

Making lives better... through music

By Leigh Patterson
Photography: John Johnston

Since 1923, St. John's Music has recognized music's transformative force, striving to both serve and enrich Winnipeg and Manitoba's vibrant music scene. Legions of music lovers, students, amateur and professional musicians have been drawn to St. John's Music for its high quality products, sheer depth and range of services, and in particular, the expertise from knowledgeable staff.

The original store, formerly located in the heart of the St. John's neighbourhood, has blossomed to eight store locations across Canada with a corporate headquarters in the Inkster Industrial Park. "If the original owners from 1923 were here to see how their vision has transpired, I am certain they would be very pleased," says Keith Brenneman, General Manager, St. John's Music. "We have 150 employees from Alberta to Ontario; so we are a small company spread throughout a vast territory; but our roots are in Manitoba, centrally we operate from here, and this is home."

St. John's Music's mission is to expose as many people as possible to the joy and challenge of active participation in music.

"Fundamentally, we believe that music makes our lives better," says store manager John Balsillie.

According to Dr. Edmund Dawe, Dean of the Marcel A. Desautels Faculty of Music, University of Manitoba, "The importance of music education extends well beyond the numerous and wonderful musical benefits. The world desperately needs good listeners and communicators, critical thinkers, and dedicated and collaborative citizens with a strong work ethic. Music develops these attributes and more."

"No other activity does as much to stimulate the mind. That's why it's so important to be actively making music, especially from a young age," says Balsillie. Longtime St. John's outside sales manager and former WSO musician, Mel King, has seen the benefits firsthand, when he delivers instruments to schools. "The best part of my job is connecting music makers with our great products, then listening to the results," King says. "The sounds, rhythms, movement and sheer joy of taking part in a music program... is not only exciting but essential to the health of our school system and the health of children growing up."

In a culture so committed to nurturing the love of music from an early age, it's not surprising to learn that St. John's Music is staffed by people whose own lives have been enriched by music and who thrive on sharing



Jim Dutton, Dave Thompson, Edmund Dawe, and Michelle Grégoire discussing her new CD and the Value of Music in our lives and schools.

their positive experiences with others. Guitar department manager and 14-year employee Glen Hartley says, "The staff are all musicians themselves and really enjoy helping other musicians to realize their dreams. There is a tremendous amount of pride in the store, and being surrounded by some of the most historic brands in the industry such as Fender, Martin, Peavey and Yamaha is fantastic. This is more than a job, it is a passion!"

Piano and Keyboard Department manager Dave Thompson, who has been in the music industry for 40 years, 12 of those with St. John's Music, agrees. "We are a music store, and one would assume that our only goal would be to sell instruments. It is so much more than that," he says. "We all share an absolute passion for music, and to work with so many people of all ages that share this same passion to me is quite remarkable."

Music: The power to connect

Music is a powerful force, with the unique ability to transport us back in time to places, events, even people, in our memory. Music has the power to heal, teach, inspire, make us laugh and cry, run, dance and play. Most importantly, music connects us all.

Connecting people through music has been at the core of St. John's Music since establishing its flagship store in Winnipeg nearly 90 years ago. Its Portage Avenue location, site of the former Yamaha Music Centre and decorated with a vibrant, distinctive mural by local artist

Charlie Johnson, is a hub for aspiring and established musicians representing all genres.

St. John's Music's pursuit of excellence in music holistically extends to the wider community: the store supports many and diverse groups and events that share the delight of music with people.

"Nothing is more rewarding to us than having a customer come back, needing more strings, music or reeds, because it means we've added to their joy of music," Balsillie notes. It also means that music's power to connect has transformed another life.

