



NEBRASKA musicteacher

NMTA Newsletter

Winter 2026

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From the President



“Give me a break!” Sound familiar? The summer months have arrived, and hopefully with them, opportunities for each of us to recharge and reset. It’s been a good year for NMTA with the next few months providing time for a “break” while we reflect and anticipate future plans.

Our NMTA membership numbers are up! That’s good news! If you know a teacher who is not yet a member, consider inviting them to experience one of our offerings: a recital or student event, a meeting, an activity, our One-day State Conference, or a monthly Coffee Chat to name a few. As we continue to grow as an organization, we will continue to be enriched by each other.

All of our NMTA Board positions are filled! That said, there can be a turnover, and new volunteers are always welcome. If you are interested in serving, just make that known to one of our Board members. Your willingness to serve will be appreciated. We are stronger and better together!

There continues to be a strong interest in student participation. All of our District Festivals were successful and student performances were outstanding across the board. Most of our students will qualify for State Festival next October. Consider the options in the upcoming competitions to challenge interested students. In addition, both LMTA and OMTA offered special student workshops or activities throughout this past year that further enriched their music education.

NMTA members will have a variety of options to engage in. Starting up again in September, Coffee Chats will meet on Zoom for a “coffee break” with fellow teachers to discuss a topic or simply enjoy social time together. A volunteer “host” will send out the invitation link and choose the date and time for a specific month. Perhaps this can work for you? Our Local



From the President continued

Associations often have their calendar year in place by their first meeting—some meetings or workshops may be offered hybridly. When possible, try to attend in-person events that help to build relationships and strengthen our connections with each other.

Our State Conference is planned for Friday, October 23rd at Concordia University (our co-host) in Seward. We are looking forward to welcoming Catherine Rollin as our Conference Clinician. This one-day event promises to be another full and rewarding experience which will include a 150th MTNA Anniversary Celebration program featuring performances by our own teachers and their students. Additional details can be found elsewhere in this newsletter. Take advantage of these stimulating opportunities presented to you!

As your President, I am honored to represent Nebraska again at the upcoming MTNA Summit Meeting in September. These meetings provide support and new ideas for each state in their affiliation. Let's keep our momentum as an organization moving forward again in 2026-2027!

In harmony,
Jane Sonneland, NMTA President



LMTA Celebrates Leadership, Service, and Community Partnerships

The Lincoln Music Teachers Association (LMTA) concluded a successful year of programming with a series of events that highlighted the organization's commitment to leadership development, community service, music education, and outreach.

On May 2, 2026, LMTA members, students, and friends gathered for the association's final meeting of the year. The evening began with a lively Music Trivia Night before transitioning into the annual membership meeting and election of officers.

During the meeting, members recognized outgoing President Lindsay Bartlett for her service and leadership over the past term. Incoming President Elizabeth Grimpo presented Bartlett with a certificate of appreciation on behalf of the association.

LMTA also welcomed a new Executive Committee for the coming year. The incoming leadership team includes President Elizabeth Grimpo, President-Elect Malachai Million, Vice President Priscilla Kliewer, Secretary Samantha Carr, Treasurer Nancy Binder, and Immediate Past President Lindsay Bartlett.

As the new leadership team begins its work, members also welcomed a new Program Director, Bob Fuson, whose extensive experience in music performance, composition, and arts leadership will support LMTA's educational programming and outreach initiatives.

President-Elect Malachai Million brings a diverse background in higher education and performance to his new role. He shared:

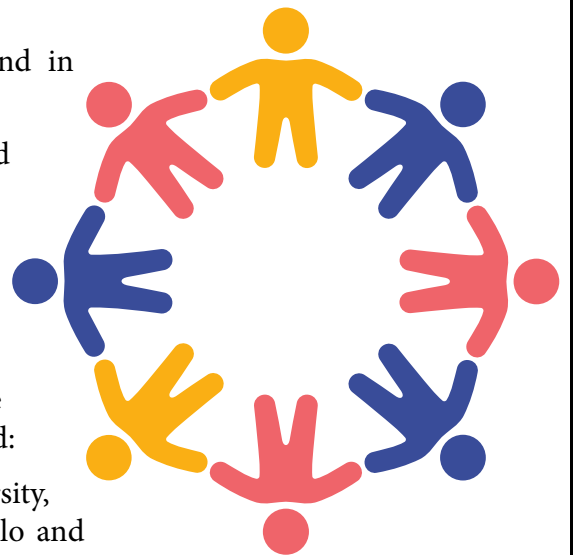
"I am an adjunct instructor at multiple universities/colleges and an active performer in a variety of styles and ensembles. I've been married to my wife Christen for 12 years and we have two boys, Gus (5) and Cyrus (3). In my (very limited) free time, I like to spend time with family and watch the KC Royals lose baseball games."

Incoming President Elizabeth Grimpo has been a longtime member of Nebraska's music education community. She reflected:

"I've been teaching in the music department at Concordia University, Nebraska in Seward for almost twenty years. I love piano (solo and collaborative repertoire), music theory, and church music. Lately, I've become interested in the concept of beauty and what that means in music and the arts. In my limited free time, I like to cook, read non-fiction, and watch baseball. I have four daughters, who never complain when I practice at home, and a large dog who curls up right by my feet, sometimes making it difficult to pedal."

New Program Director Bob Fuson shared:

"I have been in the arts for nearly three decades as a saxophonist, composer, arranger, and music director. My main musical interests are saxophonists who live on the fringes of acceptability and the fusion of the saxophone into unexpected genres. I perform in three sax-based chamber ensembles as well as my own



LMTA Celebrates (continued)

groups. I have been married for twenty years to my wife Ashleigh and we have three boys - Carter, Dave, and Theo - as well as a cat and a dog. Outside of music I am an avid reader, history buff, and gamer.”

The spirit of community partnership continued later in the month when the Lincoln Alumnae & Patroness Chapter of Sigma Alpha Iota (SAI) hosted She Sings! A Women Composers Concert on May 16. The benefit concert featured both students and local professional performers and raised funds for the LMTA Music Outreach Program (LMTA-MOP).

The Music Outreach Program provides access to music lessons, instruments, maintenance, educational materials, and performance opportunities for students who might otherwise face barriers to participation. The support of organizations such as Sigma Alpha Iota helps ensure that these opportunities remain available to students throughout the Lincoln area.

The concert also reflected the mission of Sigma Alpha Iota International Music Fraternity, which encourages, nurtures, and supports the art of music for women musicians of all ages, races, and nationalities while promoting innovative music education programs across the lifespan.

LMTA’s commitment to service was further demonstrated on May 23, when members Helena Aung, Aleta Collier, Priscilla Kliever, Jo Karl, and Svetlana Yashirin presented a student service recital at Emerald Rehabilitation Center in Lincoln. The recital was dedicated to the honor of Marian Eschliman, one of the founders of the LMTA Music Outreach Program and its chair from 2003–2005.

The event brought music directly to residents of the rehabilitation center while honoring Eschliman’s lasting legacy of service and advocacy for music education access. Through performances by LMTA students, the recital celebrated the power of music to connect generations and enrich communities.

Together, these spring events reflect LMTA’s ongoing mission to support music teachers, develop student musicians, foster community partnerships, and expand access to music education throughout Nebraska. As the organization transitions to new leadership, LMTA looks forward to building on this momentum and continuing to serve students, teachers, and communities across the region.



LMTA District Festival 2026

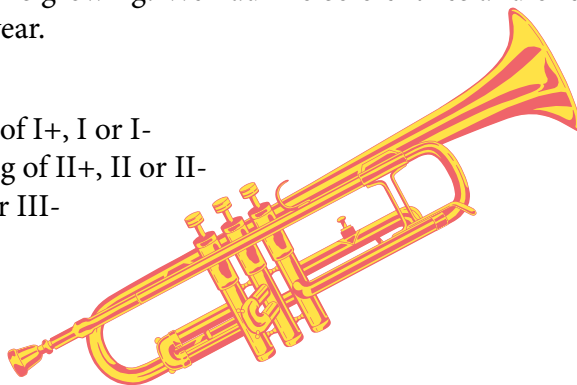
The 2026 Lincoln District Festival was held on April 11 at Nebraska Wesleyan University. 152 students and 26 teachers participated. Some students performed multiple entries, playing more than one instrument and/or joining ensembles. This gave us 167 total entries, including 5 ensemble groups. We had students on piano, violin, cello, flute, and trumpet. Seven judges helped evaluate performances: 5 for piano, 1 for strings, and 1 for flute. Eighteen parents/family members helped by monitoring Judges' rooms. As with last year, the festival used online theory and ear training tests. Our festival is growing! We had 140 solo entries and one ensemble last year and even more students participated this year.

The festival results were:

- About 76% of participants received a performance rating of I+, I or I-
- About 23.7% of participants received a performance rating of II+, II or II-
- No participants received performance rating of III+, III or III-

The average theory test score was 89.75%

- About 62.2% earned a Certificate of Theory Excellence
- About 93.6% qualified for the State Festival in October.



Our heartfelt thanks to all the teachers and parents whose support and dedication made this music festival possible, and to the judges for the valuable feedback and encouragement that helped give our students an inspiring and unforgettable experience. Finally, I would like to extend my sincere appreciation to Florencia Zuloaga, Lisa Myers, Laura Hensley, Linda Dahlstrom, Lindsay Dietze, Manuel Molina and Janka Krajciova Manning. We could not have done this without your hard work and commitment.

Respectfully submitted,

Mai Butler

Co-chair of Lincoln District Festival

OMTA District Festival 2026

The Omaha District Festival was held for the very first time at the Omaha Conservatory of Music on April 25, 2026, and it was a success! The festival ran from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. with a total of 197 students (including two piano duet groups) registered for the festival across the piano, string, and brass areas. We had 9 wonderful judges who did an amazing job of leaving constructive comments for our students: Dr. Stacey Barelos, Jennifer Aliwarga-Carlson, Dr. Kristin Taylor, Stacie Haneline, Dr. Krista Hafez Clark, Dr. Sarka Stehnova, Dr. Feifei Jiang (all piano), Dr. Mary Perkinson (strings), and Alex Serwatowski (brass).

Out of all the participants, 173 received a grading score of I-, I, or I+, and 123 achieved a theory score over 90%. Manuel and I would like to thank all the Omaha teachers for preparing their students and also for volunteering their time during the Festival. Special "thank you" to many parent volunteers serving as door monitors that day: we couldn't have done it without you!

OMTA District Festival 2027 will again be taking place at the Omaha Conservatory of Music on Saturday, May 1st.

Sincerely,

Dr. Janka Krajciova and Dr. Manuel Molina,

Omaha District Festival Co-chairs

NMTA Central District Festival Report

Our Central District NMTA Festival was held on Saturday, April 18, 2026, at Hastings College in the Gray Center. There were 8 teachers and 27 participating music students. Every student passed their online theory test and received performance scores qualifying them for State Festival this October.

It was a beautiful cool morning with the lilacs blooming and the sun shining! Families were entering from the long hallway on the north and also two harps being dropped off at the circular driveway on the west. Lindsay Dietze and I were set up in the spacious center atrium to welcome them.

The Gray Center is a new venue for the festival, as the original Fuhr Music Hall was recently decommissioned. The college is making way for more student spaces on campus. And Fuhr Hall was flooded last June after a torrential rainfall.

Dr. Jonathan Sokasits worked with the college to relocate pianos and establish offices and classrooms in this building just across the sloping hill. Everything went smoothly for the students practicing and performing solos. After one year, he is feeling more “at home” in the new location. We are looking forward to the Central District Festival there from now on.

The Central District chairs would like to thank Lisa Myers, state chair, and Florencia Zuloaga, theory chair, for all the support that was needed to make sure the online theory testing process was successful. And gratitude is also in store for all the district chairs in uploading the test results for the teachers statewide. NMTA is presently on a learning curve for theory testing. We appreciate all the member input and help through this experimental process.

Linda Dahlstrom
Lindsay Dietze
NMTA Central District Chairs

Online District Festival 2026

The online district festival was held in May, 2026, and included all of the same elements used in the in-person festivals: performance, sight-reading, theory and ear training.

29 students from 16 teachers participated, with teachers from Papillion, Bennington, Omaha, Lincoln, and Grand Island. 28 students received either a superior minus, superior or superior plus performance rating and 14 achieved theory excellence with a 90% or higher.

Judges for the festival included Elizabeth Grimpo (piano), Kyu Butler (piano), Kelly Coslet (violin), and Donna Weeldreyer (flute).

Angela Miller-Niles,
online district festival chair

MTNA 2026 Chicago National Conference

Attending my first national MTNA Conference in Chicago was an experience I will never forget. From the moment I walked into the conference, I could feel the excitement. Instructors from around the world had gathered to learn, connect, and celebrate the art we surround ourselves with every day. Over several days, I attended more than thirty presentations, explored poster sessions, met renowned composers and pedagogues such as Catherine Rollin, Helen Marlais, and Dennis Alexander, and enjoyed inspiring performances by Angela Hewitt and Jane Monheit. I also had the opportunity to hear keynote speaker Scott Yoo. My first national conference was more than I could have imagined, and I am immensely grateful to NMTA for making this opportunity possible through the Travel Grant.

One of the presentations that resonated with me most was Fundamentals of Teaching Good Tone by Dr. Smith. It served as a reminder that technique and tone are inseparable. While technical mastery is important, sound must always remain our primary focus. Dr. Smith encouraged us to hear the entire piece in our minds before ever playing it at the piano. He also emphasized the importance of the movement between notes. The “negative movement” often goes unnoticed but plays a vital role in shaping musical expression. One observation that particularly stayed with me was his claim that after depressing a key, approximately 90% of the initial energy can be released while still maintaining the sound. This concept reinforced the importance of efficiency and freedom at the keyboard rather than storing unnecessary energy. It was one of those simple ideas that immediately changes the way you think about movement and tone production.

As a pianist with Czech and Vietnamese parents, I am always interested in conversations about inclusion and cultural representation. I believe music is a universal language and one of the most accessible ways for students to experience different cultures without ever leaving home. A presentation titled

The Stories We Tell by Marceline Merrill reminded me that stories matter. Everyone knows that Beethoven continued composing after losing his hearing, but how many students can name one of his sonatas or symphonies? We often remember the story more readily than the music itself. Merrill explained that stories are powerful because they help us form emotional connections. In fact, hearing relatable stories can trigger the release of oxytocin, a hormone associated with trust, empathy, and relationship building. This was a valuable reminder that music education is about much more than learning notes and rhythms. Stories help students connect with composers, understand the music more deeply, and ultimately remember what they have learned.

Dr. Patricio Molina unknowingly expanded on this theme during his presentation on piano repertoire



MTNA 2026 Chicago National Conference (continued)

from Arabic countries. He introduced composers such as Mohammed Abdel Wahab, Umm Kulthum, and Zakryya Hamdan, and works that many of us had never encountered and challenged teachers to broaden the musical voices represented in our studios. He stressed that Arabic music cannot simply be approached through a Western lens and that understanding its unique characteristics requires curiosity and humility. Yet one of his most memorable points was that it is better to begin learning, even imperfectly, than to avoid unfamiliar repertoire altogether. His presentation encouraged me to continue seeking opportunities to introduce students to music from a wider variety of cultures.

The importance of storytelling appeared again in Helen Marlais' presentation. She shared creative ways to help students connect with their repertoire, from moving and dancing to the music to researching Italian musical terms and composer biographies. One of my favorite ideas was having students discover a composer's favorite meal and recreate it at home with their families. Activities like these transform music from an abstract assignment into a personal experience and help students develop a deeper connection to what they are learning.

Another session that immediately found its way into my teaching was Ben Kapilow's presentation, Strategies for Students Who Rarely Practice. As independent teachers, we often recognize that parents want to support their children but are unsure how to do so effectively. Kapilow recommended the Piano Parent Podcast as a practical resource for families. As musicians, we spend so much of our lives immersed in music that we sometimes forget how unfamiliar the learning process can seem to non-musicians. Providing parents with accessible resources can empower them to ask better questions and become stronger partners in their child's musical journey.

Of course, hearing Angela Hewitt, Jane Monheit, and keynote speaker Scott Yoo was the perfect complement to the educational sessions. Their artistry reminded us why we devote so much of our lives to music and music education. While I wish I could write about every presentation I attended, the common thread throughout the conference was inspiration, new perspectives, the latest research, and renewed enthusiasm for teaching.

I returned home refreshed, energized, and excited to bring these ideas into my studio. The MTNA National Conference allowed me to learn from leading pedagogues, discover new repertoire and teaching strategies, and connect with teachers who share the same passion for helping students grow through music. I am sincerely grateful to NMTA for selecting me as a Travel Grant recipient and for investing in the professional development of music teachers across Nebraska. The experience has already influenced my teaching, and I know its impact will continue to benefit both my students and our musical community.

Sarka Stehnova, DMA



The Cost of Genius: Power, Abuse, and Vulnerability

Sophia Ollis, student of Dr. Kristín Jónína Taylor

A prodigy is someone, often a child, possessing an immense talent in an area of study such as music, athletics, or other academic endeavors. While this appears straightforward, it is rather subjective. The idea of a “prodigy” varies widely, depending largely on cultural, historical, and personal background. What is considered to be remarkable in one culture or period may not meet average expectations in another. Despite this indiscretion, the concept of a prodigy has long been prominent in music, where young performers are conditioned to strive for perfection from an early age. Names of musical prodigies such as Mozart and Beethoven immediately come to mind, but the phenomenon extends much further in time, dating to current artists. More modern artists including Joan Baez, Ella Fitzgerald, Brian Wilson, Michael Jackson, Britney Spears, and Justin Bieber are shockingly, but frequently associated with the term “musical prodigy”. Although these artists differ largely in style, genre, and cultural background, they share one significant commonality; experiences of childhood abuse that shaped not only their lives, but also their art.

To understand this, it is important to recognize how the definitions of “musical prodigy” and “abuse” have evolved. In Mozart’s era, Britney Spears would hardly be considered a prodigy due to performance expectations and gender. However, as cultural norms shift so does the concept of excellence in music and performance. Similarly, awareness of child abuse has expanded. It is no longer understood solely as physical harm, but also emotional, sexual, and financial exploitation. Acknowledging this allows us to fully contextualize the influence of their personal lives on their art.

Abuse within the music industry is not new. Public awareness however, is constantly growing. Many child performers are placed in environments with adults who control their schedules, finances, and music. In some cases, these authority figures are industry professionals, but in others, they are parents or guardians who are meant to look out for the child’s safety and well-being. Both create a power imbalance that can easily lead to exploitation and abuse.

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart’s life illustrates how early this pattern began. Born in 1756, Mozart was heavily controlled by his father, Leopold, a musician proficient in violin, composition, and theory. From age three, Mozart was required to practice for 12 hours a day and perform across Europe for a profit. Leopold managed every aspect of his son’s career, including finances, which left Wolfgang with little autonomy. In addition, historical accounts suggest that Leopold frequently emotionally pressured and scrutinized Wolfgang. This control affected Wolfgang into his adulthood, where he struggled with maintaining finances and personal stability. His upbringing demonstrates how control and exploitation can have life-long effects.

Ludwig van Beethoven’s childhood also shares an upsetting narrative. His father, a court singer who struggled with alcoholism, used harsh and even violent training methods. Beethoven was forced to practice at all hours, sometimes being dragged out of bed in the middle of the night. Mistakes were met with beatings, instilling a deep-seeded fear of failure. This pressure is reflected in Beethoven’s music, which often conveys tension, intensity, and anguish. His thorough approach to composition, with constant revisions, may also be linked to the perfectionism beaten into him through fear and punishment.

Moving to the twentieth century, the experiences of Joan Baez and Ella Fitzgerald highlight other forms of abuse. Baez, known for her protest music, has spoken about uncovering memories at age 50 of sexual abuse from her father throughout childhood, which she believes influenced both her mental health struggles and her commitment to advocacy through her music. Fitzgerald’s story is another one of tragedy. After her mother’s death, she endured sexual abuse from her mother’s companion leading her to run away from home, later being placed in a reform school where she experienced further abuse. For Fitzgerald, music became a place of control in contrast to the instability of her early life. Her joyful and uplifting style can be interpreted as an escape.

The pattern spans even further with figures such as Brian Wilson and Michael Jackson, both brought up by controlling and abusive fathers who acted as their managers. Michael Jackson’s father, Joseph, enforced strict rehearsal routines and used physical punishment as a means of discipline. If Michael or his siblings made a mistake, they would be beaten. Jackson’s later work, including the song “Childhood,” reflects a longing for the youth that he was denied. Brian Wilson also endured physical abuse and emotional manipulation from his father, Murray Wilson. This abuse

Continued

left hearing damage and ongoing psychological struggles. Wilson's music typically expressed a desire for emotional release, peace, and healing. This directly connects his early experiences with his music.

Even now, these patterns persist. Britney Spears' highly publicized conservatorship revealed that control can be forced onto a performer well into adulthood. Under her father's authority, Spears faced restrictions on her freedom, finances, and bodily autonomy. She was forced to work constantly, was given only a small percentage of her earnings while her father gave himself a monthly salary and bonuses, and was forced to wear an IUD to prevent her from having more children. Justin Bieber's career similarly reflects the vulnerabilities of child stardom. Thrown into the spotlight at a young age, he was frequently placed in adult environments that lacked appropriate boundaries. While not yet confirmed, it is widely theorized that he was abused by numerous people within the profession, including P. Diddy. There is also footage of him as a child sick on a couch, with no voice due to his intense performance schedule. This lack of structure and safeguarding contributed to a challenging transition into adulthood. Like many artists before him, Bieber has used his music as a means of healing from and processing his experiences.

These artists demonstrate that while abuse is not a prerequisite for musical genius, it has undeniably influenced the lives and work of many artists, and musical prodigies are left especially vulnerable. Because music, as an art form, reflects personal experience consciously or subconsciously, it can be a means of coping, healing, or reclaiming control.

Ultimately, the issue of abuse among musical prodigies is both historical and ongoing. While increased awareness and advocacy offer hope for change, the prevalence of these cases suggest that the problem remains deeply rooted within the industry's culture. In 18 U.S. states, including Nebraska, all adults are mandated reporters. Being an educator, especially in this field, comes with an obligation to uphold the safety of the children surrounding us. By examining the interactions of talent, power, and vulnerability, society can work towards creating an environment where young artists are protected, supported, and able to thrive.

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NMTA WORKSHOP GRANT

A Workshop Grant of up to \$1,000 is available to any NMTA member or NMTA-affiliated organization to assist with the expenses of a workshop for the purpose of teacher education and training and/or student activities. Applicants must be members or associations in good standing in the year of the application, and the workshop must be presented during the 2026-2027 membership year.

Workshop Proposal Requirements:

- Description of the workshop, including location and date.
- List of expected participants, including whether the grant is to be used by a local affiliate or an individual teacher
- Specific amount requested with a detailed budget: include costs like rental fees, judge/speaker fees, liability insurance, materials/equipment, piano tuning, etc. The grant is up to \$1,000 and will only cover specific costs listed.
- Contact information: name, address, and phone number

Find application forms and other information at <https://nebmta.org/grants/>. Materials are due to NMTA Grants Chair Angela Miller-Niles at angela.miller.niles@gmail.com by September 1, 2026.

NMTA Travel Grant

A travel grant of \$1,000.00 is available through NMTA to assist with travel expenses for a teacher attending an MTNA-affiliated conference. The applicant must be an NMTA/MTNA member in good standing during the year of application, and the travel must be completed in 2027. Teachers of all instruments and voice are eligible.

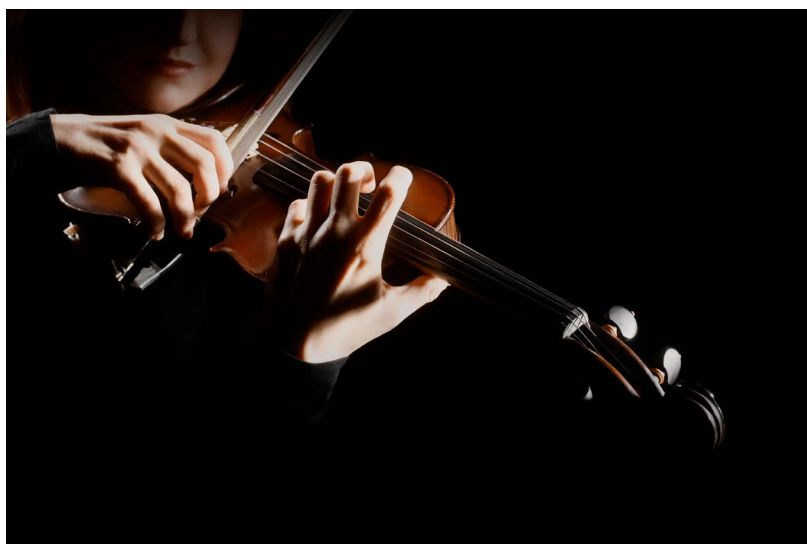
Include the following as part of your application:

- Conference location and dates
- How long you've been an NMTA member
- Whether you've received a grant in the past (and if so, when it was received)
- Any service to an MTNA-affiliated organization
- Any special awards or recognition from an MTNA-affiliated organization
- Brief resume

Recipients are required to write an article describing their conference experiences for the Nebraska Music Teacher issue that immediately follows the event as a final report.

Find application forms and other information at <https://nebmta.org/grants/>. Materials are due to NMTA Grants Chair Angela Miller-Niles at angela.miller.niles@gmail.com by September 1, 2026.

LMTA Chamber Festival Returns in Collaboration with Nebraska Chamber Players



After a hiatus brought on by the pandemic, the Lincoln Music Teachers Association (LMTA) was thrilled to revive a beloved tradition this February: the LMTA Chamber Festival. Hosted on February 16, 2026, at the Unitarian Church of Lincoln and presented in collaboration with the Nebraska Chamber Players (NCP), the event brought together nearly 30 student musicians—from second grade through adulthood—for a day of collaborative music making, coaching, and performance.

Made possible in part through support from the Nebraska Music Teachers Association (NMTA), the Chamber Festival provided a unique opportunity for students to experience chamber music in an encouraging, educational, and community-centered setting. Students were placed into small ensembles based on instrument and level, rehearsed music in advance with local teachers, and participated in coachings with professional musicians from the Nebraska Chamber Players.

For many participants, the Chamber Festival offered something students do not often experience in private lessons: the opportunity to make music alongside peers.

“The best part is always the opportunity for these students to play together,” one coach reflected in post-event evaluations. Another shared, “Students need the opportunity to play music with others from an early age. While many musicians learn to play by themselves, it is important for them to find the joy in creating music in community.”

That spirit of musical community was evident throughout the day. Students met peers from different studios, worked through ensemble challenges together, and learned to listen, adjust, and collaborate in ways that differ from solo performance preparation. Teachers and parents alike noted the excitement students felt in forming new friendships and working toward a shared artistic goal.

The event began with a performance and demonstration by members of the Nebraska Chamber Players, giving students an opportunity to hear professional chamber music up close. Ensembles then rotated through coaching sessions with NCP clinicians, receiving feedback on musical interpretation, ensemble communication, balance, rhythm, and performance skills. Students who were participating in only one ensemble also enjoyed music-related games and activities between sessions.

Participants consistently highlighted the value of working with professional musicians and learning from perspectives beyond their own teacher. One student performer wrote, “I really enjoyed the collaboration and the advice from the professional coaches,” while another shared that they especially appreciated

LMTA Chamber Festival Returns (continued)

“working with the coaches [and] playing with others I normally don’t play with.”

The day concluded with a public recital featuring all participating ensembles. Approximately 100 audience members attended the final concert, which was also livestreamed to extend access to family members and supporters unable to attend in person.

Evaluation responses from students, parents, teachers, and coaches were overwhelmingly positive. Nearly every respondent indicated they would participate in the event again, with many expressing hope that the Chamber Festival would return regularly. One parent shared, “I hope we don’t have to wait too long for the next one!”

The Chamber Festival also served as an important reminder of the power of collaboration within Nebraska’s music education community. In addition to LMTA and the Nebraska Chamber Players, the event relied on partnerships with local teachers, community organizations, and business supporters. LMTA’s Music Outreach Program further supported access by helping students in need participate in lessons and musical opportunities, reinforcing LMTA’s commitment to reducing barriers to music education.

Several respondents offered thoughtful ideas for future festivals, including additional warm-up opportunities, clearer level examples for ensemble placement, expanded activities during downtime, and broader promotion to teachers and families. These suggestions will help shape future planning as LMTA looks toward restoring the Chamber Festival as a recurring event.

Perhaps the strongest testament to the festival’s success came from the recurring theme found throughout evaluations: students were inspired not only by the music itself, but by the experience of creating music together.

As one coach summarized, “Getting young people going on chamber music is awesome!”

LMTA is deeply grateful to NMTA for helping make this event possible and looks forward to continuing to foster collaborative music making opportunities for students across Lincoln and surrounding communities.



The annual meeting of NMTA membership is tentatively scheduled for **Friday, October 23, 2026 from 12:30-1:15 PM** in the Cattle Conference Room in the Janzow Campus Center of Concordia University in Seward, NE.

OMTA News

Greetings from Omaha! In February, OMTA had the Young Artists Competition. These students are such high achievers, and they performed their program at the audition followed by an afternoon recital. The results were announced at the end of the recital with prize money donated by the Giger Foundation. There are three divisions: Senior Division, Intermediate Division, and Junior Division. The following winners in each division were:

Senior Division (grades 10-12)

1st place winner – Evan Sun, student of Momoro Ono
2nd place winner – Haven Tipton, student of Theresa Temple
Finalist – Carter Cash, student of Mark Dickmeyer
Finalist – Julian Wrubel, Student of Tammy Miller
Outstanding 12th Grader – Nolan Dunlop, student of Carol Novak

Intermediate Division (grades 8-9)

1st place & Most Musical – Zisheng Qian, student of Yulia Kalashnikova
2nd place winner – Alan Guo, Student of Jerri Niver
Finalist – Daniel Brumm, student of Maria Jacobsen

Junior Division – (grades 5-7)

1st place winner – Claire Wang, studio of Kathy Knebel
2nd place winner – Caleb Li, studio of Shirley Lewis
Finalist – Amyra Asif, studio of Olga Conkin



On March 28, the OMTA Trophy Festival took place at St. Paul United Methodist Church with an alternate date on April 11 at the home of Lisa Batten. There were 22 participating teachers and 169 solo entries of piano, voice, accordion, and guitar. This is a favorite event for students receiving trophies and their proud families who attended the auditions.

In May, members will have a short meeting and enjoy a spring luncheon held at Spezia Restaurant. We are also excited to announce our Senior Scholarship winners for 2026! Our first-place Senior Scholarship winner of a \$1,000 scholarship is Winston Schneider, piano student of Anne Madison and our second place winner of a \$500 scholarship is Taryn Geiger, violin student of Ruth Meints! There will be a presentation of these fine winners and we will have an opportunity to hear their wonderful music essay.

After the luncheon, Omaha Music Teachers Association will have the installation of officers:

- President – Maria Rotella Jacobsen,
- President Elect – Cindy Wrenn,
- Vice-President – Tarah Schoell,
- Treasurer – Lori Ann Simon Seveck, Secretary – Claire Roach.

These are such dedicated and fine teachers to work with and I am looking forward to another great year!

There are 77 members of OMTA, and we continue to offer many opportunities and events for both our teachers and their students! We appreciate NMTA, too, for what they offer our community with wonderful and educational District and State Festivals and State Conferences. It has made me a better music teacher and offers so many opportunities to our students!

Musically yours,

Maria Rotella Jacobsen, president

Ediger Scholarship Winners 2026

This year's NMTA Thomas Ediger High School and Collegiate Scholarship winners exemplify the many wonderful students that NMTA teachers have the privilege of mentoring across Nebraska. Our judges, Dr. Susan Gray from the University of South Dakota and Dr. Christopher Stanichar from Northern University, were impressed by the high caliber of the students who applied.

Our NMTA Thomas Ediger High School Scholarship winners are Taryn Geiger (strings), a student of Ruth Meints, BingYi Wang (piano), a student of Anne Madison, and Winston Schneider (voice/composition/other), from the studio of Dr. Ken Meints.

Taryn plans to major in violin performance at Vanderbilt University this fall with the ultimate goal of becoming a soloist and chamber musician. She has represented Nebraska several times at the Divisional level of the MTNA competition and was a national finalist this year. Her teacher, Ruth Meints, wrote, "What makes Taryn stand out from other students is her absolute commitment to mastery."

BingYi will be attending MIT in the fall, where he plans to pursue a career in medicine. A recommender wrote of him, "When you look at BingYi Wang's resume, you will see activities, leadership, and accolades. What you do not get to see is the outstanding young man behind the resume. In my 26 years of teaching, BingYi has been among the top students I have ever encountered. He not only aims for his success, but he also strives to push others to succeed."

Among his many successes as a composer, Winston was the national MTNA winner in composition both at the junior and senior levels. He is accomplished in piano, cello, voice, and theory as well and is a co-founder of Music Marathon 4 Music Education, which has raised over \$4,000 to support students' music studies. Winston plans to major in composition at Rice University this fall.

The winner of this year's NMTA Thomas Ediger Collegiate Scholarship is Natalie Malcom, from the studio of Dr. Kristin Taylor at UNO. Natalie plans to pursue a career teaching music in a school setting while also teaching piano privately. Dr. Taylor wrote of her, "In my piano pedagogy course last spring, Natalie distinguished herself as a naturally gifted teacher. Her warmth and attentiveness allow students to feel immediately at ease, and her thoughtful guidance fosters both trust and growth."

Congratulations and best wishes to this year's winners!





Celebrating 150 Years of MTNA: A **Golden** Performance Opportunity

As summer unfolds—with longer days, vibrant energy, and opportunities for creativity—we invite you to be part of something truly special. This year marks a remarkable milestone: the **150th Anniversary of the Music Teachers National Association (MTNA)**. For a century and a half, MTNA has supported excellence in music education, fostered community, and inspired generations of musicians and teachers.

In celebration of this historic achievement, we are excited to announce a unique and meaningful performance opportunity at our upcoming **MTNA State Conference in Seward, Nebraska**. This is your chance to honor the past, engage the present, and inspire the future—all through music.

A Musical Journey Through the Decades

We are planning a collaborative performance event that showcases **music across the decades**, highlighting the rich diversity of styles, composers, and voices that have shaped our musical landscape.

Participants (past or current students or teachers) of MTNA are invited to select a piece from **any decade of their choosing** and present it as part of a vibrant, multi-genre program. Whether your passion lies in classical, jazz, folk, contemporary, or beyond, your contribution will help tell the story of how music—and music education—have evolved over time.

This event promises to be a dynamic and inspiring tapestry of sound, bringing together **all instruments and voices** in celebration of MTNA's legacy.

Bringing Music to Life Through Story

In addition to your performance, each participant will offer a **brief narrative** to accompany their chosen piece. This narrative provides an opportunity to deepen the audience's experience by connecting music with meaning.

You might explore questions such as:

- How does your piece reflect a particular moment in history?
- What connections does it have to **Nebraska's musical or cultural heritage**?
- Why is this piece significant to you as a musician or educator?

These short reflections will create a richer, more engaging experience for the audience, transforming the performance into both a musical and educational journey—one that aligns beautifully with MTNA's mission.

Collaboration Encouraged

Music is, at its core, a shared experience. To reflect this spirit, **collaborations are warmly encouraged**. Consider partnering with fellow educators, students, or colleagues to create duets, small ensembles, or even interdisciplinary performances.

Collaborative entries not only add variety and depth to the program but also celebrate the connections and relationships that MTNA has helped cultivate over the past 150 years.

Celebrating 150 Years of MTNA (continued)

Event Details

Please mark your calendars and plan to join us for this special celebration:

- **Event:** MTNA 150th Anniversary Performance
- **Date:** October 23, time TBD
- **Location:** Concordia University
- **Occasion:** MTNA State Conference
- **City:** Seward, Nebraska

This will be a highlight of the conference and a memorable way to honor the legacy of MTNA while showcasing the talent and creativity within our community.

How to Participate

We warmly invite you to take part in this exciting event. To express your interest, please register via the following link by **August 1**:

<https://forms.gle/rMX1AoddDohhuQq4A>

Additional details and coordination will follow as we prepare for this special program.

Celebrating a Lasting Legacy

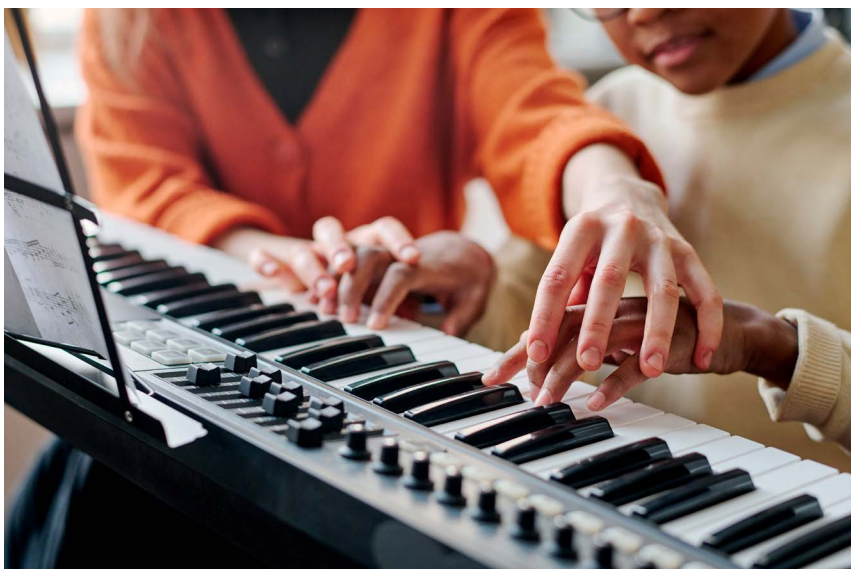
The 150th anniversary of MTNA is more than a milestone—it is a testament to the enduring power of music education and the dedication of teachers like you. Over the decades, MTNA has played a vital role in shaping musical lives, strengthening communities, and advancing the art of teaching.

This performance event is an opportunity to reflect on that legacy while actively contributing to it. By participating, you become part of the ongoing story of MTNA—honoring the past while inspiring future generations of musicians.

Looking Ahead

As we enjoy the warmth and possibilities of summer, we hope you'll take a moment to consider how you can be part of this meaningful celebration. Whether through a solo performance, a collaborative effort, or simply attending and supporting your colleagues, your involvement helps make this milestone truly special.

We look forward to celebrating with you in October—and to continuing the shared journey of music, education, and community for many years to come.



NMTA Upcoming 2026 Fall Conference, Competitions, and State Festival Information

On behalf of the NMTA Executive Committee, I am pleased to announce details of the 2026 Nebraska Music Teachers Association State Conference, Competitions, and Festival events. The campus of Concordia University in Seward, NE is co-sponsoring our conference, with most events taking place in the Borland Center for Music and Theatre.

NMTA State Conference: Friday, October 23, 2026

MTNA Performance Competitions: Saturday, October 24, 2026

Nebraska Performance Competitions: Saturday, October 24, 2026

NMTA State Festival: Saturday & Sunday, October 24-25, 2026

Highlights of the conference include the following:

- Sessions and Masterclass with guest clinician, **Catherine Rollin**

Catherine Rollin is a pianist, composer, clinician, author and teacher of prize-winning students. As a clinician, Catherine has given over 300 workshops and masterclasses throughout the U.S., Canada, Japan and Taiwan. Her efforts as a composer, clinician and author are an outgrowth of her work as a teacher. Finding the answers to help her students develop artistic, relaxed and confident technical skills led Catherine to insights featured in her groundbreaking series, "Pathways to Artistry." Catherine's ASCAP award winning book, "Museum Masterpieces" features her original piano works inspired by great art masterpieces from museums around the world. Catherine wrote this series after seeing how her students' creativity was sparked by artwork imagery. All of the many facets of Catherine's work emanate from her central passion for teaching.

- Session by NMTA member **Florencia Zuloaga** entitled "Sight-Reading With Our Little Beginners: An Integrative Approach"
- **150th Anniversary Program and Celebration** showcasing NMTA members performing music "through the decades"
- **Awards Luncheon and Business Meeting**

We look forward to seeing you in Seward for what promises to be a memorable conference and celebration of 150 years of MTNA!

Krista Hafez Clark, NMTA President-Elect

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