



Tell Your Story

How has arts education influenced your life?

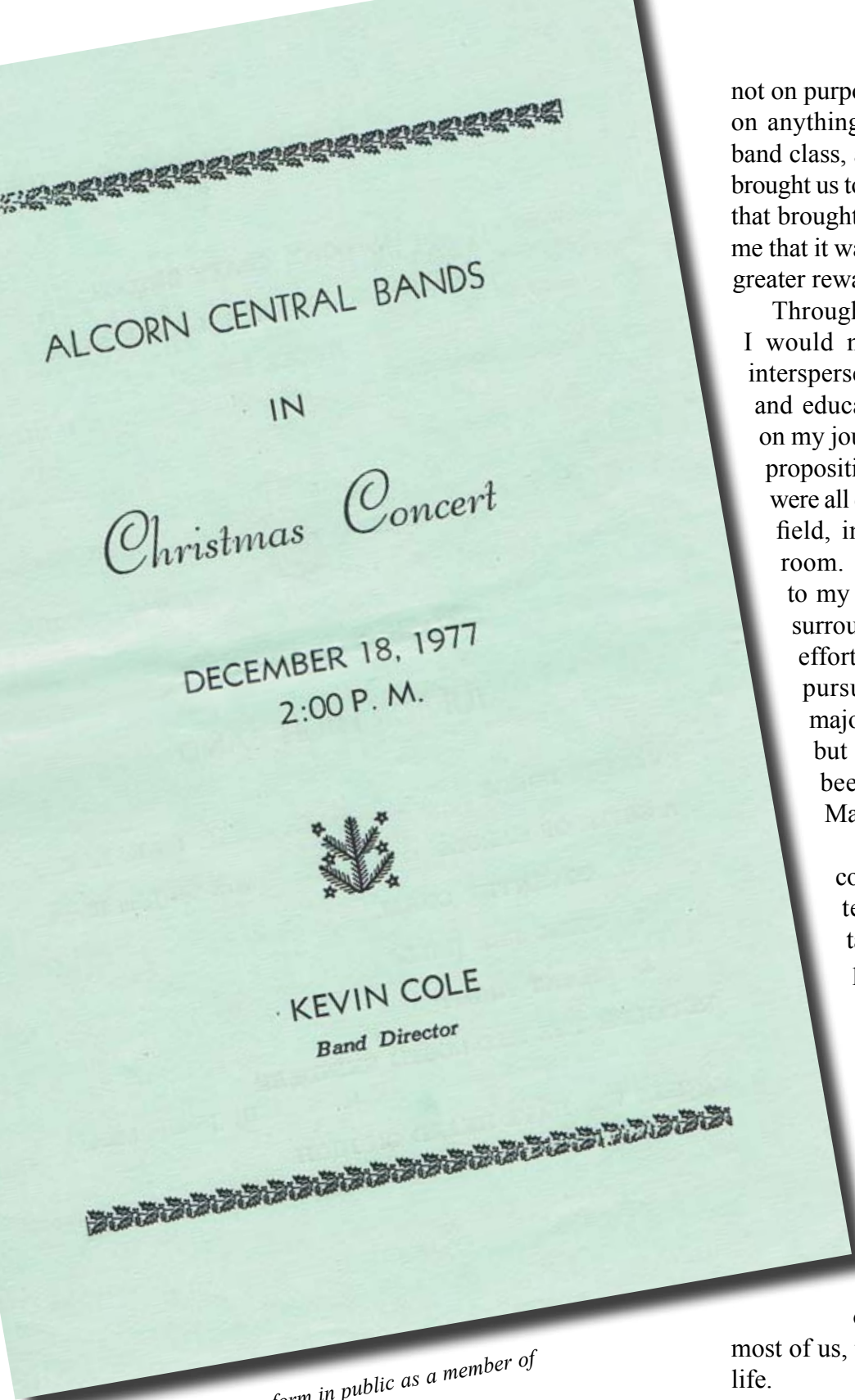
by Kevin Ledgewood

A As individuals, we tend to gravitate toward societal groups with which we share common interests and life experiences. From careers and hobbies to food and politics, we usually find our paths to our fellow citizens that can relate to our personal struggles and also to the brighter sides of our lives. One of those brighter sides that unites many people is music education, and specifically, school band programs. Based on my own life and the lives of my friends that are lucky enough to belong to this great club, we can all agree that arts education is a vital and necessary part of the daily lives of our students.

I could be a little biased, seeing that my life has been centered around the arts since I was 10 years old, but my bias is not unfounded. For many

years, arts educators have utilized information pointing to research proving that students involved in the arts have a higher chance of better test scores, holding leadership positions, better hand/eye coordination, plus other positive outcomes compared to students not exposed to the arts. We still do and can make these claims today, and these are enough on their own. We do need to look a little further, deeper into the personal lives of these students, and ourselves, to make our case.

My own life has been a prime example of how the arts can benefit one's life and sense of self. I was a shy kid who struggled with self-confidence. One day, after a little encouragement from my cousin, Rhonda, I joined the band and chose the mighty clarinet to be my voice-



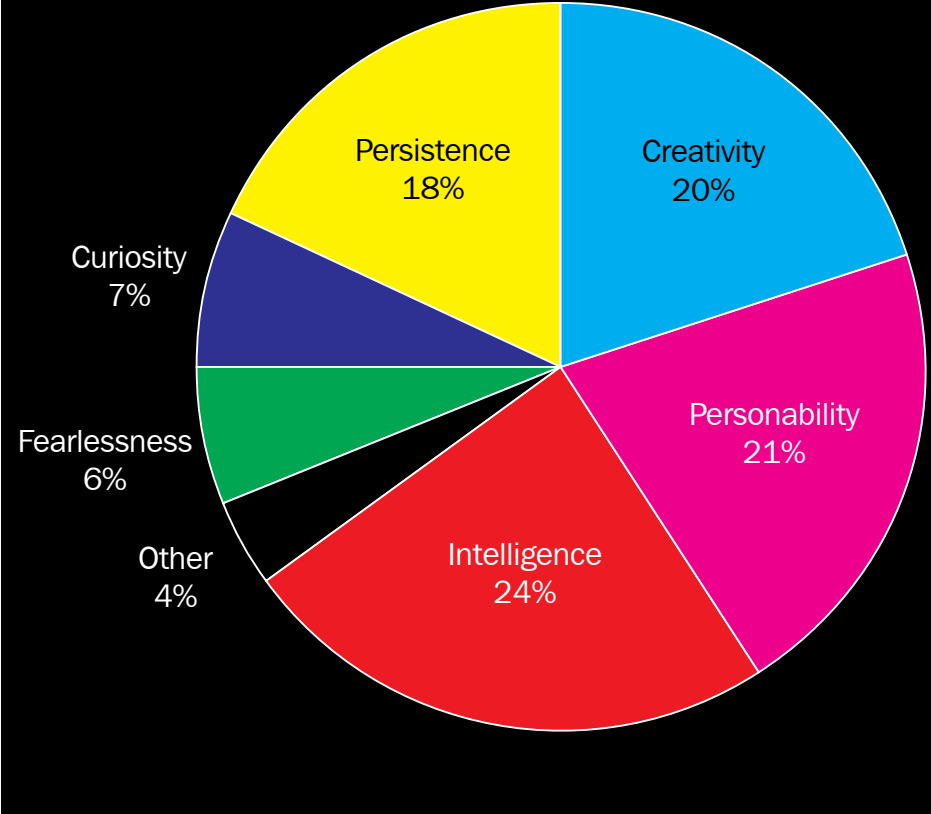
My first opportunity to perform in public as a member of a public school band program.

not on purpose, I simply couldn't produce a sound on anything else. I loved every minute spent in band class, and despite the arranged marriage that brought us together, the clarinet became the element that brought me more self-confidence and showed me that it was ok to take chances that might lead to greater rewards.

Throughout high school and college, where I would major in music, my path would be interspersed with milestones - musical, social, and educational - that molded me as a person on my journey. Teamwork, cooperation, and the proposition that hard work can lead to success were all daily concepts, whether on the marching field, in the concert hall, or in the practice room. From my high school band director to my college professors, I was consistently surrounded by people who wanted my best effort for my own well-being. If I had not pursued music, I probably would have majored in some type of biological science, but I wonder, would my voice have ever been heard without music in my life? Maybe, maybe not.

As an education major, one has to complete what is referred to as "student teaching." Undergraduates basically take the role of an unpaid intern in a public school under the guidance of an experienced teacher. At Hawkins Junior High in Hattiesburg, Mississippi, I was under the guidance of Cecilia Fraschillo. Mrs. F., as we referred to her, made the teaching experience seamless in a challenging situation. A couple of her students were without indoor plumbing while others would be lacking family members at home for large parts of the day or night. In comparison to most of us, they were pretty much on their own in life.

Mrs. F. did her best to see that her students had the chance to improve their lives through music. From the contra-alto clarinet to the euphonium, she made sure they had an instrument and a place to escape the harsh realities of their lives while in the band at Hawkins, all in a structured environment that they could depend on daily.



According to U.S. employers, creativity is one of the top three personality traits most important to career success.

Schools and employers rank a degree in the arts among the most significant indicator of a job candidate's creativity and innovation skills.

97% percent of superintendents surveyed agreed that music develops creativity, yet only 17% of their schools require music courses for graduation.



In addition to providing a voice, music has also been the source of milestones at various times in my life that I can look upon with extraordinary fondness. When I was a beginner, I was truly enamored with the full and balanced sound of the high school band's 1978 spring performance. The music of Aaron Copland became a permanent fixture in my musical life when I was only a sophomore in high school thanks to my band director, John McDonough. University ensembles would follow with exposure to experiences that were both challenging and fulfilling that took place along side lifelong friends. We all need these times to look back upon that connect us to time and place.

While my primary experience has been in music, other voices have also come to life through theatre, visual art, dance, and creative writing. Everyone needs a community composed of a group of people who face similar challenges in life

but who also reap the rewards that come with team membership. Not exclusive teams, but those made up of everyday people doing and experiencing extraordinary things. ■

Kevin Ledgewood has served as Publicist for The Arts Council of Tuscaloosa since 1999. A native of Mississippi, he has degrees in music education and performance from The University of Southern Mississippi and The University of Alabama.

“Music enhances the education of our children by helping them to make connections and broadening the depth with which they think and feel. If we are to hope for a society of culturally literate people, music must be a vital part of our children's education.”

Yo-Yo Ma