



## A conversation with Taylor Schmidt

with Anna Harrison

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Taylor Schmidt holds the degree of Bachelor of Science with a Major in Music Education from the University of Mary (2003). While at Mary, Taylor was a member of the University of Mary Jazz Ensemble, Wind Ensemble, Concert Band and Brass Choir.

Taylor started his teaching career at Springfield Middle School in Oakbank where for 7 years he directed over 270 students in the Grade 6, 7 and 8 Concert Bands, Wind Ensemble and Jazz Band. Taylor is currently the Music Director at the Dauphin Regional Comprehensive Secondary school in Dauphin Manitoba, a position which he has held for the past 8 years. With over 160 students in the band program, he co-directs the three concert bands and three jazz bands at the DRCSS. The DRCSS bands have participated in festivals throughout Manitoba, Saskatchewan and North Dakota where they have received numerous awards. Taylor has also adjudicated at the MBA Level One Band Festival, Virden Festival, and has directed the Louis Riel, Wesman, Parkland/Norman Honour Bands, Eastman Interlake Honour Band, and the Manitoba Provincial Junior Honour Band.



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### **A: Give us a brief synopsis on how you became a music educator.**

T: My first taste of being a music teacher was in high school, as a trumpet clinician at the Parkland Honour Band for Kevin Doell. That experience triggered in me an interest in teaching music. I had been thinking of different paths but I auditioned at UMary in Bismarck, ND, was accepted and got a scholarship to go there. That helped me make my decision.

### **A: Where and when were you born?**

T: I was born August 11, 1980 in Bismarck, ND. Both of my parents are alumni from UMary.

### **A: Can you describe your early experiences with music?**

T: Music has been in my life, my entire life. Before I was born, my mom was running a piano studio out of our house and to this day she is still teaching piano. I started taking piano with her at age 4. I thought this was the norm, I thought everyone grew up like that! I kept playing piano and started playing the trumpet in band in junior high.

### **A: Where did you grow up and where were you schooled?**

T: I grew up in Dauphin, MB. My parents moved to Dauphin before I was one year old for work. They were both teachers.

**A: Who and what inspired you to become a music teacher?**

T: That first trumpet clinician experience really helped me decide. I was thinking more about performance before that either in piano or trumpet. Jazz band took me in the direction of trumpet rather than piano. UMary had a fantastic jazz program. I continued taking lessons on classical piano in university just for my own interest.

**A: Where did you first start teaching music?**

T: My first job was at Springfield Middle School (SMS) in Oak Bank, MB, co-teaching with Kevin Doell. At UMary, we only had one, 12-week student teaching placement that I did at SMS. Kevin was one of my first band teachers and taught me private trumpet lessons in Dauphin, so I was able to set that up with that connection. I just got lucky in that first year that they had an opening, Kevin went to bat for me and they hired me!

**A: Is your family also involved in music?**

T: My mom still teaches piano and was involved in music. She was a piano player, oboist, music and band teacher for 30 years. My dad was a gym teacher, and actually played college basketball at UMary. I played a lot of sports growing up and currently coach varsity volleyball at the DR, so I think I got the best of both worlds from both of my parents! My children Anna (11), Thomas (9) and Claire (6) all take piano lessons from grandma. Anna has completed grade 3 piano exam and started clarinet at Mackenzie Middle School this year. Lots of trumpet, clarinet, and piano going on at our house! My wife is a pianist and played in band in school as well.

**A: Who are/were important musical & educational inspirations for you?**

T: My mom, obviously, had a big influence in the very early days. Kevin Doell and Roger Mantie were my biggest influences later on. Roger had started the band program in 1991 in Dauphin and he taught me in grade 7 in 1992, and Kevin Doell taught me in grade 8. Roger moved to the high school and also taught me at the high school for one year in grade 9. I got to play in the senior jazz band and in the grade 9 concert band under his direction. Looking back, they had a huge role in my musical development. I got to see two young band directors that were right out of college and fired up!

From a playing perspective, my most inspirational experience happened in grade 9. We were invited to MusicFest in Calgary and we went with the grade 9 concert band, senior concert band and senior jazz band. Our grade 9 band was the only group to receive 3 golds from the adjudicators. The other bands had silver ratings but we were the only ones who got a gold rating from all 3 adjudicators. I think even Roger was surprised! We were a ragtag band, but we could play. I still remember that performance and I still talk about it with my classmates that were in the band with me. It made me proud and made me want to keep on playing. I would love to provide that experience for my students.

**A: What advice do you have for younger directors or recent graduates?**

T: I know it sounds cliché, but be patient and work hard. Hard work never goes unnoticed by anyone - students, staff, parents, admin. Be patient because change takes time. Young teachers are very excited, but things need time to grow. Whatever situation you walk into, be patient and allow things time to develop into what you want it to be.

**A: You have taught junior high and high school band over the years. What are the similarities and differences when directing these different age groups?**

T: I taught junior high for 7 years and high school for 8, so I've had experience with both! In my experience, they are equals in opposite ways - junior high kids are so excited and have so much energy and want to play and play - but you can only do a few pieces of music or notes at a time. The high school is the opposite. They have so much going on in their lives, they don't have that same energy because it's spread out. But on the other hand, you get to play a lot more music! In junior high you play 5 notes in 2 months and in high school you play 5 tunes in 2 months. The one similarity is that they are all still kids. They are learning so much and are so much fun to work with, whether they are 11 or 18.

**A: What is a memorable experience from your teaching career? (A favorite concert or trip story, teaching moment etc)**

There are so many, but the one that really stands out is when we went to the Bemidji State Jazz Festival in 2016. I still have students who talk to me about that trip. When we were coming home, we were travelling on some bad roads. When we crossed the border at Emerson, the roads were closed. We had to go to the Emerson Community center where there were about a hundred other people stranded there, waiting for the weather to clear. The kids were worried but they started talking to people and before we knew it, their instruments and gear were unloaded off the bus and both jazz bands played their entire set for all the people in the community hall. There were human stands, human drum sets, pots and pans. If they didn't have it, they figured it out! We eventually got out of there and were able to drive home that night. The next week, letters to editor were in the Winnipeg Free Press from some of the folks that were stranded at Emerson of how thankful they were to hear the kids play! Talk about team building! You can't plan for those things, but they are usually the most memorable.

**A: Do you feel it is important for teachers to get involved in associations like the MBA & MMEA? Why or why not?**

T: Absolutely! I was involved when I lived near Winnipeg. The opportunity to network and collaborate with the other band teachers in Manitoba is so valuable. The other great part is that your voice gets heard. They are so good at listening to all of the directors from all over Manitoba and you have a chance to influence what's going on in the Manitoba band community and how we're teaching band.

**A: How has the MBA supported your teaching career?**

T: The opportunities - the PD, the festivals, the honour bands and most importantly for me when I was getting started, the networking. You put faces to names and build connections. Everyone was so supportive and wanted you to be successful. As a young teacher I was blown away by that.

**A: What is the value of being able to participate in a school band program?**

T: This is such a huge question! One of the most common things I hear from my student's parents is about how they didn't have the opportunity to learn an instrument when they were young. Band is also a place where you can find your people. I think it was Fraser Linklater who said that at a Parkland Norman honour band and it reminded me how important that is. A band room can become that place where students feel like they belong and connect themselves to it. Parents always say they wish they had

that opportunity. A place to go and be yourself. I have had lots of students come back and tell me that if it wasn't for the band room, they wouldn't have had such a positive experience in high school. My principal said to me once that he has noticed all the schools that have great cultures have two things in common - a strong band program or a strong football team or both. Football rosters are so big and inclusive it becomes another way for someone to find their people.

**A: You were the guest conductor of the Manitoba Junior Honour Band in 2016. What was that experience like for you?**

T: That was unbelievable! A career highlight. I had watched my more experienced colleagues rehearse the provincial groups and I used to watch the concerts when I lived in Winnipeg. It was something I really wanted to do, and I was so honored when I was asked to do it. When you're teaching junior high, you finally get them really going in grade 8 then they leave you! When I had the chance to run that group, it was such a treat. I think I may have had more fun than the kids did! When would I ever have 8 french horns in my band?? The other amazing part was the opportunity to conduct in front of all of your colleagues. Even though I've done a lot of concerts, I didn't know what to expect or how I was going to feel. But I felt such a welcoming feeling and a feeling of support from both the students looking up at me and audience watching me. I was reminded of when I saw Darrell Chrisp conduct the provincial junior group years ago, she was talking to the audience and described working with this group as, "It's the feeling of someone giving you the keys to a Ferrari." That's what that band was! Outstanding musicians, outstanding kids. Career highlight!

**A: Is there anything you would like to share with the Manitoba band community?**

T: Keep being awesome!!

**A: As a guest conductor and festival adjudicator, what are some trends that you have noticed over the years about band programs?**

T: I've done honour bands, level one festivals, and small community festivals and overall, I feel that bands are getting better. Especially at the level one level, they are sounding better across the province. Every time I go to a festival, everyone is doing so well. I think that's a testament to the MBA and the support they give us, as well to all the teachers and how much they genuinely care. They want their students to do well. I just think we're all getting better!