



**Oregon ArtsWatch**

Arts & Culture News

By [Matthew Neil Andrews](#), November 27, 2025

## **It's the journey, not the destination: Talking with concert rock violinist Aaron Meyer on the eve of his 25th anniversary Rock the Holidays tour**

**The violinist and teacher discusses his long, strange trip from son of a Philadelphia violin teacher to head of a concert rock band and teaching academy.**



The world of music is full of binaries. Perhaps the most significant is the distinction between “classical” and “folk” (under which heading we include “pop,” “rock,” even “hip-hop” and “heavy metal,” and also, naturally, the various genres we literally call “folk”). Like all binaries, these overlap: there’s a folkish element in almost all classical music – at least, all the classical music that’s worth listening to – and every musical element we crown with the term “classical” (counterpoint, formal structure, broadly speaking the “intellectual” layer) is present to some degree in the various folk traditions. These two instincts, which we might as well call Apollonian and Dionysian, create in their eternal dance all art and perhaps all life.

There’s another musical binary we need to discuss before we move forward and get into [concert rock violinist Aaron Meyer](#) and his upcoming [Rock the Holidays tour](#), which starts in Corvallis this weekend. The binary of “sacred” and “secular” is no less important, no less pervasive, than the “classical” and “folk” binary. It likewise runs through all musical traditions, cutting across the classical world and the folk world, and shares also that binary’s overlapping quality. There is always something secular and worldly and human about even the most sacred music; there is always something sacred and transcendent and holy about even the most secular of music.

That Meyer is a Bible-believing Christian is no secret – for one thing, he has Scripture all over his website (John 3:16, Romans 10:9-10, Isaiah 9:6). Lest this should give you an impression of stuffiness, note that Meyer’s website also offers a custom Rye whiskey and a limited edition 2017 Columbia Valley Cabernet, both of which are available to donors to Meyer’s successful [Concert Rock Academy](#) music education program.

Which brings us to the last of the binaries in question. “Those who can, do. Those who can’t, teach.” Sometimes that roasted chestnut is true – we’ve all known teachers like that. But when it comes to music, the situation is not so simple. It’s not just that it can be hard for even the best musicians to make a living as composers, performers, and what have you. That would be enough, sure, to fill the teaching halls with mostly successful musicians. But music, being religious in its very nature, is also evangelical. Musicians have a deep need to share, to educate, to pay it forward, to cultivate in others the same joy and transcendent fulfillment we ourselves feel.

So there you have it: classical and rock, sacred and secular, performance and education. Usually those binaries don’t blend quite so thoroughly, and so comfortably, as they do in Meyer’s work. Christmas music in particular is very well-suited to the classical-rock crossover, as groups like Mannheim Steamroller and Trans-Siberian Orchestra have long since demonstrated. It is equally well-suited to the sacred-secular crossover, most famously in the way that Santa songs share space with Jesus songs. Tchaikovsky’s *Nutcracker* music, perhaps the most famous piece of Christmas music after Handel’s *Messiah*, is not at all explicitly Christian and thus well-suited to secular settings – and yet, percolating underneath the whole thing is a story of transfiguration and loss that fits right in with all the other Christmas stories, most definitely including the original. As for *Nutcracker*’s potential for crossing from classical to folk: consider Duke Ellington’s version.

What all of this means is that Aaron Meyer is right at the nexus of a perfectly balanced cluster of binaries, which is in theological terms known as “paradox.”

Meyer takes his paradox on the road starting this weekend in Corvallis before roaming all over the Pacific Northwest: Kirkland on December 3, Walla Walla on the 5th, Hood River on the 7th, Bend on the 10th, two dates in Newport (the 12th and 13th), ending with two in West Linn (the 19th and 20th). It’s his biggest tour to date, a culmination of 25 years of hard work since his early days playing with Pink Martini and [Michael Allen Harrison](#).

We wanted to get Meyer's whole story, from the early "violin cake" episode that set him on his path, all through the long and winding road that led him to where he is today.

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*The following conversation has been edited and condensed for clarity and flow.*

**Oregon ArtsWatch:** Tell us about your a-ha moment. I believe there's a violin cake in your a-ha story?

**Aaron Meyer:** My dad was a classical violin teacher, he's retired now. He taught in our home six and a half days a week. So my entire life as a little kid growing up, kids were coming into our house for lessons all day long. And I just sort of assumed everybody played the violin. Because where I lived, they did.

And then the violin cake was an incredibly powerful moment in my life. I was five years old, and my dad had a student that won a competition to solo with the Philadelphia Orchestra. We grew up in Philly. I watched her play the concert at the Academy of Music with the Philadelphia Orchestra with 3,000 people in the audience, and I was blown away by that. And then the cake at the party that my dad had for the girl after the concert – I turned to my dad and said, "forget the concert, I want that cake!" And dad said, "well, here's the deal. If you want that cake, you'll practice, you'll win the competition, you'll solo with the Philadelphia Orchestra, and I'll buy you that cake."

So I decided when I was five, that's what I was gonna do. I took an audition when I was nine, I didn't win the first time and was pretty bummed out. But, you know, back on the horse and practicing and eyes on the prize. I did it again when I was 10, won, played when I was 11, and I got the cake.

**OAW:** What was the piece? I mean the music, not the cake!

**Meyer:** It was a piece by Kabalevsky, the first movement of his violin concerto. It was a great moment. Pretty much after that I was ready to retire. My father was like, "No way, you're good and should be continuing." And I was like, "No, no, no, I've achieved my goal." Those were some tough times in my life, because I didn't want to practice anymore. Like I truly had achieved my goal. And he was like, "No, you haven't."

**Meyer:** It was hard. I didn't really want to practice. I was a little bit unmotivated. But eventually I came around, and I really got put to the test when it was time to go to college. I was going to major in violin performance, classical music, and I went off to Indiana University as a violin performance major and

realized that there were a lot of people that were just as good as me, if not better. And I wasn't sure that really was my path. And it wasn't. I gave it a shot for a year, and I said, "this just isn't for me. I want to do something else." I changed my major and then I changed my school. I'd quit the violin at that point, but it kept chasing me around. I ended up going to Lewis and Clark College, which is how I got to Portland, and I got a general science degree. I was, for a minute, thinking maybe medical school. That really wasn't my path either.

I needed a job and I defaulted to the violin as an accident. Opportunities kept opening up for me. Pink Martini was just a local band at the time – but, you know, a successful local band – and they invited me to play with them. And they exposed me to combining different styles of music. They took classical music and mixed it with Latin music and cocktail music. And I loved that crossover.

So I was like, "well, I want to do the same thing, but I want to do it with rock music." And I never thought this would ever turn into a career or a business or something I could make money at. I just thought it was fun. I kept going and pursued a teaching degree at Portland State University – at the same time thinking, "well, this will be something I could do if this music thing doesn't work out, and maybe I'm just playing around here while I look for a real job."

And it just never stopped. One thing led to the next, and I just kept going. And eventually I started pursuing my own path and said, "this is what I'm gonna do."

**OAW:** That's great that your path intersects with Pink Martini. How did that come about? When was that?

**Meyer:** That was in October of 1996. I took a year after college, and I traveled in Southeast Asia as a backpacker, and that was a really eye-opening experience for me. I got to see a lot of places that I never imagined I would go to, and hike through the Himalayas and remote areas of Southeast Asia. And then I came back to Portland and I needed to figure out, "what the heck am I gonna do?" I didn't really have a plan. I had an undergraduate degree, but I needed more schooling, you know, because it was just a general science degree. And I was like, "Well, I can play the violin, I can just do this temporarily." Someone asked me to play at their wedding and teach their kid, and said, "my friend has this band called Pink Martini. Here's the guy's number, give him a call." And I called up Thomas Lauderdale. I said, "My name's Aaron Meyer, I play the violin." And he said, "Can you come to a rehearsal tomorrow night?" And I said, "Yes." He said, "Well, what are you doing four nights from now?" I said, "Nothing." And he said, "Well, how would you like to play with us at Museum After Hours at the Portland Art Museum?" I was like, "Yes."

And I was like, “Oh, I see what these guys are doing.” I liked the melding of the different styles of music. I loved classical music my whole life, but I didn’t like all the rules that came with it, and it was very set in its ways. You don’t do this and you can’t do that, you only do it this way. And I felt that was a bit constrictive. But I loved the discipline that it required, and I loved the music, and trying to achieve a certain level and technique of playing. I loved being able to break the rules and bend the rules and experiment and try new things. That’s really what forming “concert rock” has been: inventing a genre of music, making it up as you go.

**OAW:** So there’s these three main layers to what you do. That combo of classical and rock, the “concert rock” thing. And then the Christmas shows every year. And then the teaching. How did all those things get started and come together? And how does it seem to you now, after twenty-five years?

**Meyer:** The teaching component has always been around me, because my father taught in our home. He would funnel me students that he didn’t have time to teach anymore. I was teaching at 15 years old, and I thought it was great. I like teaching and I was around it, and it came naturally to me. So I’ve always taught, and I’ve never stopped since then.

Everything that I’ve been doing since 1996, when I first started playing with Pink Martini, I was like, “I’ll try this music thing and this will just be temporary, while I figure out what I’m really gonna do.” I knew that I was a classical violinist, but I knew I wasn’t gonna be a concert violinist like Joshua Bell. And I was like, “I like rock music, I want to figure out a way to fuse rock music with what I do.” I just didn’t really know how to do that. But I was like, “what if I just put the word ‘rock’ between ‘concert’ and ‘violinist’?” And it was like, “there’s my title! I am a concert rock violinist!”

I couldn’t tell you what that sounded like. I’m not really a songwriter, I can help with arranging but I definitely needed somebody to help me with the music part of it, the recording part of it, the producing, the arrangement, all of that, like actually making a sound. Once I had that, I knew I could go out there and play it and get behind it and believe in it and sell it. So I’ve been fortunate to always have a team, someone who supported me and helped me. I’ve gone through three distinct iterations, different people that have been influencing me and helping me with the music.

I first started with a guy named Bill Lamb in 1999. Pink Martini really didn’t need me anymore. They were getting so big and they basically said, “we don’t need you anymore, we don’t have room for you.” I was really bummed out at the time. I was like, “no, I want to be part of this.” But it was really the right move, I just didn’t know it at the time. Because had that not happened, I wouldn’t have been forced to

figure out my own thing. And that's what was happening. I mean, I felt disappointed at the time because I didn't really have much of a following. I was starting from ground zero. But I started playing with [Michael Allen Harrison](#) in 1997. He gave me a platform in Portland, because he had a following and a Christmas concert series, and I learned from playing with him.

**Meyer:** And then it was just obvious that I was gonna go off on my own. I wanted to do my own thing. I needed to have my own space to figure out what kind of sound that I wanted. And Bill helped me for six years. We did six records together, and then that came to a point where it was time for me to move on.

And my good friend [Tim Ellis](#), who was a very well-known guitar player, studio owner, and producer, put together the largest commercial recording studio Portland has ever had, [Kung Fu Bakery](#). Tim became my lead guitar player and helped me take the music to the next level. We worked from 2007 until [he passed away in 2016](#). He really took me under his wing as a producer, and he was my partner in crime. We were writing all the music together, we were going out and playing the gigs, and he understood how to record a record and have a sound and come up with a direction. He was a blessing in my life and was right there to support me in every way. And I didn't realize how much he did until he passed away, and then he wasn't there anymore. And then I was like, "here I am again, now what?" Also dealing with the grief of your best friend and your business partner passing away, just dealing with it. It happened so quickly. He was such a big part of my life, and a good friend.

**Meyer:** And then I fumbled around for a little bit. By this point I had a following, and the Christmas concert was established, and people were hiring me to play at events and concerts and this and that. I sort of flopped around for a while because we couldn't really find the right guitar player, and it had always been violin and guitar. Because the violin, you know, really isn't rock music. It can be used in rock music, but you really need drums and guitar and all the rock band instruments around it to give it that rock edge, which is what supports the violin and this whole concert rock genre.

It was a couple years, just trying different people out, not quite the right fit. And the gentleman that Tim had hired to be our engineer, [Dean Baskerville](#), had been engineering for us since 2007. When Tim passed away, Dean said, "I can produce music, and I do produce music, and I could help you." We did a Christmas record in 2018. It was the first record after Tim. It was *The 12 Days of Christmas*. Dean produced it, and he said, "I really want to bring on a drummer named [Jeremy Burchett](#), who's about five years younger than me." And as Jeremy got to know me and figure out what I was doing, Dean and Jeremy wanted to help me get to that next level, be a little bit more clear about defining a sound.

When I was billing myself as a “concert rock violinist,” people would ask me, “what do you call your style of music?” And I had this really long paragraph, I don’t know what it said but it was too confusing. It was confusing for me, and of course it was confusing for whoever I was telling it to. And no one could really come away saying, “I know what your music is.” For so many years, I was trying a lot of different things. I was trying a more acoustic feel, something that was more symphonic, something that took classic rock tunes and arranged them. It was all over the map.

And Dean and Jeramy – this would have been like 2019 – said, “it feels like you’re a bit scattered. Why don’t we get a little bit more focused and pick the things that make sense?” And when it came time to come up with a name for the genre of music, Jeramy just looked at me and said, “It’s obvious – your music is concert rock.” And I didn’t realize it the whole time. It was right in front of me. I was like, “I’m a concert rock violinist.” “Well, what kind of music do you play?” “Well, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah.” And at that moment I felt like an idiot, because it was so obvious. I was making it way too complicated. We’re simply the fusion of classical music and rock music. And yeah, when you listen to our arrangements and get to know our music, there is far more definition, and a particular sound that we’re going for.

It was Jeramy and Dean that really worked on the sound and the audio. We started recording songs like “Dream On” and “Bohemian Rhapsody,” and then *The Marriage of Figaro* by Mozart and *The Barber of Seville*. By now we have a far more in-depth catalog of music. But no one had really put much time into thinking of the marketing and branding of concert rock. And that’s where Jeramy really helped me come up with a vision of what concert rock could look like. And even with the music education stuff, I was really just focused on violin because I play the violin and I teach the violin. And Jeramy said, “It seems to me that we should focus on strings – violin, viola, cello – and rock band instruments – drums, bass, guitar, and keyboards. And those should be the instruments that we focus on having kids perform with us, not just the violin. Why couldn’t we open it to all these other instruments, and you could appeal to more people?” I was like, “man, why didn’t I think of that?”

**Meyer:** He was taking all my ideas, expanding on them, and making it so much more full and complete. And now instead of just having a couple of violinists come up on stage and play with us at a Christmas concert – before it could have been like two or three or four kids – we’ll have 25 just in Portland. And they’re on all the different instruments I mentioned. So we just started thinking a little bit more outside of the box, thinking the concert rock instrumentation is these three string instruments and these four band instruments. And as far as our music education, let’s appeal to all of those kids and get arrangements for

all of those instruments, and then you can have a lot more kids from different disciplines playing with us. And that's what we do now. As we launch into this Christmas tour we're playing in eight cities, 11 concerts, and everywhere we go we've got kids playing with us on all the different instruments. We're pulling from youth orchestras and School of Rock programs and private music studios and school programs. It's been great.

With Concert Rock Academy, we do a lot of things. We do instruments and lessons, we go into schools and do assemblies. But I think one of the things that we do really well is putting kids on the stage and getting them excited about our brand and then playing the music, giving them the tools ahead of time – the music, the audio to practice to, so that they can do that. We'll show up in Kirkland, or Walla Walla, or Corvallis, or Newport, and we have one rehearsal with the kids, they get all the music ahead of time, they practice it, they work on it with their teacher, they have audio to listen to. If they can play to the audio, they can play with us. We have one rehearsal the day of, and then they play, and it's become the highlight of the show. Everyone just loves watching the kids, and it really is moving.



Concert rock violinist Aaron Meyer with student. Photo courtesy of the artist.

**OAW:** So at the different tour stops, the students on each concert are from the town that you're playing in?



**Meyer:** Yeah, that's our model now. I used to cart kids with me wherever I went, going places that were just too far. I was like, "what if we pulled kids from the location that we're at?" Find the local youth orchestra, find the School of Rock program, find the teachers, school programs. And they're there. Sometimes you have to hunt for them. But it's pretty easy to figure out, especially being able to research online and network amongst people. In all eight locations that we go to in Oregon and Washington on this tour that we're about to launch, we've got kids coming from any one of those programs, and they're all local. We do have one girl from our program that is coming to I think six of the eight locations with us. But the idea is to pull mostly from the locations and feature those students, because then it means something to the community.

**OAW:** So then how did you get started specializing in this Christmas rock thing? You were with Oregon Ballet Theater, right? You played *Nutcracker* with them?

**Meyer:** I did, yeah. So when I was just getting going, I was thinking, "while I figure out what I'm really gonna do with my life, I'll do this violin thing because I can play the violin and I can make some extra money doing it, and it's fun." So I was playing with OBT in the orchestra and I enjoyed that. I was a sub and it was a freelance gig for me. I was just starting to piece together this little career of teaching and playing gigs and playing with other bands.

**Meyer:** I think I realized it with Michael Harrison, who had an established Christmas series. I enjoyed playing the music, I enjoyed the concerts. He told me that when you have a themed concert, that's something you can build upon. He had been doing it for 10 years at the time. This must have been 1997, and it was growing and it was successful. And when I launched on my own, I said, "we should just have a Christmas concert, and start with one, simple." And that was 25 years ago. We walked into a church and we brought in a couple speakers, three musicians, we turned on the lights and we played. That was the concert. It was just a natural fit. We did one and we never stopped. And you know, people like Christmas concerts. It's a fun thing to go to with your family. And if you can figure out a model and how to make it work, it can become a really nice tradition, and that's what it's become.

My music has changed over the years, and now I feel like it's really designed to be for me to play, because all the arrangements are written around how I play the violin, and then we've just built upon that. And now we have a lead guitar player, [Christian Kinyon](#), who plays classical music on his electric guitar. If you listen to any of the recordings, Mozart or any of the *Nutcracker* stuff, he is playing that classical music, which is highly unusual for an electric guitar player because it is so technically difficult. And he is

a beast. So now we can trade lines, and we'll have this dueling component going on between violin and guitar that really is exciting. It's fun. We can play in harmony, we can play in unison, we can trade. Then you get a really solid keyboard player and a drummer and a bass player and a rhythm guitar player, and then you have a team, you have a unit, and that's what we are. And I would say it's taken 25 years to figure it out.



Concert rock violinist Aaron Meyer with guitarist Christian Kinyon, keyboardist Jean-Pierre Garau, and drummer/producer Jeramy Burchett. Photo courtesy of the artist.

**OAW:** So let's talk a little bit about gear. You've got your normal acoustic violins, but I'm really interested in the electric violins. And then what kind of effects do you use?

**Meyer:** When it comes to gear, I'm pretty bad at remembering everything and even learning how it works. Fortunately, I have really good help around me constantly bailing me out. They put together this pedal board for me that's far beyond my understanding.

The acoustic violins, I've got five but I pretty much use two as the main live performance ones. With the electric instruments, it's been a journey to find the right ones. I started with the first one that I ever bought, 25 years ago, and then graduated onto another one. And while they were good instruments, they weren't great. There were things about the sound that we didn't like. And then Jeramy – who plays drums for me and is our music director and producer and sort of my right-hand man and brainstorms with me on

all of our projects – he went on a quest to find the best electric violin that suited my needs, our needs. And we flew out to a shop in North Carolina called the Electric Violin Shop. It's a tiny little shop, but they have the largest collection of electric instruments, I think, anywhere, if not one of the most comprehensive. Somewhere where you can go and try like 40 different electric violins. There's not many places that you can do that. So we went and we started playing and listening, and then we found a maker by the name of [John Jordan](#), who lives in California. He seemed to be just the guy that had it completely dialed in.

I've got two now, a four string and a six string. And because they're electric instruments, you can do anything you want to them, you could add more strings, the body could be in any shape – because that's irrelevant to the sound. With an electric instrument, all you care about really is the vibration of the strings and the pickups that are picking up that sound and how they translate that into an electronic signal. I bought two of these violins, and they just sound so much better than anything I've had in the past. So it's been really fun to explore those. They look cool. And because everything goes digital now, you can manipulate the sound in all sorts of phenomenal ways in the studio and live.

**OAW:** So we've already talked about the band, and the arrangements, and the process, but I did want to touch on a day in the life. What's a typical process of developing the material with the crew?

**Meyer:** I don't really have to worry about the content of the music and how it's gonna be developed because Dean and Jeramy, who are lead producers, they've got it figured out. I'm involved, but I let them pick what we're gonna do. As we were working together over the years, they were becoming better at making suggestions on what we should do, to the point where it's just like they don't need me at all. In fact, I'm getting in the way. And it's really great when you know you've got a team of people working together and everyone realizes which lane they're supposed to stay in.

So I let them pick the music now. I certainly weigh into it, but they know what to pick. And it's kind of a relief for me. We did "Every Breath You Take," and "Dream On," and then they started picking all these songs that I didn't even know. Like the Muse song, "Starlight." I'm in the classical music box. I know a lot about classical music, but when it comes to rock music I don't know that much about it, which is why I've always needed someone to help me. It's always been fun because I love the collaboration part. I love putting two or three minds together and saying, "okay, what can we come up with?" And they arrange it all now, and we go in and we record it. And at this point, when it comes to the music, I show up and I play my parts.

We figured out along the way that we loved all the instruments in the rock band part of it – two guitars, violin, drums, bass, and keyboards – but thought wouldn't it be cool if we added a string quartet to the mix. Then we could take some of these lines that are in the music and put them in the string quartet. Before we did the strings, we had horns playing with us. Jeramy was like, “the horns are cool, but they don't really fit into the concert rock thing, it should be strings.” And at first I was resistant, but I was like, “No, you're right, it should be strings.” The first time we had a string quartet play with us, we hired people from the Oregon Symphony. And then Jeramy and I looked at each other and said, “Wouldn't it be cool if we picked advanced students from our music education program and had them play on the string quartet?” And that's what we do now. That's such a beautiful fit.

**Meyer:** So we ended up purchasing an electric string quartet – two violins, viola, and cello – from a company called [NS Design](#), and they gave us an education discount. Now we can show up anywhere and have electric instruments for kids to play. When we go and do demos for youth orchestras or any kind of program, I can bring these instruments and let kids demo them.

A lot of string players, especially in middle or high school, may not have played on an electric instrument before. So I can plug it into my effects rig and have them play it and make all sorts of wacky sounds. It's just a fun way to inspire young people and get them motivated.

**Meyer:** You get into the classical world and they tend not to know much about the rock world and vice versa. So we're smooshing these two worlds together, and it's amazing how nicely they meld together, and that they work together. We just had to play around with it and figure it out.

So that's the music part of it. And then there's so many other components. You know, putting together a tour, who's gonna do that? And we're pretty much an in-house operation, with a relatively small staff. We do all our own booking, we do a lot of our own promotion, our own marketing, and we conceptualize all the programs that we're gonna do. All the online resources that we want to make available to kids. We've developed a practice tool called “Practice Like a Rock Star.” It's just a fun practice tool for beginning students, it's got songs and scales on there, and a mixer where you can solo your instrument or hear the whole band playing. You can learn the song and then practice like a rock star.

We create those kinds of tools and we do all of that in-house with our little team. And then now that Concert Rock Academy is a nonprofit, there's that. I'm the executive director. We raise money and we go out and do all the education work that we want to do, and we've got a great board. But that takes time, so

I spend a lot of time doing that. Specifically for me, it's running Concert Rock Academy on the administrative end, the fundraising and practicing and networking with the students.

**OAW:** That's a lot.

**Meyer:** Yeah, it's a lot, and I think we're getting to the point where we can start to have some more support. Like we realized we need a student coordinator. We were just doing concerts in Portland and Hood River and Bend, and I could manage it. Now I'm in Kirkland and Walla Walla and Corvallis and Newport. It is a lot, and I could use some support for that. But this is what happens when you try to grow.

**OAW:** How big is the team? How many people are on staff?

**Meyer:** [counting on fingers] Jeramy and Dean are the music producers. You got me. We've got a graphic designer that does all of our materials, so that's Joe. He does all of that. We've got a sound man. We've got the rest of the guys in the band, so that's gonna be another four there. We've got Rachael Mortensen who helps us with the nonprofit and our public relations. I need another hand! Then someone that helps with social media. And then video.

**OAW:** So about a dozen people, roughly?

**Meyer:** Yeah, about a dozen.

**OAW:** And then many students do you have?

**Meyer:** Private students of mine, I probably have 10, but I'm overseeing hundreds. We sponsor lessons on all kinds of instruments, all the other instruments in the concert rock band format. So guitar and piano, I oversee those lessons and match the teachers up with the students. And then we've got all the kids that play with us. That would be a couple hundred, over the year. The kids keep coming back, because they enjoy playing the music. The arrangements are fun, and they enjoy playing with the band. They get to come up on stage and play with a really fun band that enjoys working together. All the musicians in our band are superstars, they're solid players, they're good people and they're good at their craft. It's great to see the kids get up there. We save them for the end of the show, it's the icing on the cake. And then for the community and the parents and the teachers, it's just a wonderful experience.

**OAW:** What do you listen to just for fun? Like what's on in the car or while you're cooking or whatever? In terms of the rock and the classical worlds, who are some of your favorite composers and bands?

**Meyer:** Well, on the non-classical side I'm a Grateful Deadhead. So I've got that disease. I listen to a lot of them. And then in the classical world, I'm all over the map. I love Mozart, I love Beethoven, I love all of it. I grew up with classical music, and it's so rich. All the composers are fascinating to me. I love Bach, I love Tchaikovsky. I tend to listen to the things that I'm working on to get more familiar with them. And the songs that I'm the least familiar with are the rock band tunes. They picked "Everybody Wants to Rule the World," I knew the song but not well. So I'm learning all these songs, and now I'm listening to a lot of Christmas music.

But it's good, you know. I mean, the music is not easy, especially when you get into our concert rock arrangements of *The Nutcracker*. I mean, that music is really, really hard. And it's not like you're playing just the violin part. I'm playing all these different parts that weren't always written for the violin, so it could be awkward in the finger patterns. So I just need to get the reps in.

And then after Christmas is over, they'll tell me what the new songs are gonna be for 2026, and I'll start listening to them.

**OAW:** So I wanted to ask about your faith and how that ties into all this. That's relatively recent for you?

**Meyer:** Yeah. I became a believer in 2019. My wife was a believer, you know, since the '80s. And I knew that she lived her life by following Jesus and praying to Jesus and reading the Bible. And I didn't understand that. She was my wife and I loved her and I knew I needed to honor that. My wife always walked correctly, you know. She didn't have a lot of struggles. And I had a lot of struggle. It's easy, I think, to normalize some of your struggles. Say, alcohol – it's easy to drink a little bit and then drink a lot and then drink too much. It becomes normalized. I had quite a few different struggles, and I was able to skate by and just sort of get away with life. And I think I got to a point where I realized that I wasn't living right and I needed to sort that out. And I have an incredibly loving wife that never wanted to give up on us. And she just turned to me and said, "you know, you're not gonna get through some of your challenges until you give them over to the Lord." And I was like, "Yeah, yeah, yeah, whatever. Right. I don't want that, it's not for me." Until the point where I got broken down. I was pretty desperate. I tried all kinds of things, counseling and this and that – and all of that's good, you know, but I wasn't solving my struggles.

And I got broken down until I was at a point where I had no other choice. I asked Jesus into my heart and I got filled with the Holy Spirit. I felt it come into my body, and my life has never been the same. I've been able to overcome three specific challenges that have been pulling me down and holding me back. They've gotten in the way of my marriage, they've gotten in the way of my work, they've gotten in the way of everything. And I never thought that I would choose this path. But I started to turn to the Word of God, the Bible, and I started reading it. And I'm not a good reader, I've always struggled with reading. I was like, "oh man, I can't read that." But I started reading it, I've read the whole thing, and now that's what I turn to, it's what keeps me going. It's become the center of my life. I'm a Bible-believing Christian, I love Jesus, and it's nice for me because when you follow the Bible, it tells you how to live. I know not everybody agrees with that, and not everybody likes that. And I completely understand that. I'm not here to force anything down anybody's throat, or tell them what I believe. I like to share my faith in a really gentle way. I think there's a way to do that and be respectful to other people.

It has become the center of my music and my life. And I'll have to say that things really didn't start growing in terms of the music until this happened. I mean, yeah, we grew some and I had a little thing going on, but it's really grown in the last six years, and that's been the time that I've become a believer. And I think I just needed to release everything over to the Lord and let Him lead. Because we think of ourselves as a musical ministry. There are people that identify with it and say, "Wow, this is amazing." And some people think it's weird, and that's okay. I just want to be the best person that I can, and help kids, and go out and live as holy and healthy as I can.

**OAW:** It fits pretty well, I think. So many classical composers were Christians, and then with the Christmas thing it's right in the name.

**Meyer:** And, you know, we don't want our shows to become a sermon. It's not a church service. People aren't going there to hear the gospel or the words of Jesus. We do incorporate some things into our show. It's just more sharing our faith. But you're right, it is there. Most of the classical musicians were Christians. In fact, we just went to Europe in June. We were making music videos based on the lives of Mendelssohn and Bach, they're all Christians. We went to the church where Handel was baptized in 1685.

**OAW:** And now it's time for our usual last question. What would you ask Aaron Meyer?

**Meyer:** How come it took so long to figure all this stuff out? You know? Why did it take twenty-five years to figure all this out? I guess that's the question I would ask.



And I know the answer: It's a journey, and you can't figure out everything right out of the gate. It has to be a process. That's what it's been, and I'm sure it'll just continue to evolve. That's the fun part, to see what's gonna happen next.

It's been really great to have the team that we have now be shaped and fit like a puzzle. I feel like it does fit like a puzzle, and we have the right people in the right positions. This is the first time I feel like we have a really clear focus, where we can say, "What kind of music do you play?" "Concert rock." "What does it sound like?" "Well, here it is." And it's taken a long time to figure that out. Just trial and error. I'm grateful that we have the team that we have. We love playing the music, and we love working with the kids. And when the kids get up on the stage, I really feel like it sums up all of our work and the mission of Concert Rock Academy and what we were called to do.

I'm looking forward to all the concerts. This is our biggest tour that we've ever taken on. And while it may seem small compared to lots of other bands, it's involved for me and us and our team. It's a lot for us. We've never taken a lighting designer and production manager on the road, and a student coordinator.



These are all new components, and all cost money. But it's exciting because we're reaching so many new people. I'm excited to see what's gonna happen next. I think this tour is gonna be a special tour and a defining moment for us.