

EDUCATION

New music program tunes in to kids

Classical musicians take expertise into classrooms

GRAEME MORTON
CALGARY HERALD

A little Beethoven in Black Diamond, Chopin in Carstairs or Vivaldi in Vulcan? The Music Ambassador Program, unveiled Wednesday in Calgary by the Ottawa-based National Arts Centre, will bring the joy of discovering classical music to hundreds of Alberta classrooms, many rural, during the next three years.

Of the 70 elementary schools selected to take part each year, 70 per cent will represent rural communities, where access to live classical music is often limited.

Beginning in January, they'll be visited by one of three professional clas-

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sical musicians who'll share their expertise and passion with students in grades 4 to 6 and hold training workshops with classroom music teachers.

"This is absolutely my favourite age group of kids to work with," said Jan Amsel, a first violin with the Calgary Philharmonic Orchestra, who'll soon be juggling her performance

schedule with regular teaching road trips.

"These kids are just ripe for developing a lifelong love of music."

Amsel said many classical musicians start to play their instrument of choice when they are between eight and 11 years old, the program's target audience.

"And when we get to chatting, it's amazing how many of the musicians in the CPO and other orchestras come from smaller communities," said



Lorraine Hjalte, Calgary Herald

Samantha Whelan, second trumpet in the Red Deer Symphony, leads a Grade 4-5 class at Belfast Elementary School in a lesson about being an orchestra conductor. It is part of a National Arts Centre-sponsored effort to bring the joy of classical music to Alberta classrooms. The program was unveiled in Calgary on Wednesday.

Amsel, who hails from Minot, N.D. Amsel will be joined by Edmonton saxophonist Rosemarie Siever and Samantha Whelan, a second trumpet with the Red Deer Symphony.

Whelan helped launch the program Wednesday at Calgary's Belfast Elementary, where she worked with 25 young potential maestros in conducting the "spring" movement from Vivaldi's popular *The Four Seasons*.

"I really liked it; it was definitely pretty cool," said eight-year-old Colton Sawatzky as his arms and hands inter-

preted the music's moods.

Classmate Katelyn Dickin, 10, said she enjoys many musical genres.

"But closing my eyes today while we listened to the music and trying to imagine what Venice was like when Vivaldi lived there really brought it to life for me," she said.

Siever said whether students who take part in the program are contemplating becoming musicians or not, "it's just so important to allow children to be creative and express themselves through music."

Claire Speed, the arts centre's director of music education, said one of the travelling program's key sponsors, Agrium Inc., was keen on giving more rural students access to classical music experiences.

"And in cities like Calgary and Edmonton, we'll certainly be looking to make this program available to higher needs schools," said Speed.

A parallel program was also launched in Saskatchewan on Wednesday.