

“No Music Without Fun, No Fun Without Music” as the theme for a concert....

By Cathy DePentu

What does that even mean? Does it mean we just have fun all the time? No. Does it mean that we don't work at what we do? Absolutely not. Does it mean that I couldn't figure out a way to link all these great pieces for our upcoming concert with a theme? ...well, maybe.

But beyond that, this is a phrase that has meant a lot to me since I discovered it more than ten years ago...

Ask most of my students- I can be pretty intense about what we do together. I can be loud (but mostly harmless) and can often jump from one musical concept to another, with a strange analogy thrown in for good measure. I can be serious one moment, and march with a violin (or a stuffed horse) one moment later. We paint musical pictures. We talk about the story behind the notes, the color or shape we want to convey as we play. We start with the end product in mind, and decide together how to get there. We use the MAEIA Assessments as some of our tools for problem solving...a favorite is “Performance Critique” which gives us a common vocabulary and standard for evaluating what we hear as musicians.

After we have this color, or picture in mind, we figure out how to create it with our instruments. Bow Placement, Bow Weight and Bow Speed are the tools we have to work with, but somehow, talking about lanes of traffic on the string, sending the sound to Toledo and scrubbing the silver off the string seems to be equally effective and a bit less clinical as we work...it can even be “FUN”.

Our Chamber Music Project, also a MAEIA Assessment Task, is an activity that promotes independent musicianship, collaborative skills and the ability to use all of the skills we learn and practice in class. It is a pretty hefty playing test, culminating in a class recital, but the kids look forward to it. Once you teach students what they are listening

for, help them discover the specific tools to use and instill a willingness to be vulnerable and explore without fear of failure, they truly begin to embrace this challenge and have “FUN”. And isn’t that what learning is about?

I am in love with teaching music. I am more in love with teaching the “art-centric” process of thinking and learning. Through the art of performing we use: persistence, collaboration, creative thought, self-analysis, critical thinking and problem solving. We learn to fail and try again, to fall and get back up. We learn that doing less than your best is not an option. In short, we learn all of the skills and strategies necessary to be a productive, resourceful human being. All of these characteristics easily transfer to any profession or subject.

Whew, that was a heavy paragraph...it all comes down to one thing. We GET to make music together. We GET to have fun while we do it. We GET to be better versions of ourselves because of it. “No music without fun, no fun without music.”