



Music and Education Take Wasiak to Cuba

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FROM THE MAY 2006 LEGEND

Most Canadians travel to Cuba for sunshine and sandy beaches, but it was music and education that set the tone for Dr. Ed Wasiak's visit to Havana in February.

Wasiak is the music education specialist in the Faculty of Education and the conductor of the U of L Jazz Ensemble. He also plays trumpet with the Lethbridge Symphony Orchestra and the Lethbridge Big Band.

His trip was sponsored by Canada Cuba Sports & Cultural Festivals (CCS&CF), which is an organization that facilitates a variety of programs in Cuba for Canadian educational, cultural and sports organizations.

"The CCS&CF is interested in expanding the nature of their work by sponsoring exchanges of artists, academics and performers between Canada and Cuba. I was the test run, and it seemed to go well," says Wasiak. "We are currently in the process of planning for Cuban jazz legend Bobby Carcassés and Alina Orraca, one of Cuba's top choral conductors, to visit Western Canada next fall to conduct a series of workshops and performances. If all the arrangements fall into place, we will enjoy the benefits of a reciprocal Canada-Cuba exchange in southern Alberta next fall," says Wasiak.

Working with a translator, Wasiak conducted workshops, lectures and presentations at three of Cuba's top music schools — Instituto Superior de Arte Faculty of Music, Escuela Nacional de Arte and Guillermo Tomas Conservatory. He spoke about jazz improvisation, conducted trumpet workshops and a master class on classical trumpet repertoire and worked with Escuela Nacional de Arte's jazz band.

His work in the schools led to an exchange of ideas with Cuban music faculty and

school administrators. "I had opportunities to share ideas from Canada and learn about what happens in Cuba," says Wasiak. "Most of the Cuban national symphony orchestra members also teach at universities and conservatories. It was interesting to see how the whole music system works."

The itinerary that CCS&CF scheduled for Wasiak also included a performance with Carcassés. "They told me to bring music that I wanted to play, so I selected a couple of well-known jazz pieces and did a lot of serious practice before I went," says Wasiak.

Hundreds of people packed Teatro del Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes in Havana to hear the concert, which received a good review in Cuba's national paper, *Granma Internacional*. "Bobby and his band members are incredible musicians. Playing with them is kind of like being given the keys to a Ferrari and taking it for a spin. It was wonderful," says Wasiak.

Wasiak also worked with two musical groups from Oak Bay Secondary School in Victoria, BC, who were in Cuba for a CCS&CF-organized tour. "Curriculum instruction is one of my areas of expertise. CCS&CF asked me to conduct some informal research with the Oak Bay groups and write an article about the educational outcomes of this type of experience," he says.

Wasiak found that visiting Cuba was a positive learning experience for him as well as the Oak Bay students. "I certainly learned a lot as an educator and a musician. I witnessed Cuban music being performed authentically in its traditional setting, and I can now bring those experiences back to the University," he says.

He looks forward to returning to Cuba in the future for CCS&CF work or his own research. "I am interested in exploring some aspects of Cuba's music education system and writing a paper or two about it," says Wasiak.

To learn more about CCS&CF, please go to www.canadacuba.com.

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