

St. Michael Community School releases Métis fiddle album

Should any students at St. Michael Community School choose to pursue music education or a possible music career, being able to add “worked on collaborative music project with Juno Award winning artist” to an application or curriculum vitae probably won’t hurt.

Thanks to a Saskatchewan Arts Board Artist in the Schools grant, Grade 5 – 8 students have been working with Karrnel Sawitsky since November 2017 creating Métis fiddle music.

The unique Métis fiddle program at St. Michael became part of the arts curriculum at the school in 2016 thanks in large part to a donation of fiddles from award-winning artist Natalie MacMaster.

“The change in students because of this culturally-responsive program is absolutely amazing,” said teacher and fiddle program coordinator Cristin Dorgan Lee. “They don’t want to miss school on fiddle days, and that level of involvement leads to better attendance, participation and engagement in all subject areas. And to work with roles model like Karrnel, or fiddle master John Arcand, helps students see that anything is possible.”

Saskatoon-native Sawitsky has returned from his home in Toronto several times to work with students and co-compose their own songs. “Cristin and I started talking about this project about a year ago, and we had this idea for this grant. My passion is writing music, and getting the students writing music really gives them a sense of ownership,” said Sawitsky. “We’re not trying to make 60 professional fiddle players. The goal is get them excited about learning and to give them something they can be proud of. There are lessons beyond music—communication, math—and if those are the skills students take away from this experience, that’s a great thing.”

Sawitsky, Dorgan Lee and students spent a day in the recording studio at the end of May, and the school community celebrated with an official CD release party on June 15. The CD features the songs students wrote: *Coming Home* by Grade 5, *Peaceful Wind* by Grade 6, and *Jam on the Bannock* by Grade 7/8; the Métis National Anthem; and other songs composed and performed by Sawitsky and John Arcand.

This project was made possible thanks to funding from the Saskatchewan Arts Board, SaskCulture and the Government of Saskatchewan.

Images are available for media use at: https://gscsca-my.sharepoint.com/:f:/g/personal/dekunz_gscs_ca/EjnpoGei_61EoZ5k403-UfgBLoR52W74gY918yO4itIDRw?e=DP5Dsl

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