

Celebrating the Importance of Music Educators and the Benefits of Learning Music

Sometimes it's the small victories that add up.

For Mandart Chan, a long-time music educator and advocate, one of his biggest accomplishments in a varied music career came from being asked to officiate at a wedding for two former students.

"I came after my former mentor, who had recently passed away. She had created this amazing culture of support, and this one particular student was not too fond of me coming in because I was new and hadn't previously taught at the school."

Despite the initial resistance, Mandart's dedication and ability to connect with his students eventually won her over. "What came after those two years of working with the students was that when she and her now husband were engaged to be married, and that they came to me with not only an invitation to the wedding, but they also asked me to officiate."

For Mandart, this request was a testament to the profound impact that music educators can make. "That is my greatest accomplishment. It's not the accolades, it's not the festivals, it's not the awards. But it's the fact that these two former students said, 'We want you to be part of our special day, but we want you to be standing up there for us because it means so much.' And it means so much to me."

Saskatchewan Music Education Day on Friday, September 13, is an opportunity to recognize the impact of music educators and the numerous benefits of learning music.

Mandart Chan's approach to music education is deeply rooted in his diverse background and extensive experience. Born and raised on the lands of the Cayuse, Umatilla and Walla Walla, Stó:lō, Semiahmoo, Hul'qumi'num Treaty Group, Kwantlen, Tsawwassen, Musqueam, and Stz'uminus people, now known as Richmond, BC, Mandart identifies as a gay, cis-gender, neurodivergent, Chinese/Hong Kong-Canadian male.

His academic journey includes a Bachelor's degree in Music and Secondary Education, a Master of Music Performance (Conducting), and ongoing studies in Equity, Diversity, and Social Justice. With over 14 years of teaching experience and a role in the BC Ministry of Education, Mandart's has spent his working life fostering inclusive and equitable learning environments. He often provides his expertise to the Saskatchewan Music Educators Association (SMEA).

Music educators like Mandart Chan play a crucial role in shaping the lives of students. They are more than just teachers; they are mentors, role models, and advocates for their

students. Through music, educators provide students with a unique way to express themselves, develop essential life skills, and connect with diverse communities.

Music offers students a different way to express themselves, especially for those who might struggle with verbal communication. "Music gave me an opportunity to learn through nonverbal ways as an instrumentalist," said Mandart. "For students now, it's connecting with a different community. Not every student wants to be involved in sports or different clubs, but music is their connection."

Music education also helps students develop empathy. Playing in an ensemble requires students to be attuned to the emotions and expressions of their peers. "There's something almost supernatural when you're playing next to someone and you can sense they're having a not-so-great day. Music helps convey those feelings," he said.

Learning an instrument or singing in a choir requires discipline and teamwork. These skills are cultivated through regular practice and collaboration. "Teamwork is a huge component in ensemble music," Mandart noted. "It's you working within the group on how you can support each other. Sometimes you are the front-runner, and sometimes you are the background person."

The discipline developed through music practice translates into other areas of life. Whether memorizing a piece of music or mastering an instrument's technique, students learn the value of perseverance and attention to detail. These lifelong skills can benefit people in both their personal and professional lives.

Music education also exposes students to different cultures and perspectives. "Music is very similar to food," said Mandart. "It's the gateway to understanding the heritage of people around the world."

Mandart encourages aspiring music educators and students to pursue their dreams, and to develop a comprehensive understanding of all instruments early in their studies. "While you're in your studies to be a music educator, even before that, learn all the instruments now, find the patterns that connect all the instruments together because fundamentally speaking, they're all pretty much the same. And once you figure it out, it makes your life so much easier when you go to technical classes."

As we celebrate Music Education Day in Saskatchewan, let us recognize the invaluable contributions of music educators like Mandart Chan. Their dedication to fostering inclusive, supportive, and enriching learning environments helps students develop essential skills that will serve them throughout their lives. Learning music is not just about acquiring a new skill; it is about building empathy, discipline, teamwork, and cultural awareness.