

Bassoonist Shares Skills with Students

A Profile of Bassoon Instructor Andrew Marlin

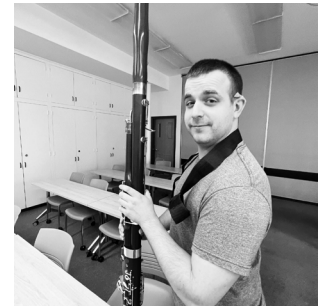


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Ask the average person to describe a bassoon, and you're likely to get a blank stare or a wildly incorrect guess. Despite its warm, vibrant sound and critical role in orchestras, the bassoon remains one of the most underappreciated instruments in the world of music. But for Andrew Marlin, a certified private lesson teacher in and around District 211, the bassoon is his life.

For years, he has spent several hours a day teaching a studio of nearly 30 students from Conant, Rolling Meadows, Schaumburg High School, and more, both in person and online. No matter the distance, he finds a way to reach his students—whether by biking, navigating multiple train routes, or coordinating rides. He works closely with band directors across the district, ensuring that his instruction aligns with each school's music program and provides students with the skills and confidence to excel in their ensembles and beyond.



To Marlin though, the bassoon is more than just an instrument—it is a tool for transforming lives.

Born and raised in the Los Angeles area, Marlin began his career in bassoon at the age of 14. From his early days, he demonstrated an earnest and diligent effort in mastering his craft, soon opening doors to perform with the Thousand Oaks Philharmonic.

Marlin's musical journey then took him to Chicago, a city renowned for its rich musical heritage. There, he continued to build his reputation, freelancing and discovering opportunities to play with esteemed Chicago-based orchestras such as the Opera Festival Chicago, Oistrakh Symphony of Chicago, Chicago Summer Opera, and Northbrook Symphony Orchestra.

But Marlin's influence didn't stop at Chicago's city limits. Nationally, his artistry caught the attention of prestigious ensembles like the Seattle Symphony and the Las Vegas Philharmonic, showcasing his ability to captivate audiences across the country. A major career highlight came in

2017, when he was selected as the soloist for Stephanie Ann Boyd’s Rituum, Bassoon Concerto—an opportunity that was part of Cincinnati Soundbox’s New Concerto Project.



With over 20 years of experience, Marlin has cultivated a teaching philosophy rooted in personalization, patience, camaraderie, and an unyielding commitment to his students. To create a friendly and supportive environment, he encourages his students to call him Andrew and consider him as both a mentor and a friend.

He also believes that any one of his students can achieve greatness with consistent practice, and a technique tailored to them.

“Andrew...really takes the time to get to know his students and find out how they best learn,” said Abigail Alcozer, a former student now on a full-ride scholarship to the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign.

“When Andrew would usually show his students beat shifts, he knew that, because of how I learn, that wouldn’t be as beneficial. So instead, he did rhythm shifts to help me learn. Or when I started practicing for college auditions, he helped me find/narrow down my repertoire to create a line up that was both challenging and reflective of me as a musician,” Alcozer said.

Marlin’s students consistently praise his dedication and individualized approach, leading many to achieve remarkable success. Several of his protégés have earned scholarships to prestigious music programs, including Northwestern University, Johns Hopkins University’s Peabody Institute, and more.

Beyond technical mastery, Marlin believes playing the bassoon, or any instrument for that matter, is more than just executing notes and rhythms. It is about conveying a story, experience, or feeling.

Whether working on a simple exercise or a full concerto, Marlin often reminds his students to “find the magic in the music,” encouraging them to dive deep into the nuances of phrasing, dynamics, and tone quality.

As one of his seniors at Elk Grove High School, Max Walaszek, remarked, “Musically, he is very focused on the artistic and expressive element, such as the different characters that can be portrayed... I feel that this is especially important, as it gives the music a human element, and many people are disregarding this aspect of music.”

“This allows students to [focus] more on expressing themselves in the music,” continued Walaszek.

Through a reflection on the characteristics of each piece, Marlin also allows students to develop qualities of their own. His lessons often incorporate discussions about mental discipline, self-worth, and courage— topics that benefit his students in every area of life.



As Walaszek puts it, “studying with Andrew has led to some of the most significant growth I’ve had as a person.

“Before taking lessons, I felt like most other high schoolers, very insecure, which in turn led to a lack of confidence. Andrew has allowed me to become more comfortable and happier with the person I genuinely am.”

Alcozer agreed with Walaszek, “He has always been one of my number one supporters in life. From when my grandmother passed away and him just taking my lesson to talk about it...to me having doubts of being a good enough performer to actually play my bassoon in college, Andrew has always been a person in my life that has uplifted me.”

This ability to create a deep connection with his student is what separates Marlin from other educators, earning him acclaims from his peers in the music community who recognize him as a world-class teacher.

“Andrew has an exceptional talent [of] connecting with his students as individuals and helping them to grow into the best versions of themselves. I’ve seen the transformative impact that his teaching has over a short period of time, not only in terms of his students’ playing, but in their confidence, engagement, and poise,” said Ben Roidl-Ward, assistant professor of bassoon at the University of Illinois.

Ultimately, Marlin’s impact goes past music, shaping his students into confident, disciplined individuals who are equipped with the skills to thrive in any field, not just music. His influence prepares them for success, no matter where their paths lead.

One of the most distinct aspects of Marlin’s work is his creation of the Bassoon Workshop, an ensemble that stands out as one of few of its kind in the world. Held annually for two months during the summer, this unique initiative brings together his students of all skill levels and technical abilities to form a collaborative, supportive community of bassoonists. In doing so, Marlin emphasizes the importance of building lasting connections, developing team-working skills, and creating a community of shared passion.

A recent guest speaker was Professor Miles Maner, an instructor at DePaul University and bassoonist of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra.

“His studio has an atmosphere of positivity, creativity, trust, and respect. He and his students are a tight-knit team and a well-oiled machine. And that machine runs on Andrew’s focused energy,” said Maner.



Marlin’s influence extends far beyond his work as a teacher or musician; it is the lasting impact he has on the lives of those he mentors that truly defines him. His ability to connect with each of his students, understand their individual needs, and help them grow as musicians and people is what sets him apart.

A recent testament to Marlin's impact comes from Esteban Avila, a senior at Schaumburg High School, who described him as "one of the brightest stars [he has] ever met. Not only does he make everyone around him smile, but he makes everyone around him better. Whether it's playing an instrument or learning how to count to three, he helps every single person he meets in many ways. He's one of the few people on this earth truly making it a better place."

As Marlin looks ahead, his dedication to teaching, his students, and the bassoon remains unwavering. Recently, his students have been featured on national radio, state-wide orchestras, concerto competitions, and more. Marlin will continue his journey as adjunct bassoon faculty at Elmhurst University, where he will undoubtedly continue to inspire countless others, proving that his impact on music—and on the world—is far from over. After all, when Marlin teaches, it's not just about mastering a piece of music; it's about making a lasting impression, one note at a time.