



Episode 8: An Interview with Bryson Tarbet

This week on the podcast we're talking to Bryson Tarbet. Bryson is a PreK-6th grade general music teacher just outside of Columbus, Ohio. He received his Bachelor's of Music in Music Education from Ohio Wesleyan University and is currently in the process of completing Master's of Music in Music Education with a Kodály emphasis at Capital University.

Bryson spent his first year out of college as part of an elementary school intervention team and he fell in love with working with students with exceptional needs. Due to this experience, Bryson feels very strongly about advocating for sensory and emotionally-inclusive classrooms.

Bryson started That Music Teacher with the goal of sharing different perspectives on issues pertaining to the lives of music educators across the country. He also hosts That Music Podcast, available on all major podcast platforms.

This episode is brought to you by the Time to Practice Pep Talk series. You can find more information on the events tab of my website ChristineGoodner.com.

Episode 8

Christine Goodner: Welcome everyone! Today I'm excited to be talking to Bryson Tarbet. I we met through a clubhouse conversation, I think, a while back. And I really just loved what you had to say about education and learning music. And then I've since connected with you on social media. So thank you so much for being here and would love to hear a bit about who you are and what you do.

Thank you so much for

Bryson Tarbet: Thank you so much for having me. Like you said, my name is Bryson Tarbet. I am currently teaching pre-K through sixth grade general music just outside of Columbus, Ohio. I also teach private piano and voice lessons in the evenings as well. On top of that, I keep myself busy: I also run an online business where I help other elementary music teachers kind of regain their time and sanity in their classrooms through digital resources and knowledge products as well.

So I like to kind of wear all the hats as some like to say.

Christine Goodner: Well, I can relate to you there for sure. Thanks so much for coming to talk with us. I've been asking people lately: "What has the last year, year and a half look like for you as a music teacher and anything you want to share about that experience would be good.

Bryson Tarbet: It's definitely been different. (laughs) Definitely something I didn't expect at all. I mean like, like, I don't think anyone really expected what we just lived through. In the studio, you know, teaching piano and voice We were virtual for quite awhile. Then we had this - where somewhere virtual and some were in person.

And then in my public school job, we actually remained in person, In some aspects, for the majority of the year, we were only fully virtual, at the end of 2020,. And then from Thanksgiving to Christmas this past year, and the rest of

the time, there was a mix of everyone's here, some people are not there. You know, we have people doing asynchronous learning. So I spent a lot of juggling and kind of re-imagining what music education needs to be, especially with not being able to sing for the majority of the year. And, it was definitely something I hope I never have to do again. (laughs)

But I will say there were some things that came out of it that kind of helped me understand that there are different aspects of music making that I wasn't quite serving in the way that I had been teaching in the past.

Christine Goodner: Interesting. Is there anything more you could share about some of those things?

Bryson Tarbet: Oh for sure. So my middle school, we just with like space constraints and we weren't allowed to sing pretty much all year. I kind of realized that with my fifth and sixth grade school, that there were a lot of students that enjoyed music, that loved music, but there were more of a kind of analytical mind and they really weren't the more performing, the singing (type). And because we couldn't sing, we did a lot more listening and, you know, analyzing it at a basic level of what the music is. What is the meaning of the music and things like that.

And I saw so many of these students flourish, and these are students that I thought, you know, they were just there because they had to be. They, they didn't enjoy music or they were not someone that music was a big part of their lives. It was, they were there because that's where they had to. And it really was eye opening to me to see that these students really loved music, but they love music in a different way.

And so as we move forward and hopefully as things start to return to normal, I really look forward to kind of including that creative listening in my curriculum to make sure that all those students are finding a way - for the whatever way they're musical. I am serving them in my class.

Christine Goodner: Oh, how important! My husband would call himself unmusical, but I think he's more the analytical brain that would enjoy that kind of thing for sure vs performing so . . . (that's) really important for us to feel like music – [pauses] you're wearing a shirt right now that says “music is for everyone.” But I think that really there's a lot of people that would say, oh, I'm not musical, but might fall in that category.

Bryson Tarbet: Yeah. And that's something I truly like at the center of me - I believe that music is for everyone and it is our job as teachers to help everyone figure out in what way they can be musical.

Christine Goodner: I agree. when we first met. He's like, “I'm not musical” A teacher told me I have no potential to learn music. And it's like, oh no, that's a shame if we're told something like that at a young age, because I don't think that's true.

I'm curious what first got you into learning music. I wonder, did you start on the piano and what made you want to play music in the first.

Bryson Tarbet: Oh, my goodness. It's been a winding journey for sure. So I started singing pretty much since I've been talking, I started doing community theater. I was tough kid munchkin Number three - (that) was the first show. Not that I'm bitter that I was a third tough kid, but anyway . . .

But you know, I did a lot of community theater and musical theater. I started leading the songs at my church from a very young age and I just fell in love with singing. I loved it. I love being able to perform.

I ended up going to an arts magnet school from fifth through eighth grade, which allowed me to have choir like three times a week, addition to general music and, and band and orchestra. And I just became really involved in music. I played the French horn and I played the Viola all the way through high school and It's funny you say, did I start on the piano? Because I, I barely passed piano in college. Like I failed piano multiple times and I think if I were ever to

meet up with my piano professor and tell her that I am currently teaching piano, I think she was just started laughing because I struggled so much with learning the pieces.

And honestly, it's only been the past few years since I've been using it in my classroom. That I've started to really fall in love with playing the piano because it was just a different way of music-making

Christine Goodner: So interesting and I think sometimes when we didn't learn something easily and organically, we have a way to teach it and help more students have access to it because we can just break it down into "here's the tiniest little piece of progress."

So it sounds like especially singing and performing was your joy. I wonder what practice has felt like to you - You can talk about as an adult or as a child, but I am always curious (about) Did people love to practice? What was hard about it? Things like that, that

Bryson Tarbet: It kind of goes into that piano piece. Again Singing has always come really easy to me. And I really didn't have to practice that much. And it really came and bit me in the butt when I got to undergrad. And it was like, "um, that's not an option anymore."

You have to practice! Or you're going to struggle. And I struggled. You know, I was there, especially in my first couple of juries. And I'm like, "I barely know these songs." Like they are not memorized - we are making up some Italian. And I really had to learn how to practice because it was something that no one really teaches you to do. It's like, all right, well, you need to make sure you're spending time in the practice room.

And I think it can be really easy to, you know, spend hours and hours in the practice room, but get nothing done. And, and that's where, when it comes down to the piano - I didn't practice. Or even if I was in the practice room, I wasn't practicing right. I wasn't actually making any progress. So then I'd feel frustrated. So then I wouldn't want to practice anymore. That's kind of one of those things that I've taken with me in my teaching, especially in my private teaching, I work primarily with very young children. I think my youngest is four and my oldest is like eight.

So I work with very young children and (for) practice if you want to practice five minutes a day, that's fine. Like, you don't need to sit down for 30 minutes every day and do that because I want you to keep the love of it. And I want you to keep enjoying it. But I think it's important for us to break down the processes of what good practicing looks like, so that our students are able to recreate that at home, because I think we've all been in lessons where we're like, well, why did I do that? You know, the professors, they just like show you one thing and you're like, "well, that just solved all the problems that I've been fighting for the past two weeks."

So, you know, unlocking the processes of how to practice is something that's really hard to teach, but I think it's really powerful.

Christine Goodner: I agree. And I always want to hold that idea of We love music in really high regard - that's my biggest goal. So I don't want us to crush that in the process. And I don't think we have to, when we're practicing. What would you say to a parent who

is curious, you know, why their child isn't liking practice or what's the first tip you would give as a student in your studio that is having some struggle, wanting to practice.

Bryson Tarbet: I just think that the more that we can game-ify practice, the more that we can increase that intrinsic motivation to allow our students to want to practice.

And it's one of those things, you know, building a relationship is great because If the student likes you and you have a good relationship, a good working relationship, they're going to want to do right by you. So if you say, Hey, we should really work this out. We should, by the time you come back here, you should really have this part of your

song, you know, kind of fleshed out. Then you want to, because you have the relationship you want to do right by them.

But when it comes to gamification, using things like iPad apps or, printable resources. Or I have, especially with the younger kids I use cards to basically trick them into playing the song again, but, “oh, well, this time we're going to try it, but at a low octave and we'll see how that sounds different.”

They're still practicing those skills. They're still doing things, but it's changing it up for them. It's gamified a little bit so that there can stay engaged throughout the lesson and throughout the practice.

Christine Goodner: So important. I know sometimes there can be a feeling from parents, for example, like, well, “let's just get things done and not waste time with a game.”

And so I think remembering why we're playing the game and that okay. You can work really hard in practice sometimes harder than without a game. So it's really worthwhile

Bryson Tarbet: for sure. And the students are going to remember that they're going to latch onto those skills a lot more than if we would just kind of done them in a quote unquote, traditional way.

Christine Goodner: Right. I think that's really important. I saw a quote recently that it takes, you know, 400 repetitions to learn something for a child, but then if there's a game or fun involved, it cuts those repetitions down dramatically and is just really helps our brain. (Bryson :For sure!) I think along the same lines, I was just curious about what made you excited to become a teacher or what do you love about teaching?

Bryson Tarbet: Oh, it's again, it's quite the journey. This one's a little bit more direct, but my parents were both middle school teachers, middle school English teachers. So education is kind of been in my family for awhile. When it came to deciding what to do, you know what to go into college for? I was really torn on the performance side or the education side.

I loved singing. I had dreams of, you know, joining professional choir and doing that professionally. But when it came down to it, I ended up doing music ed. For one, because I always knew that If I really didn't end up loving teaching, I could always go back and do a masters in performance and it isn't necessarily the same, the other way around.

So I went into music education and I went in as so many people do. I was going to be the next great choir, high school choir director. We're going to have all the, competitions we're in class AA. We're going to do great. We're going to get to Disney. And I, it was literally in the first class of freshman year.

We had an introduction to music education, and it was basically like, Hey, we're going to just throw you in all these classes, so you can see what you enjoy. And I was so excited for the high school choir and we finally get there and I'm like, “I don't think this is for me.”

And I was heartbroken. Cause I'm like, I just made this decision to come and be this high school choir director And I'm, I'm not enjoying it. Luckily not far after that, I ended up observing a Kodaly influenced elementary music class and I fell in love and my life has been completely changed. Just the amount of joy and the amount of music making and music understanding, even if it's not explicitly known going back to that play-based curriculum, you know, we're able to Instill such a love of music in these young kids and everything is so joyful. And that's what I've really latched on to, especially this past year when things have been so different, is that there's still those moments of just pure joy that I don't think I could live without honestly.

Christine Goodner: And I imagine connecting students to music and helping them fall in love with that like you had as a child, that's really rewarding.

Bryson Tarbet: Oh yeah. Especially when you think, you know, at the elementary level is we might be the only interaction they have with music, you know these kids, they might not do music after elementary, they might just stick with . . . you know they might not do it now in middle school. And so we want to make sure that they're getting the best music education, the best music experience that they can.

Christine Goodner: Right, And at the very least, they love it and they seek it out as something *for* them in their life.

Bryson Tarbet: For sure. And that's kind of where I go when I'm thinking about "what is the role of my class?" It is not to create the next . . . you know, a bunch of music teachers obviously I'd love a bunch of professional musicians or music teachers to come out of my classroom, but really what I want is I want a bunch of appreciators of the arts. I want them to go through life, understanding what the role of the art is and why it's important and why it's there and to draw joy from that.

Christine Goodner: Exactly. And just remembering teachers who help us experience joy or connection to music, like that's a lifelong influence we get to have

Bryson Tarbet: yes, 100%.

Christine Goodner: So one thing I enjoy watching on social media, that you post about, is just humorous stories from your classroom. And it seems like you take a lot of joy and just a quirky thing students say, or the fun moments in music teaching. And I wondered if you could share, if you had one to share or you had anything to say about.

Bryson Tarbet: Oh, my goodness. That's another reason why I love the little ones. They keep you on your toes. There's not much that I can say to beat this - something that happened while I was student teaching. We had just finished singing, you know, peanut, peanut butter and jelly.

And the video I used at the time was it was like a dancing and peanut butter jar. Like it was super hokey, but whatever, and this kindergartener looks at me and he goes, "Mr. Tarbet how is the peanut butter jar singing a song about eating a peanut butter sandwich??" And he looks really serious and he goes, "how does that work?" (imitates horrified voice).

And I never thought I would have to consider the moral ethics of cannibalism in elementary music class, but here we were. And I like, there are so many moments like that, that just . . . they see things in a way that we just don't. And it's so joyful and I absolutely love being able to . . . I'm so glad that they get to sprinkle those little nuggets of, of just amazing during the day, because that's what gets me through sometimes.

Christine Goodner: (laughs) Exactly. I say my job is never boring because I never know what someone's going to say to me.

Bryson Tarbet: For Sure

Christine Goodner: Well, I was wondering, if you could wave a magic wand and share one thing about learning music with parents - because I know we have parents that listen to this podcast, thinking about their own children, practicing. What, what do you wish parents knew about music and children?

Bryson Tarbet: Oh, I guess I don't know.

My, my brain goes immediately to motivation and you know, trying to find ways to get that intrinsic motivation because you know, you can give stickers all you want. You can (say) "do your practice and then we can do this" all you want. But yeah until you get that intrinsic motivation, until you get it to (where) the students want to practice without receiving something.

That's what it's going to really hinder you until you get that. And the ways that we can do that is again through gamification through practice that doesn't necessarily look like practice. I think that that's something that, especially a lot of us that have taken piano lessons, maybe in a more traditional setting have to kind of unlearn is that we, the way that we learn music, doesn't have to look the same way as when we learned it. It can look different, it can be more, you know, centered around the child. It can be truly differentiated. And it isn't really about just, following a book, you know, page to page. Sometimes it looks like just being a kid and I think that's what you can really do to get them engaged, to get them involved and you get them to really love what they're doing.

Christine Goodner: Yeah, I think so too. And I think there is this myth of like the serious, you know, pianos, for example, sitting on the bench, like totally focused. And then if we think of a four, six, even eight year old student, or probably not going to see that a ton, because we, you know, I didn't practice like that as a young kid.

So I think that can be surprising to parents sometimes and just really. It doesn't have to look, you know, serious and, you know, without Joy at any time.

Bryson Tarbet: For sure. I think, I think that whenever you can put some joy in the lesson, that's always going to, it's never going to be something that is going to hurt you.

Christine Goodner: Exactly. And I like parents to think about that. Okay. We're trying to help them develop a love of music, whether or not they're a pianist for life or violinist or whatever instrument we still want them to love it. So how do we help them learn and love it at the same? (Bryson: For sure. A hundred percent) I wondered if you could share a little bit more about the work you do with and for teachers and anything you wanted to share about that, for sure.

Bryson Tarbet: So I kind of came out of college and I really like a lot of us that came into the elementary music world felt really well prepared to teach high school band or high school, you know, or secondary. But unfortunately at the elementary level, (things) kind of get put on the back burner just because of the reality of how full the degree is. So I've been doing a lot of work helping elementary music teachers, especially those that are kind of early career, or maybe they made a career shift And now they're in the elementary world for the first time to really kind of fall in love with teaching and under understand the joy and no, not really feel overwhelmed.

So I, I do a lot of work with, you know, setting up procedures and things that kind of set everyone up for success because not only does that help us with the teachers, but it helps our students, you know, we're setting everyone in the situation up for success. I do have a free guide that elementary music newbie guide for elementary music teachers to kind of think through some of the assistance.

If you want to grab one, you can edit it to thatmusicteacher.com/newbie. That's N E W B I E. And that is some things that I did my first year of teaching that kind of brought me through these processes to help everyone be success.

Christine Goodner: Great. And then I think I saw recently you post something about some cards and I think you mentioned them earlier that sort of prompt a creative way. So if people can go to your website too and see what other resources are there.

Bryson Tarbet: Yes. So if you head over to thatmusicteacher.com, you can find a link to go to my teachers pay teachers store, or you can just head to teachers pay teachers and search "that music teacher" and you will be able to find those as well.

Christine Goodner that was a great idea. I do that sometimes but yours were much prettier (laughs) but just some ideas like with violin students, you have to play this and spin in a circle or stand on one leg, or you know, just some ideas of how do we just inject some fun and creativity into the things we're doing over and over again. It's really important. Yes. I love it. And I think what you said about motivation, you know, it usually clicks for my older

students, middle school, high school, like, “oh, I want to practice to improve this piece of music, but it's usually not something that clicks for really young students yet.” But we can create activities where it feels like “oh, this is going to be fun in some way.” And then we're motivated by that. If it's not the piece of music.

Bryson Tarbet: Definitely

Christine Goodner: Well, I always like to wrap up and ask people to share one tip about practice. It could be something we've already said or, something new, but just to kind of tie a bow on the conversation and think about what we want to send listeners off with it, they could use right away.

Bryson Tarbet: If I could try to boil everything I've learned down into one tip about practice is.

Well, one do it. (laughs) That's always helpful. But you know, it doesn't matter how long you practice if you're not doing it in a meaningful way. So, you know instead of practicing one hour, practice five hours every day (oops!) or five minutes every day that is. But do it in a really meaningful focused, you know, have a plan and really do it in a way that's going to work for you and for what your goals are.

Christine Goodner: Right. We're not just putting in time, but we're trying to actually make things better. Absolutely. Exactly. Yes. And I love your first tip of just like we just have to do it in the first place, for sure.

Well, wonderful. I'm excited to share where people can find your work and your resources. And thanks so much for taking the time to talk to us today.

Bryson Tarbet: Thank you so much. It's been a pleasure.

Christine's Top Takeaways:

- 1. Meaningful, focused practice is key (and much more important than any arbitrary times we may be assigned to practice).**
- 2. Sometimes practice looks more like being a kid than following an exact method, and we have to let go of some of our preconceived notions about it**
- 3. Look for ways to gamify practice, especially for young students. This builds motivation and works with the way their brains work and learn.**