

FRIDAY FANFARE - FEBRUARY 20, 2026

NEWSLETTER



MTSU
School
of Music

DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE

Dr. Chris Combest, Assistant Director - chris.combest@mtsu.edu



This has been a busy audition season for the School of Music as we've welcomed hundreds of students and families to campus, but this week was the first time we've tried an event like Music Monday. Music Monday was created to give prospective students and their parents a deeper look into the daily life of our School of Music. Beyond auditions, they were able to sit in on classes, meet current students, talk with faculty and staff, explore our organizations, and experience the music making that happens here every day. What stood out most to me wasn't any single activity, but the way our community came together to support it.

As with any new initiative, there are always things to tweak. We're learning in real time and paying attention to what worked well and where we can grow. Even so, the energy and vibe throughout the day were high. The building felt active and welcoming. Conversations flowed easily, and there was a genuine sense that everyone involved was working toward the same goal: helping future students feel comfortable, encouraged, and excited about being here.

I'm deeply thankful to the MTSU School of Music staff, whose preparation and steady leadership made this event possible. I also want to recognize our SOMSAC students, who truly made a difference. Their willingness to engage, answer questions, and share their experiences gave this event its heart. Music Monday reminded me that recruitment works best when it's shared. When students, faculty, and staff show up together, that collaboration becomes visible. And it matters.

MTSU CENTER FOR CHINESE MUSIC AND CULTURE

10th Anniversary Celebration Concert



FEATURING YAZHI GUO

A world-leading performer of Chinese wind instruments and a member of the Silk Road Ensemble



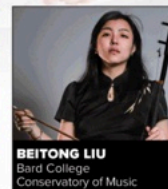
HAIQIONG DENG
Florida State University



YUXIN MEI
University of North Texas



JINGYI ZHAN
Shaanxi Normal University



BEIYONG LIU
Bard College
Conservatory of Music

Saturday, March 21 • 7:30 p.m.

Hinton Music Hall, Wright Music Building, MTSU

With **MTSU Jazz Faculty**, **MTSU Chinese Music Ensemble** and alumni,
and **Middle Tennessee Community Zheng Ensemble**

Led by **Mei Han**, Director, Center for Chinese Music and Culture

Presented by MTSU International Affairs, MTSU School of Music, MTSU Center for Chinese Music and Culture, and the Distinguished Lecture Fund



Center for Chinese
Music and Culture

**MIDDLE
TENNESSEE**
STATE UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF MUSIC

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Office of
International Affairs

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I AM *true*BLUE

FEATURED FACULTY: DENNIS HAWKINS, BANDS

Dr. Dennis A. Hawkins, Jr. is a conductor, trumpet player, educator, and certified nonprofit professional whose work spans national and international stages. He is an author and reviewer with a teaching practice shaped by mentorship and collaboration with artists, composers, educators, and students. Since joining Middle Tennessee State University, Hawkins has completed training in Safe Zone, Mental Health First Aid USA, and QPR Gatekeeper. He serves on the graduate faculty, advises the Music@Middle living learning community, and represents the university on the executive committee of the Middle Tennessee School Band and Orchestra Association. Hawkins is an active member of professional organizations.



THE MTSU SCHOOL OF MUSIC PRESENTS THE

TOM NAYLOR MEMORIAL SOLO ARTIST COMPETITION

Open to MTSU students currently studying voice, keyboard, strings, brass, woodwinds, and percussion instruments. **Cash prizes awarded.**

Applications due Friday, February 20, 2026.

Applications Due
Friday, Feb. 20th



Preliminary Round
Friday, March 6

Finals Recital
Sunday, March 22, 7 p.m.



Scan the QR code to register!

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Stones River Chamber Players

RHYTHMS OF PLACE

Adam Clark
Andrea Dawson
Christopher Dye
Bryan Hayslett
Eunbyol Ko
David Loucky
Brian Mueller
Susan Mullen
Anunesh Nadgir
Will Perkins
Jayden Po'e
Keith Sorrels
Staci Spring

FRIDAY, FEB. 27
7:00 PM

HINTON HALL AT MTSU
PRE-CONCERT TALK AT 6:40 PM

MUSIC MONDAY AT THE MTSU SCHOOL OF MUSIC!

This past Monday, we were thrilled to welcome prospective students and families to the first Music Monday at the MTSU School of Music. It was a full day of discovery, connection, and music making. Students explored the many organizations that shape our community, sat in on classes, met current MTSU music students, and spent time talking with faculty across disciplines. Several visitors even took the opportunity to audition, getting a firsthand look at what life in the School of Music can be.

The day concluded with a vibrant Prism Concert, featuring performances by the MTSU Orchestra, SOAL Choir, and chamber ensembles from the trombone, bassoon, and percussion studios. It was a powerful snapshot of the artistry, collaboration, and momentum that define our program. Thank you to everyone who helped make this day welcoming and meaningful. We look forward to many more Music Mondays ahead. Where every note counts.



FACULTY NEWS

Julie Davila, MTSU Percussion Faculty, recently served as conductor of the 2026 Texas 5A All-State Percussion Ensemble, one of the most selective and respected honors for young percussionists in the country. Over just two and a half days, Davila guided twelve outstanding students through an intense and joyful rehearsal process that culminated in a powerful concert performance. The ensemble's focus, preparation, and musical maturity were evident throughout, with a program marked by energy, nuance, and precision. Their ability to peak on performance day earned a well-deserved standing ovation and left a lasting impression on everyone in the hall.

Davila worked closely with Nicholas Martinez, the 5A Percussion Coordinator and assistant conductor, whose leadership and care were central to the success of the weekend. The program featured works by Dave Hall and Brian Nozzy, a guest appearance by theremin artist Sandi Rennick, and a world premiere of Davila's own work, Clickbait!, for twelve claves.



Great conversations and meaningful connections this week across our local schools.

Dr. Jennifer Snodgrass visited Rockvale Middle School to lead a clinic with 8th graders focused on career opportunities in the arts and the many paths creative work can open.

At the same time, **Dr. Bryan Braue** spent time at Stewart's Creek High School, leading clinics and reconnecting with alumni Michael Chester and Debbie Burton.



Grover Baker, Visual and Performing Arts Librarian at MTSU Walker Library, recently participated in the debut performance of CorAthena, a newly formed professional recording choir based in Nashville. The performance took place on February 13 in the inspiring setting of the Parthenon, bringing together music, place, and community in a meaningful way. It is always encouraging to see our campus artists contributing their voices beyond the university and helping shape the cultural life of our region. Congratulations to Grover and to CorAthena on a memorable debut. <https://www.athenafestivalrecords.com/corathena>



COR
ATHENA

STUDENT SPOTLIGHT

On Tuesday, the **MTSU Chinese Music Ensemble** filled Walker Library with music, color, and community as part of the Arts in the Atrium series. With listeners gathered throughout the main lobby and along the balconies above, the ensemble created a truly immersive experience.

Led by **Dr. Mei Han**, the performance highlighted the rich sounds and unique voices of traditional Chinese instruments, capturing the spirit of the Lunar New Year and offering a moment of shared celebration in the heart of campus.

If you missed it, there's another opportunity to hear this ensemble soon. The Chinese Music Ensemble will join distinguished guest artists and MTSU faculty for a Celebration Concert on March 21 at 7:30 p.m. in Hinton Hall



Center for Chinese
Music and Culture

ALUMNI HIGHLIGHT

Alumnus **Dalton Parkerson** (BM Music Education, Tuba) will serve as the inaugural Tennessee state representative for the Rural Band Director Alliance. Dalton is a recent graduate from the MTSU School of Music and serves as Director of Bands at Marshall County High School. He also teaches band at Lewisburg Middle School. Congratulations, Dalton!

RURAL BAND DIRECTOR ALLIANCE

STATE REPRESENTATIVES



NORTH CAROLINA
Joshua Tew



OHIO
Christin McClain



PENNSYLVANIA
Kyle Grabigel



TENNESSEE
Dalton Parkerson



UPCOMING EVENTS

- Tuesday, February 24 – Schola Cantorum Concert, 7:30 pm (Hinton)
- Friday, February 27 – Johnathan Oldham Senior Recital, 5:00 pm (Hinton)
- Friday, February 27 – Stones River Chamber Players, 7:00 pm (Hinton)
- Saturday, February 28 – MTSU Symphony Orchestra Concert (Hinton)
- Sunday, March 1 – Tuba Equinox Recital, 3:00 pm (Hinton)
- Sunday, March 1 – Grace Whitten Junior Flute Recital, 5:00 pm (Hinton)

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The FRIDAY FANFARE is a weekly newsletter of the MTSU School of Music edited by Dr. Chris Combest - chris.combest@mtsu.edu

Want to see your event, faculty, student news featured? Submit it to the [Director's Advisory Box](#)

Share your Alumni news at <https://forms.office.com/r/8Eu72excj6>

To learn more about our programs and events at the School of Music, please visit music.mtsu.edu.