

# SPRING 2017 EDUCATION REPORT



ACG  
EDUCATION

[www.austinclassicalguitar.org](http://www.austinclassicalguitar.org)

## FROM THE DIRECTOR

Dear Friends,

We've just finished our sixteenth year of work in education. What started with one high school and our desire to build a superior approach to classroom guitar here in Austin has grown into a passion to provide young people with opportunities to connect with their own aspirations, with other kids, with teachers and mentors, and with their families and the community – all through music.

Music still surprises us with its understated but universal power. It takes us to places words cannot, gives a voice to people who struggle to be heard, and offers a safe place to explore one's convictions and build one's identity.

I recently had a long conversation with an educator on the west coast who was looking for our help in improving the quality of guitar education in his state. He described the challenges he is up against: no district or statewide standards, students who are not learning even basic music literacy, and performances that lacked refinement and polish. It was a great reminder of how far we've come, and why our work is so important.

Because when we can have a role in helping teachers and communities create platforms of excellence for diverse youth through quality and rigorous arts education, we can have a role in nurturing self-esteem, which is the fuel of confidence.

No day passes in which I am not profoundly grateful to each and every one of you for believing in our work all these years, and for making everything you'll read about in the following brief report possible. My door is always open. Please call me at 512-300-2247 any time to talk, ask questions, give me feedback or suggestions, or just to say hello.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in white ink, reading "Matt Hinsley", with a stylized, flowing script.

Matt Hinsley, Executive Director





## TEXAS

From a program-building perspective, our highest priority is Texas. Texas is our home, and there is still much work to be done. This year, ACG is directly supporting sixty school programs in Austin—mostly in Austin Independent School District—along with special programs for students at Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired and juvenile offenders in Travis County’s Juvenile Justice System. Our curriculum resources and teacher training services are helping to create and enhance programs in virtually every major metropolitan center in the state. We work with hundreds of individual teachers, administrators, and districts to promote these programs, as well as with various state agencies to ensure that guitar education meets the same standards of any established school-based arts program.

One of our current priorities is to develop district-level Concert and Sight Reading Assessments. These assessment events are a key building block for establishing and maintaining a culture of excellence across a district, as they provide teachers and their students with clearly defined expectations for performance quality. Our Austin event grows every year, and attracts schools from as far away as Killeen and Odessa. We have also helped organize assessment events in Houston, Brownsville, and El Paso, and are planning more for next spring.

A second priority has been to establish a statewide advocacy organization for guitar teachers similar to those that already exist for choir, orchestra, and band directors. In the past year we announced the creation of the Texas Guitar Directors Association, organized a statewide meeting, held the first statewide officer elections, and with the leadership in place we passed off control of the organization to the teachers it was created to represent. The TGDA is in good hands and the future is bright for guitar educators in Texas!

A third priority for us is meeting the needs of our newest partners. This year our efforts are largely focused on Austin’s neighboring communities. We are working closely with Del Valle, Manor, Dripping Springs, and Comal County to launch brand new programs this coming fall. We are still helping build programs elsewhere in Texas and beyond, but these four districts are within our direct service area, which makes them particularly exciting for us.



## GLOBAL REACH

We are constantly amazed by the global reach of our online curriculum and teacher training services. At our upcoming summer training workshop in Austin, we look forward to welcoming guests from as far north as Canada and as far south as Nicaragua. This past September, a U.S. State Department-sponsored delegation from six Middle Eastern countries visited our office to learn about our curriculum and other educational services. And this spring saw the launch of our first program in India, and a particularly inspiring new program for kids in Nepal.

We invite you to watch [this beautiful video](#) about the guitar program at the Early Childhood Development Center in Nepal. It just came out—to our surprise and delight—earlier this month.

*“The realization that we were, together, creating such a powerful sound for the first time was simply overwhelming, and culminated in a small explosion of joy.”*

- Daniel Linden, Gharana Music Foundation, Kathmandu, Nepal.



## JUVENILE JUSTICE

Our program at Gardner-Betts, the residential lockdown facility of Travis County Juvenile Justice System, began in 2010. In 2012, Austin ISD approved our course as the first and only for-credit arts elective available to the youth incarcerated there. The individual stories that have emerged from this program have been astonishing, and our work there continues to be some of the most impactful service we do.

On June 13<sup>th</sup>, we held the first class of a brand new program designed to serve youth who are court-involved, but not incarcerated. We were asked to develop this program by Travis County's Chief of Juvenile Probation, who was familiar with our work at the detention center and sought to provide similar musical engagement for this particular group of at-risk young people. Eighteen months in the making, the program has just launched, and we're already seeing some promising results. The students are excited and learning fast, and some staff members are actually sitting in to learn and play guitar together with them!





## LULLABY PROJECT

We entered into a partnership with People's Community Clinic this year in order to offer the Lullaby Project to women receiving prenatal care there. This relationship has led to the creation of many beautiful new lullabies in both Spanish and English by women and girls in profoundly challenging circumstances, including recent immigrants and refugees. Our Lullaby Project clinicians continue to work with women at Travis County Jail and Any Baby Can as well.

If you would like to hear some of the newest lullabies, we have a recent update [online here](#).

*"I feel happy and I have the most complete love for my son when I hear the song we made. I feel proud of myself and proud to be a mom."*

– Lullaby Project mom



## CURRICULUM & TEACHER TRAINING

After many fits and starts, we are weeks away from re-launching our curriculum website (GuitarCurriculum.com) on a new platform. Though many of the improvements will be "under the hood," we look forward to providing a better overall experience, along with some new features intended to foster community among the teachers who use the site.

This summer we will offer teacher training sessions in St. Louis, Cleveland and Austin. St. Louis now has over 20 affiliated school programs, and the work they are doing in that community is simply miraculous. This will be our fourth visit there, and the investment in time and training is really paying off. We chose Cleveland as a training site this year because we are seeing impressive growth there as well, along with the commitment and leadership that we believe will bring about increasing impact in the coming years.



## BRILLE MUSIC INITIATIVE

We first began teaching guitar to students at Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired in 2010, essentially by rote. In 2012 we converted the early stages of our curriculum materials into braille notation and began prioritizing braille literacy in the classroom. The results have been fantastic, and the guitar program at TSBVI is thriving.

The one problem we have long sought to address with this program is that kids leaving the school have no access to braille-adapted resources that would allow them to continue their studies at home and enjoy the pleasures of life-long learning in music.

Our newest initiative will change that. We are building an online repository of carefully sequenced braille music scores, audio guides, and other instructional resources specially designed for blind and visually impaired learners. When it's complete, this resource will be available, at no cost, to anyone who wants to use it. Thanks to many friends like you, a generous gift from The Rea Charitable Trust, and our partnership with TSBVI, this ambitious project is now fully funded and on target to launch in spring, 2018!



## PERFORMANCE ENGAGEMENT

When we do our jobs well at Austin Classical Guitar, we positively change lives. This is, perhaps, easy to understand with regard to the education and outreach programs I have been describing in this report.

We have all experienced performances that left us feeling exhilarated and inspired, and others that left us feeling relatively flat. We often attribute these reactions to our perception of the performer's skill, but they can be influenced by a whole range of factors, including programming choices, the performance space, or even the degree to which we feel personally invited to be part of the experience.

Here at ACG, with the help of Dr. Joseph Palmer, we are working to develop a better understanding of performance engagement, especially as it relates to diverse audiences. Here's one example: This summer, as part of a new partnership with Austin Public Library, Dr. Palmer will be collaborating with a storyteller and puppeteer to create musical story times for kids ages 8-12 in libraries throughout Austin. Their presentations will seek to engage young people through an entertaining, interactive, and artistically rich performance experience.





# THANK YOU

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All of us at Austin Classical Guitar are so profoundly grateful for your support. The work we are doing through our education and social service programs gives back to us in indescribable ways, and we feel so fortunate to be able to participate in bringing beauty through music to so many people in our community.

The list below recognizes donors who have contributed \$200 or more in the 12 months preceding June 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2017. ACG's work is made possible through the generosity of these and many more individuals, institutions, and businesses, including the supporters who volunteer their time, energy, and passion to sustain this organization.

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