

## CONVOCATION 2010 VALEDICTORY ADDRESS

*The Benedict Wong Cup is awarded to a student of music or dance who has best shown love and dedication in learning all aspects of his or her discipline. Since 2009, the recipient has also been invited to give the Valedictory address at the June Convocation. In 2010, the award was given jointly to **Annelies Diepeveen and Maia Bruce**, who have been students of both the Schools of Music and Dance. Following are excerpts from their address:*

### **Maia Bruce:**

My life has been filled with music since before I can remember. My mom being a piano teacher, music of some sort has always been present in our home. At a young age my best friend began violin lessons. Soon I was begging Mom for violin lessons. Having just had her third child, Mom informed me that there was no way she could listen to the painful sounds of "Twinkle Twinkle Little Star" on beginner violin for the next few years. She did, however, have a solution to this problem.

Prior to having children, Mom had accompanied some young cellists from the studio of Olive Shaw in Dartmouth. The cello would be a much easier instrument to listen to Twinkle Twinkle on, and since Mrs Shaw lived in Dartmouth getting me to lessons would be easy! Over the next few weeks while I waited to meet Mrs. Shaw, Mom did everything she could to get me excited about playing the cello.

The day finally came when I would meet Mrs Shaw and I remember being so excited, but yet extremely nervous at the same time. Before we left Mom asked me if I would like to play the cello. I shook my head yes, to which she continued with "Are you sure, because once you start you're not allowed to quit... ever!" Once again I shook my head yes. Little did I know that she actually meant it. When Mom asked Mrs Shaw for her address, she was quickly informed that she no longer lived in Dartmouth and only taught at the Conservatory! So much for her easy commute to lessons.

The next fall I started lessons with Mrs Shaw, loving every minute of them. It was a long commute to Halifax twice a week for just a half hour lesson so I soon began Ballet classes with Janet Bradbury. While I was in ballet Mom took up a few students at the Conservatory to avoid just sitting around and waiting for me. Soon I was the one waiting for her.

Throughout my ten years of study with Mrs Shaw, she became someone very dear to me. I love her very much, and feel that I will never be able to repay her for all that she has done for me. Mrs Shaw and I had two lessons every week. Boy, does that woman have a sense of humor! We spent so much time together. It wasn't long before she became a grandmother to me. Just like any grandparent or parent knows, after so many years together, there comes a time for a child to move on. One day Mrs Shaw looked at me and said: "Maia, you're fired!" She organized for me to begin taking lessons from the director of the Conservatory, Ifan Williams who was also a cellist. Ifan and I have become best friends and he has really stepped in as a father figure in my life. He has a heart of gold and even now as the former director of the Conservatory is constantly doing anything he can to support and help the faculty and students here.

### **Annelies Diepeveen:**

I started at the Conservatory when it shared the building with what is now Sacred Heart School, and I would go there often with my Mom, who is a Kindermusik and piano teacher. I began taking Kindermusik with her when I was three years old, and continued on with dance and Kindermusik in the new building. I spent nearly every day here, and became very comfortable, some would say a bit too comfortable, in this building.

I started dance lessons after getting very tired of hearing my friend brag about her ballet lessons, so I too said that I danced. I started begging my mom to let me take ballet, and since I was at the Conservatory all the time anyway, she agreed. I started with Janet Bradbury, and took with only her for a good six years. As I got more advanced, it became necessary to come much more than just once a week.

I started taking from Rachael Dyer, Barbara Dearborn, Diana Rutherford, and Elena Labartkava. All of these teachers don't only know me as a dancer, but know me as a person, and some probably know a lot more about me than they'd like to. I look forward to spending time with them every day, not only for their fantastic teaching, but also to just talk and laugh.

Laughter is one thing you will never have a shortage of in the School of Dance. Elena Labartkava is the only teacher who has ever yelled at me. It happened in Russian souvenir class. I had been taking this type of dance for only a month and had been corralled into performing at a concert, I made one little mistake and to my surprise she yells: "Annelies, I am going to kill you!" Of course, she meant it all in good fun. These teachers always push me to be beyond my best; they never let me slack off. As Mrs Rutherford said to me while I was complaining while doing an exercise: "It hurts? Good, that means you're working."

All of my teachers have understood my many conflicts with violin as well, such as recitals, orchestra concerts, and trips, and many have even come to see me perform. They understand that I could never give violin up, and have helped me succeed in both violin and dance.

Not only do I get an amazing education in this building, but also I have met some of the most wonderful people. There are so many people in this room right now that I care about so much, other dancers and teachers alike, and I've never really had that anywhere else. It is such a nurturing, uncompetitive atmosphere, that we are all just happy when someone else succeeds. I feel really blessed, because I have this wonderful thing in my life, the ability to dance, and I get to do it every day with so many of the people I love. I'm actually really sad in the summer when classes stop!

So, at the age of five, Maia joined me here and so our story together begins.

Both of our Moms being music teachers here, we spent much unsupervised time in the Conservatory and naturally found each other... eventually. Together, we have spent countless hours exploring every

nook and cranny of this building, regardless if behind a locked door. By the way, don't get any ideas. The old locks have since been changed and can no longer be picked with bobby pins.

Saturday mornings were our most wild times together. These two strong, young, beautiful bodies have been nourished every Saturday morning with breakfasts of blue slushies and dill pickle chips, eaten wherever we felt like it; whether that be in the elevator, on the ledge separating the faculty washroom from the public one, or the attic.

The attic was a place for many adventures. Few of you have probably been to the attic because as we have previously stated, the locks have been replaced with new ones, and apparently cannot be picked with bobby pins, but the attic has been our most prized hideout...

Saturday mornings were also the time for orchestra. Now, we being who we are, we had to make this as eventful as possible. Poor Ms Wyman had to deal with the two of us, who had eaten candy for breakfast, doing such things such as making up a sign language, and talking very loudly between the violin and cello sections. Costumes were worn more than once, and actually not that long ago. Ms Wyman bravely took me on a trip to Nunavut last year, and us both to PEI for many years before. Again, we tried to make these trips as entertaining for the others -and ourselves- as possible. Pat taught us more than anyone could have imagined about self-discipline, teamwork, respect and loving music.

### **Maia:**

Although we have had many *learning* experiences here at the Conservatory, the aspect of the Conservatory that we have valued most has been its warm, cheerful, inviting atmosphere. Being extremely focused on our music and dance hasn't been easy for us, growing up. As young children and teens, our peers haven't always understood why we had to practice every day or why we had to get to bed early because of a concert the next day. I know that soon my teachers began to question why my schoolwork wasn't my first priority. It has

been hard having to justify my priorities to people who don't see the art in what I do as a musician.

For both of us the Conservatory has served as a place where we can come and not need to constantly justify not being like everyone else. It has been one of the few places where we feel we can really be ourselves, and because of that it has been the learning environment closest to my heart, with the exception of course to my home. A huge thanks goes out to my Mom. She's my biggest fan. Thanks Mom for all the sacrifices you have made so that I can have the best education possible. I love you.

I would like to encourage all of you students to appreciate the incredible privilege you have of studying here. The Maritime Conservatory of Performing Arts is by far the best school of the arts in the province. It is here that you will find some of the provinces best teachers. Now look around yourselves. You are all sitting in these seats because you are the best of the Conservatory. Don't ever let anyone tell you that this is not a huge accomplishment or that it shouldn't be a priority in your life. Stand up for who you are, because you are Nova Scotia's greatest. This being said, don't let this all go to your head. It's not just you that deserves to be sitting here today. Each of you wouldn't be here if it weren't for your parents who transport you back and forth from lessons, teachers who come every week and smile through your lessons, even if you obviously haven't touched the piano since your last lesson; and all the directors of the Conservatory, past and present. Make sure you give them a hug later today and thank them for providing you with the opportunity to be here today.

Parents, realize the importance of your children's artistic education. The Conservatory doesn't just teach music, dance, theory, etc. It teaches discipline, respect, love, kindness, organization, and most importantly how to expand your children's growing spirits. It is your responsibility to hound them to practice every *single* day. The rule in the Bruce household has always been that you only have to practice on the days that you eat. This may be something your family should look into. The Conservatory provides you

and your children with the opportunity to turn off the TV and get a life! Take advantage of the Conservatory. Don't just come to lessons. Stay and create friendships. I promise you that friendships with people who have the same priorities as you will make being an individual so much easier.

As Annelies goes to school to study math and dance, and I head to the western states to study music next year, we are leaving our home to you all. It is now up to you to love the Conservatory. Be comfortable and at home here. Know that this is a place where you can be whoever you want to be, as long as you always try your hardest.

#### **Annelies:**

We would like to close by thanking all of our conservatory parents: Ifan Williams, Pat Wyman, Olive Shaw, Carmelita Hearn, Jim Danson, Janet Bradbury, Elena Labartkava, Barbara Dearborn, Rachael Dyer, Diana Rutherford, Sean Wigginton, Gail Hiseler and Lorraine Thompson, who have unknowingly fed us throughout the years. All of your recital receptions have been delicious, especially after a long day of exploring... We still can't figure out why you call us the *Conservatory Rats!*

#### **Maia:**

Thank you all for your support, expertise, encouragement, scoldings and love over the years. It is because of you all that the Conservatory continues to have an incredible reputation for producing strong, artistically gifted individuals. We would not be who we are today without our Conservatory family!

June 10, 2010

