

The Bridge: Milestones!

Simon Christie

The Bridge Program at Hugh John Macdonald School has been a great success thus far. With an almost entirely new group of students to work with, we have come a long way in just a few short months together. Very few of the students have any musical training coming into the class, and many are just learning English, so communication is one of the biggest hurdles we've had to clear. The students have progressed remarkably well. We have just recently started working on Miles Davis' "Milestones" as our first tune in the regular band class.

It is encouraging to see the progress the students are making from class to class. Neil and I find great joy in the small victories of learning to read rhythms and play in time because we know that with strong fundamentals, the students' abilities will really start to take off. We try to strike a balance between focusing on

the somewhat more tedious tasks, such as sight reading rhythms, and the more enjoyable aspects of simply making music together.

At the beginning of the year we auditioned each student on all the different instruments and chose the one that they showed the most natural aptitude for. The dividends of that method are really paying off now. All of the students have developed at least a beginning level command of their instruments while some have truly excelled.

The after-school portion of the class is where we really focus on learning repertoire that we will eventually perform. The students who stay for this period are considered our Core Members and they even get a fancy sports jacket to show for it! Most of the learning during this time is done by ear and memorizing rather than reading from a page. We cover a wide variety of genres while keeping the main focus on jazz. Some of



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the tunes we have dealt with so far are "Blue Bossa," "Bourbon Street Parade," "Feeling Good," and our own reggae-styled version of the pop song, "Perfect."

A few of the students are so advanced for such a young age that I often forget they're students and find myself treating them more as fellow musicians. Many times we show them something new one class and they will come back the next class having worked it out and ready to play—that always amazes me.

Having the opportunity to teach such a diverse group of students is extremely rewarding.

Some of these individuals were born and raised in the most war-torn places on the planet, and yet they are among the kindest and most good-natured people I have ever encountered.

I find it truly remarkable and inspiring to see the resilience of the human spirit. If they learn half as much from me as I learn from them, then I think this year will have been a huge success.

■ Simon Christie

Simon Christie is a Winnipeg trumpet player. This is his second year working with students in the Bridge program.

The Bridge is an outreach program of the Marcel A Desautels Faculty of Music, and the incarnation of a long-time dream of Steve Kirby, Director of Jazz Studies. Invaluable supporters include Long & McQuade, the Asper Foundation, the Sensible Shoes Foundation, Peaceful Village, Michael Nesbitt, and several private donors.

