



## A conversation with Donna Wryha

with Jennifer Shead

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### An Interview with Donna Wryha

Donna was born in Winnipeg on May 10, 1960, and was raised in East Kildonan. She received her Bachelor of Music in 1982, and her Certificate of Education in 1983, both from the University of Manitoba. Early on, she played the clarinet, alto and tenor saxophones and tuba, and was on the executive committee of the Kildonan Community Concert Band under the baton of Monty Schoen and Marilyn Bourbonnais. She played the clarinet for one season in the Winnipeg Winds, under the baton of Orv Anderson. She has adjudicated in the Agassiz Festival of the Arts (for recorder), and more recently has enjoyed working with other instructors involved in the Eastman/Interlake Honour Band program. She currently plays the clarinet in the Eastman Community Concert Band under the direction of Peter Hayward and trumpet in the Pinawa Stage Band under the direction of Sandy McDowell. She is also a regular attendee at the International Peace Gardens summer band camp for adults, where she plays under the baton of Cheryl Ferguson in the advanced band, and under the direction of John Darling in the jazz band. Donna recently retired from teaching in the Whiteshell School District in June 2017.

### Could you provide a brief history of your career as a band director?

I started teaching band in 1983 in the River East School Division, first at Morse Place Junior High then River East Collegiate. This was followed by a year teaching general music at Immaculate Heart of Mary School before accepting a position that would last 27 years. This was at Pinawa Secondary School and F. W. Gilbert Elementary School in the Whiteshell School District. For two of those years it also involved a third school, W.B.Lewis Elementary School. I was the itinerant music teacher from 1990 to 2017.

### What have you been up to since retirement?

Since retiring, I have been substitute teaching in the two schools in Pinawa, in all subject areas and grade levels. I have remained an active supporter of the school music program, particularly by staying on the Pinawa Band Aid Executive. Personally, I have made a daily routine for myself of regular exercise and other activities. I continue to play in the Pinawa Stage Band and Eastman Community Concert Band, and enjoy more frequent trips to Winnipeg, visiting family.

### What is a challenge you have encountered as a band director and how did you overcome that challenge?

I have had the challenge of being the only teacher of music in my division. Although the community has been huge in its support of the arts, including a local community band and stage band, some needs I felt were left wanting. Only since the formation in 2015 of the Eastern Interlake Honour Band Committee of regional band teachers have I felt a real and lasting connection to others in my field. Talking to others about programs, challenges and successes reassured me about the things I was also promoting.

**How has the Manitoba band scene changed in the last 35 years from your perspective?**

Since 1983, Manitoba bands have remained vital but smaller, and supported by most. The addition of more accessible events across the province, such as the Eastman Interlake Honour Band, are making it possible for young musicians to play together as a community. There is less isolation of band programs in rural areas, which is so crucial when faced with declining enrollment.

**What was the most rewarding part of your time as a band director?**

April 26, 9:00 a.m., 2010, Winspear Centre for Music, Edmonton, Alberta, Cantando Music Festival. All 3 of my children, Matt (1st Trumpet), Sarah (Bass Clarinet), and Adam (Trombone) were a part of the Pinawa Secondary Concert Band, performing "Fire Dance" by David Schaeffer. One of our chaperones (and former concert band member) replied that he was completely awed by our "flawless" performance. Everything just seemed to come together, musically, emotionally and personally. It is a time my 3 adult children and I still talk about to this day.

**What are your top 5 concert band pieces of all time?**

"Irish Tune From County Derry and Sheperd's Hey" by Percy Grainger; "Three Ayres from Gloucester" by Hugh M. Stuart; "Concert Variations" by Claude T. Smith; "Creed" by William Himes; "Fire Dance" by David Schaeffer; and "Tu Ungane" by Scott Watson (honourable mention: last piece I conducted).

**From your perspective, what is the number one thing we should be teaching kids about music?**

Play to perform. Learn your craft well enough to hopefully inspire others to want to join in. Stay the course. Learn to play with good tone, rhythm, phrasing, dynamics and technique. Have as many mini performances as possible for one or more to hear. Record yourself often. Listen and give yourself and others feedback. Be your own audience first if you want to play in front of an audience.

**What is the best piece of advice you could give to a young band director in Manitoba?**

Get into the students' classrooms and involve yourselves if at all possible in learning something new along with them. It could be reading a student novel, learning a new dance, song lyrics, sport or new instrument, etc. Show that you are human, and a life-learner. This is what you should want for each of your students.

**Is there anything you are really passionate about that you want to communicate?**

Play in a band. Do not let an instrument collect dust if you have an opportunity to play it. Life-long learning is key to a long, happy life.