

APATA Podcast 2023 Transcript.

APATA Award Winner Pulteney Grammar School's Jonathon Rice, Head of Performing Arts.

Hosted by APATA Managing Director, Yolande Smith.

STARTS---

Yolande:

Hello Jonathon, welcome to the APATA Podcast.

Jonathon:

Hi Yolande, how are you?

Yolande:

Good. Thank you and great for you to join us today. Really looking forward to chatting through education and more about Pulteney and sharing your insights into the education system, which will be fantastic. What I'd like to do first today is really open up and talk about Pulteney Grammar School. We know, and with our audience that you were the performing arts school of the year, last year in regards to the APATA Awards, but tell us more about your overview, and program, and team and how it all works at Pulteney.

Jonathon:

So, a bit of context, Pulteney is an interesting school. It's called Pulteney Grammar School and we started 175 years ago. In fact, we are the second oldest school in the country. But the reason it's interesting is because there's a street in Adelaide called Pulteney Street. So, we're an independent private school that's not named after a saint- It's a location. And I think that's really significant because in the very early days of Pulteney, it was about providing a school for children who are local to the CBD and in the city and that's how it started.

So quite humble beginnings. It was very low fee. It was inclusive. It was co-educational which, back in those days, was quite significant and from then of course, it's grown and changed over the years and eventually became a boy's school and a hundred years ago, 1922, the school moved to South Terrace where it currently resides and to a larger site. It's called block 681 which on the title of Adelaide back in the day it was divided up into little blocks and we are on block six eight one by Colonel Blight and it stayed there and in that same context for some time. And then in 1999, it returned to be co-educational again. A very significant time in the history of the school.

The school was struggling for numbers. It was in a place where it didn't. I think in hindsight, it didn't know really what it wanted to be. It was confused about where it should fit in the scheme of schools and South Australia so decided to go back to co-education, which I think was a very important decision. I think it saved the school in lots of ways and allowed it to become what it is now today. We are about to have the largest numbers enrolled in the school in the school's history, which is 935. We are, therefore, not a large school and that's one of value propositions.

It's important for us that we are not too big. But about a thousand or just under is absolute maximum. And we're going to reach that in term three this year. And the reason that's important is that we want to be a school that has a community where the kids are known and we believe that in very large schools that can be challenging, when you have so many students in the school for all of those kids to be identified and understood individually. So, for us, we are a contemporary,

traditional, liberal, co-educational school in a private setting, but we also are deciding, I think, what we are going to be good at and as it's turned out we are becoming very good in the sense of providing a broad opportunity for our students to be involved and engaged with performing arts. And that's really exciting.

So, I guess from that point Pulteney had an interesting history. From a performing arts point of view the school's had a lot to do with performing arts in the last 70- 80 years, but it's really only very recently that we've been able and had the opportunity to broaden our program. Recently, we introduced dance for the first time and that has gone gangbusters.

I remember four years ago four and a half years ago. I did a survey to parents and said, you know, is anyone interested in dance, do any of the kids do much dance and what I got back was a wave of information where there's so many students engaged in dance in private schools around this inner city in all sorts of ways. And because we were really interested about developing our music theatre program dance obviously is really important in that context.

So, we started the dance program and that has grown year on year and continues to grow. In fact, we've just had our second dance studio just being completed in the school. So, we have two dance studios now with sprung floors and mirrors and bars and the program is going incredibly successfully, which is exciting, but I think that also speaks to our journey in Performing Arts.

We are certainly becoming much more engaged in that space, I think. To be fair our principal does say we are not a performing arts school. And that's not what we're trying to be. What we're trying to do though is to make opportunities where students can find their tribe, find their journey in performing arts through their schooling career because we all know how the enormous benefits students can get from being exposed and engaged in the Performing Arts in the way that they want to be involved whether it be drama, dance, or music, or all three.

So, I think we're in a really exciting time in the school's history where we have good numbers. We have students now enrolling in the school who are already engaged in the performing arts so that we don't have to train them so much because they're already coming ready to go and then we just take them to the next location and the next point in their journey. So, it's pretty exciting time to be at Pulteney Grammar.

Yolande:

Absolutely! What size team do you have there Jonathon?

Jonathon:

So, in the performing arts team, I have five music teachers, two drama teachers and one dance teacher. So not huge. In addition to that. We have about 22 instrumental music and individual drama teachers. So, all up about 33 of us in total. Which is a good size. It gives us a breadth of capacity, but in our core from the FTE of actual teachers, not a big not a big group.

The population of our performing art classes is generally 10 to 15% of each Year's cohort. So, in year 12, you'd have about 15% of them doing music as a subject and about 10% doing drama and dance at the moment. So that seems to be relatively stable. I guess like a lot of schools like ours. A lot of our parents are very ambitious for their children and have a preconceived idea of where they're going to be going when they leave the central school setting whether it be medicine law or whatever it may be. And often we struggle, like many schools, to allow students to do the subjects. They really want to do in year 11 and 12 rather than what their parents really want them to do.

So, we have a significant co-curricular program that allows those students who can't do the academic performing arts subjects, particularly in year 11 and 12, to do substantial co-curricular programs. That still supports their passion the Performing Arts and allows them opportunity to be engaged with it, although not in the academic sense at those year levels. So that's always been a challenge for many schools I guess, parents want them to do, you know, the maths, and science and be prepared for Uni math for medicine or whatever it may be. But as long as we're providing opportunities and whatever space we can for those students to remain engaged in Performing Arts then I think that's really important.

Yolande:

Have you seen over your career? And you know, I've noted that you you've worked in Queensland, you worked in Victoria, and now in South Australia, especially with the co-extra-curricular that you were just talking about. Have you seen growth and uptake in that over your teaching career or has it stayed stable? What are your thoughts there?

Jonathon:

I think generally speaking it has grown only because I think places like ours are offering a greater diversity of opportunity. We've talked recently last year. We talked about my own program in particular where we have things like, you know DJ school. We have a DJ class. We have podcasting classes. We have sound engineering in a year nine subject that that also links to co-curricular in sound engineering. So, what we're offering is broader rather than the traditional band, choir, drama club and that's allowed more students to be engaged that perhaps might not have been in the past. So, I think for us and for my experience. I think the growth has come in the diversity of what we offer, not necessarily more kids doing the band program or more kids being engaged in choirs from my observation.

Yolande:

Yeah, great. Tell us about your showcases. Now the school puts on some incredible showcases throughout the year, and they are big performances and just so beautifully directed and artistic directed across all levels including technical production presentation. The whole works. Tell us about some of those fabulous showcases that I know the teaching team must work so hard on.

Jonathon:

Yeah, we had a fairly big program last year. We did just under 90 public performances in the year across performing arts. And as you say they have the full gamut of range. So, we have a Soiree series that we do 4 times a year and they're very small mostly very young musicians and singers and actors in them. It's in our Chapel. So, it's a very small environment very comforting very informal just to allow those younger musicians and actors and dancers to come in and have a go perhaps their first public performance as a soloist in front of a very friendly audience right through to the very large programs. We offer the big-ticket ones, I guess are things like our musicals.

We do two musicals. Every year one is the Middle School / senior School Musical where it's about 75 kids in the cast, about a hundred and ten students involved in the production entirely. So, about a quarter of the senior school / middle school and this year we're doing *Jesus Christ Superstar*, which we're really excited about last year. We did *Mamma Mia*, which was fantastic fun. The year before that we did *Matilda*. Interestingly, we actually won the Theatre Association of South Australia award for *Matilda*, which was really exciting.

Yolande:

You did, and congratulations.

Jonathon:

Yeah, really exciting. It was a very funny story. Actually, I went to the awards night, which was delayed because of Covid so they did 2020 and 2021 in one evening and I went along with my director and my competitor, thinking we had no chance of winning because no school's ever won before and being a school my philosophy on that production was that if you can't dance, can't sing, can't act, and you want to be on stage - you're on stage. We guaranteed participation which takes us out of the audition sphere. So, to win in that award was quite remarkable and really surprising and the school was thrilled as you can imagine.

But also, we do a year five/six musical every year in term four. Again, all the kids in year five and six are on stage during that musical again. So, making sure they're all engaged and those students who are a little bit reluctant to do it, and not really theatre kids, or music kids, or Drama Kids still get a chance to participate. Learn some dances, learn some songs, learn some blocking on stage and be engaged.

Other concerts are more traditional. We have a Winter concert which is an event where the whole school comes together. We have two concerts in the one day. The Junior School. We have a two-hour break. We had food vans and musicians out in the quadrangle of the school and the gardens and then we have the Winter concert in the evening with all the middle school and senior school students. So, a huge diversity of things that we do, and I guess that's we have to do that because we have such a broad program now that we need so many events to make sure that all those kids have opportunities to have a go and just play and be in that public performance space.

So yeah, a really broad program but that's really pivotal because we can only do that with the appropriate resources. And as we know putting on concerts when you're trying to do them really well become very expensive and the school has been really supportive about growing our budgets and our financial capacity to put on those events and consequently more and more students are being engaged. So, the bang-for-buck if you do it on a capital basis, we're doing really well when you have a huge number of the school being involved in those events. But yeah, that is a broad range of activities, which I think feeds us as educators. Keeps us engaged and interested and certainly challenged particularly the last couple of years, but hopefully this year we'll have a more even and less disrupted year.

Yolande:

It must be wonderful to watch, and I love that guarantee that you're in the program if you want to be on stage, you're on stage, and it's not about necessarily skill level. It's about full participation and I absolutely love that. It must be wonderful to watch students who have stepped. I suppose onto the stage and behind that curtain for the first time watching them grow and find their feet or their comfort zone.

Jonathon:

Yeah, it is. It is one of the joys of being a performing arts educator. I think you know becoming or going into as a teacher into that performing arts career path through schools is a joy and I've said it many times and I can I always say I have the best job in the world because they pay me to do all these wonderful things with kids and see them on their journeys and help them through their

journey. Whatever it may be is quite a privilege actually. And my career has gone very quickly. I feel as if I'm as I'm getting older now in the end of my career that time just is whizzing by. But really what's driven that is that joy of being part of a young person's discovery through the Performing Arts, whether they be just a pure musician who stands behind the music stand and plays an instrument. To those kids who discovered that they can act, they can actually take on a character and be someone else, and communicate that to and to an audience, is an absolute privilege actually.

Yolande:

I know when I visit schools I walk away with that same inspired feeling because you're just watching their journey, and their discovery, and they're learning, and their stagecraft and I think as you get further down into your career, you don't think, you're a little bit disconnected from it because you're more into a rhythm and it is a beautiful moment to be captured most definitely and you get to see it every day. You're very lucky.

How do you go about engaging your students, Jonathon? So, you know, when you think about you know, as you said you're a very broad program that you deliver which is fantastic because it offers great diversity and more interest across the curriculum and co-curriculum and what students can tap into and discover a little bit more. What are some key things here about engaging students and creating those lesson plans and really keeping their interest and engagement?

Jonathon:

Yeah, it's an interesting thing. And I think we are again in a very interesting period of history because for the first time we've had students who are extremely digitally aware and have a capacity to access things that you and I, when we were young, could only dream about. So, students now have access to the internet and all the power and knowledge and information that that has. So, we have to change, we have to grow, we have to follow, enable, and interest, and engage students in a way that does capture them. And that means we have to change.

So, one of the things that we've been working on for the last five years, in fact, the final piece of our puzzle happens this year. It's particularly in the middle school program is, 'What can we do to communicate the knowledge and information and the skills that we value, but in a way that students want to engage with that, and want to be a part of it, particularly for those students who are not instrumentalists or singers, through their primary years.

So, half of our year seven cohort every year is new to school. It's a major influx of new students and they come from a very broad, disparate range of schools. Many of them have virtually no Performing Arts education at all, which in 2022/2023 is a staggering thing to say, but it is true. So, we need to make sure that we have a program, particularly in the middle school I think, that's engaging, interesting, challenging to those students in the context of what they have available to them.

So, we have changed the year 7/8/9 program substantially. The first stage was actually changing year 9, so we introduced things like Sound Engineering, Music Theatre as semester subjects, which students can come along and just specialise as an elective subject that study, rather than just picking music or drama. So now we have music, dance, drama, Sound Engineering, music theatre, design. We have another one now called Ableton Live where they just getting stuck into digital music processes through Ableton. So that we have a breadth of areas that students can engage with even if they don't have or haven't had the opportunity to be engaged in performing arts in the past.

Year seven. We introduced the integrated performing arts program. So, all the students in year 7 come to performing arts at the same time twice a week. We have five teachers engaged; we have each student go through five six-week programs. So, music, dance, drama, Ableton, and

sound engineering and they go through those through the whole year and then in term 4 the whole cohort comes together and puts on a production for their parents. So, they have to use all the skills they've used and created and developed into this live performance. They do two performances in the final week of the year. One to some Primary School students, bit like a dress rehearsal, and then that evening to their parents and for many of those kids, it's the first time they've ever been on stage doing something with a full stage and a professional light and sound and the whole shooting match and that's how we try to be relevant and interesting and allows students to find jam. To find what really interests them.

And the final stage of that five-year process happens this year which is year 8. So, the year 8 program has always been traditionally music and drama. That's it. That's all they do. But we want to integrate the others. So now they have 10 subjects which they can choose two of per semester. So, they can do, over a year, 2 music, 2 drama, 2 dance, but they can also do - set design and construction, and they can do digital music. So, we're trying to again, really drag forward the idea of elective choice from year 9 to 8. So some of those students who are really musically able will do two subjects of music this year, but they could also do set design, they could do digital music, they could do dance in a way that just gives them opportunity to have a bit more of a taste and a look at different things before they go to year 9 and then before they go to the senior school.

Obviously if students don't do any performing arts in year 9, they're very unlikely to do any in the rest of their school career. So, it's really important that we provide opportunities to students to see a lot about what performing arts is about, not just about music, dance, and drama but other technical areas of Performing Arts that appeals to certain types of students before they get to year 10. So, hopefully capturing more of those students involved in that and another part of that also is the digital music path. Of course, we've had in the past students could only do year 12 music if they basically played an instrument and can read and write music.

Well, that's ridiculous that terribly old-fashioned and we need to be much more open about that. The creative life of music is not just about minims, and crotchets, and flute. So, we have for the first time this year, in fact the year 12 student who's doing year 12 music - Max, who is doing entirely in Ableton. He doesn't know what a crotchet and a minim is. But he writes fantastic music in that space. Now with there are some issues with the connectivity of his knowledge and the music program, which we have to work through and support him and we will do that. But it is completely possible that he could get an A+ and a merit for year 12 music and not know what a crotchet is because what it starts is creatively valuable and worthy. So that's really exciting. So, we are trying to create other pathways for students through their journey to meet what they want to do but also to make sure that we connect that with the academic outcomes that schools and the social and the Australian certificate of education require.

Yolande:

Oh, just wonderful to hear that that way of thinking Jonathan and I couldn't agree with you more that to engage that interest and where they want to go in their journey and...We're in a very quick pace digital world these days and as you said quite often there they're coming in and they're across a lot of that technique and that's what they want to major in and go further and it's really great to hear aspects like set design and you know, the technical production elements which send you know

beyond and into the whole of Performing Arts and all the different roles that you can do and to have that introduced early on in your life. I think it's really, you know, a great thing for you to follow those paths. So that's really good. What do you think some of the biggest challenges here are and one of those I think you've just said know what the curriculum is and finding that bridge between the two to move into it. What do you think? Some of the big challenges are here in Performing Arts education? And how do we meet them?

Jonathon:

I think the obvious challenge is that while the Performing Arts are diversifying, so is everyone else. So, other faculty areas in the schools are realising that they're going to have to diversify and broaden their opportunities for students to be engaged. So, we're competing I guess for those same students to be engaged with our program. So, I think in that space and when you combine that with the digital world, as you said our students are connected to, it's about providing things that students will see, and react, and respond to in our educational setting that they can't get in the digital space.

So, one of those things is people, so our connections with each other as individuals and as people in groups of people in the school become really important. Our relationships with our students become really important. And I think particularly in performing arts, I think we have an opportunity but also a privilege to have relationships with our students that perhaps other faculty areas have always struggled with. I think, you know not to be too singular about it. But I think sometimes in the maths and science areas. Some of the connections between individuals are not the same as the connections that we have in performing arts. And I think that's our advantage and that we need to exploit that, so I think it's really important.

I was thinking about it earlier too about - you know, what's important in becoming a music educator or performing arts educator in schools. And I think one of them is about relationships and people the idea that you are as a leader and an educator, to help students make connections with themselves and others either individually or in groups the same thing that we do in bands and choirs all the time. We just do it because that's what we do. The actual fact what's going on is quite sophisticated and it's allowing students to grow in their relationships with other human beings in different ways, and we have an advantage in performing art, but we do need to exploit that we need to have an awareness of it so that we are genuinely creating and somewhat curating opportunities for students to be engaged with other people.

I was talking to the principal the other day at a conference and we're talking about the [ChatGBT](#) and the digital AI setting. I think it's a fantastic opportunity. I know some states are banning it, and I think that's ridiculous. I think we need to embrace it and think about, 'Well if that's going to happen what can we do? We should use these tools the same way we use calculators. When I was at high school, as kid I came back with a calculator and my teacher wouldn't let me use it of course. So over time of course that's changed. Now, we have scientific calculators the kids use them all the time. Why wouldn't you? ChatGBT is the same. But we have to change, therefore, what are our plans and how we going to assess and achieve outcomes that are measurable so that the learning outcomes are still valuable and I think that's part of our challenge. But for us, I said before, I think the relationships and the people thing that we do is so, so important and I was saying to the principal the other day, I mentioned that the thing that we've learned about and through Covid was that some of the things that we do in education, particularly in performing arts, you cannot do any other way than having people in a room together. You need that human community in the same room talking together, working together to have the outcomes that we know.

So, I'm not fearful of Education going through a significant revolution of how we do it because I know that for performing arts, we have to be in the room together. To do that digitally does not work the same way. You have all the fancy, you know, production side and having choirs spread throughout the world and that's wonderful, but that's not the same as having 20 people in a room together working with a piece of music, or a play and I think that's really reaffirming and reassuring that we're not going to be made secondary to any educational process. That's really important that we're there.

Yolande:

Yeah. Absolutely. What would be your highlight of 2022?

Jonathon:

Gee, it's interesting. I was talking to a colleague at the end of last year. And I know I'm getting older but for the first time in my career, I'd actually run out of steam. I've got the end of the year and I was done, and I think that was because it was such a disrupted, challenging year in so many ways that I just found it exhausting. We had so many staff rolling away students, you know on covid off & on. The obvious disruption at the beginning of the year where we're doing digital education for the first four weeks. So, none of our music programs began until week five and all the relationships that we normally have at the beginning it didn't start. So that was a real negative to the whole process of what we do. So, I think surviving 2022 for me personally was a great outcome because it was a very challenging year and I think we're now seeing that change where we're having serious issues with Staffing. Getting the right people, in the right place, doing the right thing. I think that's going to be a challenge for the next few years coming.

So, I guess for me the fact that we achieved all that we did in 2022 with our students against that background of disruption was fantastic. I know the year 12 cohort that finished had a very strange senior school life and many of them were very challenged about it and feel somewhat let down. They feel they missed out a bit. And I completely understand that, but I think for them also it being so disrupted they found challenges that they didn't think were coming. They didn't ever realise what was going to happen and the negative experience that it gave them the chance to overcome while they did overcome it, was at a cost. And I think that cost was quite significant actually. So, I think yeah, I think it sounds a bit trite, but I think coming through that year and getting through the end of it was a big thing for us and we did everything that we wanted to do. Although it was somewhat, um under much more pressure than their normally. So yeah surviving 2022. I'm very happy to see the back of it.

Yolande:

What's your aim for 2023? What's your one thing or two things?

Jonathon:

Normalcy, I'd like it to be normal. I'd like it to have less people who are sick, less people who think they might be sick. Less people being away and feeling the pressure of being away and then trying to come back. So, I'm hoping it's to be a very normal year and I think there'd be many people around the country and the world feeling the same. But we also have really some fantastic opportunities and changes coming up with that we're really excited about, so I just want to really see those programs roll out because I know that kids are going to love it, and be challenged by it, and if we get those things up and running then who knows where we'll be in 2024. I'm really excited.

Yolande:

Yeah, absolutely. Onwards and upwards, isn't it? Let's talk about you Jonathan because you've had you know, and an amazing career and heavily focused on education and worked for and managed a jazz club. But the first thing I want to start with is, do you still play the trumpet?

Jonathon:

Yeah, I do. One of my things that I'm desperately trying to make sure this year is that I actually practice as well. So, because I tend to play and not do any practice but I'm really ambitious to get back and just do regular practice on my instrument in a room by myself. So that's one of my ambitions. But yeah, I do still play. I play in a big band and of course play at school a lot, just to demonstrate to the kids and show them that I'm still a musician. I think that's really important. That you have... they see you play and be engaged with an instrument and in the musical setting but yeah, so I still play I don't play as much as I want to. But I will practice more this year. I will, there I promise.

Yolande:

Excellent. Well, maybe we can have a little show and tell and talk to you at the end of the year and see how you've gone. Thinking back, when did you first pick up the trumpet? So, your journey from what I've read in conversations it started for you with this attraction to the trumpet. You played in orchestras and it's still with you today, which is which is wonderful.

Jonathon:

Yeah, so my favourite instrument actually is cello. I always wanted to play the cello. I don't know why I saw it and I was a primary school what an amazing issue in that is and I tried to play that and that there was a primary school program where you would go along and you would test and if you would test it high enough, you could get an instrument. I did that and failed that test and then a year later. I've got the high school in year seven and went to music classes -we all had to go, and the school was – I must share was Elizabeth West High School.

Now, I'm not sure if you're aware of Adelaide but Elizabeth West was a very tough area particularly in the 70s. Extremely tough, I think to be honest with you and I'm at the school and the teacher said I've got some instruments. Who wants to learn an instrument. I put my hand up of course. I want to learn, why not. So, I've got a trumpet. Is that okay? Sure. So, I just took it because that was available and then I got lessons through the education department, the state system, and mostly it was a year 12 student actually who took me under his wing and showed me how to play it and gave me lessons, in between lessons, because the teachers often didn't turn up and things like that and then I got to a point pretty quickly where I could play pretty well.

So, one of the teachers said there's a scholarship opportunity. There's a brand-new system in Adelaide called *Special Music Schools*, and they're creating these high schools where kids can go and do more music than they normally would. So, I auditioned, my parents supported me in that audition, and I got in. So, I went to a school called Woodville High School, which was the newest Special Music School in the state. There was Brighton High, Murrumbidgee High and Woodville High. I wanted to go to Brighton, but they put you where you went. So, I went to Woodville High and even though it was still a very multi-cultural and challenging high school, in comparison to where I've come from, it was nirvana. I couldn't believe schools like this existed.

It had a beautiful music facility and all these rehearsals and bands and choirs. I couldn't believe

it. And other musicians, other trumpet players. So, I stayed there until year 12 and then went to do a music degree and I never really thought about it. That's what I was always going to do. I loved playing the trumpet. So, I wanted to keep playing the trumpet. I got into the State Youth Orchestra at a very young age and enjoyed playing in that setting. In fact, I still am I and an orchestral, classical musician to my heart even though I played more Jazz than anything else. And then got into the university and did my undergraduate music at SACAE - South Australian College of Advanced Education, which was actually on the same campus as a university and eventually they joined together and that was fantastic.

I had some amazing teachers there. Bob Hower, band director and educator extraordinaire. Steve Whittington, Hal Halls, some amazing teachers that just showed me a world that I never thought existed even to that point. And then I did post-grad and then fell into teaching. Only teaching because I was sick of Adelaide and wanted to get out of Adelaide and do something different in my life and I took up a job in Cairns. I thought that'd be an adventure. So, I took off and went to Cairns to start teaching and have been teaching ever since basically.

Yolande:

I've noticed that you've worked across the three states so Queensland to Cairns and that's quite a big change and as you said, off I went and let's give that a go. Victoria in Ballarat Clarendon College there on Sturt St. That I'm very familiar with myself and across to Adelaide. Did you notice in your education journey big differences between the states, or varying challenges.

Jonathon:

They're all quite different so I spent a year in Cairns and a year in Brisbane and even though they're a long way apart. The state system that I was engaged in was actually very similar and substantial. So, I was a little bit surprised how big the programs were in those schools. This is early 80s. And then when I moved to Victoria at the beginning of 2000s the way that we did it there was very different to Adelaide. So, I had in that school I had a Head of Brass, a Head of Woodwind, Head of strings, Head of voice. I was a Head of Directive Music, and I had 1100 kids in the school, delivering 1200 one-to-one lessons a week in the instrumental program. So, it's a very substantial program and that wasn't like most schools in Adelaide.

So, I was surprised at the scale of them, and I think even to this day there's big schools in the eastern states that had these massive programs, that are really impressive and facilities that match, Adelaide doesn't quite do it like that. We have I think since I was at school had a significant change away from the state school system into the private system. So unfortunately, now for some people if you want a really good music education and South Australia probably have to go to a private school. The state system has gradually changed and diminished, and it doesn't do what it used to do 30-40 years ago. It's still there, but it's so reliant on what school you go to, what resources are available to those students.

So, unfortunately that change has happened, and the Catholic system and the independent system has taken over effectively that performing arts background. So, if you have a student who really wants to do performing arts, they probably have to go to a private school unless you're lucky enough to be in a state school that happens to be doing it well. So yeah, there has been changes between the three states. But I think now what I've seen the last sort of 10-12 years, I think that has evened out. It's just a scale of the school. Adelaide is starting to develop bigger schools; you know Pembroke School down the road are really successful with now about 1700 students.

We have some super high schools coming on with two or three thousand students. I'm not a huge fan of that. I much prefer smaller communities where we have a better chance of getting to know most kids. I probably know half the school, kids in this school by name and I don't teach much so I think that's a real advantage to that but nonetheless, I think there has been some change over the years particularly in South Australia from that more broad State system to now a more private system for performing arts in particular.

Yolande:

It there's definitely been quite some shift and transition as you said over the last 20 or 30 years and it's interesting. To friends of mine that have children, I always say that it's really important that you go to the school, you go the open days and see as a student where you fit? What is your fit and what you want to do? I think that's a really important part of the journey in order for you to set your own foundations. And that cultural fit is really important. What about curriculum. Did you notice much difference between curriculums between the states? Like, is it? Is it really broad or pretty on par with each other?

Jonathon:

No, I think by and large they're very similar. The emphasis and the way they do senior schools obviously different. I mean the CAT system in Victoria for example versus our state system is different and I think they are going through a period of change. I have struggled with, over many years, the South Australian Certificate Education the SACE that students get in year 11 and 12. I've struggled with it because I find and feel that there has been a gradual weakening of it and I hate the word, but dumbing down, and I think that's a great shame and I think that's concerned me. But there is some change going on at the moment which is going to value students' engagement at school more than just the academic outcome. And I think that's a really positive thing.

But nonetheless I still I still am concerned about the reduction of rigor at senior school because I think the system often underestimates its students and lowers the common denominator. And I think that's a great shame. Like I am concerned about that and even in SACE program here in South Australia with music in particular, you know students can now do musicianship at year 12 and take a cheat sheet in with them like you do for a math exam. I have a problem with that. You know, I think it's about what students have learned and then they apply their learnings. So yeah, I think there's some challenges I think by and large they're all similar, but I am excited about some of the recent change in the senior school programs across the country and the valuing they have our students beyond the academic world, and I think that's really positive and very good to hear.

Yolande:

Well last year Pulteney Grammar took the Performing Arts School of the Year for the APATA National Awards, and we thank you for your application, bit more important congratulations. It was just wonderful to see the assembly and as you said you had everything on show, there was the orchestra, that was playing and the kids doing the band then we had, you know full tap and dance on the stage and the drumline Jonathon. The Drumline was just absolutely beautiful. What a welcome and what a close and I'm all into big openings that you can remember and closing which is really important and it was just such a wonderful presentation and congratulations to everyone. Your application was, you know, as we've heard today so full of heart and full of moving forward and such a drive and it was great.

Jonathon:

Thank you.

Yolande:

Looking at the awards one of the things that struck me and what I loved in your application is and we'll hear it from you yourself. What are the must-haves as a teacher working in Performing Arts to encourage young people? What are your must-haves or what do you see when you're bringing on teachers that you're looking for as part of your team and your culture?

Jonathon:

Yeah. It's a really interesting area. I think we recently employed a new Drama teacher in the school and I went along to watch him teach. We asked him to teach a year 11 English class actually and we gave them a very small instruction about what he could do what the kids have been doing recently. You just create a lesson and deliver that lesson to us and what he demonstrated is what I'm looking for in all my staff. And those are passion for Education. Clearly. He loved the idea of teaching kids. That was evident in the first few words he spoke. He was passionate about what he was doing. And in that passion, there was clearly a connection that he wanted to make with the kids that are in front of him. So, he loves young people. That interests him, that challenges him directly.

The second thing I think was all the other things that we take for granted. But many people don't have and what I value is energy, enthusiasm and ambition for our students and a resilience. The resilience is harder to see in the short term. There's no doubt about that. But over a period of time, you do see how performing arts educators need to be really resilient, not just from a point of view of their own self development, but resilient in the sense of helping students through their journey. Because we all know that students will go up and down through their own journeys have doubts about what they're doing, and we need to be resilient with them to make sure that they have the opportunities to get the outcomes that they really value.

So, I think they're the sort of things I look for in a teacher and it's not, I don't want them all to be the same. I think I really love diversity in my team, and we have a very diverse group. We're not all the same. We're all similar; and we all have music degrees, education degrees, and gone through our journeys in the performing arts, but we're all so very different and that difference that divergence is a strength in my faculty. So, I don't want to employ everyone the same. I in fact look for difference, but underneath all of that some of the commonalities are that passion for education, and passion for young people, and to make connections with people, but the energy, enthusiasm, ambition and resilience I think is really important.

Yolande:

Absolutely. And we need that drive for Performing Arts. I constantly say that our supply chain for industry or audience or whatever those things are start with the foundation of schools. And it might be that not every child who's in music or doing drama is going to be professionally on the stage or work in the industry, but they are a future audience member where they will fall in love and passion with the Arts and that will continue in their life in another way. And it's also that foundational diversity in what they learn, and what they are exposed to that might head them off into a career and Performing Arts and an area that they, weren't aware of before and and it moves forward and it's at the heart of our supply chain to feed into professional but feed into the longevity of what we all love as well. Very important. How do you think or how do you go about influencing decision

making to ensure the ongoing success of Performing Arts education? I think that's really important, and I don't think people are fully aware of how much teachers in Performing Arts are constantly advocating and working towards keeping and growing their programs.

Jonathon:

Yeah, it's interesting area. I mean even my own personal journey a few years ago now, quite a few years ago, a friend of mine gave me a book called [*Good to Great*](#) by Jim Collins. It's about 20 years old - 22 years old now, and I wasn't aware of him. And he gave me this book and I read it and I just was blown away by it and I had been in and out of businesses as well through those years and I decided to do my MBA. And the reason I did that was because you don't know, what you don't know! And I knew I didn't know stuff. I didn't know what it was. So, doing the MBA for me was a real opportunity to understand areas and aspects of business that I had inklings about, & some idea about, but I didn't have the depth of knowledge that has now allowed me to make decisions much more carefully and strategically and specifically for what I need.

So, I think the idea that and I think we all see it where, performing arts educators often have to be really strategic in the way they go about their thing, but also have a direction and I don't think strategy and direction are the same thing. But I think that idea that performing arts educators need to be able to sell their vision, their dreams, their ambitions to all sorts of people whether it be business directors in schools, the principals, to deputy principals of curriculum, to parents, to their own staff, to others, to bring them along that journey so that those people have all the aspects that they require to make the outcomes possible and I think that's really important.

In the local Association here the heads of music and in schools. One of the things that comes up often is supporting younger leaders in working out how are they going to get the resources and the facilities they require for their programs to flourish. And that idea of strategy and direction is so important. Quite a few times. I've had the opportunity to work with Heads of Music in different schools and just sit down with them for a day and talk through what they have done. What do they want to do? And how they're going to get there, and it is strategic. They're sitting down about what could be their strategic plan, but equally important, what is their strategic direction?

The idea behind planning and direction I think is very different planning. It's having this goal. It's going to be three - five years. You're going to do these things along the way, and this is how you're going to do it. But I think in a school environment we need to have equally a strong direction and I think the idea of direction means that there is possible change, you may have to modify and adjust what you're doing along the way. Have a general direction where you're going absolutely critical, but also be understanding that that may have to change for all sorts of reasons.

We have a year three string program, immersion program starting this year. So, all the year three's will learn violin, viola or cello for the whole year as part of their following our program. I've been wanting to do that for years, but I couldn't. I didn't have the right people yet. So, you have to have a plan and a direction and when they come together is when you can actually apply it. So, we're for the first time, we're doing a string program and immersion program in year three only because I had to have the two people to make that program work. And I have both now in my program, and we can now implement that plan. So I think it's about having an awareness of your strategic plan and your directions, and then being diligent and resilient and dogmatic and determined to get what you want because you know, it's best for the school and for your students.

Yolande:

Oh Jonathan, it has just been an absolute pleasure to talk with you this morning. And thank you so much for your time, and your generosity, and sharing with us, you know, all your information and the journey so far. We wish you well in 2023, and we certainly look forward to following that journey and watching as you say, a more balanced, normal, and hopefully thoroughly enjoyable year at Pulteney Grammar. And again, thank you so much for your time.

Jonathon:

Thank Yolande it's a pleasure. And thank you so much for all that you're doing at APATA. It's such a joy to have an organisation in the background that we can tap into for support and guidance and learnings as well. So, thank you so much. Really? Appreciate it.

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