

# AMSA orchestra teacher performs on 'Late Show with David Letterman'

By Community  
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[Watch the video on the "Late Show with David Letterman" YouTube channel](#)

By day, Jesse Peterson is an orchestra teacher at Anoka Middle School for the Arts. By night, he's a rock star.

"If by rock star you mean a guy who plays violin on the corner of the stage with a Minneapolis indie-band, then sure," he joked.

Think about it. Who other than a rock star gets a gig to perform on the "Late Show with David Letterman"?

"Yeah, I still can't believe it really happened. I watch the video of it on YouTube just to prove to myself that I was really on the show," he said. "It seems too good to be true."

And while rock star maybe pushing it a bit, Peterson, who is a member of up-and-coming indie-artist Jeremy Messersmith's band, did perform on Letterman's show Aug. 20. What's even better, he's using the experience to inspire his students at AMSA.



Jesse Peterson, Anoka Middle School for the Arts orchestra teacher and violinist for the Jeremy Messersmith band, left, walking into the Ed Sullivan Theater Aug. 20 to perform on the "Late Show with David Letterman." Photo courtesy of Jesse Peterson

## Being in the band

Peterson, who has taught in the district nearly 10 years, was first introduced to the idea of playing with Jeremy Messersmith through his connections in the Northern Symphony Orchestra, which is based in Anoka. Peterson plays violin for the group, which was founded in 2002 by Anoka High School orchestra director Michael Halstenson and Blaine High School orchestra director Ed Schaeffe.

Long-story short, Messersmith, who lives in the area, wanted to add a string section to his band and began working with Josh Misner, who recruited Peterson.

Driving home after an audition, it dawned on Peterson how close he lived to Messersmith.

"We're neighbors. Like, we got out of our cars and were like, 'You live here? No way,'" Peterson joked. "Now I take care of his cat and he waters my plants when one of us (is) out of town."

## Performing on the 'Late Show'

It's funny how things can come full circle, Peterson said. As an eighth-grader, he actually wrote a letter to Letterman, who he says was his favorite TV talk show host while he was growing up.

So when Messersmith told his nine other bandmates about a big upcoming gig on the "Late Show," Peterson was thrilled.

"I was actually jumping up and down for joy," he said. "I remember thinking that I couldn't believe we were going to do

this — I was going to perform on my favorite late-night talk show before the host was to retire. How cool is that?”

But it was hard to take it all in, Peterson said. “It was a whirlwind,” he said.

While some bandmates arrived to the Ed Sullivan Theater — Letterman’s studio — at 3:45 a.m. to set up the equipment, Peterson said he didn’t have to arrive until a little after noon to rehearse.

“We performed the song ‘Bubblin’ three times during rehearsal so the crew could set up the lights and cameras,” he said. “But Letterman’s crew — they were lovely to us. We actually played two more times because they liked the song.”

From rehearsal it was to hair and makeup. “The guy doing my hair told me: ‘These fingers have done the hair for the last three presidents, so really, there’s only one degree of separation between you all,’” Peterson said. “What do you say to that? I did get a kick out of it though.”

After a brief stop in the green room, it was time to go, Peterson said.

“(Letterman) read the card introducing us, and the next three and a half minutes I have no real memory,” he said. “I wasn’t aware of the audience or the cameras or anything. When we were done I thought, ‘It’s over? We did it already?’”

### **Bringing it home**

As a teacher, the most obvious thing to do was show the video of his time on Letterman’s stage to all of his AMSA students, which he did on the first day of school.

“Maybe the song isn’t their jam, maybe it is, but they all understand how cool it is to be on TV, and I think students find it cool to see their teacher playing an instrument on the ‘Late Show,’” Peterson said. “Hopefully it was a moment of inspiration for them.”

It’s also a way for them to bond. Last year, AMSA’s orchestra became a YouTube sensation of its own when members won a Schmitt Music competition for their rendition of Taio Cruz’s popular song “Dynamite.”

“It was a fun way to bond and kick off the year,” Peterson said.