Music – Soothing the Human Soul

Music can calm us down, lift us up, encourage us to sing, dance and so much more. It can tell a story, relax us, soothe, and encourage us to move our body in unusual ways. Music can make us happy; it can hold healing powers and allows us to discover ourselves and connect with the world around us. Music explains things when words fail. Music speaks and brings a sense of freedom. It can profoundly affect us to the deepest depths of our being. People will travel great distances to listen to their favorite artists. Almost every day we turn on music in some form: through listening to the radio, through listening to iTunes and Spotify or through playing our own music. Music has a powerful effect on humankind. This story is how music has transformed one individual who joined our community 14 years ago and calls The Pas his home. It is how one individual chooses to share his love of music full time in a career that he loves. His love of music overflows into the community through many productions and groups that he is involved with. This is Andrews story.

Andrew Legeny was born and raised in Winnipeg in 1980, born into a Hungarian family. His parents were born in Hungary but did not know each other prior to immigrating to Canada. They resided in different parts of Hungary. When Andrew’s father András was 17 years old, he fled from Hungary to the safety of Vienna. In Vienna he earned enough money to immigrate to Canada seeking a better life for himself. In the meantime, Andrew’s grandfather (his mothers’ father)) was already working in Northern Manitoba to bring his family to Canada. Andrew’s mother, Maria Göttli, arrived with her family in Winnipeg during the early 1960s. It is in Winnipeg going to school and being involved in the Hungarian community, that his parents met, fell in love, married, and had two children, Andrew, and his sister Giselle.

Music came naturally to Andrew. When Andrew was 5 years old, he would tinker on the family piano to relieve any upsets of the day. He found that playing the piano was good therapy for him, reducing childhood stressors as a creative outlet. Andrew’s parents did not have musical abilities, but they did recognize that Andrew had plenty and quickly enrolled him in music lessons. He was influenced by multiple music teachers. He fell in love with playing the piano and trumpet. At 17 years old, Andrew opened his life to teaching piano lessons to others through *Kolt Music and Sales*.

Andrew knew that his life must involve music. Fresh out of high school, he applied and was accepted at the Brandon University School of Music. Here he completed six years of studies completing two degrees, Bachelor of Education and Bachelor of General Studies with a Major in Music. After completing his studies, he was a substitute teacher for Seven Oaks School Division for two years. In his second year as a substitute teacher, a position opened up in The Pas for a Music Teacher.

In 2006, Joyce Dugan retired from her position as the Kelsey School elementary music teacher. The division post the position on the Education Canada site and Andrew was immediately attracted to the advertisement. Prior to applying for this position, he had never travelled north of Hecla Island, Manitoba. He sensed a new opportunity. It is at this time that Andrew, Kelsey School Division and The Pas crossed paths blending Andrew’s joy of music, singing, teaching others to play an instrument, and encouraging creative movement through music with our community.

Andrew applied for the position on a Monday, interviewed on Tuesday and received a call on Wednesday that the job was his if he wanted it. As the interview was done on the phone, he decided to travel up to The Pas prior to accepting the job. He recalls being met by Julia McKay and immediately feeling good about the move, the job, and the community. He accepted and moved to The Pas in August of 2006. With his acceptance he brought his love of music, firstly as the Music Teacher at Kelsey Community School and secondly as an inspirational volunteer in many Music and Artistic productions. He instantly felt the comradery and support of administration, staff, and colleagues at Kelsey Community School. He loves his job and refers to his workmates as a second family! The staff are awesome and administrative team are supportive of the musical programming that he proposes for the young students. He offers a variety of music options for 350 plus students throughout the school year, ranging from singing, music in movement, and learning to play various musical instruments. In a typical year, Andrew offers lunchtime rehearsals for recorder club, Grade 1 & 2 choir, and Grade 3, 4 5 choir. He also offers after school programming teaching fiddle, ukulele, drumming and karaoke club.

Andrew wears many hats in the community, all of them volunteer based but essential to bringing arts, culture, music, and theatre to the local scene. He has captured the hearts of others in the community by committing to sharing his musicality with The Pas Community Choir, Aurora Singers, Theatre 53, The Pas Music & Fine Arts Festival and The Pas Arts Council. He brings with him his incredible ability to sing, dance, compose, and play many instruments. His true joy is found when he is playing the piano. Andrew has played a fascinating role in many volunteer organizations that bring much delight to local audiences.

Andrew loves being a part of the Community Choir. It is a shared respect from the audience. Business and residents absolutely love it when Andrew brings his music students Christmas Caroling in December. Andrew has a passion for organizing this event. This is one of his favorite times of the year because the cheerful singing brings smiles to many listeners faces. Every year, Andrew ensures that St. Paul’s Residence have an opportunity to enjoy the musical talents of his students playing their recorders.

As Christmas approaches, one major production that will be missed this year is the Community Choir Christmas Concert. The Christmas Concert was one of the best received events in the community. There is no hope of this popular event coming out due to the current situation with COVID-19. The carolers are sad that they cannot gather to practice.

Under the Arts Council umbrella, Andrew currently holds the position of President, chairing meetings and ensuring that The Pas Arts remain active. Andrew appreciates the day to day operational tasks of arts coordinator Debbie Howell Davidson. The Pas Arts Council are a key player in many events brought to The Pas. Recently they were responsible for organizing Culture Days. The Pas Arts Council continues to bring events such as the Prairie Theatre Exchange, The Pas Arts Council Annual Craft Sale and many entertainers and performances to the town.

Theatre 53 has been a part of the community for many years. Andrew’s love for Theatre has brought many productions to our community. In past years, Andrew was involved in acting and codirecting various plays and productions. He acted in *The Foursome*, *Having Hope at Home*, an *Alfred Hitchcock Radio Play,* and *Bedtime Stories*. Currently he has a role in the play of *Drinking Habits*, which is a story about nuns secretly making wine to save their convent. Although this play is on hold right now, the actors are rehearsing their lines at home. Andrew was a Co-Director with Kristy Dyck in three local productions: *The Pirates of Penzance*, *Anne of Green Gables* and *Rodger’s and Hammerstein’s Cinderella*. We are fortunate to have these types of theatrical productions which are always in the works and minds of the Theatre 53 group.

 Andrew was invited to perform at Carnegie Hall in New York City with the Flin Flon Community Choir and other local Northern performers. He recalls that Carnegie Hall was close to a full house. In the first act the group performed; becoming a part of the audience for the second act. He was so excited to perform in a space where the sound is crystal clear.” I could hear the music coming back to us as we were performing, crystal clear”.” It was an amazing experience, truly magical”. They were invited back last April, but as with so many other events were cancelled due to the pandemic. He has also accompanied mezzo soprano singer Rhonda Head on her award-winning albums Nikumun and Kisahkihtin. These albums translated from Cree respectively mean” To Sing” and” I Love You”. He has performed with Rhonda in various places including The Pas, Flin Flon, Winnipeg, and the Ebell Theater on Wiltshire Boulevard in Hollywood, California.

Andrew has many hobbies outside of his music life. He is a hockey fan, supporting the OCN Blizzard as a season ticket holder and enjoys watching hockey immensely. He also has organized his students to sing, “O Canada” pre-game at local OCN Blizzard games. He supports his students by attending their local hockey tournaments and cheering them on. He understands the importance of connection and encouragement with his students at school and within the community.

Andrew has a soft spot for animals. His faithful dog, named Coda keeps him exercising on a regular basis as they like to go for daily walks. Coda was a rescue dog recovered from a dumpster many years ago that Andrew welcomed into his life. Coda has reserved a spot in the heart of Andrew and receives special private performances from their home often listening while Andrew plays his acoustic piano. Occasionally Coda will critique the performance using his dog voice.

Family is exceptionally important to Andrew. In 2004, Andrew was invited by his parents to tour Hungary and discover his family historical roots. He returned in 2005 to Hungary to attend a family wedding and then took advantage of being out of Canada touring Austria, and England. Each summer when school is out, he takes the journey to visit his parents, sister, and the many people that he calls good friends living in all parts of Manitoba and across the Canadian landscapes. If anything makes him consider moving away from The Pas, it would be an opportunity to be closer to his family while supporting his love for music.

Andrew relaxes and explores the imaginary world through reading, watching movies and television. It is through his love of reading that he can slip away into another world. Although you would never expect it, he Is a fan of Stephen King, science fiction, Horror and Thrillers. As you can imagine he loves the singing shows such as The Masked Singers and America’s Got Talent. He is also a fan of The Walking Dead TV series.

Andrew is very social and some of his favorite local places to frequent In The Pas are Tim Hortons, Taviis, the Legion and Our Lady of the Sacred Heart Cathedral. He loves to enjoy a cup of coffee with the choir after practice at Timmies. He absolutely loves the food at Taviis, and he likes to join his friends at the Legion. He is a parishioner at Our Lady of the Sacred Heart Cathedral Catholic Church and often plays at mass rotating in with other musicians to cover the services. Andrew has created balance in his work life, with friends, food, and his faith. Music is what has driven his career, his friendships, and his volunteer work.

Andrew’s thinking is truly positive. He is action oriented. He believes that there are no limits; that there can never be enough music, shows, productions and performances. Although he has a few jitter bugs just prior to going on stage, he says that once he hits the spotlight, that time vanishes. It is all over in such a short time, after many hours of practicing lines, composing music, directing, producing, and accompanying. Although he has not yet created his own album, this is something that he sees himself accomplishing in the future.

 He is continually upbeat in his personality, laughing often, and always encouraging positive conversation. He is a wonderful volunteer at so many levels giving without asking for something back. He is deserving of a gold star! He has made many lasting friendships in The Pas and Flin Flon and states in his words; “I feel blessed”. He loves his job and feels supported by his workplace, and the many volunteer organizations that he chooses to be involved in.

The next time you are feeling down, pick up an instrument, sing a song, move about freely, and enjoy the beauty that the creative arts can bring to you. That is exactly what Andrew did at 5 years old. He is surrounded by everything that he loves to do and has made a career of music.

Thank you, Andrew, for sharing your story. Continue to inspire our youth and bring more incredible productions and musical events to the tri community.

Make Shift Happen