



Adam Goring/The Banff Crag & Canyon

Samantha Whelan shows one of her instruments to students at Banff Elementary School Friday during a visit of the Music Ambassador Program, an initiative of the National Arts Centre of Canada.

Local kids meet Vivaldi

BY SABRINA FABIAN

BANFF CRAG & CANYON STAFF

If you ask grades 4,5 and 6 students at Banff Elementary School who Antonio Vivaldi is, where he's from and to name one of his most well known concertos, they may just tell you he was a 17th century composer from Vienna and he composed the Four Seasons.

The reason they should know that is thanks to an initiative by the National Arts Centre of Canada called the Music Ambassador Program.

Over the course of the next three years, up to 300 rural schools in Alberta and Saskatchewan will be visited by a musician who will speak to students about Vivaldi's Four Seasons.

On Friday, Banff Elementary students were graced by the presence of Samantha Whelan of Calgary. Whelan is a trumpet player with the Red Deer Symphony. She is also the creator of The Rocky Mountain Fairy Tales.

Whelan spent over an hour with the students Friday afternoon, speaking about Vivaldi's life and musical achievements. She also played the trumpet along with portions of the composer's music and got the kids to create their own music using their voices.

A surprise appearance by Vivaldi himself — at least it looked like him — provided for some extra entertainment, and the composer answered some of Whelan's questions regarding his life and his work.

The ambassador program is part of an initiative designed to educate children in rural areas about classical music in order to spark an interest and create music appreciation.

"For the last 15 years we haven't had music programs in our elementary schools across Alberta," Whelan said following the presentation.

"In order to hopefully bring some of that back these kinds of things come in and they might inspire some additional programming or more arts coming into the schools."

Teachers were given information packages in the weeks leading up to the presentation, in order to give the students some background information.

"This also sparks a lot of interest from the kids back

into music," Whelan said.

BES principal Nancy Crosley also spoke highly of the program and the opportunities it presents.

"At Banff Elementary School... fine arts is very important for the school," she said. "The parents and the staff feel that there is a value to fine arts education."

"We realize the importance of the fine arts in a well rounded education. So any opportunity to foster interest and understanding of music as one of the fine arts is something we really strive to do on an ongoing basis.

"This is a wonderful opportunity that fits very well with our school goals."

Whelan is a Calgary Arts Partnership and Education Society artist and has been involved in educating children about classical music for some time. She was recommended by several people to the hiring committee for the project.

Through the process of going to the schools, she has become very motivated and passionate about the program, although she was hesitant at first due to other work and personal commitments.

"I saw the promotional package... and I thought there's no way I can't be involved in a program that is this well designed, this well thought out, this well researched" said Whelan.

Now that she's involved, not only does Whelan want to continue with the program, but she's asked to be sent to remote areas of northern Alberta.

"Year 3 of this program would love to go into some remote communities and bring Vivaldi."

Overall Whelan sees this as a great opportunity for the children of this province.

"I love it," she said. "It doesn't really matter what the platform is or what the music is. As long as we're bringing music and we're getting children of Alberta excited about classical music.

"Not necessarily so they become the classical musicians of the future, though that's great. But so they can also become the classical music consumers. So we have an audience that comes to listen to it and understands why this music is so important and why it's so great."