

some sort of standard needs to be set in order to properly meet the new curriculum expectations in an equitable way.

What we discovered was that we did not have a school within our board that met all three criteria. The closest we could find was a school that had a qualified music teacher on a one year leave, returning to the school in the fall of 2011. We spoke to the administration who assured us we could make this work. There were two teachers with a limited background who were willing to make the program work for this year until the qualified teacher returned.

So on September 2, 2010 a full set of brand new school instruments were delivered to Gateway Drive Public School in Guelph. We spent the day setting everything up and working with the two teachers. The school offers a semestered arts program, so it was decided to leave the new music program until the 2nd semester in January 2011.

We have started our data collection process by doing an online questionnaire with the Grade 7 and 8 students at Gateway Drive. They have been asked to rate their overall opinion of the school,

and asked to rate their level of involvement in their school community. We will be collecting a second round of data in January at the beginning of their new music program, and again at the end of the school year. We hope to find that the music program leads to positive growth in the overall morale of the school community.

Overall this whole project has been both exciting and frustrating. I am excited to see our school board investing money and effort into developing music education programs. It shows that there is an overall interest in arts education. However, it is very frustrating to see these wonderful new instruments sitting on a shelf until January because we could not find a school with a qualified music teacher. It shows that progress is being made, but the school boards still need to address the inequity issues in the way music education is administered. CME



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Popular Music Education: A Different Type of Musicianship, the Follow-up

By Steve Giddings

Abstract: *As a follow-up to an article written in Spring of 2008 about a performance based popular music course for high school, this enthusiastic article shares what happens when this concept is applied to elementary school students and the successes that follow. We all have very talented kids in our schools and we often underestimate what they are capable of and playing in rock music ensembles develops skills that other ensembles have a hard time accomplishing all at once. As well, there are so many other benefits for the school, the parents and the community by having a school based rock ensemble.*

Rock music is typically considered to be something that adults do. When a group of elementary school students perform music that is considered to be exclusive to adult performers, audiences are automatically impressed without really knowing why. When I had dreamt about having a rock band as a regular ensemble in schools, I had never imagined it to be in an elementary school! When I was a music education major at the University of Prince Edward Island, I loved to imagine a complete school music program that included bands, orchestras, choirs, jazz bands and yes, rock bands. I published an article in the Spring 2008 issue of *Canadian Music Educator* during my time at university called *Popular Music Education: A Different Type of Musicianship*. The article was essentially an outline and philosophy behind a course I had designed

which was fully intended to be offered *exclusively* in a high school setting. When searching to find a job in the music education field after graduating, I soon found out that you should be ready to take whatever you can get. I ended up landing a very part-time gig teaching music at a small Island primary school of 53 students. Being trained in teaching grades 7-12 instrumental music, this was less than ideal. As the year went on, I increasingly began to enjoy teaching younger children and started to realize what they were actually capable of. Being very passionate about having popular music in schools, I decided to try starting a rock band with a grade 4 class of 11 students.

I brought in all of my own equipment including a drum set, two

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electric guitars, a bass and a couple of small amps I had around the house. None of these children had any background in any of these instruments but I still decided it would be a good idea. I held auditions to see which instrument each student would be most successful at. When the band was chosen, all of the students had a role to play in it. There were two guitar players, one bass player, one drummer, two keyboard players and five singers. The song that they ended up learning was *You Really Got Me* by The Kinks. It took them a couple of months to get it, but they successfully pulled it off in the spring concert and boy, were they excited. They were so excited prior to the concert about learning these instruments that many of them couldn't wait to practice in music class and would always be disappointed if it was a gym day instead of a music day!

This year, I was at a much bigger school of 350 students, grades K-6, and over a two-day span I got to see all of these young musicians pass through my music classroom to be enlightened and excited about music. When I was hired for the job I was asked if I had any experience teaching a rock band at this level, which surprised me because I thought I was the only person doing that! The previous teacher had begun to take three or four students and form a small rock group to showcase a few different talents in the school. When I started in September, I held auditions for the rock band and opened it to guitar players, keyboard players, singers and drummers. The requirements, like the course I had designed for high school, were that they had to have been playing their instrument for at least two years or have been taking lessons on that instrument. When this band was chosen there were two vocalists, three guitar players, two drummers and a keyboard player. All of these students were in grade 6 except for the drummers. One of the drummers, who I ended up teaching private drum lessons to for the year, was in grade 3 and the other was in grade 4. As I had predicted, no bass players auditioned so I had the guitar players switch around between bass and guitar depending on the song. From there, I started with lesson one from my high school course and used the binder I made as a resource throughout the year.

This is what I have learned and observed over the year:

WE OFTEN UNDERESTIMATE WHAT KIDS ARE CAPABLE OF

Have you ever seen the Jack Black movie, *School of Rock*, and thought about how unrealistic it was having kids that age being able to play like that? Think again: they exist in your schools! When I chose those 8 students to play together, I was looking for an actual working skill-set on those instruments. This band, who later called themselves *PennyBack*, had a wide range of songs that they were able to play well by the end of the year. The more I challenged them throughout the year, the more these 8 chil-

dren surprised me. They didn't just play an easy version of a particular song, they played the actual song, note per note, solo per solo, and they knew when it was good and they knew when it wasn't. Our repertoire this year included all of these songs: BTO – *Takin' Care of Business*, The Kinks – *You Really Got Me*, The Animals – *House of the Rising Sun*, The Beatles – *Oh! Darling*, Aerosmith – *Dream On*, Journey – *Don't Stop Believing*, Lynyrd Skynyrd – *Sweet Home Alabama* (extended guitar and piano solo included), The Beatles – *Blackbird* (performed by one of the guitar players and one of the singers) and The Beatles – *Yellow Submarine*. At Christmas time they performed *Run Run Rudolph* and Billy Idol's *Christmas Love*. I have a video of PennyBack performing three of these songs at a Coffee House put on by the Junior High School in Montague which had them sharing the stage with Prince Edward Island's Tim Chaisson & Morning Fold at <http://www.youtube.com/user/stevegiddings801>. This was one of two concerts they took part in off of school property in addition to the multiple in school assemblies and concerts. Included on the YouTube channel is PennyBack's rendition of *House of the Rising Sun* as performed at this year's spring concert in June. All solos are done by the students, some of which were improvised. YouTube is a very good resource for student performances and learning, which brings me to my next observation.

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YOUTUBE AS AN EDUCATIONAL TOOL

YouTube is one of those places on the internet where people go to find a particular video. If YouTube doesn't have that video, you will be hard-pressed to find it elsewhere. Some people load up YouTube to be entertained, while others log on simply to learn. One particular student in PennyBack is a very

gifted guitarist. He became the lead guitar player and a leader in the eyes of many of the students at his school. Anything I asked him to learn, he could do it. On many occasions, I would ask him to learn a particular, quite challenging guitar solo and he would come back the next week, and sometimes the next day, with it learned well. I asked him how he learned these so quickly and he told me that he went on YouTube and searched for a video lesson on how to play the solo and learned it that way. Something to keep in mind is that this student might have had 2 formal guitar lessons in his entire life, the rest is all self-taught and 90% of what he knows about the guitar is from YouTube. The only part I had to show him how to play was the bass line from *Oh! Darling* because he couldn't find a decent video to show him how to play it.

HOW TO RUN AND SET UP A SOUND BOARD

Being a trombone player by trade, there were not very many opportunities for me to tinker with a sound system. I always just guessed at how to run a board but for my spring concert this year, where the rock band did 9 of the 15 performances in the show, there needed to be a good sound system. I ended up renting from a local music store, setting it up on my own and figuring out what

most of the buttons do during a sound check with these youngsters. Learning how to run a sound system was a valuable learning experience that all music educators should be familiar with before they graduate university.

WHY THIS IS IMPRORTANT FOR MUSIC EDUCATION AS A WHOLE. PROVIDING OPPORTUNITIES AND EXPANSION

Many school philosophies revolve around providing opportunities in school where children would not otherwise have the chance to participate. The truth of the matter is that a group of 8 – 11 year olds are not going to start a rock band on their own. They need the guidance of their teacher and the school to be presented with the opportunity to perform in such an ensemble. The same can be said about many 12 – 18 year olds who may not know a friend with a guitar or drum set and want an opportunity to play in a rock band. The fact is, this type of music gets more students interested in your program and wanting to participate in extra-curricular activities. If you are concerned with how to include more students in your extracurricular programs, start a rock band or something as simple as a student-lead guitar club. During the spring concert, many of the other students from grades 4-6 did choreographed dances to a few of the songs that PennyBack had played. The dancing helped to involve more of the school than just those involved with a class song, choir, rock band or guitar club. This was another way that the band helped to involve more students in the program.

There is also a guitar club at my school that includes students of all skill levels but does also include students who would not normally be involved in choir or rock band, concert band or jazz band. Guitar club can be a much less stressful way of implementing rock music into your program than a rock ensemble. As well, in time, guitar club can act as a feeder program for the rock band, which over time may grow into multiple ensembles.

DEVELOPS MUSICAL INDEPENDENCE

Many music educators struggle with how to have a student or group of students develop musical independence. What better way to develop this coveted skill than to form a rock band at your school? By nature, a rock band does not need a conductor. It forces these musicians to listen to each other and play as an ensemble because there is nobody up front telling them what to do. Sure I've had to remind them a few times to listen to each other and pay attention, but if a teacher can resist the overwhelming urge to play with or conduct their students they would begin to rely on each other more and develop their ability to play with other musicians much quicker and much more effectively. During this year's Spring Concert I may have given PennyBack 3 or 4 visual cues if they were uncertain of what was next but for the most part I sat back and let them do all of the music on their own. Essentially, if they are being coached well, they won't need you.

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DEVELOPS AURAL AND MEMORY SKILLS

Rock music, by nature, is learned by ear and performed by memory. Many, if not all, of the students in PennyBack, over the year, developed tremendous aural and memory skills that any university music student would be envious of. The piano player in PennyBack could read music very well but had very little need to implement that skill with the band. Out of the 8 PennyBack songs that included piano, 7 of them were learned entirely by ear or improvised, and where there wasn't a piano part, he would make one! At the beginning of the year, one of the guitar players could already tune his guitar pretty well, the others needed a bit more guidance. By the end of the year, without any guidance from me, the piano player and the three guitar players were able to work together to tune each guitar separately and accurately without a tuner. As well, the two singers in the band were so well practiced by the end of the year at memorizing words that we would only have to run a new song once or twice for them to have it learned. The drummers developed their concept of phrasing in rock music which can only be learned by listening and playing with other musicians.

DEVELOPS CREATIVITY SKILLS

Rock music is, by nature, creative. Having played in many types of ensembles throughout my career, I never feel more creative than when I play rock music. There are no written parts, no chord charts, no score, and no conductor. In addition to the blues improv sessions and other creative moments that occur inherently when playing rock music, PennyBack, had the chance to go through the process of writing their own song. I was very lucky in that I did not have to force this process on any of the students. The lead guitar player came to a rehearsal very early on and said that he had written a song. Since this was at the beginning of the year, we were able to spend a good chunk of rehearsal time on it. I decided to go with it. He played the new riff for everyone and I was shocked by how well thought out it was. Without knowing what would happen, I said to the students "let's just jam it out." Right away, one of the drummers came in with a beat, the pianist started to riff and one of the singers started developing a rough outline for a melody. After jamming for a few minutes, with some encouragement, everyone was jamming to the new riff and a new song was beginning to take shape. We eventually got to try developing a chorus for the song but I was not concerned with finishing it or performing it. I wanted them to go through what every rock musician goes through when trying to write a song, by being creative and experimenting.

Are these not the skills that we should be promoting? As important as reading music is, shouldn't it come second to musical independence, advanced aural, memory and creative skills? I suppose that is a matter of an individual philosophy, but, including a rock band in your program will develop these skills, which are skills that many other types of ensembles have trouble accomplishing all at once.

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PUBLIC RELATIONS

Rock music is, by nature, relatable. Having a rock band at your school can act as a major PR vehicle for the school. Although the choir might perform at the local senior's home or your concert band at the local fundraiser it can not connect the same way with a person as a rock band can. The main reason for this is simple, people like to hear music they know. This year, PennyBack performed for the opening of a new wellness centre in their community. They played first on a bill of two rock bands. The promoter for the event wanted the community to be involved with the opening and what better way of doing this than getting the local elementary school involved? However, she was not interested in the choir, she wanted the band. The band also opened for a couple of local rock musicians at a school fundraiser in the parking lot of the school on the back of a flat bed truck. Since most of the songs in their set were familiar to most people, they connected with the audience right away, more so than a typical concert band tune could. Even if the songs weren't familiar, the fact that they were playing familiar music hooked the audience. As much as we may not like it, as music educators, we are public figures. As public figures, we need to constantly be reaching out to the community, its children, its parents and its events. A rock band does this very easily.

HOW DO I START A ROCK BAND AT MY SCHOOL?

So many music educators make the foolish mistake of thinking "because I'm not a guitar player I can't teach guitar." Not true! We are trained musicians and trained music educators, we know all the intricacies of what makes good music, we know all the theory behind what makes good music and we know what it takes to perform music well. For instance, I am not a guitar player, but I know what to tell a guitar student to make him or her better. As with the clarinet, I am not a clarinetist but I know how to help a clarinet student sound better. When teaching the guitar and rock band, I tried to keep one step ahead of my students, in doing so, I learned more about the instrument(s) and how to teach them more effectively. If you were to picture yourself as a coach rather than a teacher, you would begin to possess what it takes to be successful with a school rock band. For instance, I don't teach a song to them, I coach them through it. In the end, keeping an open mind and a willingness to learn is key in having a successful school rock band.

IN CONCLUSION

I had a ton of fun teaching these 8 students to become better musicians, and since the end of June, these students kept performing under the guidance of two of their parents and got paid to do it! Unfortunately, all but two of them were in grade 6 so they will be moving to the junior high. Fortunately, there is a rock band at the junior high. I started the recruiting process in March and April this year so as to have some good guitar players in the band again. There is no doubt in my mind that this year's band will improve upon their musical independence, memory,

creativity and aural skills simply due to the fact that they will be playing in a rock band. Having a rock band in one's school has so many benefits for the music department, the school as a whole and music education as a whole. Together, with all of the wonderful things that are already happening in Canadian music classrooms, including rock band(s) as a regular ensemble in schools will compliment your program and help to pave the road to a complete music education. CME

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Steve Giddings teaches K - 6 music at Montague Consolidated School in Prince Edward Island where he directs a grades 3 - 6 choir, leads a guitar club and coaches a rock band. Among other performance pursuits, he tours and performs regularly with The Sidewalks, a ska-alternative rock band based out of Prince Edward Island. Any comments or questions are welcome and can be forwarded to swgiddings@edu.pe.ca.



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