

“Success in Music... Success in Life. It’s no coincidence.”

By Laura Mercer

This is a slogan from a very successful campaign Yamaha Canada had in the 90’s, where it depicted in a poster, a group of about 30 successful Canadian professionals from all sectors. Each person is holding the instrument that they played in their youth or still play today. Sitting in the center is the Governor General of Canada of the day, Ray Hnatyshyn, with his Bass Clarinet, along with the CEO of Sunnybrook Medical Center, the host of Much Music and a Supreme Court Judge with their chosen instruments to name a few. The point of this poster was to encourage us as music educators to continue to deliver instrumental music and to encourage our music students to look and see how many like themselves, developed so successfully with their chosen careers.

Music for life is the motto for me and I am sure for most of us who teach or guide musicians. Once a student has left the private studio or the band program in Grade twelve, it is our hope that they will find a way to continue playing, especially for those who are not furthering their studies in music or the fine arts field. Continuing with the arts in any form gives you a chance to grab some freedom for yourself either through a rehearsal, personal practice or a performance. You still need to focus in order to succeed and this takes you away from your everyday happenings for a half hour or a couple of hours.

As a teacher of instrumental music and a conductor, I became aware of how important music education impacts with the economics of the community. I am not here to prove that we need music in the schools system. I know that is the case. I know that it has been proven why we need the fine arts in the school system and I know that the fine arts of all disciplines have been placed in a higher priority category with the decision-makers during these last decades.

What I have learned through out the 15 years I have conducted the Second Wind Community Band and the 8 years I was with the orchestra is, it is an excellent opportunity to connect to the community. You may have just moved to the area or are being recruited to Cape Breton or you just want to stay in Cape Breton. You are always so welcomed in our groups because of your musical interest and talent. It can be the networking one needs to learn about the community and who is the community or who might be in the office down the hall from you. In the Second Wind Community Band, there are successful business administrators, educational administrators, teachers, students or CEO’s, Department heads of programs, specialists in medical fields, technology experts and public relations officers, along with performing musicians who are attracted to this group and to other performing ensembles. When human resources are recruiting for specialized workers to come to Cape Breton, perhaps one of their questions to the potential employee, is “do you play an musical instrument?” or “have you a musical or artistic talent?”

First, if the answer is yes, you may find that this is the right person for the job because of their creative nature, their great sense of teamwork and their ability to focus. Secondly, once you know they are the right person for the job, you can entice them to come to Cape Breton, by

letting them know about the excellent performing groups within our community. We have, for example, the Second Wind Community Band, the Cape Breton Orchestra, The Cape Breton Chorale, the Cape Breton Gaelic Choir, the Cape Breton Chordsmen, Community Groups from communities around Cape Breton, ensembles and choirs in our churches and the list goes on.

There are so many gifted and brilliant medical doctors and specialists, business administrators, students and educators that love to attend these presentations because of their cultural appreciation and the need to nurture that appreciation. We have such a wonderful array of live music and arts presentations here on our island to offer these folk when they come to Cape Breton to live. We have a number one Festival Venue in Canada in our province, right here in Cape Breton, "The Celtic Colours International Festival". It blends performances, education and tourism together with Cape Bretoners and folk from around the world.

From being involved with the performing groups I am associated with, comments from the musicians have been amazing. "I stayed here because of my place within this ensemble." "I have rediscovered myself through my music and making music with this group". "I love living and working here in Cape Breton." "I want to attend university here and it so great to know I can continue playing my instrument." "There would be a void in my life if I couldn't play my instrument". "Since I have retired or slowed down a bit, this has been a great hobby". "This gives me a place to create." "I love this."

I believe that focus, teamwork and creativity makes for a healthy community.This is good economics.