon the community to help support the music makers and performers we are molding as they face, arguably, one of the most trying times in their young lives. With your continued encouragement and support, we can overcome the challenges we face, and the effect they have on our program in the coming years.

If you have any questions, please send me an email at dan_gilbert@marancook.com. I'll be glad to answer them.

Regards,
~Mr. Gilbert, RSU38 Music Educator, High School.