

Ashleigh Smith celebrates performance through an exciting school recital series...

Why a recital program?

Music plays an important role in our social, cultural, aesthetic and spiritual lives. At an individual level, music is a medium of personal expression. Through my experience developing a recital program in a comprehensive public high school, I have found that it has provided a platform for students to showcase their abilities in performance and to grow as a musician, with benefits to HSC results, confidence and personal development of the students involved.

At my school, Keira High School, music has always been an important focus, and the Recital Program has provided the school community with the opportunity to celebrate the success of a range of individual and group performances. Inspired by the renowned composer Antonio Vivaldi and his signature suite, *The Four Seasons*, the program builds into the school calendar a series of recitals to be held annually. These four celebrations of musical talent take the name of each season, reflecting Vivaldi's work and connecting the school community to the individual performers and to the world of classical music beyond the classroom.

Such events allow students to hone a vast array of collaborative and organisational skills through direct engagement in decision-making around aspects such as staging, programming, rehearsal schedules, technical support and performance delivery. A scope and sequence of learning activities supports students to negotiate the decision-making required of them to work towards delivery of these events. Associated student self-evaluations and teacher observation assessment documents also provide feedback on the development of problem-solving abilities and the impact of this on the quality of each event. Combined with audience responses to these programs, it is clear that our program has been successful in building these key capabilities within our music students.

Curriculum beyond the classroom

A school's curriculum can be enhanced by the inclusion of quality learning experiences provided to students beyond the classroom and syllabuses. Whilst there can be many competing priorities, delivery of music programs, which are inclusive, well-resourced and sustained, should be a significant focus at all schools to ensure a sufficiently broad and culturally rich curriculum. This is especially true for schools serving disadvantaged communities.

At Keira, our band program connected to the recitals boasts high levels of participation of students, with some 35 students from Years 7 to 12 performing in a variety of contexts, both within and outside of the school community. We think this popularity comes from providing a supportive learning environment that allows students to explore music in a culture that values the importance of making mistakes, seeking feedback, and planning for future success. Most importantly, our music program has allowed a wide range of students to enjoy exceptional success as part of a quality band, as the statement below from Year 11 student, Lola Sossai, who joined the Recital program in 2018 and featured at the Summer Recital in 2019 as the leading musician, attests:



Let's Play!

Benefits of Music Recitals



Recitals build character, resilience, friendships and can benefit one's happiness immensely. I never liked to sing in front of people, I loved to play the drums and guitar and hoped it would bring a smile to someone's day. The ongoing support from music teachers and students helped me learn to love singing in front of people. You create memories, you create moments, and you can maybe leave a recital stage, having inspired someone with the same potential they didn't know existed.

Overcoming challenges for performers

It is important to acknowledge that the COVID-19 pandemic we are living through has affected our program, and we were unable to run live events in 2020. During the last week of Term 2, this year our Winter Recital was modified and performed to selected class groups; a change that was decided upon very last minute. The Recital ran in school hours and was filmed and sent to parents, carers and performers via a YouTube link. It was important for me that the students had this opportunity to showcase the hard work they had put in over the term, and it also taught students the importance of innovation in the performing arts.

More than external factors, since the beginning of our program, it has been clear that the biggest obstacle for students is performance anxiety. Most students in the 2018 Recital Program had never performed for their classmates, let alone their parents, teachers and friends. As a performer myself, I understood the necessary tricks needed before a performance, which included being prepared and limiting self-doubt. A student will typically feel more confident in their performance if there has been substantial preparation before the recital. So, leading up to what we call 'show week' there are numerous rehearsals at lunch times and after school. As a teacher, this might appear to be a lot more work. However, what initially appears to be a substantial increase in workload actually provides the platform for student growth in creativity and self-expression and makes future teaching more efficient and effective. A rehearsal does not only provide students time to practise a piece, but also has social benefits which build rapport between students and across year groups, which makes the classroom environment more positive too.

Last notes

Performing is a major element of the arts, and the Recital program provides students with the platform to aim higher. Creating this opportunity for students to perform on stage, with a program and audience brings many benefits. Our Recital Program has built the confidence of many students and increased their skills, contributing to the development of each child. Creating a program that has built student confidence has positively impacted my classroom. Not only has it given students the chance to strive toward excellence in the performing arts, it also regularly brings our community together to celebrate the successes of our students through music.

Ashleigh Smith teaches Music at Keira High School where she initiated the development of a framework to successfully re-establish the importance of a school band and to provide the learning and organisational structures to support it. Ashleigh has been teaching for five years and co-ordinates the intermediate and beginner Concert Band, advanced Stage Band, Choir and upcoming string and woodwind ensembles as well as the professional experience program between the school and universities.