

## **Submission to Inquiry into Music Education, 17/12/12:**

This is our response to your terms of reference for the inquiry into music education in Victoria. We are a group of instrumental music specialists who, combined, have over 187 years of experience in collectively 93 schools, working in the state system in the provision of violin, viola, cello, doublebass, flute, clarinet, saxophone, vocal, trumpet, French horn, trombone and tuba tuition along with the provision of string orchestra, symphony orchestra, quartet/trio/octet chamber groups, junior mixed ensembles including guitarists, music theory tuition, aural training, performances and exams, choirs, improvisation ensembles, concert bands, wind ensembles and brass ensembles.

### **\*The benefits to students and the broader society of music education in schools.**

As instrumental music teachers we see our students' growth and development throughout secondary school from mostly little musical experience in Year 7 to an independent musician by Year 12. The benefits of this education are many and not solely confined to music. In our experience these benefits span all areas of the curriculum and development of our students. They include:

- 1) increase in overall academic achievement in the order of 10-15%.
- 2) team work and cooperation.
- 3) self discipline and commitment
- 4) self respect and respect for tradition and hard work
- 5) confidence under stress through solid preparation
- 6) ability to think on your feet
- 7) tolerance and open mindedness
- 8) acceptance of external discipline
- 9) organizational and time management skills
- 10) negotiation
- 11) creativity
- 12) cultural and historical understanding.
- 13) stress relief.
- 14) physical well being.

We see these benefits accruing to our students and society generally across all areas of the curriculum and life as a direct result of their music education and specifically instrumental music education. There are very good reasons behind the decision of all good state and private schools in providing quality music education with a strong emphasis on instrumental music. The benefits above are of the individual students own making and hard work and commitment over the six years of their secondary education. They have earned the right to receive this opportunity and we feel strongly that this opportunity should be available to state school students as well as their private school peers. We all have a firm commitment to excellent state school education and have been active through the western, northern, southern and eastern regions of metropolitan Melbourne in providing this through our respective instrumental music programs.

Moving on to the actual subject specific benefits of music education itself to our students and to society generally we must emphasize that, of our students, only a small proportion end up as professional musicians per se but that all who are involved earn many of the benefits listed above. They all become part of a more civilised and cultured society which can support all

types of music with respect and gratitude for the enormous amount of work it takes to provide the beautiful music of all types that our society is graced with.

The first and most demanding to earn but rewarding to achieve is the benefit of the development and creation of future Australian musicians, conductors and composers. Australian musicians, composers and conductors punch well above their weight on the world stage and are renowned in both classical and popular genres, contributing to the world's cultural heritage in a most disproportionate manner per capita. Though Australian society itself values sporting accomplishments at a higher rate it is a valid point that we have an international musical reputation and set of achievements which well outweigh our international sporting reputation and achievements.

Secondly, music education is critical in the development of cultural identity and the meaningful experience of and appreciation of music: the art form, the social form, the spiritual form and the unifying nature of music across all societies and historical periods. Our students can play music that spans a thousand plus years and ranges from the great composers from medieval times through to current days and can contribute to the continued traditions which music builds upon thus providing a continuous centuries old stream of learning that looks both forwards and backwards and is one of the few traditions in the world that is and has been neither interested nor involved in war, destruction or anything that is harmful to society.

The third benefit that is earned by our students of music is that of the development and creation of very specialised technical skills and actual brain changes, which are necessary for any performance. The dedicated practise of an instrument has been proven to develop the human brain's ability to communicate between the two hemispheres of itself, a fact not seen in any other area of human endeavour. In these early days of neurological scientific research into brain plasticity music education may be critical factor in this research.

Fourthly, music education has the capacity to lift our students' minds and hearts towards the most uplifting and long lasting experience of eternal beauty and joy known to humankind, music.

#### **\*The extent and quality of music education in Victorian schools.**

We can only comment on our own programs or those of which we have attended concerts of to really judge quality. At least, with music performance, it is readily apparent if the program is working well as it is obvious from the quality of the performance and the ease with which the students move through all the complexities of performance whether the program is of high quality or not. As to the extent of music education, if this refers to how far through the years the program operates then this is also readily apparent but if it is related to how many schools have music programs then we are, again only able to speak of our own schools and students.

Many factors need to combine for a program to develop a high standard of performance: quality takes time, teamwork, whole school participation and support, principals' support and appreciation, excellent administration, a committed and expert team of instrumental teachers who have a passion and love of both their instruments and their students' musical development, budget for repertoire which is the key to it all, time and a progressive year by year approach to building musical knowledge and skill. This necessitates time being made available within the timetable for both classroom and instrumental music education.

At Strathmore Secondary College we have built a quality music program over decades which includes tuition in all orchestral instruments, including harp and double reeds, solid year 7 & 8 band and string ensembles including classical guitar. The performance elements of the program include: Symphony Orchestra, Concert Band, Big Band, Improvisation Band, Chamber Choir, College Choir, String Orchestra, Harp Ensemble, Violin Ensemble (Grapelli Strings), Cello and Doublebass Ensemble (Bass Clefs), Flute Choir, Double Reed Ensemble, Clarinet Choir,

Saxophone Ensemble, Percussion Ensemble, Brass Ensemble, String Octet, two String Quartets, Guitar Orchestra, Electric Guitar Ensemble. This extensive list is supported by one of the best stage crews around at their performance opportunities. Even though our facilities are limited to two portables with three instrumental rooms and two classrooms and a big rehearsal space with three more small teaching spaces attached we have room for everyone somehow and students look at the music spaces as their own and are found there at every lunchtime rehearsing or listening to others rehearse or using the facilities to play music with friends. This is a good sign of a quality music education when the students want to spend their lunchtimes rehearsing and playing music.

**\*The optimum funding and governance arrangements for music education in Victorian schools.**

Whilst it is difficult to discuss funding we do believe that the presence of Instrumental Music Coordinators who are drawn from the music education sector are the best judges of whether a program is well governed or not. They have an understanding of all the different factors mentioned above and attend concerts as a sure fire way of judging a program's quality.

There is political pressure to split up staff from successful programs so that other schools can say they offer music without any more funding being made available and used to develop music programs overall but this is, frankly, a recipe for disaster as isolation from fellow musicians is likely to result in the destruction of the successful program and the dissipation of the very limited resources into isolated and struggling programs. The successful governance of successful programs is a direct result of all the factors mentioned above. In our opinion, if you put one or two teachers into a school without the administrative support, budget for repertoire, whole school enthusiasm, time allocated in the timetable and principal's support in the true meaning of that word, then it is unlikely that a high quality music education will result. If those same teachers are added to with more expert staff to develop the critical teamwork and ensemble required and all the other factors are present the result will be exciting.

We thank you for this opportunity to submit our responses to your inquiry and hope that music education in Victorian schools continues to thrive and contribute to the broader society in which we all live.

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