

CHANGEMAKERS

Through the power of music, these organizations are healing wounds around the world | BY PATRICK SULLIVAN

The bloody summer of 2014 in Ferguson, Missouri, was unfolding before William Ash's eyes. "And I started thinking, 'What could we do to make things better?'" recalls Ash, executive director of the St. Louis Classical Guitar Society. "We're just an arts group—how can we help?"

Then it hit him. Just a month earlier, Ash had attended a guitar education workshop a few miles from the epicenter of that awful August event—the Ferguson street where a police officer shot African-American teenager Michael Brown.

"I thought, 'Well, we could start working with schools right here in Ferguson,'" Ash says. "It would be the natural place to try to make a difference."

With support from the Augustine Foundation in New York, Ash quickly jumpstarted music education programs in two Ferguson schools.

Three years later, Ash's organization—one of America's oldest guitar societies—is helping to provide music education in 13 elementary schools and one community center in Ferguson and the surrounding area. More programs will come online soon.

Society musicians team up with classroom teachers to give kids guitar instruction during classroom hours and after school. And the program's high standards are making a difference.

"The kids enjoy it, and they have performance expectations from the very first day," Ash explains. "When they perform, it draws



parents and families into the schools."

Ash's work in St. Louis-area schools is a dramatic example of a larger trend.

Across the guitar world, musicians, the guitar industry, and nonprofit organizations are ramping up efforts to bring the joy of music to people and places where it is needed most—from African children orphaned by AIDS to budget-challenged urban schools, Native American reservations, and veterans administration centers in the United States.

Here are a few organizations and companies making a difference.



THE D'ADDARIO FOUNDATION Supports music education for children, veterans, and others

"My belief is that music is an incredibly powerful way to unlock innovative thinking and creativity in a child," says Suzanne D'Addario Brouder, director of the D'Addario Foundation.

And she's putting that belief into action by channeling foundation resources into innovative organizations like the Harmony Project, a nonprofit teaching music in low-income areas of Los Angeles.

Funded by D'Addario, the world's largest maker of instrument strings, the foundation bestows about \$1 million in cash and product donations a year to some 200 organizations in 40 different states. The emphasis is on supporting robust programs that truly transform music education in communities.

"It goes back to our belief that the more a kid participates in music, the more improvement you'll see in their cognitive abilities and social skills," D'Addario Brouder says. "The ultimate goal is to get music back into everyday circulation and make it as accessible as possible."

daddariofoundation.org



ACOUSTIC FOR A CHANGE Provides instruments to underprivileged children in California

Music can change young people's lives, but only if they have an instrument to play. That's why Arturo and Susan Echarte collect and refurbish guitars and other gently used instruments and donate them to underprivileged children and afterschool programs in Southern California.

The Orange County couple's organization—Acoustic for a Change—has given instruments to young cancer patients, homeless children, and a young girl in a domestic violence shelter who left her own guitar behind when she and her mom fled an abusive partner.

"We have been active for over ten years and have donated over 2,500 instruments," Arturo Echarte explains.

acousticforachange.com



GUITARS FOR SWAZILAND Provides instruments to African children orphaned by AIDS

For Stephen Doster, it started with a 2012 trip to Swaziland. Selected to participate in the U.S. State Department's arts envoy program, the Texas-based songwriter and producer helped give concerts and guitar demonstrations in the small, impoverished country in southern Africa.

Because Swaziland has the highest HIV rate in the world, Doster worked with many

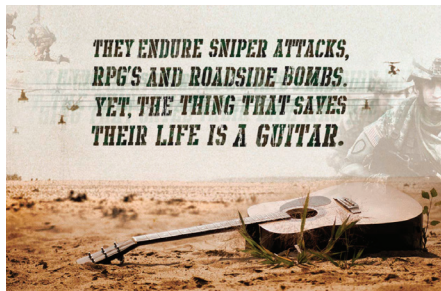
children orphaned by AIDS. And throughout his tour, Doster encountered many school children using guitars that were virtually unplayable.

"I have a lasting image of driving away from an orphanage down a long, dirt road," he explains. "A group of children, who had seen us play earlier, began waving and playing 'air-guitar' as we passed. This was all the inspiration I would need."

With support from Fender and Latin Percussion, as well as musicians like Austin guitar legend Eric Johnson, Doster launched Guitars for Swaziland. The organization has sent dozens of guitars and other instruments to Swaziland and Mauritania, as well as grants for teaching initiatives and educational supplies.

The aim, says Guitars for Swaziland spokesperson Cash Edwards, is to increase understanding between cultures and "inspire and bring hope through music and education to orphans and underprivileged children."

guitarsforswaziland.org



GUITARS FOR VETS Provides music education to military veterans

Milwaukee guitar teacher Patrick Nettesheim recalls how one of his new students came into class battered, traumatized, and angry. "He told me, 'I know how to use a guitar pick—I'm not an idiot.'"

The student was a 30-something Marine who'd been injured by a mortar blast in Iraq. But not long into that first lesson, things started to change. "He was strumming away and suddenly he just started trembling," Nettesheim says. "And he said, 'This is the first time I've felt peace in years.'"

In 2007, Nettesheim teamed up with Vietnam veteran Dan Van Buskirk to found Guitars for Vets, a national nonprofit that provides guitar lessons and instruments to military veterans.

Since then, Guitars for Vets has pulled together 200 volunteer instructors who have given more than 25,000 lessons in VA Centers and other venues. Support from the music industry—including Taylor, Yamaha, the D'Addario Foundation, Kyser, and individual luthiers like Tip House of Ohio—has allowed the organization to distribute more than

2,500 guitars to vets across the country.

Nettesheim stresses that he and his volunteer instructors are not therapists. But research suggests his program can benefit veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder. "We find that teaching men and women to play the guitar can open a window onto serenity and break the trance of past trauma," Nettesheim says. "It cultivates hope."

guitars4vets.org



GUITARS IN THE CLASSROOM

Trains teachers to use music in classrooms

Imagine a guitar in every classroom and a time in every school day when music helps students learn literacy, math, and other subjects. That's the goal of Guitars in the Classroom, a California-based nonprofit that trains music and general classroom educators to incorporate guitars, ukuleles, and singing into elementary education.

Founded in 1998, Guitars in the Classroom has trained 11,000 teachers in the US and Canada, according to founder and executive director Jessica Baron.

"In addition to providing students in predominantly high-poverty schools with what may be their first or only hands-on experiences with folk instruments, we bring music and academic teachers together in a common endeavor to build musical culture in their school districts," Baron explains.

guitarsintheclassroom.org



LEVY'S LEATHERS

Supports music education for disadvantaged children

In 1973, Dennis Levy launched a remarkable endeavor. Armed with a handful of leather-working tools, Dennis and his brother—both guitar players—crisscrossed Canada in a van,

selling handmade guitar straps, gun slings, and dog collars.

More than 40 years later, Dennis is president of the Levy's Leathers, the world's leading creator of handcrafted guitar straps. But the Levy brothers still seem to have a fondness for plucky startups—specifically for enterprising nonprofits that use music to help disadvantaged people.

The company supports a wide range of charitable projects, from high-profile music education groups to an upcoming guitar camp at the Rosebud Reservation in South Dakota. Home to the Sicangu Lakota, the reservation has unemployment levels that sometimes hit 80 percent.

The guitar camp aims to give reservation students a new way to express themselves. And David Attebery, a Christian minister helping to coordinate the camp, says his request for help got a response from Dennis Levy within 10 minutes.

Levy's donated 50 custom guitar straps with art relevant to the Lakota tribe. "This was incredible, and we know the kids and adults will love them," Attebery says.

levysleathers.com



THE NAMM FOUNDATION

Supports music education for students, veterans, and the elderly

"We've got 50 millions kids in American schools, and we want to help every single one find their way into making music—that's the big, audacious goal," says Mary Luehrsen, executive director of the NAMM Foundation.

To that end, the foundation pours hundreds of thousands of dollars worth of support every year into organizations around the US and abroad that are advancing music education for school children, veterans, and the elderly.

Founded in 2006 and funded by the National Association of Music Merchants, the NAMM Foundation has had a particularly strong impact on increasing guitar-based education in schools.

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The Teaching Guitar Workshops supported by the NAMM Foundation and other groups have helped bring the instrument into thousands of school music programs.

“People attending the workshops learn how to structure and produce classroom guitar programs in their schools,” Luehrsen

says. “Kids flock to those guitar programs—it’s like a magnet.”

But what might truly distinguish the NAMM Foundation is the \$200,000 a year it pours into research on music education.

“We’ve made a commitment to being a thought leader in music research so that

when we go to a member of Congress or a school board, we’re using validated data to describe the benefits of music education,” Luehrsen says. “We’re trying to influence the influencers and teach the teachers.”

nammfoundation.org

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TAYLOR GUITARS

Provides instruments and support for music education

From budget cuts to an outsized emphasis on standardized testing, music education faces many complicated problems. But one big challenge is as simple as it is stark: Where can teachers, musicians, and activists find quality instruments for students who want to play—especially in low-income communities?

That’s where Taylor Guitars comes in. The 43-year-old, California-based company has established a strong reputation for backing music education by donating thousands of guitars to schools and nonprofits. Taylor has supported organizations ranging from Guitars for Vets to the nonprofit San Diego Music Foundation, which has brought guitar instruction into almost 100 local elementary and middle schools.

On the other side of the country, Taylor instruments are used by kids at the Franklin Delano Roosevelt Academy in New York City, thanks to the company’s partnership with Little Kids Rock, a nonprofit that provides music education and free instruments to public school children in under-served communities.

“Music educates, heals and inspires,” says Taylor’s Tim O’Brien. “Whether you’re a young novice just starting out or an experienced player pursuing your passion, everyone deserves the opportunity to create and participate in music. That’s why our charity partners are so important to us.”

taylorguitars.com