



SANTA MONICA-MALIBU UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

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Three SMMUSD Music Teacher Receive High Honors

Three music teachers in the Santa Monica-Malibu Unified School District received statewide recognition for their outstanding contributions to music programs in the school district. Music and art programs are an integral part of the curriculum, and opportunities for students are highly regarded in the communities served.

The California Music Teachers Association (CMTA) announced **Kirsten Bersch** as the 2020 California Music Educators Association (CMEA) Elementary Music Specialist Award recipient, and **Joni Swenson** as the 2020 CMEA / Richard L. Levin Orchestra Educator Award recipient. **Angela Woo** received the Shining Star Award by Education Through Music Los Angeles and was honored at the SCSBOA (Southern California School Band and Orchestra Association) Winter Conference with the SCSBOA Gold Award.



Kirsten Bersch has been teaching elementary music in SMMUSD for 20 years. The CMEA Elementary Specialist Award honored her for excellence in elementary instrumental music instruction. Bersch is known for being knowledgeable, well organized, passionate, dedicated and talented. Her students are well prepared to continue their music education at the middle school level. In addition to the SMMUSD traditional music program, Bersch has been an

advocate and leader in bringing the new SMMUSD mariachi music program to Santa Monica students. *(Photo: Bersch)*

Joni Swenson has been the director of orchestras at Santa Monica High School for the past 19 years. In December 2019, Swenson was chosen to receive the prestigious CMEA / Richard L. Levin Orchestra Educator Award, Honoring Excellence in Orchestra Education and Performance. Under her direction, the Samohi orchestra has won numerous awards and students have gone on to perform internationally in Vienna, Austria, Argentina, China and Prague. Swenson has guest conducted honor orchestras throughout California and has presented sessions at CMEA and SCSBOA conferences on numerous occasions. She has served as the orchestra representative in both CMEA Capitol



and Bay Sections and is currently on the California Orchestra Directors Association (CODA) board. In 2001, Swenson was selected by San Francisco radio station KDFC Classical 102.1 as Music Educator of the Year. In 2004, she received the CMEA Le Blanc Outstanding Orchestra Music Educator Award, and she was selected as a finalist for the Los Angeles Music Center's BRAVO Award in 2008. In 2016, she received the ASTA (American String Teacher Association), Elizabeth A. H. Green School Educator Award. When she began teaching at Samohi in 2002, there were four orchestras and there are now seven orchestras and two full time orchestra teachers. *(Photo above: Swenson, left, and former Samohi student, now SMMUSD elementary music teacher, Erin Wells.)*

Bersch and Swenson will receive their recognition at the CMEA Awards dinner, during the California All State Music Education Conference (CASMEC), in February.

Angela Woo, currently the instrumental music director at John Adams Middle School, has worked for SMMUSD since 1995. Woo enjoys an active schedule as a guest conductor, clinician, and adjudicator with numerous honor groups, conducting symposia, and music festivals throughout the country. She has been invited by local universities as well as those around the country to lead professional development workshops for music educators at both the middle school and high school levels.



In addition to her work in Wisconsin, Georgia, Florida, Nevada, Indiana, Colorado, Utah, and New York, she has conducted the 2004 Kentucky All-State High School Concert Band, the 2007 Oregon All-State Middle School Band, the 2014 California All-State Jr. High Concert Band, and the 2016 Michigan All-State Middle School Band. She appeared as a guest conductor with the 2018 State Honors Ensemble Program at the Queensland Conservatorium (Griffith University) in Brisbane, Australia. Most recently, Woo guest conducted the 2019 Honors Performance Series Middle School Orchestra in New York at Carnegie Hall. In 2005, Woo was recognized by the Santa Monica Rotary Club as the Santa Monica-Malibu District Teacher of the Year. She was honored at the Midwest International Band and Orchestra Clinic as a 2012 Legion of Honor Laureate by the John Philip Sousa National Foundation. *(Photo: Woo at the 2020 SCSBOA Conference- Dr. Thomas Lee, retired UCLA Director of Bands, left; Woo; Sean Garnreiter and Michael Stone, Bakersfield City School District, VAPA Coordinator.)*

“We congratulate these three extraordinary music teachers on their recent recognition,” School Board President Jon Kean said. “We are fortunate to have the Santa Monica Education Foundation’s financial support for all our Santa Monica students, starting in elementary school, to receive an exemplary arts education. Our music teachers deliver high quality programs and opportunities to students at all levels.”

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