

THE UNSUNG SYMPHONY

*This weeks edition of 'Picture this Profession'
goes behind the curtains, instruments and emails of a Music Teacher*

MUSIC TEACHING: THE UNSUNG SYMPHONY



Article by Samantha Howe



When first meeting Scott Copeman, his warm, welcoming demeanour and quirky personality make the conversation with him flow easily. Mr Copeman took time out of his busy teaching schedule to provide me with insight on what goes on in the music department at East Doncaster Secondary College. Our discussion lifted the curtains to reveal an insight into the ins and outs of music teaching.

Music has been a big part of Mr. Copeman's life, "I've been playing piano since I was very young," he mused. He went on to give a brief summary of his early childhood experiences with music. His music teacher who he admirably described as "supportive and encouraging," played a role in his realisation that being a musician was for him. Mr Copeman went on to study music at The University of Sydney.

But during his honour's years, he realised that he wasn't meant to be a professional composer. "It became quickly evident to me, that I wasn't necessarily cut out to be a professional composer," Mr Copeman explained. But all hope wasn't lost. During his studies, Mr Copeman worked in youth musical theatre. "I really enjoyed working with people my age and young people," Mr Copeman mentioned, "So I thought, maybe I should go straight into a master of teaching, and I did, and it was great." And look at how far Mr Copeman has come! His passion for teaching and music are evident through his nine years of work at East Doncaster Secondary College. "It has been great to have a lot of opportunities to teach different students with different musical experience and needs," Mr Copeman stated.

"I love going to work everyday"

Despite the normal stresses that come with teaching Mr Copeman expressed his delight with his job. "I love going to work every day," Mr Copeman gushed.

Mr Copeman works with a team of musically inclined teachers down at the Performing Arts Centre (PAC) at EDSC. "We share an office," Mr Copeman began "It's fantastic because we communicate all the time," which allows a positive communication system when it comes to challenges and events such as VCE or ensembles. However, there is a downside, as with many teachers only coming into school once or twice a week there can be a "lack of continuity and communication."

In addition to effusive praise for his colleagues, Mr Copeman also spoke frankly about the many challenges music teachers face. Many of us have witnessed or been in a class with a challenging student, but we never get the perspective of the teacher. Throughout my conversation with him I realised there is a lot of thought behind dealing with difficult students. "Sometimes you're faced with students that don't want to be in class, and have no interest in it whatsoever," Mr Copeman explained, "But somehow you have to get them through 55 minutes of class." Mr Copeman has concluded that challenging students will respect you "If you can show them the passion that music can bring."



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Outside of the routine struggles inside the classroom, a lot of work goes on in order to conduct rehearsals, prepare equipment of shows and to organise upcoming performances that a lot of us aren't aware of. "Be prepared to work hard." Mr Copeman warned any future teachers. However, behind the curtains and consistent rehearsals the final production may not turn out the way the staff and students has initially planned for. Mr Copeman explained that not everything goes according to plan, and in order to run events smoothly, overtime is often an option. "You are going to have to stack chairs and sometimes you're going to have to put out a stack of equipment and sometimes you're going to have to fix equipments, and that's not necessarily the case for a Maths teacher or an English teacher for example. But there's a lot of nitty gritty little work for a music teacher that goes on behind the scenes and out of hours," he explained, "And that can feel unfair." But Mr Copeman graciously accepted that overtime is "Just another part of the job," embracing his chaotic schedule.

Another part of the job is recognition and promotion. Undoubtedly sport is a very celebrated topic in our community. Some might wonder, whether some subjects are propagated more than other subjects. Mr Copeman gave his thoughts on this when stating 'There is a very strong promotion of sporting achievements at the school, and that's because the PE department are really good at promoting it,' Mr Copeman applauded. He assured me that 'Nobody in the music department feel aggrieved about that.' He explained that the music department doesn't lack appreciation "We have 'Attitudes' on or something like that we're involved with when we work with drama to get that sort of stuff done, I feel that there's recognition and students come and support that."

A passionate Mr Copeman also gave insight into what he'd change about society's view of music. He says he wants to change the way people see music as a subject, especially when referring to music as "an extra" subject. Mr Copeman stated, "A lot of people see it as something extra and not something that fits in their VCE portfolio." Mr Copeman would like to change that. Mr Copeman explained that many people drop music as a VCE subject, but he says, "I've never had a conversation with somebody who's dropped music and gone 'I am so glad I dropped music for year 12.'" Mr Copeman blames the fact that "Maybe the culture of chasing an ATAR and chasing high study scores means it's going to have a detrimental effect on music but also some of the other arts in the school so if I could change that mindset if there was a magic wand, I could change that I would."

As a final, deep question, I asked Mr Copeman what he would do to show the community the value of music. He says "I'd try and have a wider exposure of the concerts that we provide. That they can see and hear not just the music that's made but what it brings the students that are involved in the sense of camaraderie and the sense of accomplishment and the sense of satisfaction that comes from having a really good concert." Mr Copeman stressed the fact that his job is important, not only for him but for the students. "These performing arts opportunities are the things that people remember when they leave school," He stated. Mr Copeman continued to emphasise the significance of remembering and valuing music "I mean sitting in a class is not what people remember, they remember the events, the occasions, they remember their teachers. So, I think you know, having more people aware of that would be really good."

At the close of the interview, Mr Copeman strolling back to his classroom, the golden sun rays shimmering atop his shiny head.