

## SDCF grant helps young Comp musicians strike the perfect chord in composition class



Conrad Jack and Kenley Kristofferson, representing the LSRCSS Jazz Ensemble, are awarded \$3,979 grant from the Selkirk & District Community Foundation through the to the Royal Blues Band Parents to purchase computers and software for composition class

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Grade 11 Comp student Conrad Jack has been in band since Grade 7, he plays a multitude of instruments, and his main is the clarinet. He's now added a new voice to his musical repertoire by taking the high school's composition class.

“What I like about composition is being able to kind of describe my own feelings through music and looking through, how as a composer we can speak in a language everyone else can hear,” Jack said.

Thanks to a Selkirk and District Community Foundation grant of \$3,976 from the Gaynor Family Fund to the Royal Blues Music Parents, Jack and the other composition students will be able to work on their music on two new MacBooks outfitted with composition-specific software.

For class instructor Kenley Kristofferson, the arrival of what amounts to two mobile work stations, is music to his ears and critical to the advancement of the growing class.

Last year there were only four students in composition – this year it's ballooned to eight students, and while that doesn't sound like a lot it is when you're trying to compose on four stationary iMac computer work stations for as many as 16 instruments.

“We're really happy the program is growing, but right now it's growing faster than we can sustain it,” said Kristofferson, himself an accomplished composer.

“With a MacBook a kid can work, goodness, at a music stand or at a desk. But with the iMacs, they are where they are and they take up a lot of space.”

SDCF president Gord Henrikson said seeing foundation funds benefit young people learning new skills is gratifying, and speaks to the heart of what the community foundation is all about.

“We’ve been talking a lot lately about new and improving and the computers and programs these funds will help purchase for the high school composition class are in perfect step with that idea,” Henrikson said.

“These young students are learning new skills on new equipment and it will make them better musicians, improving their abilities and helping them on their way to fine tuning a skill that will benefit them all their lives, no matter what professional path they choose to follow.”

According to Kristofferson, the Comp is just one of two schools in the province offering a composition class. He sees it as a crucial part of a music education, and says if the Selkirk high school is going to be a truly comprehensive high school, it’s important that composition be available to music students.

“In the music education setting right now we do a lot of playing other people’s music,” he said.

“It’s kind of a one-way conversation. With kids in the composition program, we want to try and get them creating, in the same way that we don’t just read poetry in English, we also write it, we don’t just read short stories, we write them. There’s a two-way conversation and that’s what we want to do with music.”

Composition, of course, can be done with your instrument and pencil and paper, but like many things in life, technology can improve how you do the task at hand. Especially when you’re writing parts for multiple instruments.

Kristofferson said the students’ final project for the year is to write music for every instrument in the band, including those in the woodwind, saxophone and brass families, and even percussion.

“When we have to start making parts for the whole band it becomes way too labourious to do it by hand,” Kristofferson said.

When you’re composing on the computers he said, you can hear your creations in real time, even if the notes that come out of the computer might not sound exactly like the real instrument.

“The flute mostly sounds like a flute, the saxophone sounds like a chainsaw, but it’s mostly right,” he laughed.

The software also accommodates students who prefer to compose on computer versus simply writing it down.

“It’s not so pencil and paper, it’s about playing it in.”

The grant will also allow for the purchase of a mini keyboard that plugs right into the computer and lets students play the notes into the program. It can detect how hard they strike the keys and other individual styles, and Kristofferson likes that.

“It humanizes the performance. It absolutes does, and that’s really cool.”

The Selkirk and District Community Foundation is a charitable organization that provides financial support to charitable causes and agencies in the region, which includes Selkirk, St. Andrews and St. Clements. Gifts from donors enable the Foundation to support countless groups and individuals in our community. The Foundation has given in excess of \$2.4 million to more than 125 local charities and community organizations over its 23+ years. For more details contact SDCF Executive Director Bev Clegg at 204.785.0547.