

Music in the School Washington Island, WI school year 2014 -2015

September 28, 2015

Dear Friends,

We are already engaged with the new school year, although it really seems as if school let out for the summer "just last week". Perhaps that is because time seems to go ever more quickly the older I grow. Still, it is indeed good to stop and consider what was accomplished in the now concluded 2014- 2015 school year.

I have continued a three fold emphasis on

1. **music literacy**, (the study of how to read and write music),
2. of **music appreciation**,
3. and of **musical performance**.

My hope, in teaching music literacy, is that students will be encouraged to write their own music; to express their own feelings. To that end, we have worked together in the lower grades to compose music as a class project.

Older students were given the opportunity, (and they did quite well) to compose and notate their own individual compositions. In addition to notation, I work with the students both on playing the recorder and on playing simple melodies (and chords) on the piano.

This month, as Jennifer Munao, has begun her choral program at the school, I have been pleased to be able to assure her that her students do, indeed, know how to read music. I cannot help but believe that this will make it easier for Jennifer to move on more easily to more advanced elements of choral work in a shorter period of time.

Following my meeting with the Music Festival Board last spring, I have also invited Jordon Harris, who plays excellent trombone in the Community

Band, to teach two trombone students this past summer. He and I are now taking on four trumpet students. I pick the students up and we meet Jordon either at the Red Barn, during the summer, or now at the school in the early morning for lessons. (Jordon has been a music education college student in Bloomington, IL, and is quite wonderful in his handling of these students who are, as yet, mostly young male students.)

I attend the lessons and pay Jordon for his work. My thinking is that he is an accomplished brass player and is also a winsome young man. He can do a better job than can I at connecting with young boys, and he is a better brass player than I, as a woodwind player, am.

Last year I also worked with one guitar student and one voice student. We will continue with these, and there is an interest on the part of some other students as well. It is hoped that these young people may find their way into involvement with the Community Band., and eventually will be fully participating in our band program.

Their progress on their musical instruments, as is that of the choral students working with Jennifer Munao, is enhanced greatly by the fact that the Music in the School curriculum has been helping all these students to learn how to read and write music since they were in the primary grades.

Each quarter I ask each 7th and 8th grade student to list his/her favorite songs of the day from their radio or internet listings. I then download one song from each student's list and we listen to one of them before every class.

I tell them that I do this for two reasons. First, I want to know what they are listening to on their own, and secondly, I want to demonstrate to them that there is nothing they will be hearing on their electronic devices which they could not have written themselves. They have as many or more musical literacy skills as do those persons who are making the music they listen to. Often I find some of their songs already notated, and they have a go at playing the music on the piano.

Music literacy also greatly advances the capability of a student to appreciate the musical accomplishments of other people. Music appreciation allows our students to become acquainted with the musical traditions of other times and places.

In the lower grades we have worked on acting out a story, or the general feeling of some of the songs we sing, and much of the music we listen to. This has included our learning how to polka and to waltz. I have focused mostly on American music, and have taken that from various historical periods in our national story, and from various levels of sophistication.

I believe it is a good thing for our young people to have a sense of who we are as Americans, and what we have stood for in the past. Hearing music and learning songs from various American composers and genres helps to keep our young people in touch with the commonality of our American experience, "from sea to shining sea", and for over two hundred plus years.

Since I teach students that music is a language of our feelings, particularly, I ask them to identify the emotional content of the music I have them listen to, and of that which the older students choose to listen to for themselves. It is remarkable to me how universally people know what feeling they are listening to when they listen to music.

I also try to explain to the students what a privilege it is for us to share our music with other people, especially the people in our community. I try to let them know how much the older people in the community appreciate their efforts.

Each class period we spend time in vocal exercises to "warm up" before we sing, and to learn successful vocal techniques for sound production. We also do a series of exercises to strengthen our core muscle strength.

Our students perform as a vocal group at the Veteran's Day program held each November. We also perform at the community Christmas Program, held in December. The older students danced the waltz on stage during our Community Band program in November of 2014. Last school year there was not community program held in the spring for them to participate in, but generally there is.

We will see what the new school year brings. One thing I am very pleased to report is that our new school superintendent, Mr. Mati Palm-Leis, is VERY, VERY, VERY supportive of the arts, and of arts education. That is a very welcome encouragement to all that you are trying to offer this community.

I continue to be deeply grateful for your commitment to the young people of our Washington Island community. For that matter, I recognize that you have also committed yourselves to providing quality musical experiences for the entire adult population as well. "Thank you" from all of us...

Donna Briesemeister