

Dufferin Youth Festival of the Arts – Learning Experiences Continue

The fourth annual DYFA held on May 1 and 2, 2002

- brought on board a corporate sponsor, Carter and Associates Law Firm and
- featured musical interludes by the Westside and Orangeville Second School bands.
- Steven Campbell at the Ontario Arts Council remarked that the DFYA is unique in his opinion is that he knows of no other festival that involves public, separate, private and home schooling sectors at no charge into a non competitive venue.
- Orangeville Baptist Church opened up their chapel area for a second year in 2002 so that schools could display visual arts and the response was overwhelmingly enthusiastic.
- David Nairn led us in our new mass choral piece composed by Wendy Pound.
- Once again, volunteers like Kathy Ayliffe, Val Scorgie, Elizabeth Campbell, Carol Vastag, Lilla Fodor, Maryan Angus, Kathryn Matzov, Sandy Harron, Sharon Mullins and Joan Borden welcomed students and teachers to the event and its logistics. Yes, the DYFA story is about being blessed by volunteers who have caught the vision.

Responses from students lead us to question what ways we can improve arts experiences in Dufferin. Students from Princess Margaret have written us each year to cheer us on and one story we'll always remember is when their students asked for 40 audience seats on a day they didn't perform, just to be a part of the entire festival. The students in paid that instance for the bussing themselves! A PMPS student in grade seven wrote, *"Thank you very much for the wonderful time at the Festival. Also thank you for letting us open with O Canada. I have been at the festival three years now and every year it becomes more enjoyable. I may be at the festival next year with the high school band, hopefully."* This young man's letter alludes to ways in which the festival may be impacting students and their decisions about courses at the high school level. Does the DFYA experience allow grade eight students, as they wonder about grade nine high school elective courses, to choose in a more informed way? Do many elementary students have opportunities to attend high school student performances of improv, drama guitar classes, jazz ensemble and bands? One student told us that she was particularly impressed by the fact that not only did she get to find out what high school 'improv' was, she remembers that those improv students listened to her performance as well. She was proud to perform! Some students do not have many opportunities to perform in front of audiences. Is performance valuable? How often do students from different school sectors sing *O Canada* together? The festival encourages that audience respectfully listen quietly to students from other school communities and what they are sharing. How many opportunities do most students have in this respect?

May 2003 expanded into a third morning of celebration - Mary Runciman, career educator at Mono and Amaranth writes, *"The Dufferin Youth Festival of the Arts is celebrating its seventh year. Starting as a community driven initiative, the festival has now become a tradition. It brings together private, public, separate elementary and secondary students and teaching staff to share the experiences of their arts program. Classroom and/or group performances remain the focus. The celebration is truly diverse – each morning of the three day festival is unique. Schools are allotted approximately seventeen minutes to organize on the stage, perform and return to their seats."*

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A secondary school principal new to 2003 Dufferin culture wrote, *"I did have the opportunity to visit the program not once but twice. I did get to see my students from the Jazz ensemble and also the girls who were videotaping. Again i must say how impressed I was. On the two occasions I was there, I got to see the ending piece performed. On the second day, I brought with me my coordinator for commencement to hear the piece of Celebration. What a splendid ending. Thanks. . .It was truly amazing. All the best"*

2004 DYFA – A fourth morning is made possible! Bernadette Hardaker joined David Nairn, Theatre Orangeville's artistic director, as an emcee. Bernadette has worked for CBC Radio as a native affairs specialist, an environmental commentator, a consumer columnist and a producer, on network and regional programs across Canada. She senses along with other volunteers that the DYFA is a story that other communities need to hear.

The teachers, principals and administrators of Dufferin share a special place in the unique and powerful event that has brought energy and opportunity to the students of Dufferin. The heart beat of the DFYA is people assessing needs sensitively and suggesting appropriate support strategies. Teachers welcomed the idea and were willing to give it a try. Principals let us give it our best shot. Personal determination still makes a difference in the education of our children, even during days of phenomenal change and challenge.

Orangeville Baptist Church must be mentioned at this point. They partnered to provide the best 600 person auditorium in the county with a terrific sound team. This is offered at a token fee. In no small way this has allowed the volunteers to focus primarily on arts opportunities, not fundraising. The impact cannot be underestimated.

In 2004, not only did PMPS students write us, their primary students drew illustrations of their experiences and the delightful artwork captured our hearts. Several pieces were used in the posters for DYFA 2005 but the impact would reach beyond what we had ever dreamed. We marveled at the way the pictures expressed aesthetic experiences in a special way. Why were their drawings so captivating?

We went onto DFYA 2005 knowing that schools were providing and sharing learning Beyond arts curriculum criteria. This sense of purpose and vision might be best expressed in the words teachers passed onto the emcee to be read before their performances. The texts hint at the potential that is possible when we can share, model and influence each other when we gather as community

"Let us hold onto each other" is a song that talks about working together to make the world a better place. It was composed by Dale Wood of Georgetown, who is the director of the Achill Choral Society. He wrote "Let us hold onto each other" in response to the 9/11 disaster and sold the recording as a fundraiser to help victims of war in Afghanistan. It was also performed at Credit Meadows in an assembly to honour the victims of the recent tsunami.

Know that the beauty of those moments when the children sang that anthem is something that must be experienced. Felt. Absorbed. The arts connect us in ways nothing else can. What are we learning about the arts in the DYFA? Why do we remember these moments in ways that defy description in words? When aesthetic experience defies words or explanation, does this make the moments of connection less important than other teaching moments? How can we use the arts in our education communities to prepare our children for Canadian society a decade from now? What have we done to explore how this is done well with the arts? You'll sense some of what we mean if you ever have a chance to view the DFYA DVD highlights.