

Musical Life History
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I have loved music for as long as I can remember. My mom tells me that I fell in love with music when I was in her belly. She attended an Elvis Presley impersonator concert and once the music started to play, I could not stop moving around and kicking. She also claims that she tried the “Mozart Effect” on me and would play classical music during her pregnancy. While both of those instances' impact might be negligible, something about music just clicked with me. As a toddler, I was fascinated by music and would try to sing along with whatever was playing. I could sing “Somewhere Over the Rainbow” at age 3. “Little Einsteins” was always my favorite children's show because it was filled with a variety of music. Recognizing my interest in music at such a young age, my parents placed me in *KinderMusik* classes. Being placed in an atmosphere of music-making, dancing, and singing made my fondness for music develop even more. My parents continued to look for ways to invest in my aptitude for music. They enrolled me in piano lessons at age 5. This not only deepened my love for music but also honed my musical skills, setting the stage for a lifelong musical journey.

After three years of piano lessons, my parents transitioned me to another piano teacher, Jessica DiGiovanni. She was a singer and songwriter from my church and my parents thought it would be wise to connect me with her. I began piano lessons with her at age 8. While I loved playing the piano, I still had a desire to sing. Jessica DiGiovanni taught me both piano lessons and voice lessons and soon I was able to sing and play the piano at the same time. I began to develop a passion for singing and playing and looked for ways to apply my acquired skills.

Since I was young, I had attended church, but I wanted to do more than just be in the building. I wanted to play a role in ministering to others. This drive to be used by God led to me singing and playing for our Kids Church program starting around age 9. This opportunity added

to the fire of my passion for music. It was no longer strictly about notes, lessons, and songs, but it was about playing music for something greater than myself.

At age 10, my parents wanted me to expand my knowledge of piano. I started taking classical piano lessons from Olga Lukanstov while continuing to take voice and piano from Jessica DiGiovanni. This reinforced my church playing and my professional playing and performance. These lessons provided me with an even stronger foundation for my passion for music and continued to drive me to move forward.

In 6th grade, I realized piano and singing were not enough for me. To me, music was not just about piano and singing, but about applying my musical skills in every area possible. This inspired me to begin playing cello in the orchestra at my school, Riverside Intermediate School, under the direction of Johanna Kitchell. Doing this grew my skills as a musician and energized me to push myself further than I had thought possible. To encourage my cello playing, in 7th grade, I started taking lessons from Dr. Lori Honer, while continuing in orchestra at school. At first glance, it may seem this was a lot for a young person to take on, but for me, it was not a burden, it was a passion.

Wanting to add another instrument to my life, at age 13, I started taking drum set lessons from Vito DiGiovanni, Jessica's husband. This skill reinforced my sense of rhythm and only continued to build my repertoire and ability as a musician.

Some of the most influential people in my life were the music teachers who have guided and continue to guide me. Not only did they teach me about all different kinds of music, but they were my role models and adults I could trust and look up to. Because of their impact on my life, I developed a passion for teaching others. Encouraged by my piano teacher, Olga Lukanstov, I took a piano pedagogy class at age 13 and started teaching piano lessons shortly thereafter,

which I have continued to this day. During the early stages of teaching, my main goal was to make my students piano prodigies and would often get frustrated when things would not go perfectly each lesson. I started to notice each kid's struggle, ranging from anxiety and depression to ADHD and even high-functioning autism. I often asked my piano teacher “Why is it so difficult to teach these kids? Am I a bad teacher? I feel more like a therapist rather than a teacher.” Every time we discussed my students her response was “God is sending these students to you for a reason.” So instead of focusing on my students learning every single note perfectly, I started to focus on how music could build their confidence and help them with their specific needs. I started making individualized lesson plans and even re-arranged pieces to make their learning experiences memorable and fun. I wanted to be more than just an average teacher teaching the material. I wanted to be a role model for my kids, just as my teachers were for me.

I continued orchestra in High School, under the direction of Nicole DeGuire. During my freshman year, I was first chair in the Advanced Freshman orchestra. Throughout sophomore, junior and senior year, I was in the top orchestra and was always 2nd or 3rd chair. We would compete at ISSMA and would almost always receive “Gold” or “Gold With Distinction.” During this time I built amazing friendships and grew not only as a cellist, but as a team-player.

Being a part of orchestra reinforced my desire to teach. However, I wanted to expand my horizons from just teaching private lessons to teaching in a classroom. My senior year I took a class called “Cadet Teaching.” I chose to work with Johanna Kitchell and her 6th-grade orchestra, which solidified my decision of wanting to be a music education major when I began university.

Becoming proficient in music and learning how to teach it as well, drove me to use my position in music education to benefit anyone I could. Since kindergarten, I have been friends

with my neighbor who has autism. I would ride the bus with her and take her to class. Working with her made me fall in love with working with and teaching children who have special needs. I joined our Best Buddies club in High School and continued to build my friendship with my autistic neighborhood. My senior year I decided to become a Direct Care Provider, providing Respite Care for that same individual. I have taken classes on how to work with individuals who live with learning and physical needs. Teaching young people in this position can be a challenge, but they too deserve a chance to experience the wonders of being involved with music. Around this time during my senior year, I began teaching piano to a young person with high-functioning autism. Having this experience gave me a passion to work with people with special needs and to learn more about how music can benefit them. All deserve a fair and equal chance to pursue music

During this time of musical growth and involvement, I became more involved with music at my church in Indianapolis. Here in front of over a thousand people, every Sunday and Wednesday, I was on the praise band, either playing piano, drum set, or auxiliary keys. During Christmas concerts and other special events, I would also play the cello. More recently I began regularly singing at my church.

In the Fall of 2020, I began my Music Education Degree at Ball State University. I enrolled with cello being my primary instrument under the direction of Dr. Peter Opie and piano being my secondary, under the direction of Dr. Lori Rhoden. I also joined the Ball State Symphony Orchestration. While I attended Ball State, I was still actively involved in my hometown of Fishers Indiana and decided to commute. I attended school in Muncie, taught private lessons in Fishers, and attended and was actively involved at my church located in downtown Indianapolis.

Since my Freshman year of college, I began to grow my piano studio. I extended from only teaching piano lessons to cello, drum set, and voice lessons, with students of all ages, from as young as kindergarten to a woman in her 40s. My studio has grown, and each year my studio ranges from fifteen to twenty students.

In my sophomore year, I wanted to get involved in more teaching opportunities than Ball State provided. I began to work at the Ross Community Center in Muncie, teaching music lessons to students who attended the after-school program. While this opportunity only lasted a year, it was an eye-opening experience to work with a wide range of students with diverse backgrounds, family lifestyles, and personal struggles.

During this year, I was also offered the position of Youth Music Director at my church. Each week I work with over 50 students, training them in not only music, but also worship ministry, and team building.

I also decided to become an adjunct teacher for Johanna Kitchell at Riverside Intermediate, once again working with her 6th-grade orchestra program. I continued working there and during my senior year added another school to do adjunct work in, Fall Creek Intermediate under the direction of Andrew Wirtz. At both schools, I work with the students on how to begin playing the cello and bass. Since both 6th-grade programs are large, I work with about 30-40 cello and basses.

During my final semester at Ball State University, I will be student teaching at Noblesville West Middle School, working with the orchestra program under the direction of Katie LeSesne. I am so excited for the next stage of my musical life and can't wait to become a music teacher in a classroom of my own.

From a very young age I have had an intense desire to instill the principles of music in the next generation. This drive has led me to develop myself into someone who can be a benefit in any situation. I want to inspire, not just teach, but ignite a light in the hearts of my students through the power of music and push them to become something they never thought possible within themselves. So many individuals have taken the time for me in my life to instill this passion and I will not entertain the thought of allowing it to stop with me.