



THE PROMISE OF MUSIC

THE FIRST WORLD CONGRESS
ON THE SOCIAL IMPACT *of* MUSIC

FORUM EVENT SCHEDULE

MONDAY, OCTOBER 6, 2025 | [MONDAY TICKETS](#)

TIME	SESSION TITLE	DESCRIPTION	PRESENTERS
2:00-3:15 PM	Jamie Bernstein on the Power of Music and Media	Join this special appearance by author, narrator, director and filmmaker Jamie Bernstein. Her 2018 memoir, <i>Famous Father Girl</i> is about growing up with legendary composer-conductor Leonard Bernstein, subject of the Academy Award nominated 2023 film, <i>Maestro</i> . She has written and narrated concerts about Mozart, Aaron Copland and Stravinsky, as well as “The Bernstein Beat,” a family concert about her father. Jamie will discuss her father’s artistry and career and ground-breaking use of mass media for music education and appreciation.	Jamie Bernstein
3:30-4:30 PM	Music and the Arts – Saving Society Billions Through Enhanced Wellness	Frontier Economics is one of the world’s largest economics research firms with a staff of over 500. In 2024, Frontier Economics completed a major study for the UK government examining the impacts of arts, culture and heritage on the health and well-being of British people. Using a broad spectrum of evidence and new economic modelling, took the bold step of determining the economic impact of arts engagement on the population, based on health and well-being and savings in healthcare costs, increased productivity, etc.). The results were startling. Not only did the evidence show that engagement with the arts enhanced people’s wellness, it also saved government money – a lot of money. Frontier Economics did not consider the benefits from tourism, hospitality, employment, etc., (as real as those are), but focused specifically on wellness. The Frontier Economics research found a value in healthcare and other public expenditure savings of as much as \$15 billion CAD annually. Consider how much greater the impact would be with an even more robust public investment. Matthew Bell, Director of Frontier Economics presents the findings of the report, and its implications both for public policy, and for the health, wellness and life satisfaction of people everywhere.	Matthew Bell
4:45-5:45 PM	Positive Fatalism: Music-Making in the Harsh Realities of Kinshasa	Drawing on nearly two decades of field research in Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo, Dr. Pairon will introduce the concept of ‘positive fatalism’ relating how the art of music-making may empower people to live with dignity amidst the unimaginable challenges, dangers, structural injustice, and hardships of daily life.	Dr. Lukas Pairon

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 7, 2025 | [TICKETS](#)

TIME	SESSION TITLE	DESCRIPTION	PRESENTERS
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9:00-10:30 AM	Music Education – Transforming Children’s Lives	Across the planet, social initiatives rooted in the teaching of music have shown the powerful impact that this form of creative expression, collective engagement and personal development can have on the lives and futures of children and youth. The programs presented in this panel hail from diverse cultural and social environments, and address different needs and challenges among the students they serve. Despite these differences, our speakers will draw upon their lived experience, and that of their students, to identify the common threads that make their work successful, impactful and life-changing, with lessons that can benefit children and communities everywhere.	Dr. Lee Willingham Elizabeth Njoroge Adam Greig Kenn Mainville Ron Davis Alvarez Nabeel Abboud Ashkar
10:30-11:50 AM	Music and Social Prescribing – Holistic Health and Wellness	In an era of constrained resources and an over-taxed health care system, we can and must find better and more cost-effective ways to enhance health and wellness across the population by addressing the social determinants of health: the conditions in which people are born, grow, live, work and age. Health is affected by numerous social factors that arise long before the need for physicians and hospitals becomes acute: loneliness, nutrition, emotional and home support, education, one’s physical environment, availability of cultural and social engagement, to name a few. Addressing these needs in a way that can save health care dollars, relieve stresses on the medical system and produce better health outcomes is the essence of the movement called Social Prescribing. Social prescribing holistically unites clinical and social care by referring patients to local, non-clinical services that are chosen according to the client’s interests, goals, and gifts. Our panelists draw upon a wealth of real-world experience to discuss the powerful role that learning music and access to musical culture can play as a social prescribing aid to the wellness of our children.	Annie Saumier Dr. Sue Bennett Tina Fedeski Dr. Arla Good
12:45-1:45 PM	Music in Exile: the Struggle to Preserve Culture	Dr. Ahmad Sarmast is the visionary Founder and Director of the Afghanistan National Institute of Music (ANIM), established in Kabul after the fall of the Taliban in 2001. ANIM was created as a modern, inclusive conservatory, welcoming children in need, and open to girls, who had long been banned from access to education. ANIM sought to rescue and revive Afghanistan’s rich, musical heritage which was nearly eradicated under Taliban rule. Sarmast’s mission came at great personal risk. Despite death threats and a targeted suicide bombing that left him with grave injuries, Sarmast persisted and ANIM flourished, until the sudden return of the Taliban in 2021. He refused to be deterred. After several months in hiding, and in an extraordinary act of defiance and hope, the students and teachers escaped and re-established the school in Portugal – reborn as a “conservatory in exile.” Dr. Sarmast vividly recounts and speaks with raw emotion about the harrowing experience, the ache of separation from home and the enduring strength his students and faculty find in music. Through it all, he continues to champion music as not only an art form, but a basic human right.	Dr. Ahmad Sarmast
2:00-3:15 PM	Music Education – Preserving Culture, Preventing Erasure	Music is a connecting thread that runs through cultures, extending from the very origins of identity to today’s contemporary expressions. The central role of music makes it an essential part of who people are and how they understand themselves, from cultural celebrations and sacred observances, the telling of folk stories and foundational myths, sustaining family memories, and the voicing of hopes and concerns of the present-day. Yet, with the passage of time and changes in society or the uprooting of families and populations through traumatic events of displacement, war and natural disaster, people can become separated from themselves and their roots, becoming strangers in strange lands, or even alienated from their culture while still living in their homelands. Hear our panelists discuss the vital part music and music education plays in preserving and recovering cultural traditions, in regaining a sense of rootedness, and even finding a fresh sense of identity and kinship as they reconcile themselves to their new homes.	Dr. Richard Marsella Dr. Sommer Forrester Ron Davis Alvarez
3:30-5:00 PM	Glenn Gould’s	Joshua Cohen is a professor of philosophy, and has taught at MIT, Stanford and the University of California, Berkeley, before joining the faculty of Apple University, established by Steve Jobs in 2008. Jobs’ goal was to infuse	Brian Levine

Variations and the Human Qualities that Foster Remarkable Human Creativity

Apple’s employees with a more holistic and creative vision of the company’s mission and values.

As part of his three-part series, “Best Things,” Prof. Cohen developed this presentation about Glenn Gould and his re-imagining in 1981 of his groundbreaking 1955 hit recording of Bach’s Goldberg Variations. Created for Apple, and rarely seen outside of Apple University, Dr. Cohen presents revelatory insights not only about a landmark recording, but about the richness of ideas that went into its creation.

Through this presentation, illustrated with numerous video clips and penetrating analysis, Prof. Cohen reveals Gould’s insights about the rich inner workings of a musical masterpiece, but also his ideas about the ethical dimensions of technology, and their implications for society and the future of humanity.

For those whose lives are touched daily by technology (all of us!), and for whom music is essential, this talk will be a provocative, stimulating and attitude-changing experience.

Joshua Cohen

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 8, 2025 | [WEDNESDAY TICKETS](#)

TIME	SESSION TITLE	DESCRIPTION	PRESENTERS
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9:00-10:00 AM	Music, Trauma and the Developing Brain	What are the unique qualities of music that make it such a powerful force in the early development of children, whether lullabies at bedtime, singing nursery rhymes, jumping in time to skipping songs, or the endlessly repeated playback of tunes heard on-line? How does music contribute to a young child’s bonding, emotional development, cognitive maturation, socialization, mood regulation and development of peer relationships? Hear our panellists discuss not only how the formative impacts of an active engagement with music listening and learning advances the young child’s development, but also the implications for lifelong resiliency, wellness and success.	Dr. Ellen Waterman Dr. Wendy Stewart Margaret (Mags) O’Sullivan
9:00-10:30 AM	El Sistema at 50 - The Movement that Started it All	In 1975, Venezuelan economist and musician Dr. José Antonio Abreu had the idea of expanding the reach of music education to make it available more widely to the young people of his country. Beginning with 11 students meeting initially in the only available space, an underground parking lot, Abreu worked relentlessly to expand the program, which quickly evolved into the movement popularly nicknamed “El Sistema” (the System). In Abreu’s vision, learning music was a form of social action to nurture better citizens for whom there should be no barriers to access, regardless of a child’s economic circumstances, challenges, or special needs and abilities. Using the orchestra as a model society (“whose only purpose is to be in harmony with itself”), El Sistema grew to include teaching centres (“nucleos”) in economically challenged neighbourhoods with persistent problems of crime, gangs and drug use, in juvenile correctional facilities, as well as programs run by Indigenous communities, others serving youth with special needs and disabilities, and programs teaching the art of instrument making and repair. With its toddler-to young adult program, emphasis on group learning, play and teamwork, today more than 2,000,000 Venezuelans have experienced El Sistema, which has produced 400 nucleos and given rise to more than 170 orchestras, and in addition to symphonic ensembles, has choral, jazz and has spurred a renaissance in Venezuelan folk-traditional music. Today, El Sistema inspired programs have spread to more than 60 countries worldwide, including Canada. While the musical results produced by these programs are impressive and inspiring, the central purpose of El Sistema is “Social Action Through Music.” Join us for a discussion of this revolutionary movement, moderated by Eric Booth and Tricia Tunstall, publishers of the worldwide newsletter of El Sistema, “The Ensemble” and a panel of leaders from international El Sistema programs. “Music has to be recognized as an . . . agent of social development in the highest sense, because it transmits the highest values – solidarity, harmony, mutual compassion. And it has the ability to unite an entire community and to express sublime feelings.” – José Antonio Abreu	Eric Booth Tricia Tunstall Nick Skinner Vicky Williams Tina Fedeski Ron Davis Alvarez
10:45-12:00 PM	Dr. Gabor Maté in Conversation: Trauma, Childhood and Musical Pathways to Healing	A captivating, and deeply insightful conversation, recorded exclusively for The Promise of Music, exploring the profound connections between trauma, childhood development and emotional healing and music. Dr. Maté is joined in conversation by Brian Levine of The Glenn Gould Foundation.	Dr. Gabor Maté
11:00-12:00 PM	Strategic Granting in Music Education: MusiCounts Insights & Process	MusiCounts is Canada’s music education charity, having directed over \$18 million in instruments and resources to thousands of underserved schools and community music programs across Canada. Join MusiCounts as they offer a focused overview of their granting model as well as data-driven insights on the state of music education in Canada. These insights not only inform key trends in music education across the country, but also offer a foundation to inform broader educational and cultural policy conversations as they pertain to the state of music education.	Nick Godsoe
1:00-2:15 PM	SIMM Panel:	This session focuses on the specific skills, training and personal qualities required of musicians who facilitate	Dr. Lukas Pairon

	Essential Skills for Musicians Facilitating Social and Community Music Projects	participatory music projects.	Dr. Irina Kirchberg Eric Booth Tricia Tunstall Pierre Vachon Nabeel Abboud Ashkar
1:00-2:00 PM	Rooted in Movement: Art, Equity, and Community	In this powerful keynote, internationally acclaimed dancer, choreographer, and arts advocate Lil Buck shares how Memphis Jookin’ – a street dance style born in the neighbourhoods of his home town – became both his personal path to possibility and a platform for youth empowerment. With its signature glide, bounce and elaborate footwork, Jookin’ launched Lil Buck from local streets to global stages. Reflecting on his own journey and the work of the Lil Buck Foundation, he explores how culturally rooted art forms can foster resilience, unlock talent, and expand opportunities for young people, especially in underserved communities. A Wall Street Journal Innovator of the Year and subject of Netflix’s MOVE and the documentary Lil Buck: Real Swan, he invites us to reimagine the role of community-based art in shaping brighter, bolder futures.	Lil Buck
2:15-3:30 PM	Roundtable: Building Bridges to a Better Future	When young people grow up facing adversity, whether through economic deprivation, violence, displacement, or multigenerational trauma, feelings of hopelessness, disengagement, and hostility can become internalized responses to their outward circumstances. Through self-destructive or even criminal behaviour, too often, young lives can be wasted or tragically cut short. Against such overwhelming, soul-destroying odds, how can something as ephemeral as music make a difference? And yet, as our speakers have witnessed firsthand, music can inspire and catalyze an astonishing metamorphosis. It begins by showing young people that they are not alone. It affirms their potential to learn, to create and to achieve. And it nourishes an environment for personal growth, self-discovery and contributing to something greater than themselves. The external realities of these young people may not immediately change, but through music, many develop inner strength, a sense of community, and spiritual and intellectual resources that help them rise above their circumstances and empower them to find a better way forward.	Dr. Richard Marsella Elizabeth Njroge Steve Happi Dione Roach Davis Moussinghi Micah Hendler Ndondo Mulli Ron Davis Alvarez
2:30-3:30 PM	Changing the Tune: Rethinking School Music Programs to Meet Student Interests and Needs	When young people grow up facing adversity, whether through economic deprivation, violence, displacement, or multigenerational trauma, feelings of hopelessness, disengagement, and hostility can become internalized responses to their outward circumstances. Through self-destructive or even criminal behaviour, too often, young lives can be wasted or tragically cut short. Against such overwhelming, soul-destroying odds, how can something as ephemeral as music make a difference? And yet, as our speakers have witnessed firsthand, music can inspire and catalyze an astonishing metamorphosis. It begins by showing young people that they are not alone. It affirms their potential to learn, to create and to achieve. And it nourishes an environment for personal growth, self-discovery and contributing to something greater than themselves. The external realities of these young people may not immediately change, but through music, many develop inner strength, a sense of community, and spiritual and intellectual resources that help them rise above their circumstances and empower them to find a better way forward.	Nick Godsoe Sherryl Sewepagaham Zeda Ali Darren Hamilton
3:45-5:00 PM	The Value and Power of Music Therapy	Music therapy harnesses the power of music in a therapeutic relationship guided by a trained professional to address a wide range of conditions in order to improve wellness and quality of life. Dating back to the early 20th century – and gaining formal recognition in U.S. universities by the 1940s – music therapy is now a well-established and respected discipline.	Sandrine Zuyderhoff Jennifer Buchanan

		When applied to children, music has been shown to support language acquisition and rehabilitation, motor skills development, emotional expression, social engagement, cognitive development and recovery from trauma. Music therapy is used extensively in paediatric, rehabilitation, mental health, medical and chronic care settings. Based in Calgary, Jennifer Buchanan is one of Canada’s most respected and successful music therapists. Based on her vast experience, and compassionate use of music as a healing tool, Jennifer will explain why, at this time of unprecedented increase in mental health challenges amongst children and youth, music is a powerful tool for promoting wellness. Jennifer will be joined in this session by members of Music for Every Child, a unique youth-led, registered charitable organization run by students ages 8 – 23. Music For Every Child initiates and funds music therapy programming for children with special needs in inner city schools. Through the universal language of music, Music for Every Child helps students develop important skills including socio-emotional, communication, and behavioural regulation. Music for Every Child is currently an official Educational Partner of the Toronto District School Board, collaborating with educators and professionals across Toronto, Mississauga, Ottawa, and Oakville.	Samantha Fung
3:45-5:00 PM	New Advances in Applied Music Neuroscience - from Mechanisms to Interventions	In recent decades, research into the effects of music on the brain, cognition, and neurological development – from early childhood through end of life – has surged. The massive body of work has evolved alongside science’s growing understanding of neuroplasticity (the brain’s remarkable ability to continuously reorganize itself by forming new neural connections in response to stimuli, experience and activity). While huge gains in understanding have been made, vast frontiers remain unexplored in uncovering exactly how listening to, learning and making music change the brain. Already, we are gaining insights into the uses of sound, rhythm and musical structures for therapies to treat diverse conditions including stroke recovery, autism, Parkinson’s disease, epilepsy, traumatic brain injury, dementia, multiple sclerosis and mood disorders. This expanding field raises compelling questions for parents, educators, and clinicians about the role of music in early development, and how it may build the neurological foundations for lifelong health, cognitive resilience and emotional well-being. It also points to the potential of music-based targeted interventions that can be applied throughout life in response to specific health challenges.	Dr. Marco Battaglia Dr. Gottfried Schlaug Dr. Michael Thaut

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 9, 2025 | [THURSDAY TICKETS](#)

TIME	SESSION TITLE	DESCRIPTION	PRESENTERS
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9:00-10:30 AM	Music in Prisons and Detention Centres	How can music programs in prisons and detention centres contribute to rehabilitation and reintegration of inmates into society? In places of incarceration where human dignity and sense of self is repressed, creative expression offers a fragile yet vital form of agency. Drawing on years of collaborative research within the SIMM research network and the lived experience of the founders of a ground-breaking prison program, we will show the value of music both as a tool for rehabilitation, but also as a form of identity-building, quiet resistance, and constructing positive relationships. Rather than romanticizing the role of music, we critically examine the limits and risks of musical practice in prison settings, how power, vulnerability, and institutional control affect prison music programs, and the ethical responsibilities of practitioners in working musically with the incarcerated. This session will include a presentation by Anne-Katherine Dionne (University of Toronto), alongside reflections by a panel of experienced practitioners and researchers in this field. We hope to provoke dialogue around the complexity of music’ impact in places of confinement. The presenters will play a recorded message from Alanis Obomsawin.	Dr. Lukas Pairon Anne-Katherine Dionne Dr. Bina John Dione Roach Steve Happi Recorded Message: Alanis Obomsawin
10:45-12:00 PM	Lessons Learned – The Sweet Sounds of Success from Winning Music Programs	What does it take to build a transformative community music program, one that changes kids’ lives, opens new horizons for them, and contributes to healthier, more engaged communities? Each of our panelists has put in endless hours, faced innumerable challenges, made and corrected mistakes, and helped build a program that can serve as a role model for those who want to bring learning music to the young people in their own community. Our panelists will share insights gained from years of organizing, fundraising, working with parents, teachers, administrators and public officials. Their examples show how to get started, build strategic alliances, create and adapt plans, persuade the skeptical, cope with challenged and challenging students, and nurture their organizations from “startup novelties” viewed with skepticism, to cherished, indispensable pillars of their communities, garnering enthusiasm, support and pride.	Eric Booth Tricia Tunstall Ken MacLeod Nick Skinner Vicky Williams Diego Becerra Dr. Shawn Earle Dr. Tina Fedeski
12:45-1:45 PM	Music and AI: Threat or Blessing	Will AI increase our musical enjoyment or dull our emotional response? Will it enhance our sonic creativity or lead us to become quick-but-facile “composers”? Tod Machover — who has been at the cutting edge of music and technology for over 40 years, and who leads the visionary MIT Media Lab — will provide context for today’s AI music explosion, explain current approaches and where they might lead in music learning and creating, play relevant examples from recent AI-infused compositions by himself and others, and present an adventurous path forward that blends human and machine in mutually beneficial ways.	Tod Machover
2:00-3:15 PM	SIMM Panel: Social and Community Music Projects and their Possible 'Impacts'	If community music projects are to have genuine value, we need to challenge outmoded and romanticized narratives, many of which are rooted in paternalistic assumptions from the past. Presenter Dr. Roger Mantie will pose provocative questions about how we understand the social impact of music and what underlying assumptions shape our interpretations of concepts like agency, transformation, and responsibility. Posing these difficult questions can lead to more realistic, evidence-based and beneficial initiatives that respond to community needs in a wide range of social, economic and cultural contexts. A more grounded approach frees music educators from well-intentioned but often utopian notions that portray music as a panacea, something that “saves” or “redeems” so-called “endangered souls.” This session invites us to strive for initiatives founded on a more nuanced, context-sensitive, and ethically grounded understanding of what music can (and cannot) do in the face of social inequality, oppression, displacement and human suffering.	Dr. Lukas Pairon Dr. Roger Mantie Dr. Imogen Flower Dr. Lee Willingham Dr. Richard Marsella
3:30-5:00 PM	Starting a Music Program in Your	Starting a music program from the ground up can be a powerful way to foster community, engage youth and create a lasting cultural, educational and social impact. This roundtable brings together leaders and program founders from across North America to share their experiences launching music initiatives. Join this session for practical	Eric Booth Tricia Tunstall

**Community - Tips
for Start-Ups**

advice on everything from securing funding and building partnerships to creating lasting long-term engagement. Whether you're an educator, community advocate or artist, this session will bring the tools necessary to launch a music program in your own community. Learn from their successes, their setbacks and their growth – but most of all, learn that it is possible for you, your children and your community!

Dr. Erin Parkes
Andrea Unrau
Dr. Richard
Marsella
Chelsey Hiebert

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 10, 2025 | [FRIDAY TICKETS](#)

TIME	SESSION TITLE	DESCRIPTION	PRESENTERS
9:00-10:00 AM	Music is Medicine – A Scientist’s Perspective and a Personal Journey	Join us for this illuminating address by Dr. Shimi Kang MD, award-winning psychiatrist, bestselling author of The Dolphin Parent, acclaimed speaker; recognized expert on mental health, positive parenting, family dynamics, innovation, and resilience. An inspiring exploration of music’s profound scientifically validated power for healing, connection, and thriving, drawing on Dr. Kang’s clinical practice, research and real-life experience as a mother.	Dr. Shimi Kang
9:30-11:15 AM	SIMM Panel: Decolonial and Justice-Oriented Social and Community Music Practices	How do community-based music-making programs engage in a meaningful way with diverse cultures and their representatives, authentically reflecting Indigenous values and perspectives, and those of other formerly colonized nations? With sensitive planning and design, and inviting the leadership of Indigenous community leaders, Elders, song-keepers and others, community-based participatory music projects can become a gateway through which to challenge dominant cultural frameworks and centre local knowledge and traditions, energize community agency and promote individual empowerment. Who leads these initiatives? Whose music is being made? Who decides? What forms of teaching are most powerful and authentically rooted? How can those “from outside,” with potentially useful skills offer their help and resources in a respectful, supportive way that listens, responds and does not impose? And how can such projects challenge and resist colonial dynamics, and connect with the rediscovery and strengthening of traditional stories, dignity, spirituality, and solidarity?	Sherryl Sewepagaham Dr. Lukas Pairon Dr. Deanna Yerechuk Kathy Armstrong Karen Cyrus Nicole Schutz
10:15-11:45 AM	Bringing Awareness to Careers in Music	Music students are often steered towards careers in performance, teaching, or academia - paths that reflect the structure of most post-secondary programs. But Canada’s music industry is much broader, powered by professionals working in artist management, music publishing, record labels, nonprofit leadership, community service and much more. These roles are not only vital to the music industry, they are varied and rich with opportunity and creative fulfillment. Yet, they are systematically overlooked in most music education contexts despite offering powerful and fulfilling ways to apply the skills gained through music education. Join some of Canada's leading music industry professionals as they shine a light on the full spectrum of careers available in music.	Nick Godsoe Matt Maw Keziah Myers
11:30-12:30 PM	The Musical Brain and Impacts of Learning Music – A Universe Between Our Ears	The study of neuroplasticity – the brain’s ability to change in response to stimuli, activity, experiences, and training – is one of the most exciting and promising areas of research in medical science. The infinite complexity of the brain, with its hundred trillion neural connections, remains a vast and largely uncharted landscape. We are still in the early stages of understanding how the brain works, how it develops from infancy through to old age, and how what we do and learn can change it. But one fact is now clear – from cradle to grave, we can and do change our own brains. And in early childhood, when development is especially critical, the experiences and opportunities provided by parents, teachers, and caregivers can decisively shape the path of a child’s life. The effects of music on the brain have proven to be an especially rich field of study, yielding startling new insights on the vital role that this essential human art can play in preparing children and even infants for fuller, more resilient futures. And this is just the beginning. Join our panelists as they explore the latest insights into the remarkable interplay between music and the brain, and discover how this powerful art form can support the development and well-being of your brain, and your children’s brains.	Dr. Marco Battaglia Dr. Laurel Trainor
1:00-2:00 PM	Why Music Matters for Youth Mental Health	An illuminating keynote double-header exploring music’s scientifically validated power to heal, connect, and thrive. This session brings together two extraordinary voices offering complementary perspectives on music’s transformative effect on young lives. Dr. Battaglia draws from clinical psychiatry and evidence-based research, while Dr. Stewart approaches the world from pediatric neurology, exploring the role of music in activating synapses	Dr. Ellen Waterman Dr. Marco Battaglia

		and dopamine responses and supporting brain development. Rooted in science, but elevated by deep compassion and rich personal experiences working with young patients, both speakers offer a powerful and hopeful vision of what music can do. With live music!	Dr. Wendy Stewart
2:15-3:30 PM	The Musical Brain and Impacts of Music Learning - Part Two – The Cerebral Symphony Orchestra	We live in a world deeply focused on competition and competitiveness. Policy-makers want to have the most skilled workforce possible to enhance productivity. Parents seek to equip their kids with “marketable skills,” that will enable them to compete in a rapidly evolving technological environment. These pressures converge in public policy, leading to an education system that emphasizes STEM subjects (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics). But what are we missing? At the foundation of all learning and all human achievement lies the human brain, and its infinitely complex and varied functions. Does our singular focus on a specific range of academic subjects fully prepare children’s brains to achieve their maximum potential, even in those specific areas of future professional activity that we’re training them for? Or is something else needed? Dr. Peter Gouzouasis will review his groundbreaking research showing the startling effect studying music has on students’ achievements in subjects entirely outside the arts. His study of more than 110,000 students in British Columbia showed profound differences in the academic success of students who had studied music and those who had not. His work compellingly suggests not only deep neural interconnections between disciplines, but also that studying a musical instrument can play a role in supercharging the capacity of young people to excel across a broad range of academic areas.	Dr. Laurel Trainor Dr. Peter Gouzouasis
2:45-3:45 PM	Inclusive Music Education: Building Transformative Music Programs for Students with Exceptionalities	This panel brings together leading educators, researchers and practitioners who are reimagining music education to serve students with exceptionalities. Through diverse approaches, from adaptive instruments to inclusive ensemble programs, panelists will share how their programs foster access, autonomy and engagement for students with exceptionalities. This session will explore how music can support communication, emotional expression, and social connection for students across a range of abilities. Designed for educators, administrators, parents and advocates, this discussion will offer practical strategies for developing inclusive music programs and highlight the profound impact these programs have for students, educators, and the broader field of music education.	Dr. Ellen Waterman Dr. Erin Parkes Daniel Coronado Dr. Adam Bell Rory McLeod Michael Carter
3:45-4:45 PM	Policy, Action and Activism	Over the past three decades, People for Education has grown from a small, grassroots initiative into one of Canada’s most respected and influential voices in public education policy. In this keynote, Executive Director Annie Kidder will reflect on the organization’s evolution and its impact on shaping equitable, evidence-based education. Through research, policy development, and public engagement, People for Education has influenced provincial and national conversations about the essential role of the arts and music in a well-rounded curriculum. Annie Kidder’s keynote will offer a practical look at how long-term advocacy can influence public policy and create lasting systemic change. Attendees will gain concrete strategies for protecting and expanding access to music education and learn how to build broader support through effective policy engagement.	Annie Kidder Roberta Guaspari
4:00-5:00 PM	Bringing Music Alive in Schools: Transforming the Lives of Children and Youth Through Music Education	Music programs are a powerful force in the lives of young people, whether it's through building self-confidence, fostering belonging, or helping students navigate the overwhelming challenges of today. And yet, access to meaningful music education remains deeply unequal among children and may become increasingly inaccessible in the future. This roundtable brings together panelists from across Canada, the U.S., the U.K., and Ireland who are reimagining what music programs can look like. Together, the panelists will share insights into how their music programs are	Emma Cunliffe Jeannie Hunter Melanie Doane Andrea Unrau Margaret 'Mags' O'Sullivan

		bringing about social change and the impacts they have witnessed in the lives and well-being of their students. For educators, administrators, parents and policymakers alike, this session offers a window into what's possible when we commit to making high-quality music education accessible to every child - a right, not a luxury or privilege.	
5:00-5:15 PM	Final Forum Address	Ken MacLeod has been a leader in the not-for-profit sector for most of his career - as a volunteer, board member, senior manager, donor and consultant. Ken is the former President & CEO of the internationally acclaimed New Brunswick Youth Orchestra, Inc. and led, over more than twenty years, the development of what is today known as one of the most accomplished youth orchestra programs in Canada. Ken is founder of NBYO's Sistema New Brunswick program, recognized in 2015 with the Prime Minister's Award for Social Innovation. Launched in 2009, Sistema NB offers opportunity and hope to children and youth. Sistema NB is expanding annually and operates eleven Sistema NB centers in New Brunswick, serving more than 1,200 children daily. In a recent book, Nuts, Bolts and a Few Loose Screws, by Gair Maxwell, Ken was profiled as the 'Virtuoso of Vision' for his work with the NBYO and Sistema NB.	Ken MacLeod
5:15-6:00 PM	"Super-producer" Bob Ezrin: A Challenge and a Plea	The term "super-producer" gets thrown around a lot, but in Bob Ezrin's case, it's well earned. The Toronto-born musical mastermind has been behind the board for many of rock's most legendary albums, among them Alice Cooper's Billion Dollar Babies, KISS' Destroyer, and Pink Floyd's The Wall. But Ezrin isn't just about making hits, he's also been a vocal champion of music education in Canada, working tirelessly with MusiCounts, to keep the beat alive in schools facing ongoing governmental arts funding cuts.	Bob Ezrin