



# *Through My Music: Empowering Girls to Lead*

*by Dr. Myra K. Rhoden  
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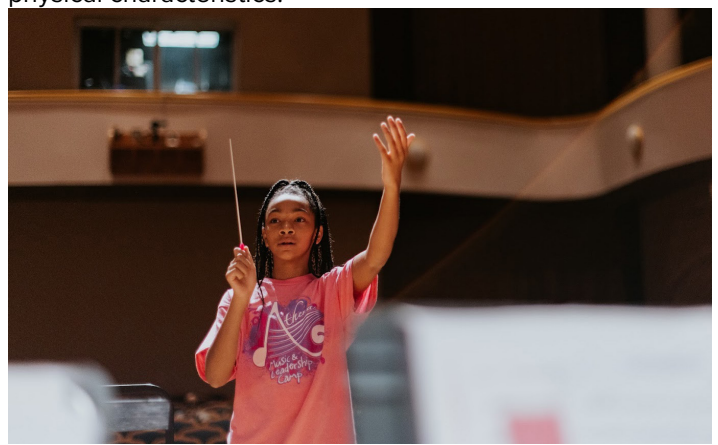
We have had the privilege of conducting middle and high school students in various honor ensembles all over the country. Participating young ladies would often ask if we were really high school band directors in charge of all things for the program, including marching band. They were not asking because they questioned our credentials. They asked because they sought advice on how to be a leader in their school band programs. Many of them expressed that their band directors saw something in them that they did not yet see. Consistently, they would tell stories of how they had been named drum major or section leader, or was appointed to another leadership position. The young ladies were worried because they were shy, or small, or felt they didn't possess the confidence to do the job. It was never a question of skill...they were honor band musicians. Why would they feel as if their band director was wrong about their leadership potential? From this came the idea of the Athena Music and Leadership Camp. We created a place for middle and high school young women to grow and blossom both as leaders and musicians. We will explore how empowering your young ladies "through their music" can help improve your overall music program.

## **The Issue**

There is available research that indicates gender differences in the areas of self-assessment, self-promotion, self-awareness, and actionable feedback. Although there

is no gender gap when evaluating others, young ladies may underestimate their performance when evaluating themselves. In addition, studies show that women are less likely to self-promote than men. What does this mean when asking students if they are interested in leadership positions? How will this manifest when students are asked to identify strengths and weaknesses?

Women may more quickly align their confidence and self-awareness with peer feedback. Research says that women will also make adjustments according to feedback received, positive or negative. Consider how this may affect the young ladies in your program if offered criticism from peers regarding leadership abilities, musicianship, or physical characteristics.



## ***Bridging The Gap***

In 2009, the Athena Music and Leadership program was created as a space for young women to achieve musical excellence while improving confidence and leadership skills. Led by successful, professional women in music, the faculty serve as positive role models who continue to make an impact on the lives of the young ladies who attend. Although many Athena alumnae may major in music education, the goal is not to create the next generation of band directors, but to develop the next generation of leaders in their field of choice. Participants identify who they are as musicians, know they can create music at a high level, and recognize that, through their music, they can do anything. The program is designed to connect middle schoolers who are just beginning to learn how to play, high schoolers who are perfecting their skills, and college students who are learning to teach and inspire, with professionals who have been teaching anywhere from 1 to 40+ years. The signature leadership and empowerment seminars embrace inclusivity and collaboration while shaping confident, well-rounded individuals who will contribute positively to their band programs and to society.



## ***How Directors Can Help***

Band is one of the few classes where the teacher witnesses a student's musical and personal growth over an extended period of time. Because of this, directors have the unique opportunity to make a tremendous impact on a student's life. Recognizing that all of our students will not be music educators, experiences in band can help develop leadership potential that may be used in all professions. Here are a few ideas regarding positive ways to influence the lives of the young ladies in your classes.

**Recognize:** Appreciate quiet leadership in girls. Listen to your young ladies' voices regardless of how loud or quiet they may be. Understand that young ladies may not exhibit traditionally "masculine" leadership qualities. This includes assertiveness, competitiveness, and expressing oneself confidently. Look for the quiet leaders in the ensemble while understanding that gender is not an indicator for success or aptitude.

**Encourage:** Approach and encourage young ladies who have leadership potential. Ask them what they are most proud of and what skills they want to develop. Listen to what they have to say, then help them achieve those goals.

**Develop:** Remember that leaders are created, not

born. Help students identify their personal strengths and recognize their areas for growth. Although leadership training and development is for all, there may be some skills that will be approached differently by girls. Recognize those areas and make the adjustment in your training plans.

**Include:** Be intentional about the inclusion of young ladies on your leadership teams, even at the highest levels. Try your best to ensure that the team reflects your membership. Be mindful of your interactions with women in leadership positions. Provide opportunities for your students to see women as leaders and role models.

## ***About The Athena Music And Leadership Camp***

The Athena Music and Leadership Camp (AthenaCamp.com) is a unique experience designed to empower young women through music, leadership training, and mentorship. Held annually, the camp brings together talented musicians, industry professionals, and mentors to inspire, educate, and empower the next generation of leaders across all professions, through their music. Learn more at AthenaCamp.com.

## ***About The Authors***

**Dr. Myra K. Rhoden** is the founder of the Athena Music and Leadership Camp (AthenaCamp.com), an all-girls music program created to promote musical excellence while emphasizing leadership skills. She also serves as the Director of Bands and Fine Arts Department Chairperson at Fayette County High School (GA). Rhoden frequently serves as a guest conductor for state, regional, and university honor bands and is honored to have presented sessions at The Midwest Clinic, various national, state and regional conferences, and for school systems and professional development clinics throughout the United States and Canada. She is honored to be a member of the Phi Beta Mu International Bandmasters Fraternity, serves as a Conn Selmer Educational Clinician and was elected to the prestigious American Bandmasters Association in 2023.

A native of Monroe, Georgia, **Dr. Zandra Bell-McRoy** has been a music educator since 2002. Upon graduating from the University of Georgia in 2001 with degrees in music and music education, Dr. Bell-McRoy has served as a middle and high school band director in Georgia and is the Virtual Professional Learning Community Lead for 6-12 Band with the Georgia Department of Education. Dr. Bell-McRoy received her Doctor of Education in Music Education from the University of Georgia under the direction of Dr. Roy Legette in 2014. While studying at the University of Georgia, she served as a Graduate Teaching Assistant earning awards for teaching and being selected to participate in the Future Faculty Program. She maintains an active research presence, being invited to present her research at conferences and symposia across the country. Dr. Bell-McRoy has numerous professional affiliations and serves as a flutist with Tara Winds. She is an active clinician and adjudicator and resides in Monroe, Georgia with her husband, Darvin McRoy.