

## **Benefits of a Special Composition Project** **By Amy Klippenstein, Band Director**

For the 2020-2021 school year, it was very rewarding to find new ways for students to learn and study music. Last year, Biggar Central School 2000 and Humboldt Collegiate Institute partnered with composer Tyrone McKenzie to put together a composition premiere for the Grade 9-12 band students.

There were a few reasons why we decided to create a special project. We saw that our band engagement was suffering and that we couldn't offer the students a band trip to take learning outside the classroom. Our kids were losing interest. Not only that, but band enrollment went down, due to new scheduling conflicts with other electives and smaller band groups created by cohorting. Our instrumentation was no longer full enough to be able to perform regular repertoire, so we needed to switch to more flexible instrumentation.

After brainstorming with each other, Erika Rybinski, Tyrone Mckenzie and I (Amy Klippenstein), decided to create a project for our students designed to combat the challenges we saw. Erika and I had specific parameters, such as that our project had to have 4-5 parts with flexible instrumentation, it needed to be Grade 2 level so it could span all throughout Grade 9-12 students, and that we wanted the students to see Tyrone's composition process.

Erika and I presented our parameters to Tyrone Mckenzie, who expertly designed a composition experience for our students that fit every single one of our parameters. Tyrone exceeded our expectations and used his creativity to expand our learning opportunities outside of the classroom in a year where it was very difficult to do that.

Tyrone conducted 2 virtual workshops with each of our cohorted bands, for a total of 4 workshops per school. He talked about the pentatonic scale, working in discussions about the harmonic, melodic and rhythmic components of composing. We were so fortunate to have Tyrone working with our groups. The feedback from the students was very positive. They were ecstatic that their own pentatonic melodies and harmonies were included in the composition. One student even commented how much he appreciated Tyrone's input, especially how down-to-earth, relatable and humourous a composer was. I truly believe that before the workshop, the students didn't understand that each piece of music they played was created by a real, live person. I am convinced that their perspective of composition was transformed and that they realized that they could compose at any stage in their musical journey.

Our students were excited to connect with each other as well, and used Flipgrid as a method of creating virtual "penpals" so they could meet others they've been collaborating with from a distance. They have been so excited to introduce themselves and see who they are working with.

After our workshops were completed, Erika, Tyrone and I met with the SBA and developed a delivery strategy for our project. Suzanne at the SBA connected us with Matthew James, who added his creativity and expertise to make our premiere of the song a piece of art! Matthew has done tremendous work with our recorded videos and has made our video much more than I could have imagined it could be.

I want to publicly thank the SBA and Sask Arts Board for their financial support of the project, too, as they have blessed us with grants that have made this project possible. Thank you to all who supported us and worked so hard to make this project happen, including Erika Rybinski, Humboldt Collegiate staff and students, Biggar Central staff and students, Tyrone Mckenzie and Matthew James. Let's all continue to look for new ways to inspire our students to dig deeper and keep learning!