

Renaissance Music Man - A Teacher Profile of Paul Cummings

By Gerry Brach, Brooks Secondary School Counsellor



Although he is passionate about music, Brooks teacher, Paul Cummings doesn't let music define who he is! Outdoor activities such as sailing and world travel are also a big part of Paul's life. Paul started playing the trombone, when he was in Grade 6 at Grief Point Elementary School. He really wanted to play the trumpet, but his band teacher at the time, said he could get a better sound out of the trombone. Paul continued playing the trombone throughout his high school years and he also loved playing in the school jazz band. While in high school, Paul spent three summers at Courtenay

Music Camps where he was exposed to world class jazz. By Grade 10, he knew that he wanted to pursue music as a career. During 1986 Paul took a year off from his Bachelor of Music Program at UBC to play professionally at Expo 86. When the year was over, and music opportunities were few and far between, Paul decided to become a teacher. "You are literally married to your job as a professional musician. Teaching looked more inviting as it was exciting to think about the caliber of music that Powell River teachers were getting out of their students and I wanted to be part of that. It was also an opportunity for me to continue to play and improve my skills as a musician." said Paul.

Paul credits Dave Robbins as someone who had a great influence in his life. "This man was a world class trombone player and an incredible teacher who inspired a lot of people. He was like a guru for all the young jazz musicians of my era." Paul is also thankful for his parents support in recognizing his musical abilities. "My father, Hank, drove me to Vancouver once a month for two years for trombone lessons when I was in Grade 11 and 12."

In spite of COVID, Paul's school year has been excellent so far. "The down side is that I don't have as many students as normal, and we have lost the opportunity to perform live or to travel. On the upside, all of my classes have made fabulous progress. It has also been beneficial to have more time to reflect on what is most important for my students, my program and myself."

Although Paul is in the twilight of his teaching career, he is highly motivated to come out of COVID and get the Brooks music program "firing on all cylinders" again.

When Paul is not involved with music, he enjoys sailing his thirty-foot sailboat with his wife, exploring the West Coast. When Paul eventually retires, he plans to do more travelling, sailing and further developing the Townsite Jazz Festival.

His advice to students wanting to improve their musical skills is: "Listen to lots of music. If you want to be a Jazz musician, listen to Jazz every day and practice, practice, practice."

