

Dear World-Changing Musicians,

Happy New Year. As we step over the temporal threshold into 2026, it is the perfect time to pause, breathe, and reflect on the previous year. It was a difficult year for the arts, for music, and for college and university music programs. I know there were many challenges, frustrations, and roadblocks that we experienced as music educators. Thank you for your dedication and resilience. Your work changes lives. I also know that amidst the struggles there were also moments of success, of transformation, of joy. Take a moment to look back with gratitude at the impactful work you have done. Look back with gratitude at the people, and community around you that made a difference. Look back with gratitude at the ways you saw music transform lives. Look back with gratitude at what we get to do—bring the metaphysical, transformational power of music into a world in desperate need of the transformational power of music. This is difficult, joyful, frustrating, magical work. As we enter 2026, give yourself space to breathe, space to love, space to appreciate those around you, space to heal. We need to prioritize our health and well-being in order to do our life-changing work.

I'm Brian Pertl, and I am currently the Director of the Lamont School of Music at the University of Denver. I am honored, excited, and humbled to take on the role of President of The College Music Society. I love CMS. I love that it welcomes all musical disciplines, all voices, and asks its members to dream bold futures into existence. I am so grateful for the visionary work of Brian Chin, Jeff Loeffert, Hannah Pearson, the CMS Board, the CMS staff, and the forward-looking CMS members. Thank you all for the important work you do, bringing music into the world. I can't wait to continue the bold, beautiful mission of CMS.

For those of you I already know and for those I haven't met yet, I look forward to collaborating with you. If you are interested, you can find out a little more about me at my [website](#).

As a leader, I am a passionate advocate for the power of culture-building to create radically responsive music schools, and radically responsive organizations. I believe that fostering a culture of true belonging, well-being, creativity, collaboration, innovation, playfulness, and joy is the key to creating the educational environment that will best prepare musicians for the rapidly changing world of today, tomorrow, and far into the future. I detail my approach to leadership through culture-building in my book, *Radically Responsive Music Schools: Leading Change through Culture Building*. I will bring this ethos into my presidency.

While all these aspects of culture-building are important, and I will do my best to foster all of them at CMS, during my presidency, I particularly want to focus on the power of collaboration. I will be proposing "*Collaborate!*" as my common topic.

At our best, we musicians can show the world what high-level collaboration looks like, sounds like, and feels like. Our musical collaborations can be transcendent. We listen deeply, respond to every nuanced change in rhythm, pitch, and phrasing. We enter a collective flow state rarely experienced in other areas of our educational ecosystems or the broader world. What if we could change that? What if we could bring this transformational power to collaborations within departments, or between departments, or between institutions, or between professional societies and organizations? There is an urgent need for high-level collaboration at every level. For every collaborative opportunity we pass by, or neglect, we are diminishing our collective power. We are diminishing our ability to be heard. We are diminishing our ability to innovate. We are diminishing our ability to fully celebrate the central importance of music in society.

CMS has always been a catalyst for collaboration. It is the one music organization where musicians from every discipline can gather to collaboratively tackle the overarching challenges that music in higher education faces. We are perfectly placed to lead a collaboration revolution at every level of our musical ecosystem: student to student, student to faculty, student to staff, faculty to faculty, music department to music departments, music departments to departments outside of music, music school to music school, music school to business, music societies to music societies, music societies to non-music societies, musicians to communities, musicians to public schools, musicians to arts organizations, musicians to government organizations, musicians to government leaders.

The possibilities are practically endless, as is the potential power of an integrated, inter-disciplinary, multi-dimensional collaborative network. Please start dreaming of ways CMS can foster more transformational collaborative opportunities across the musical ecosystem. I will be doing the same. I am excited to hear your thoughts and ideas. You can contact me at [\[email protected\]](#).

In the spirit of collaboration, I want to use the President's Message to periodically highlight the voices and ideas of our CMS members, by featuring guest authors. I will share details next month on exactly how that will work. I am excited to see what you have to share.

I hope to see many of you at the Think-Tank Summit in Houston.

Keep Listening, Keep Dreaming, Keep Collaborating,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Brian Pertl". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Brian" and last name "Pertl" clearly distinguishable.

Brian Pertl  
President, College Music Society  
Director, Lamont School of Music  
Board Chair, Smithsonian Folkways Records