



As the current state chapter chair for ASME (Australian Society for Music Education), a K-10 Arts teacher and passionate advocate for excellence in music education, it has long been my desire to assist in uniting music educators from all parts of the state and across all areas of the music education. I strongly believe that the best educators are also actively engaged in lifelong learning! My recent appointment to the position of TASME chapter chair and near completion of my Masters in Education (UTAS) has only fuelled my desire to be challenged, better informed and to lead by example in this regard. It was with this in mind that I applied for and received one of the NEAT scholarships on offer in 2011. The generous funding it afforded enabled me to attend the XVIII ASME National Conference which was held on the Gold Coast in July.



## **ASME XVIII National Conference 2011**

### **Making Sound Waves:**

**Diversity**

**Unity**

**Equity**

A national conference of any description is always an enticing vehicle for learning and growth. Such conferences provide exciting opportunities for presenters, delegates and the organisations that run them. As a general rule they are packed with workshops, lectures, papers, keynote addresses, forums, opportunity for networking and a good smattering of social activity. The ASME XVIII National Conference was no exception. This year's National conference was entitled *Making Sound Waves: Diversity, Unity, Equity*, and it delivered precisely what it promised. Arriving on the Gold Coast from the depths of a freezing Tasmanian winter it was wonderful to feel the warmth of the sun and enjoy the sound of waves crashing below my 17<sup>th</sup> story apartment. But this was by no means the extent of sound waves! Over the next five days issues of diversity, unity and equity were explored through a variety of workshops, keynote presentations and collegial discussions.



The opening address by Dr Robert Duke (Marlene and Morton Meyerson Centennial Professor and Head of Music and Human Learning at the University of Texas, Austin) provided an excellent platform for launching the conference theme. In his address he brought us back to the heart of why we do what we do. His thought provoking insight into human learning and behaviour was both confronting and affirming. Through countless anecdotes and examples he reminded us to hold on to everything that is important in education and the arts, and to avoid conforming to institutional demands at the expense of teaching for life. His comment that we should throw out half the curriculum so that the other half is taught with meaning and understanding was indicative of his passionate belief that learning is about understanding and life.

The conference also provided a series of forums which allowed delegates to explore the impact of Australian



National Curriculum on Arts Education. It quickly became evident that rumours, misnomers and fear abounded. Jay McPherson (ASME immediate past president) and Andrew Reid (ASME XVIII National conference co-convenor) were able to provide up to date information while engaging delegates in discussion on practical and philosophical issues on this very current and important aspect of music education.



Through trade displays, presentations and carefully designed workshops, delegates had an opportunity to explore technology and it's ever increasing impact on music education. Katie Wardrobe (*Music Technology resources on a Shoe String*), Bruce Pearson (*Effectively using Technology in Beginning and Development Band Classes*) Dr William Baker of the University of Tasmania (*Fully on-line teaching and learning in pre service teacher unit in music education*) and Bradley Merrick (*Emerging Technologies – valuing what students think now and into the future*) were just some of the inspirational and informative speakers on this topic. Central to all of the presentations on technology was the message that (a) as educators we must explore and understand the technology before we use it with our students, and (b) technology is a tool which can both support and enhance music education – it is not a means or objective in itself.

A short report such as this could not possibly acknowledge or do justice to the breadth and depth of learning opportunities on offer at the ASME XVIII National conference. And yet, despite all these wonderful experiences it is the small moments, the snapshots in time that continue to linger well after the conference is over: meeting and reacquainting with colleagues and friends, past and present; watching the nervously excited faces of students in performance; listening to Laura Hassler (Musicians without borders) passionately explain the power of music to unite communities torn apart by civil unrest and turmoil; listening to a huge range of performances groups and once again reaffirming that what we do here in Tasmania is up there with the best of Australia; watching the dynamics of a community which formed overnight and worked together for a common purpose in just four short days.



For me, the ASME XVIII National Conference was an amazing opportunity for learning and growth on so many levels. It was inspiring and confronting, hard work and relaxing. It was everything a good conference should be! It was also everything a good music conference should be – a mix of research and practicality, academics and classroom teachers, efficient organisers and co-operative delegates, good colleagues and great coffee. Most importantly it was a community of people who sensed that music is far greater than a mere subject area to be examined.

I conclude with a timely quote by Dr Robert Duke. It's a little lengthy, but it sums up wonderfully why music should always be about the music

“After watching instrumental music teaching in our professional lives over the past 30 years, we’ve come to the conclusion that many teachers’ approaches to instrumental music instruction go something like this: Get students to make a sound, any sound, on their instruments; then teach them to play 7 or 8 notes; teach them to start notes with the tongue; teach them to play a few different rhythms in common time; teach them to play softly when there’s a *p* and loudly when there’s an *f*; tap their feet to the beat of the music (or some approximation of the beat); count rhythms using some syllabic coding system; clap rhythms as they count; follow the conductor; breathe only at phrase endings; match one or two pitches to an electronic tuner. Are all these good goals? Sure they are. Anything missing? Lots. Music’s missing. And expression. And beauty of sound. And melodic intonation. **Our priorities are beauty and expressiveness.** Students must come to believe that a melody isn’t learned until it’s *played beautifully and expressively.*”