

30 Brave Minutes Podcast

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"A great sense of community:" UNCP Music
and the 'Spirit of the Carolinas' Marching Band

Dr. Gay

Welcome to *30 Brave Minutes*, a podcast of the College of Arts and Sciences at the University of North Carolina at Pembroke. In *30 Brave Minutes*, we'll give you something interesting to think about. I'm Richard Gay, Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, and with me is Dr. Joanna Hersey. Joining us today is Dr. Joey Van Hassel, who's Chair of the Department of Music, and Associate Professor. Kalem Graham, Director of the 'Spirit of the Carolinas' Marching Band and music education faculty, are also with us.

Now get ready for *30 Brave Minutes!*

Dr. Gay

Hi, thanks so much for joining us today!

Dr. Van Hassel

Good morning.

Mr. Graham

Good morning.

Dr. Richard Gay

Thank you, so tell us a bit about yourself, introduce yourself to our listeners.

Mr. Graham

Hello I'm Kalem Graham and I'm the Director of Athletic Bands in the Music Department, and I lead the 'Spirit of the Carolinas' Marching Band, and the basketball pep band.

Dr. Gay

Excellent.

Dr. Van Hassel

Hi everyone, I'm Joseph Van Hassel, as Richard said, I'm the Chair of the Music Department, and an Associate Professor, where my main area is percussion.

Dr. Gay

Tell us how you came to UNCP?

Dr. Van Hassel

So I started at UNCP in fall of 2014, and I came, I had recently finished up my Doctorate in Percussion Performance at the Hartt School, University of Hartford, and had been working part-time as an adjunct in Ohio, which is actually where I'm originally from. Basically I just submitted an application and got the job, and I've been here since then.

Dr. Hersey

And it was a fun connection for me, because Dr. Van Hassel's office was across from mine in the music building when I was there, and I also did my doctorate at Hartt, though just a little bit before Joey's. So it was fun to have a second person from that school on board at UNCP.

Dr. Gay

Excellent, well we're very glad to have you with us, both on campus in general and today with the podcast.

Dr. Van Hassel

Thanks, glad to be here.

Dr. Gay

So Kalem, tell us about yourself a little bit more.

Mr. Graham

This is my second year here at UNCP. I came from North Carolina Central University, where I spent three years as the Assistant Director of Bands. I'm very excited to be here, I really love the campus and the atmosphere and the diversity, which really drew me to UNCP.

Dr. Hersey

Can you tell us how you first knew that you wanted to do music education and marching band, was there a moment for you, like, you must have done marching band, did you grow up in that?

Mr. Graham

I did, I've been doing marching band since seventh grade. I think the moment for me was, I didn't initially come to college to be a music major. My first major was computer science

Dr. Hersey

Oh, we like that too.

Mr. Graham

And then I found, that was in the school of mathematics, and I knew that was not for me, and I switched to information systems, and I just wasn't happy in the major, I just really felt like I couldn't see myself doing this longterm. I remember having a conversation with my band director, and he was like 'well, you're already always here practicing and playing anyway, why don't you become a music major?' and it really didn't take me long to think about it, and I was like, that's probably the right path for me, and I set forward from there.

Dr. Hersey

I think that's a common theme when we talk to faculty across the college in these podcasts, that a lot of us started out in a different major from what we've ended up spending our life teaching and doing, and I love that message for the students, that they come to campus, and they're trying something, and then maybe that's not the thing. You would've been a great computer scientist, or an IT specialist, but instead you're out in front of the marching band on the practice field evening after evening, and it's fun to think that we might somehow find our niche in the campus culture. Joey did you know you always wanted to do this, what's your take on that?

Dr. Van Hassel

I did start my undergrad as a music major, when I was in high school it was actually between library sciences and music. I just enjoyed music so much and was learning a lot of new pieces, solo repertoire for my entrance auditions for undergrad, that it just kind of fell into place.

Dr. Gay

I think that's one of the great things about our general education curriculum, it gives students an opportunity to try on different hats and find the one that really suits them.

Dr. Hersey

And it's a common misperception that musicians will always come from musical families but that is not always the case, I don't have other musicians in my immediate family, do you all? Did you grow up with that?

Mr. Graham

My grandfather also played trombone...

Dr. Hersey

Oh, nice!

Mr. Graham

...went to college for music education, that's really about it as far as musicians in my family.

Dr. Van Hassel

My parents were music lovers, they played music in the church bell choir.

Dr. Hersey

Oh, that's good.

Dr. Van Hassel

They made us all take piano lessons, I have two siblings, we all took piano lessons in elementary school, but none of them were professional musicians. My dad played trombone in the Michigan State University Marching Band in the 1970s...

Dr. Hersey

I love it!

Dr. Van Hassel

...and that's as far as he went, he did not major in music, nor did my mom. Funny enough both my brother, my older brother Dan and myself, are professional musicians now. He's a composer living in the Boston area.

Dr. Gay

That is so interesting, I didn't realize you had other musicians in the family. So Joey, could you tell us a bit about your scholarship as a musician?

Dr. Van Hassel

Absolutely. A lot of times in the collegiate atmosphere, scholarship is thought of as publishing articles, presenting at conferences, that kind of thing, and that's certainly a part of music. I know, for myself, I publish articles in *Percussive Notes*, which is the main journal for my discipline, percussion, and also present more traditional lectures at conferences. One of the things I really love and what I think makes it really fun is performances, as a percussionist, performances are really my main area of scholarship. I spent three degrees, so however long that was, nine years...eight years...simply practicing, getting, refining my craft as a percussionist. So then all of that is my research, and what I pass on to the students as well as what I do with various performances. So that includes local performances, I play timpani with

the Carolina Philharmonic in Southern Pines, I play percussion with the Fayetteville Symphony, the Florence Symphony in South Carolina, as well as the Long Bay Symphony in Myrtle Beach, and then also national and international performances.

So, this past December, I played at my alma mater, the Hartt School, in a concert of works by composer Stewart Saunders Smith, who's a well-known composer of contemporary music, composes a lot for percussion as well as other instruments, travels around the world getting his music performed. And then this past summer in July, I was in Japan at the invitation of a friend of mine who's a percussionist and composer Takayoshi Yoshioka. He puts together, I believe it's four concerts of his music every year, so he invited me to perform on the one in July, where I had commissioned a piece from him, a new piece for marimba solo, premiered it here at UNCP, with Takayoshi Yoshioka in residence, so he visited North Carolina in April. Then I went out and performed it, among other pieces, in Japan this past summer, and then along with that also presented a master class and performance at Senzoku University in Japan.

This is part of scholarship that's often not thought of as well, or is maybe different than other disciplines, where I go to a class, percussion students there perform for me, and then I give them comments, so a bit of coaching on their performance. So I did some of that in Japan, and it was interesting there because I had to have a translator, because English isn't spoken very fluently in most areas of Japan. So everything I said, then the translator would repeat it back. And actually, the person I met as a translator, performed here in November, as a marimba soloist with flute.

Dr. Hersey

That's great!

Dr. Van Hassel

So it was nice to make a lot of connections in Japan and kind of reciprocate, go out and perform in Japan and have them come here in North Carolina and play. So, yeah, performances, even judging, so I judge marching band competitions, judge All-District high school, middle school auditions, or at a more national level, auditions for Percussive Arts Society, which is the largest percussion society in the world, actually, have competitions and they often have judging for that. I get bored easily, so the wide range of things that one can do as a musician that are scholarly, and especially as a percussionist I think, because we have thousands and thousands of instruments that will never be mastered by anybody, just because there's too many for a lifetime. I find that to be one of the most rewarding things of being a musician and percussionist.

Dr. Gay

When I think about the hours and hours of practice that you guys put into mastering your instruments I'm always blown away.

Dr. Hersey

Across our whole lives, yeah, it doesn't stop.

Dr. Gay

Yeah, it's ongoing.

Dr. Hersey

We'll link in the show notes to some neat video that we'll have you send us. Kalem, we know you're finishing up your doctorate, will you tell us a little bit about that and plans you have for the research that's going to involve, and maybe what gave you the idea to begin some of that research?

Mr. Graham

Sure, so my research is based upon Covid and music education...

Dr. Hersey

Oh, yeah.

Mr. Graham

...kind of what we did during Covid to survive, and what we can take away from it to evolve our practice in the future.

Dr. Hersey

That's great, and what are some themes that you're seeing, I know you're still involved in that but...

Mr. Graham

There was just a lot of online presence, online music programs, Smart Music, Zoom, a lot of Zoom. We personally, we had to hold sectionals via Zoom, so we still had to give students music to learn and we taught it to them a couple of days a week during sectionals, and tried to piece it back together on, like, Friday, or a weekend, but we couldn't really play all together but a handful of times during that 2020 year. So I know what we worked through, and I was very interested to see other schools, what they did to navigate through the pandemic with music.

Dr. Hersey

It really showed us some differences in the economic set-ups of school systems and communities, who had internet at home to keep going with the music, and were able to transport the students to get instruments, and that was a time of a lot of change for us.

Mr. Graham

It really was. Right now I haven't quite got into the research of specific directors yet, more gathering literature on the subject currently.

Dr. Hersey

That's great, we look forward to hearing more about that as you go along with it, it's an important thing that we learn from the time we went through, and maybe there's pieces of that, that, as you say, can come back into our curriculum and our learning initiatives down the road.

Dr. Gay

Yeah, it certainly transformed other disciplines, and even just the way we hold meetings on campus now, the flexibility that it adds to us, so I'm curious to see if there will be a musical equivalent to that as you move forward. The takeaways from that experience, I think, have really transformed the workplace in so many ways.

So we just had a stellar season with the 'Spirit of the Carolinas' Marching Band, so could you please tell us about the band and the band's activities?

Mr. Graham

Sure, this year we were a very young band, I would say about eighty percent were first year members of the group, so there were some growing pains at first, of just being together for the first time and learning our style, understanding that it's different from the high schools and the places they've come from before, but there was a lot of growth throughout the season. The students really liked our show, which was kind of like a journey through time of music from the eighties, nineties, and two-thousands, so we felt like we had a show that appealed to everyone in our audience, and the students really seemed to enjoy playing said music. We like to pick music that they have an interest in, or maybe music that they've never really heard before that they can grow an interest into. So I know some of the eighties songs, the students weren't exactly...

Dr. Hersey

[Laughing] They don't know? O dear!

Mr. Graham

...the most familiar with. We took time and played the songs for them, kind of talked about their historical reference and their pop genres.

Dr. Hersey

Nice, can you give us an example of what was on the program?

Mr. Graham

Sure, for the eighties we played Whitney Houston's "I want to Dance with Somebody..."

Dr. Hersey

Nice!

Mr. Graham

...which was one of her first big singles as an artist. We also played "Vogue" by Madonna, which sparked a whole dance trend in itself.

Dr. Hersey

Absolutely.

Mr. Graham

From the nineties we played "Kiss from a Rose" by Seal, which was his number one hit, his biggest hit through his career in the nineties, from the *Batman Forever* soundtrack, and then we played "Toxic" by Britney Spears from the two-thousands, which was really her resurgence of coming back after being popular in the nineties, and laying back for a little bit, but "Toxic" really brought her back to the forefront of being an artist.

Dr. Gay

Man, I thought for sure he was going to say there was some Earth, Wind and Fire in there, I just keep hearing that horn section!

Mr. Graham

Well, actually, for our very first encore we played "September" by Earth, Wind and Fire...

Drs. Gay and Hersey

All, right, there we go...

Mr. Graham

...to commemorate the month of September and you know, the historical context with the song, so we did play some Earth, Wind, and Fire this year.

Dr. Gay

Excellent!

Mr. Graham

One thing we debuted this year for homecoming was brand new uniforms, the Chancellor was kind enough to gift us new uniforms this year and the students love them. They're a newer design than what we've used in the past, designed to keep us warm in the cold months and cool in the hot months, so it's very nice to see the support, and the excitement that everyone's had for the new uniforms this year, we were happy we were able to debut them at Homecoming, so our alumni base could see them, and a lot of them felt jealous that they couldn't have these uniforms when they were marching.

Dr. Hersey

I like it! What do they look like, tell us a little bit about them.

Mr. Graham

Well, they're kind of like a vest with gold and black, with UNCP going across the chest, and then they're sleeveless, and we have multiple shirt options underneath that we can do based on the weather.

Dr. Hersey

They can layer.

Mr. Graham

Yeah, which they can layer underneath.

Dr. Gay

Maybe we can put a picture in the show notes.

Dr. Hersey

We will that's a great idea. Can you talk a little bit about the student leadership potential that's in that group, because we do really utilize leadership training as part of marching band and some of our listeners might not know, talk about how we train leaders.

Mr. Graham

Yeah, so we bring our leaders back in the summer, in the start of camp. They go through an application process in the spring, where you can apply for whatever position you want. We have Drum Major, we have Brass Captain, we have Woodwind Captain, we have a Personnel Manager, and we have an Equipment Manager as well. So we encourage students to apply for these different positions, it really helps teach them responsibility of managing their specific area. Our Brass and Woodwind captains are responsible for helping us teach the music to their individual sections. Our Equipment Manager manages the field and field markers, and making sure our field is in tip top shape and we have visible lines when we go out there and march. Our Personnel is in charge of attendance and uniforms as well for fittings, and making sure that everyone has the correct parts to all their uniforms every week. So we do put a lot of responsibility on our students, but we feel that it's growth that can help in all areas of what they do.

Dr. Hersey

Right, absolutely.

Dr. Gay

Are there opportunities for people who may not have mastered a musical instrument to participate?

Mr. Graham

Yes, we actually have a couple who help us with equipment, so helping us move equipment from music building to the stadium on Saturdays, things like that. Driving the Gator when we need it too, so we do have some non-instrumentalists that help us in that aspect.

Dr. Gay

Excellent.

Dr. Hersey

And the marching band students don't have to be music majors of course, and many of them are not, and they are able to take lessons on their instruments if they would like, to get better at something if it's been a little while since they marched last they can take lessons, and the Music Department is a class, it doesn't cost extra, and join the band and march after they've mastered their instrument a little bit.

Mr. Graham

I always encourage students to take lessons. Marching Band is more of a fun ensemble, I would say, but they can truly get their growth as a musician by taking individual lessons, as

well as joining other ensembles in our department. I always encourage Concert Band or Jazz...

Dr. Hersey

They're always open to majors and non-majors, absolutely.

Mr. Graham

Always open, and they meet on the non-days that there's Marching Band, so there's not a conflict of time, you have that time free, so why not indulge in another ensemble and help you build as a musician.

Dr. Gay

And the Band of course now, it meets the Gen Ed Requirement for a PE, right? So people who are interested in meeting that requirement can now do that through the band.

Dr. Hersey

That's right.

Mr. Graham

Yes, so this year we were able to get Marching Band as a PE course, so students, it's another incentive for students to join the group, where they can fulfill their PE credits by just being in the Marching Band, which can be quite physical with all the movement and what it takes to actually put on a field show, so we're very excited to have that opportunity for our students this year.

Dr. Gay

I'm always amazed with the breath control with musicians, it's something once you realize, 'man, they are really having to move and blow that horn,' and it's quite athletic, I think.

Chancellor Cummings

This is Chancellor Robin Cummings and I want to thank you for listening to 30 Brave Minutes. Our faculty and students provide expertise, energy, and passion driving our region forward. Our commitment to southeastern North Carolina has never been stronger through our teaching, our research, and our community outreach. I want to encourage you to consider making a tax-deductible contribution to the College of Arts and Sciences at the University of North Carolina at Pembroke. With your help, we will continue our impact for generations to come. You can donate online at www.uncp.edu/give. Thanks again for listening. Now back to more 30 Brave Minutes.

Dr. Gay

Kalem, if I'm a new student at UNCP, and I'm interested in joining the Band, how would I go about getting involved?

Mr. Graham

You can always email us at sotc@uncp.edu you can go to the website at <https://www.uncp.edu/music/ensembles/sotc> and that will take you to our Marching Band page and there's an interest form that you can fill out that gives us your information so we can contact you and keep you up with everything going on with the Marching Band.

Dr. Gay

So we are moving into the spring semester with basketball, so can you tell us about how the Music Department is supporting the spring semester?

Mr. Graham

So we have a basketball Pep Band, that plays at all home games, this is probably the ensemble that gets our students the most excited, because we're so close to the action, we sit right behind the goal, they love to cheer and shout, and cheer on our team with the spirit squad, they just seem to have a lot of fun in Pep Band. So you can always see the excitement and like, 'oh my gosh, basketball season, I can't wait to be in Pep Band.' And we also use it as a segue ensemble, to maybe ease someone in to the department or to the music, that may be more familiar with the Pep Band setting, and then encourage them after that to join other ensembles, so I tend to get in a few people that haven't been a part of the Music Department before, and I kind of use that as a bridge to lead them towards other ensembles.

Dr. Gay

I think one of the things that's a real take-away for me from your discussion of the band is just how it really takes a community to pull off a show, there's so many aspects that as a spectator in the stadium, just doesn't realize has gone into that performance. So we appreciate all that work you put in behind the scenes.

Mr. Graham

Well thank you, I definitely don't do it alone. I have a really great staff that I work with, with Isaac Pyatt on percussion, Meggan Hollis, the Marching Band Assistant, Nick Rumbeau, that works with our Color Guard, we all work together in tandem to really make what we do happen. So I could definitely not do it alone.

Dr. Hersey

So, Joey, the Music Department just had another highly successful Holiday Extravaganza concert last month, and this is a performance that we put on every year as a fundraiser for

student scholarships, and it features a lot of the different areas of the Music Department. Will you tell us a little bit more about that?

Dr. Van Hassel

Absolutely, it's one of my favorite performances of the year, it's probably the only concert that has the entire Music Department working together. So we have faculty ensembles, we have the Faculty Brass Quintet for example, and the Faculty Piano Duo, student ensembles, so the Concert Band plays, the University Chorale sings, we have jazz combos playing, it's just a big event that really showcases and highlights the entire Music Department, faculty and students. That's one of the reasons I think it's just great, I love it very much.

Yes, and as Joanna mentioned it does, all the ticket sales go towards music student scholarship, so when a student wants to apply for a music degree, they have to submit a separate application to the Music Department, which includes an audition on their instrument, and if they do well, they're offered a scholarship, and that money has to come from somewhere, so the Holiday Extravaganza really helps with that. I'll also say, it's part of the GPAC series of concerts, which is a relatively new thing, within the last five or so years, it's part of the series of concerts, so there's a lot of community engagement. We typically have a lot of folks from the university, a lot of folks from the surrounding counties and areas, students, adults, just from all over the place coming to this, so it's also one of our best attended concerts of the year which is great, because again, it benefits the students through scholarships.

Dr. Hersey

One of my favorite aspects of this every year is that we do different times of music outside GPAC, on that cement area, we have had percussion, we've had brass, the TubaChristmas used to happen there, and so as the families are coming in, and as people are walking in, they get to hear music before they even get to the lobby of GPAC, which is one of the things that makes this, I think, a special night for many of us.

Dr. Van Hassel

Right.

Dr. Gay

It's really welcoming when the musicians are outside, it makes it a real event for the visitor, and I attend every year, and I enjoy it, and it's a celebration of the holiday season but it's also a real showcase of the richness of the Music Department as well, so you guys really make us proud on that night.

Dr. Van Hassel

Well thanks, it's always a blast and the pre-show is always a lot of fun, as Joanna said we've had TubaChristmas, we had a steel drum band last year, the brass quintet played at this previous one, Faculty Brass Quintet and student brass.

Dr. Hersey

Yes, and sometimes, a little snow might fall...I don't know, it depends, but it's fun to see if the children are there, and they see, in past years we've had some snow falling even though it's been in the fifties, normally temperature-wise, very mild.

Dr. Gay

I was going to say...

Dr. Van Hassel

We've had snow in the auditorium as well [laughing] it snows inside, I'm not sure how that happens.

Dr. Hersey

Let it snow!

Dr. Gay

It's that theatrical magic behind the scenes.

Dr. Hersey

That's right.

So Joey, can you tell our listeners a bit about some more upcoming events that they may be able to attend in the Music Department?

Dr. Van Hassel

Sure! All of the upcoming events are listed on our website, so if you just google UNCP Music, it'll take you right to the website and there's a list of events there. If you have questions or want more information, you can always email us at music@uncp.edu and we also have a Facebook page that talks about various events, student opportunities and events and that kind of stuff.

Dr. Gay

There's always something going on in the Music Department, that's one of the great things I love about visiting, I go over and the students are in the hallway preparing for a performance,

and there's really a great sense of community when you enter that building, so even the casual visitor picks up on that sense of community over there.

Dr. Hersey

And the music faculty does a really good job of making Pembroke a stop on tour for so many different musical groups, I know we've all done that where we welcome somebody, it's often their first time in Pembroke, surprisingly, but we welcome them. I have a tradition of selfies by the Clock Tower, right outside of Moore Hall with my guests, and we've welcomed musicians and music teaching faculty from all over the globe at UNC Pembroke, and they've played in Moore Hall and worked with our students. We had a Norwegian tuba soloist who came once, and it happened to snow. That's rare on campus, but it was a Wednesday morning department event, and it happened to snow, and so they had closed campus until, I think, noon, and his performance was supposed to be at ten, and so we were here and we just put the word out, you know, students who can, if you want to walk over, you know, no worries but if you want, and he worked with the students in a casual way during the snow, and it was just so much fun.

So, this sense of Pembroke really being a center of musical activity, both in GPAC but also in Moore Hall with these guests. I know Joey's welcomed several percussion guests, and we have a lot more on the schedule coming up for the spring semester, so definitely check that out. Things in Moore Hall Auditorium usually have no ticket fee, parking is free right nearby, the Holiday Extravaganza has a small fee, as we said, for the scholarship donation, but normally you can come to Moore Hall, no tickets are required, and enjoy everything that we have there.

Dr. Van Hassel

Yeah, and I'd say this past year even, we've had guest artists from around the country, but also from Italy, from Japan. We're welcoming someone from Vienna, in February I believe, and then we have our honor festivals, so Honor Band, Honor Choir, Honor Jazz, those are all upcoming, so definitely check out the website for information about all of those, and don't hesitate to contact us with any questions.

Dr. Gay

Well, I'm looking forward to it, I'll definitely check that website out. Thank you so much for joining us today, I've really enjoyed learning more about the band, and all the prep work that goes behind the scenes, and I want to say that I'm really excited about the work that the Music Department is doing, so I've really enjoyed our conversation, so thanks for joining us.

Dr. Van Hassel

Thanks for having us.

Mr. Graham

Thank you.

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Thanks for listening and Go Braves!