

Mr Music in Coffs Harbour

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After working in Canberra for over 15 years, lecturing part time at the Canberra School of Music, and working in Music Curriculum development, it seemed time for a change. The opportunity arose in 1995 to establish a music department from scratch at the newly founded school, Bishop Druitt College, in Coffs Harbour, so with only two small buildings, portable toilets, 52 students and next to no budget, the task was daunting. Initially in the first 5 years here I had to teach English, history, maths, woodwork, cooking and even agriculture to justify the existence of a music teacher at all.

Coffs Harbour is situated on the mid-north coast of NSW with probably the most even climate in all of Australia. It is right on the coast at a point where the ranges come close to the sea. It is beautiful in every way. The population of the immediate region is about 65,000 and growing fast. A large proportion of the population is retirees, and many of the younger generations have come here for the relaxed lifestyle away from the relentless pressure of city life. Music, apart from a very small number of generally older people, had been on few people's agenda. On moving to Coffs I quickly came to the conclusion that there was a desperate need for something to happen in regard to getting more young people involved with "classical" music.

The school roll at Bishop Druitt has now grown to 900 students, we have a team of 3 highly qualified full time music teachers and also 7 qualified visiting instrumental tutors. Within the school 20% of students are taking lessons on an instrument or voice and we have infants, primary and secondary choirs, a fledgling jazz band, several chamber music groups and primary and secondary orchestras.

Central to my work here was the establishment of the Coffs Harbour Regional Youth Orchestra, which now has over 70 young players between the ages of 12 and 20 involved in the Orchestra and its various training ensembles. We have raised the funds to purchase orchestral percussion including pedal timpani, xylophone, bass drum and cymbals and our next task is to raise funds to buy and offer scholarships on french horns and bassoons, as these instruments are unavailable for students to learn in our region.

I have also co-founded and conduct the North Coast Camerata, which seeks to bring musicians from a wide area together to perform major orchestral and choral works that would otherwise never happen in a regional area. We have performed the Bach *Christmas Oratorio*, Handel's *Messiah*, a number of symphonies and overtures, and given young players the chance to perform as soloists in the Mozart *Clarinet Concerto*, The Binge *Saxophone Concerto* and the Haydn *Trumpet Concerto*. All 3 of these young soloists are now undertaking performance degrees at tertiary institutions.

As a classroom music teacher, I think sadly that there is a lack of understanding of the time and energy required to get students to truly understand, love and commit themselves to music. The necessary commitment of time and relationship with students is taxing, unrecognised and unsupported, while probably double that required of any other area of teaching. Also, the current obsession with productivity means that the real contribution music makes to individuals, schools and communities is being increasingly overlooked - because it is personal, it is not quantifiable in either "results" or "measurable outcomes"

However there is no denying it is truly satisfying when students do make that commitment to music.

If there is one thing I would change if I could, I would love to be better organised with all the many things that I do and to have more time to do things properly and reflect ...