

Alum Jeffrey Kever, Orchestral Conducting M.M., '21, leads the [Middle Tennessee Sinfonietta](#), who will present their production of The Nutcracker at MTSU's Hinton Hall this weekend. Read on to see how his MTSU graduate degree led him to found this musical group.

What brought you to MTSU?

Through my undergraduate studies at the Blair School of Music at Vanderbilt University, I became well acquainted with the faculty at MTSU due to close knit relationships between faculty members of the two schools. When I began looking into potential graduate schools for Orchestral Conducting, I was surprised to see that MTSU offered such a degree, since a conducting degree is not extremely common across schools. I was able to use those relationships to begin inquiring about studying there with the Orchestra Director, and quickly decided that MTSU would be a great fit and opportunity of growth for me.

What was your favorite part of your program?

My favorite part of the program was the intimacy within both the School of Music and the conducting program. I was the only conducting student at the time of my studies, which led to a wide range of opportunities in a multitude that would not have been available in any other program with multiple students. The student relations within the School of Music due to the size and community aspect of the school enabled me to create and develop relationships with a majority of the students. These enabled me to develop and continue projects to enhance my conducting experiences that continue well after my degree.

What is your favorite memory of MTSU?

My favorite memory from MTSU was in my second year of my degree, when I was approached by a local writer and director that was putting together a new musical entitled A Vote of Her Own, which encompassed several faculty members in the Department of Recording Industry at MTSU, as well as writers, composers, and directors throughout the area. I was able to help produce both a professionally recorded cast album and a stage production of the musical at the Bijou Theatre in Knoxville, Tennessee with a pit orchestra.

What takeaways from your time in graduate school have you brought to your career?

There were so many things that I learned during my studies at MTSU, and I think the biggest would be the administrative and academic qualities of a conductor. What the audience sees at a concert barely touches the surface of what a conductor actually does, and I was able to see firsthand the inner workings of multiple orchestras of different skill levels and age ranges and how to prepare for such orchestras as well as how they need to be run administratively. Those qualities are extremely hard to simply study unless you are able to be physically involved in them yourself. I was lucky to be able to learn these and apply them to my career. Without them,

I would not have been able to create and expand the Middle Tennessee Sinfonietta, a volunteer, nonprofit orchestra that strives to further the inclusivity of the arts in the Middle Tennessee area, and which has continued its reach and growth over the course of the past two years.

Do you have any advice for current or future graduate students?

I would say that graduate students should learn and do as much as they can in their craft while they are studying for a graduate degree in a specific field. Although it is a lot of work and can take up so much of your time, the experiences and knowledge you are able to achieve while under top professionals in your craft is unlimited and is always easily at your disposal during your studies. Alongside that, I also would recommend making as many connections within your studies as possible, both in your degree area and outside of that area. These connections are invaluable and help you immeasurably in your career, regardless of what you decide to do in the future.

