

# indian hill **music**

**Evening of Gratitude – November 13, 2021**

**Remarks -- Ryan Solero, District Music Facilitator, Lawrence Public Schools**

Good evening! My name is Ryan Solero and I am the District Music Facilitator for the Lawrence Public Schools. I'd like to tell you some reasons why I love working in Lawrence.

I love working in Lawrence because of students like Gaby. Gaby is a firecracker, strong-willed and determined. She came to the United States from the Dominican Republic only nine months before I met her, and she was already determined to become a professional singer. Without any formal training or access to private lessons, there wasn't a lot of opportunity in Lawrence for Gaby to chase her dreams.

During the chaos of open gym immediately following MCAS, Gaby snuck over to my room and without giving me much of a choice, sat down at the piano and asked, "Do you know the song 'Beauty and the Beast?'" When I said yes, she instantly said, "Ok, sit down, you can play piano and sing the harmony." Her confidence was staggering. So - I put my hands on the keyboard - and Gaby let out a voice that was so full, so rich, and well beyond her years. Without any formal training in school, this is what she can do. I was so struck by her potential that I wanted to do anything I could to help her develop her skills.

This is what it feels like to work in the Lawrence Public Schools.

It was not long before Gaby started introducing me to some of her friends. There was Helpy, and his brother Huangel, both of whom could play any instrument you put in front of them with remarkable ease and skill. I'd learn later that their father, Helpy, attended the National Conservatory of Music in Dominican Republic. At home, he would often fill up glasses with different levels of water, hit them with a spoon, and ask them what note he was playing. Additionally, their mother, Leidy, was also a singer and performer and they often would perform as a family locally.

There was also Juan - who I quickly came to learn could play the bass line to any song by ear - in real time. And this was just the beginning. Every year I would meet students like Gaby, Helpy, Huangel, and Juan - and every year I know that they will need more than our school is able to provide.

Enter Indian Hill Music School. Indian Hill Music has been an incredible partner for the music department at Lawrence High School. Unlike other similarly sized districts, Lawrence has no middle school instrumental feeder program. To help fill that gap, for half a decade, Indian Hill helped provide group and private lessons, which has helped students to improve their skills exponentially. When our orchestra program was struggling to get off the ground, Indian Hill invited Lawrence students to be part of award-winning cellist Mike Block's masterclass. Our orchestra students were blown away! When our orchestra teacher, who was brand new to teaching, was struggling with classroom management, Indian Hill used their network to connect us with the incredible curriculum coach, Daniel Levin, to help model and provide feedback that helped him improve his practice tremendously. During the pandemic, when Lawrence lost all of their ensembles for a year and a half, it was Indian Hill (namely, Pete Robbins) who helped hire a music educator to lead two sections of Beatmaking and Hip Hop songwriting - one of the most popular music electives we offer at Lawrence High School.

To illustrate the effect this partnership has had on our students and teachers, I'd like to share some remarks from the Indian Hill teachers who have had the opportunity to work with our students.

From Dr. Eileen Yarrison, the flute teacher for our concert band:

*For the last 2 years, I've been going to Lawrence High School, working with the beginner flutists in the 9th grade band and the flute section of the Grade 10-12 band. Laylali was a 9th grader who wasn't having much success making a good tone. In our class, I asked to see her flute, only to discover that the instrument needed some small adjustments. I was able to do this for her, and her tone changed immediately! The other students were intrigued by the idea that I could repair a flute, which led to a lively conversation about the possibility of flute making and repair as a career. I also remember the day I brought the alto, bass, and contrabass flutes to LHS, did a short workshop with a few of the players, and then THEY demonstrated the instruments to their band colleagues. They were so proud of themselves, and confident to show what they learned in a short time.*

From Ms. Ellie MacPhee, teacher of Beatmaking and Hip Hop Songwriting over Zoom:

*Teaching during this time was wild. Things were scary and uncertain in the world, and Zoom was tough to get used to. I loved the mutual understanding of what was going on and how we should treat each other in music class. There were days that were hard for the students, and days that were hard for me. We all supported one another through music. These students gave me a lot of energy during the pandemic. It was really powerful to see the growth in student engagement by the end of the year. Beat Making essentially went from 2 people turning on their microphones and nobody turning on their cameras to everyone turning both on and interacting with one another.*

Kevin Fortunato, enrichment teacher of Bucket Drumming at the Guilmette Complex described his students as they began to realize their potential:

*I guess for me it's the smile that appears on the faces (noticeable in their eyes because they're wearing masks of course) of students as they realize that they actually can play what I'm asking them to do - it's the first sign that they are now starting to believe in their ability to learn and grow within our subject.*

As you can see, working with Pete and Indian Hill Music School has allowed us to dream-- and to dream big. What if we could get an instrument into the hands of as many Lawrence Public School students as possible at a young age? What would that do for their cognitive development, sense of self, and love for music and the arts? What would that mean in terms of the quality of the music program at the high school once those kids age up? With your support and donations, we can continue the great work we have started to make so many of these dreams a reality for the students of the Lawrence Public Schools.

Thank you so much for inviting me to be part of your Evening of Gratitude. A very special thank you to Catherine Coleman, Pete Robbins, and the staff at Indian Hill Music School. Thank you for everything you have done for Lawrence Public Schools. I look forward to continuing to dream big with you.