**Ep. 19 Gary Fagan Interview**

**Gary Fagan:** How's that

**Charlie Nesmith:** Hey now I have ya.

**Gary Fagan:** awesome.

**Charlie Nesmith:** How's it going, man?

**Gary Fagan:** I'm doing well. How are you?

**Charlie Nesmith:** I'm doing great. Thank you so much for joining us on the show today.

**Gary Fagan:** Happy to be here?

**Charlie Nesmith:** Awesome. Okay. So it says in your bio that you taught for 36 years, and it was all of that at the same school.

**Gary Fagan:** It was not. I graduated from Bridgewater college and I taught, actually taught choral music in Louisa County for two years. And I was a lousy choral teacher, a lousy teacher period. And. Figured, maybe teaching wasn't for me after the first two years. But then I was over at JMU one day and, and met up with Jim, Jim Simmons at a band camp over there.

And he was the coordinator of fine arts in Albemarle County. And they just that morning, one of the band directors in Albemarle County called him and said he was leaving. So we were sitting there chatting and he said, well, I just got a job opening this morning. Would you like to talk about it? And we did.

And so I came to Albermarle County then after the first two years and I taught elementary school, I was a roving band director. They still had band in, in some of the elementary schools. So I wrote from one school to the other and taught band at the elementary level for two years. And so then after four years, two in the County and two in Louisa, I finally ended up at Henley middle school where I was for the next 34.

**Charlie Nesmith:** Wow. That's awesome. When you reflect now on your teaching career just what do you have any like general feelings about the career as a whole in the classroom?

**Gary Fagan:** It's the greatest job in the world, making music with young people. I mean, it has its moments, but every job has its moments and there've been. Principals that I enjoyed working with and principles that drove me crazy. And, but it's the greatest job in the world because I was making music with young people and they were so eager and they wanted to play so much that it just, it was great.

It was great. Great job.

**Charlie Nesmith:** Yeah. So one of the things I wanted to ask you about is, so my, my generation, I guess, and those younger than me primarily know you as a composer for band, but you spent so many years in the classroom why did you stay in the classroom and not pivot towards being a full-time composer? Like so many people do

**Gary Fagan:** Yeah. I always saw myself as a teacher first and a composer second. And as a matter of fact, I didn't even start writing the first piece that I had published, I was 40 years old when that was published. So I started really, really late getting into composition. So I had already taught for 20 some years before I even wrote the first piece.

And so I always viewed myself as a teacher first and a composer was a hobby.

**Charlie Nesmith:** so did something happen that made you want to pivot to composing or were you always kind of writing a few things on the side before that.

**Gary Fagan:** Well, well, I did, when I was at Bridgewater for my senior project, I wrote a piece for percussion sextet. And took we had a thing where you just did one class for, it was called, it was called inner-term. And you just did one thing for three weeks. So I composed this piece for percussion sextet in three weeks, and then we Performed it in a recital.

And then I didn't do any writing at all for quite a long time. And then a lady in Charlottesville named Adele Abrams wrote a piece that she was hoping was going to become the Virginia state song. Carry me back to old Virginny was losing support as the state song for various reasons. And so they put out a.

I noticed that they were looking for people to submit new songs that could be considered for the state song as it ended up, they did not change the state song. It still carry me back to old Virginny but in the process of her submitting this song that she wrote. To be the state's new state song.

my wife who was teaching choral music at the time wanted to do the piece. And so she said, well, would you consider writing a band arrangement so that we can have choir and band together perform this piece? So I sat down and I wrote this little band arrangement of this piece called the old dominion, but at any rate, it got me sitting down with pencil and paper. I wasn't using finale at that point. Got me to sitting down with pencil and paper and putting notes on the page and I thought.

You know, I can, I can do this. And, and another impetus that I had was in, in the County here in Albemarle County, we started commissioning. Pieces to be written for our middle school honors band every year which is still occurring 35 years later. And so as we would hire these composers to commission these pieces and they would come to our County to direct.

They're premiere and direct the honor band. I got to know a lot of these composers that I, I kind of always saw composers, you know, up here on this pedestal and, and I wasn't, I wasn't even in their realm of realization and actually working with them and meeting them and realizing that they were real people too.

I thought this, this is something I'd like to try and, and that's just kind of phased into it gradually.

**Charlie Nesmith:** . Did you ever take any classes in composition or was most of that experience from your time in the classroom?

**Gary Fagan:** It was from the time in the classroom. The school of hard knocks is where I learned to write a lot of score study. You know, and you sit down and you studied 30, 40, 50 scores a year just by osmosis, what to put on paper and what not to put on paper kind of becomes more and more evident. So never at Bridgewater, we did not have any composition or arranging courses.

So it was all learned at the school of hard knocks.

**Charlie Nesmith:** how often would you have your own students play some of your compositions?

**Gary Fagan:** once I got to writing it. Once I had my first piece published in 1990, then I started writing for my bands because I wanted them to be able to perform the pieces that I wrote. So I was basically writing for them. So almost every year, starting with about 1990, we would do one or two of my tunes a year.

**Charlie Nesmith:**  Could you tell us a little bit about your creative process when starting a fresh piece?

 **Gary Fagan:** but you know, it's not consistent sometimes I'll start with, with a fragment of a melody or, or just a phrase in my head. And I'm just finding myself. Singing mentally sending this phrase. So I'll run into the computer and sit down and, and put that phrase down and then all the development and the harmonization and all comes later.

Other times. It actually starts with a rhythm being a percussionist, a rhythm is something I pay a lot of attention to. And so a piece of that, one of the first pieces where that happened, I wrote a piece called new millennium and this rhythm uh, can you do my head bump? bum, bum, bum, bum,bum,bum,bum Very repetitive rhythm and that's where it started.

And it turned into a three and a half, four minute piece. After that, it just took that little idea of that rhythm. To you know, kinda like Beethoven, I guess he started with bum,bum,bum,bum. We're going to assume that's what he started with and ended up with an entire symphony after that. So it's not always, sometimes, sometimes it's some chords.

Sometimes I'll hear three or four chords and sit down to piano, play the chords. Put them into finale and, and then the melody goes over top of that. So it can start with a melody fragment. You can start with, with a chord section fragment, or it can start with a rhythm and it's always different.

 **Charlie Nesmith:** What's one thing that you find to be particularly challenging about composition for young band in particular.

**Gary Fagan:** Well, the parameters I, you know, as you probably know, I write the, the sight reading pieces for assessment, for VBODA, and I'm given a set of parameters that I have to follow. For example, the grade 0.5 piece every instrument has to be limited to an octave trumpets C to C. It has to be in the key of B flat.

It has to be in four, four time and it has to have no accidentals. So there are a range limits, rhythm limits accidental limits, key limits, and, and the more limits that, that you put. On on a piece as you created, the more difficult it becomes. If you're writing grade five, you can write almost anything you want to, but at grades 0.5 or one, or even grade two, it's tough.

I've kind of told students before. It's kind of like if you went to a language arts class and your teacher said, I want you to go home and write a story for me tonight, you're going to turn the story in tomorrow, but you can only use these seven words. And all of a sudden writing that story becomes really difficult because you only have seven words to work with.

So those, the younger grades, the lower grade levels become challenging because there's a time limit. And, and the other limits that I, that I expressed. And so the more of those parameters you put in place, the trickier, it is to go through the process because you put something down on paper and all of a sudden you realize that's not going to work. So you, you trash it and you start all over again until everything lines up. So to speak.

**Charlie Nesmith:** How did you get into composing the music for the sight reading for VBODA?

 **Gary Fagan:** The site reading for VBODA was, was done for many, many years by a company called RBC out of, out of Texas. And there was quite a bit of dissatisfaction with W w with those materials, sometimes the grade three was actually easier than the grade two. And there were, there were some complaints about that.

So at that point in time, I had had maybe, I don't know, six or seven, eight pieces published and Diana Love who was at Blacksburg high school. Was on the site reading committee and I guess he just said, why don't we have Gary do this because he's got some pieces published at different grade levels.

And so she gave me a call and asked me if I would be interested in doing that. So I said, sure, I'll, I'll, I'll give it a try at least for a year. And after the first year, everybody seemed to be fairly satisfied with the, with the level and the musicality of it. And so it just kind of continues. Now.

It's been 12 years.

**Charlie Nesmith:** and some of those pieces you go on to, to sell, how many of them for a given year, do you actively choose to have published?

**Gary Fagan:** actually I think I last year was year 11, which means that there are five pieces a year that I write the grade 0.5 through grade four. So five pieces a year. So after 11 years I had written 55 pieces for V for VBODA and at that point in time, 52 of them have been published, And one of them will be published this coming summer that I wrote for, for the for VBODA last year. So most of them have been And you know, I just sent them to first. They go to the site reading and then I start sending them out to publishers. And of course now co-owner of a small publishing company.

I'm in a partnership with Jim Meredith who taught in the Lynchburg area for 40 years and retired a while back. And Jim was writing for Carl Fisher publications. And so Jim and I finally got together and said, you know, why don't we try starting our own company? So three years ago we started James River Music.

And so now I'm publishing a few of my own pieces along with Jim's but prior to that time, After VBODA would use them. I would send them out to various publishers and sometimes I get two or three rejections but I was always persistent and send it somewhere else. And as I said, 52 of the 55 at that time had been picked up.

**Charlie Nesmith:** So if there is a band director who is getting into composition I know there's so many options for self publication nowadays. Do you still recommend trying to go through a publisher or self-publishing.

**Gary Fagan:** that's a really good question. That's an excellent question. And my response is when, when you. Send a piece out to a major publisher, Hal Leonard or Alfred or something like that. The, the beauty of that, the pros are, they do all of the all of the production work. All I have to do then is proofread the score and the parts and compare it with my original and make sure there aren't any wrong notes or missing crescendos or anything like that.

So they do all the production work. They do all of the advertising. And so basically once you sign the piece over to them and you signed them to copyright, I don't have to do anything except wait for a royalty check. Unfortunately, the royalties on with most of the major publishers is 10%. So if they sell.

$10,000 worth of music. Well, that, that would be it that's a little bit of an exaggeration. If they would sell $5,000 worth of the music, I would only end up with 500 out of that. And I'm thinking, well, that was an awful lot of work for $500. I spent three months writing that piece and how I got $500 out of it.

So at that point in time I, the self-publishing. Became more appealing. The problem is with self publishing is it is really difficult. There's so many people doing it now and it really difficult to get your name out there and to get people to even look at your website and listen to the music.

 Certainly when I was writing for Alfred. Pretty regular regularly. They were sending out 35,000 CDs all over the world of my music. And so that's that's I certainly, I could not afford. All my own to send out to mail out 35,000 CDs worldwide, and I'd have to second, third mortgage my house to do that.

So the beauty of going with a major publisher is, is they take most of the risk and you just. Wait for the royalty check to come as small as it is but the problem with that is that self-publishing is really tough. It's a lot more work. You have to do all the production and all the advertising and all that yourself.

And it it's, it's a lot more work, but hopefully when you sell a piece, instead of getting 10%. You maybe get 60% because 40% of it is the cost of production, the paper and the printing and that type of thing. So there's a higher percentage, but it's harder to get there.

**Charlie Nesmith:** Now you and Jim also published a book together, correct?

**Gary Fagan:** we do did actually, we have two books now. The first book was just Jim and I, and that is , preparing your school band for assessment for, we called it adjudication so that we would get. everybody calls it something different. We used to call it band festival in Virginia, and which always interested me because the word festival implies that you're having fun. And for many band directors, festival was anything but fun. But so at any rate preparing your school band for adjudication. We followed that up last year. We teamed up with Don brew Baker, who was the orchestra director at Buford Middle School in the city of Charlottesville. And we wrote preparing your school orchestra for adjudication.

**Charlie Nesmith:** Now, when you were taking your bands to assessment, how did you approach selling that to your students? What was the perspective there?

**Gary Fagan:** The, the approach that I took was when we prepare music. For a concert, we're certainly going to do the same thing that we do when we prepare for assessment. Except at this point, the ears that are listening to you are much more critical. There are three adjudicators back there, and they're probably a little bit less forgiving than your parents are when they hear you play.

And so my approach was, this is kind of our SOL, this is where we. We display to anybody that's there or to the judicators, what our strengths and weaknesses are. And so my students enjoy going to festival because they really got a chance to get into three or four pieces in much more depth than we ever got into when we prepared a piece for a concert, because we're preparing a piece for a concert we're doing five or six or seven tunes, and you never get to the level.

Of musicianship or the level of detail that you, you get to when you get into a piece of music and you're preparing it for assessment.

**Charlie Nesmith:** Did you take your bands to other festivals, like like theme park festivals and things like that?

**Gary Fagan:** I did not, generally not. I did only went to the assessment. I took a concert band. I took my symphonic band, my, my highest group. And I also attended a jazz festival. I had a jazz ensemble and so I took kids to jazz ensembles also. Took my jazz ensemble quite often over to JMU for the jazz festival at JMU.

But as far as going to theme parks, I did not do that. I never went, I really had a big reason other than the fact that it scared me to death to take 80 kids and release them all and do a theme park, not knowing where they were. It always just seemed like it was kind of an overwhelming day.

**Charlie Nesmith:** Well, I, you know, I feel the same way when I, when I look at middle schools that do overnight trips, it's like, I'll, I'll take my kids to the, the King's Dominion band competition, but I have like a very regimented system of chaperones and groups, but I could not imagine taking middle schoolers on an overnight trip.

I have no interest in that at this time.

Okay. How would you rate your work-life balance when you were teaching and composing at the same time?

**Gary Fagan:** That, that can be a real challenge as all band directors, any band director that views, this is knows this from the day they started it it's time intensive and it is very difficult to strike that balance between But between work and, and doing the composing part added made that even more complicated.

In addition to that, I was playing in a rock band at the time. And so every Friday, every Friday and Saturday night I was somewhere. Playing. So my weekends were, were pretty much shot to that really gets tough. And I wish I had a really easy answer to that. I recommend to people that they do the best they can to balance that, that family time.

But when you're a band director, there is no easy, you know, wave the magic wand. And now you've got plenty of time. It's not going to happen. My family was very supportive of me and very understanding, but it's not an easy road to go down.

 **Charlie Nesmith:** Did you have kids at home during that time?

**Gary Fagan:** I did. I have three girls they're all teachers now. And but at that time, yes, I did have three girls and I would go out on Friday and Saturday night and, and play and get home around three, 3:00 AM. And then at 7:00 AM sharp the next morning they were over by the bed, slapping me in the face time to get up.

So.

**Charlie Nesmith:** Yup. I have an 11 month old now and he gets up at 4:45, regardless of what day it is or what's going on. And he is, he is ready to go. Is just calling my name and like just flailing his arms, you know? So I'm, I'm kind of just now learning that balance. Cause I was always super married to the job, especially in my early career, you know, it was not uncommon to work a 12 hour day easy.

And now it's like, I have really, I don't really don't want to do that. I don't want to be one of those like absentee band director, dads, you know, I want my kid to know my face

**Gary Fagan:** No, and you keep that up for very long. It just, it just burns you out. You know, you can do it for a while, but after a while you figure like you did , it's not worth it.

**Charlie Nesmith:** How much did your kids accompany you to band events? Or did you keep that fairly separate between home and work?

**Gary Fagan:** All, all of my girls were in band. And they were also inquire my wife taught choir at Henley when I taught, was teaching band and she told him the room right next to me and she taught choral music. So all of our girls were involved in band and, and in choir my, my oldest daughter was a clarinet player and a second daughter played French horn.

Yeah. And daughter number three, was euphonium they all three were in my jazz ensemble. So you know, I, I saw those, I saw my own kids twice a day. I had a symphonic band and a jazz ensemble that met daily. And so they were in both classes. So I worked with my own kids, two periods a day, every day.

which was great. So they were always at every band concert. They were always at every parade. If we did the Dogwood parade in Charlottesville they, they were, they were there.

**Charlie Nesmith:** man. So that's crazy. So they have both their mom and their dad every day at school.

**Gary Fagan:** Yeah.

**Charlie Nesmith:** Did you find that to be like in the, in the throws of teaching a class, did you find that to be weird in any way or did other kids give them a hard time about that?

**Gary Fagan:** I, they didn't actually, I don't think they received a lot of flack. It actually worked out better than my wife and I, either one of us thought it would, we thought it could cause issues, but But it, but it didn't. The only issue I had ever caused was my oldest daughter, the clarinet player one year didn't do as many playing tests as, as she should have done.

And so she received a B in band and I walked up to the office one day and the secretary called me over to her office. And she said, You gave your daughter a B. And I said, yes, I did. And she said, you realize that's the only B she got on her report card. She would be on the all a honor roll if you hadn't.

I want you to change that grade to an A and I said, I certainly will not. And it stayed a B, and she was a little upset with me about that. But that's the only issue that I recall we ever ran into.

Hmm.

**Charlie Nesmith:** well, I think there's just a lot of integrity though, showing that you weren't willing to compromise your standards as a teacher.

**Gary Fagan:** Well, I, you know, I think that would have made me look bad in my daughter's eyes. She probably wasn't happy about the B, but I don't think she would have appreciated me changing the grade just for that reason.

she's a math teacher now, so she can appreciate, you know, what you get is what you get.

**Charlie Nesmith:** Yep, absolutely. So now that you've retired from the classroom, do you feel like you actually have more free time on your hands or have you just filled up the time with other projects and fun things that you've wanted to do for awhile?

**Gary Fagan:** no, I do. I do feel like I have more time on everyone, especially since the pandemic. We we've been hunkered down here now for a year, practically, except to go to the grocery store. So certainly that has provided a lot of extra free time, but yeah. Even before that I was still doing honor bands once in a while.

And and, and judging at assessment, but it did provide a lot more free time. At least it provided more flexibility. I could pretty much make my own schedule at that point. And that's what I appreciated most about retirement. I wanted to stay busy but wanted to stay busy at my own pace instead of having to jump every time a bell rang.

**Charlie Nesmith:** Absolutely. Now you've had one of your compositions performed at the white house, correct?

**Gary Fagan:** I did that. That was actually the, I was telling you a while ago about that piece, the old dominion that was the first piece I arranged. It was written by. Adele Abrams in Charlottesville. And the one of the military bands performed at the white house at an, at an inauguration ceremony.

And they played that piece. I think it was 14 times because it was kind of. , it was actually part of the ceremony as people were going and coming. And and so that, that piece was performed a lot that day. I'm sure the guys in that military, were probably never wanted to hear my name again after playing that piece, that arrangement 14 times. But yeah, it wasn't, that it was such a great piece. It's just that it was the occasion called for the Virginia state song or a, a Virginia folk song to be played. And that was the one that came up.

**Charlie Nesmith:** Do you have a favorite piece that you have written.

**Gary Fagan:** I do. I think probably my favorite is a piece. You, you may be familiar with Shen Valley Band Instrument Repair in Harrisonburg, and many, many years ago, the owner of Shen Valley band Gary Dovel he and his family were involved in a very, very tragic. Car accident on their way to Virginia Beach.

They were hit head on by a dump truck. and Gary Dovel died and his wife died and he was his son's girlfriend perished in that wreck. And so following that. Very tragic accident. I wrote a piece called "On Streets of Gold" and actually wrote a poem first I wrote a poem and then I followed that up by writing the piece and because I knew Gary so well, and I knew his dad, his dad was the previous owner of the shop because of that close connection.

I think that piece has an emotional connection with me more than anything I've ever written. And so that, I think that's, my favorite is "On Streets of Gold". And that was published in by Alfred probably in about 2007 or six, something like that.

**Charlie Nesmith:** Well, what is your most commercially successful piece?

**Gary Fagan:** That's a really good question too. I actually I do know that the best, the piece that sold the most of anything that I've written was a grade three piece called algorithms and algorithms is misspelled it's. It's A L G O R H Y T H M S. Instead of the regular spelling the mathematical term, and that piece has probably sold about 1300 copies worldwide.

So that, that is undoubtedly undoubtedly though. The one that sold the most.

**Charlie Nesmith:** So if you were chatting with a young band director who was thinking about getting into composition, do you have any recommendations for them on how to go about that?

**Gary Fagan:** I would probably,recommend to start, I think the best way to learn how to write is to write for a specific ensemble. So if you're writing for a local community band, or if you're writing for your own band and you know, their strengths and weaknesses, It kind of helps, you know, what to put on paper when, you know, you've got a very, very strong french horn section.

You, you write in that vein and you write for that french horn section. And I think that kind of gives you an easier path to go down than just writing for a nebulous group that you don't know. So I think my most. Successful writing projects have been writing for specific groups. I play in the Charlottesville Municipal Band.

And so writing for that ensemble and writing for my own kids and some commission works that I've done. I think that's a, that's a good way to start. And, and again, the way I learned to write was by doing a lot of score study of other people's music. So doing score study and seeing what works for them and writing for a specific group with a specific goal in mind makes the whole process start out a little easier.

I think.

**Charlie Nesmith:** Oh, I have a question I was supposed to ask earlier and I totally forgot. What was your relationship like with your administration at your school?

**Gary Fagan:** Most of the administrators that I re I worked at just the middle school that I taught at. I just calculated yesterday. I worked with eight different principals in, in that 34 years. And I always had a fairly good relationship with them because Some of them were in band. One of the principals I've worked with was a french horn player.

And, and so I had a good rapport with them because they were familiar with what I did and the work and the working relationship was always very good. I was also very, very fortunate in that most principals that I've worked with the first thing they scheduled every year, W was band, they said, tell me, who's going to be in concert, band,

tell me, who's going to be in symphonic band. Tell me who's going to be in jazz ensemble. And then I will design the master schedule. Around that. So and sometimes I felt real guilty about that because I felt like maybe some other teachers were a little bit resentful about, I remember one year kind of a funny story.

One year back in the, in the eighties and early nineties, it was a big thing for your school to have a mission statement. You had to have a mission statement. . And so the principal said, okay, let's, let's throw out some ideas.

What do you think our mission statement should be? And the guy who was teaching choral music there at that time raised his hand and he said, I I've, I've got it already. He said, I think we need a school. The band can be proud of. And of course, everybody laughed. But there was a little bit of truth in that.

And a lot of times I felt a little bit guilty about that, but administrators were very, very, I was very fortunate to have administrators that were willing to work with me in that, in that way.

**Charlie Nesmith:** Yeah, absolutely. It can really make or break your school experience.

**Gary Fagan:** It really can.

**Charlie Nesmith:** I feel very fortunate that one of my assistant principals is Alan Kirkdorffer who had the position at my school as band director for 17 years before I got there. So, I mean, I realize that's a very fortunate position to be in, not everyone has a musician administrator.

Um, although from, from what I've been told, that can be a curse in some situations if, if that person wants to micromanage the program. But, but my, my assistant principal, Alan, he's been very great about letting us do our thing. And I know that the way that Jon and I do things are very different than the way that he did things, but he's 100% okay with that and gives us the freedom to do like run the program, how we see fit.

**Gary Fagan:** Right,

**Charlie Nesmith:** Yeah, I feel very, very fortunate in that regard. Cause not everybody has that experience.

**Gary Fagan:** right. That's exactly right. You're absolutely on mark.

**Charlie Nesmith:** Well, I do have three final questions that I ask everyone who comes on the show. But before we get to that did you have anything else that you wanted to throw out there or any new compositions or projects you would like to plug.

 **Gary Fagan:** I'm working right now on the Charlottesville municipal band is getting ready to celebrate its 100th year of existence. It started in 1922. So in 2022 that the municipal band will be having their Centennial celebration and some special concerts. And so I just wrote a short fanfare for that for those concerts that we'll be doing.

And I'm also writing a longer, a longer piece for that. So the writing I've been doing lately has been mainly for the, for the municipal band. And I've enjoyed doing that and I'm looking forward to them performing those pieces.

**Charlie Nesmith:** absolutely. I'd love to get out and see it.

**Gary Fagan:** Yeah, well, you know, we do a summer concert series and the band is actually hosting a, having a composition contest. So they're asking composers just saw the ad in the instrumentalist magazine the other day, they're inviting composers to write a one minute. Fanfare and they'll take the top 10 and those composers will each receive $250 for their, for their fanfare .

If there's, there's this one of the 10 that is chosen. And then one of those fanfares will be performed at the opening of each of the 10 concerts. The band will play that year.

**Charlie Nesmith:** I thought that was very cool. I'll be sure to pass that around to some other budding composers that I know.

**Gary Fagan:** Yeah. That's a terrific opportunity to get your music out there and get it heard.

**Charlie Nesmith:** absolutely. All right. Well, I have three questions. I ask everyone who comes on the show. The first one is, do you have a mentor? Shout out?

**Gary Fagan:** I think as far as teaching is concerned, the guy that hired me in Albemarle County, James Simmons, he was president of vmea a while back and was the director of the Charlottesville Municipal Band. And he's the one that met me at JMU that year. And and offered me a job that same day.

It's funny because I was a student at JMU doing my master's work at that point. And the day I met him, I was wearing an old blue t-shirt. I had just gone to class and I was wearing an old blue t-shirt with a rat on the front and a pair of blue jeans. And interviewed with them all the other interviews I had done with a coat with a suit on, or a coat and tie and, and didn't get the job and met with him in a, in a t-shirt with a rat on it and a pair of blue jeans.

And he interviewed me that day and, and offered me the job. And through the years he would be in my classroom very, very often as I was a young teacher and giving me pointers and, and just was, it was a great mentor. So Jim Simmons was a big help as far as composition. A real important mentor for me was John Edmondson years and years ago when John was running a company called Queen Wood Publications.

I sent him. Pieces to consider for publication. He never took one of them, never took a single one for Queenwood, but every time I'd send him a piece of music, he would go over it with a red pen and he would probably spend hours just editing and say, do this, get rid of that? Are you sure you want that to be that way?

And he took a lot of time that he didn't have to take, I mean, he could have just said we're not interested in the piece. But he always took the time to go through and make comments and, and suggest edits. And I really appreciated that because the, all of those pieces of music that I sent him that he rejected for his company, there was enough comments that he made that helped me, that all of those pieces of music were eventually picked up by another publisher.

So I have to thank him for that.

**Charlie Nesmith:** I mean, that's incredible that he would take the time to do that. I mean, I think to me that says that that's someone who cares more about education than just making dollars.

**Gary Fagan:** Absolutely. He was, he was an educator. He was another person that was, I think, an educator first and a composer second. And he spent a lot of time giving me a lot of valuable pointers.

**Charlie Nesmith:** All right. Question number two. Do you have a favorite? I usually say beginning band piece, but that could be any middle school level piece.

**Gary Fagan:** That's a tough one because I've done, you know, literally hundreds and hundreds of pieces, and it's really difficult to pick out, to pick out a favorite. Wow. Boy, I don't know. I'd have to look through old programs, you know, old, old programs that I have to come up with a favorite.

I have a lot of really, really wonderful music to work with through the years, but none of them jumps out at me at the moment. I I'd have to get back to you on that one.

**Charlie Nesmith:** That's totally okay. Or, well, we can roll that into question number three. So question number three is name a band director. Who's crushing it right now, but since you were a composer, you could also name a composer who you feel like consistently does really amazing work.

**Gary Fagan:** Wow. Yeah. I am a really big fan of, of Robert Sheldon. I, I don't think I've ever heard a piece by Robert Sheldon that I did. I didn't like. And at the middle school, Level, I don't think he ever published a piece for the middle school band that I didn't buy. He's. He also is another person that years ago he became the instrumental editor at Alfred.

And so as that started writing and sending pieces to Alfred, he, and there was another person that would. If he accepted a piece, he, said we need to make these changes. We did. You might want to consider doing this and that you don't have to we'll take the piece as it is, but you might want to consider this and that.

And every suggestion that he made. Made the piece better. So yeah, Bob Sheldon was a big influence. John Edmonson was a big influence on me as not only as a band director, because I did a lot of his music, but as a composer too Jim Swearingen was, was I did a lot of his music back in the nineties and early two thousands.

 Michael Sweeney. I liked a lot of Michael Sweeney's music. One of my favorite arrangements is he did an arrangement for a middle school band at about grade three level of Holst first suite. In E flat a few years ago. That is just so masterfully done. That, that you almost think you're listening to the original first suite E flat, but it's two grade levels easier, but the beauty of an arrangement like that is it's so well done that you don't really realize that it's two grade levels easier when you're listening to the piece.

It's that well arranged. So yeah, Michael Sweeney is, is at the top of my list as well.

**Charlie Nesmith:** awesome. Well, that's all the questions I have. Thank you so much for coming on the show today.

**Gary Fagan:** Thank you for inviting me. It's been a pleasure. It's always good to see you. And I enjoyed the questions were very, very thoughtful very well thought out. And I enjoyed this time with you.