

APATA Podcast May 2022

Guest Host: Angela Loh, Managing Producer of Camerata: Queensland's Chamber Orchestra.

Guest: Eva Spata, Supervisor of Creative and Performing Arts at Sydney Catholic Schools.

Angela: Welcome Eva.

Eva: Thanks Angela for having me today.

Angela: Well, we have so much to cover today. We are so delighted to be able to speak to you about your extensive experience not only on stage, but behind the scenes and in education. Let's just dive right in, I think. I'm always interested to speak to people who have carved out an amazing career in the performing arts and has seen performing arts education take them to all kinds of interesting places. How did it all start for you, like where did you grow up and where did you go to school?

Eva: So, I grew up in Western Sydney, so I grew up in Guildford. It's kind of near Parramatta and I had a lovely childhood and upbringing and went to school at **St Patrick's Primary School** in Guildford, and then went on to **Cerdon College** at Merrylands where a lot of my performing arts started and I began to develop my skills, and my training, and my experiences.

And, just with my home life my father is a drummer, has always been a drummer, amongst other things, so my earliest experiences in the performing arts started at a very young age.

Angela: And so, were you drawn to a particular area of the performing arts? For you, was it music initially that first caught your eye if you like?

Eva: Well, those who know me would be surprised by this but my very, very first performing arts experience was as little ballet dancer from the age of three.

Angela: Lovely!

Eva: I'm not good at dancing anymore but I do appreciate it. I used to go to my ballet lessons every Saturday with my mum and my grandmother and I really enjoyed the experience. I did that for a few years - did the concerts and did all those things. Did a bit of tap, a bit of jazz, etc.

Angela: Nice.

Eva: ...So I did all of that and then went on to **Johnny Young Talent School** later in my primary school years. And did some more dancing but then I took a singing class, and the teacher pulled my mum aside and said, 'Your daughter can sing' and so that's kind of how the singing started.

I would have been about, oh, by the time that happened maybe eleven or twelve, and yes, I went down that pathway, the singing pathway from that point. I sort of then went, 'Look I'm not a great dancer, I think I'm going to move on to the singing!' And yes, the passion for music started from about then.

I think that would have been when I started to move into year seven and that was when that journey started. Then of course the opportunities at Cerdon, where I was at school. We did a musical every year. So, by year eight I'd auditioned and got a lead role in the **Mikado**, so that was my very first musical.

I had some amazing experiences through school and just really enjoyed doing the musicals every single year. I did elective music. In those days you could do elective music from year eight, so I started that from year eight.

I had amazing teachers and went through - did the musicals every year, did every single performance that became available to us, and we were given a lot of experiences and a lot of opportunities there. So, I continued all of that I also did some other lessons.

My parents were so supportive. My sister is also a singer, she's an opera singer, so we both did singing lessons for all that time, and I also did some piano and guitar lessons and continued all of that. But singing became my main love so I just worked on those skills and had some amazing opportunities that were given to me. So that's where the love started, I think, in high school. Yes, I found my passion through my voice.

Angela: It's amazing isn't it that that teacher, that very important person who identified that skill and that fire in you and spoke to your mother about that for the first time and said, 'This girl can sing.' That's what is so wonderful about our teachers in all of our schools and that they are there, and they can identify that in children and provide them with an amazing future. It's such a wonderful thing.

So, from quite a young age, I assume you've had access to some great teachers, some great opportunities, is there any mentor that you linked with at quite a young age or was that something that came for you later? How has that worked for you?

Eva: There were a few teachers I worked with through my high school years firstly my private singing teacher, her name was **Heather Cain** she was a country singer. But what I loved about her, and this is what has stuck with me, she used to work with us on interpretation of the lyrics and making a song your own.

Even though her specialty was Country, I didn't sing Country music I sang Jazz and musical theatre and popular music back then. But what I learned from her was how to deconstruct the song, how to make it mean something. How to change the phrasing and do all sorts of different interpretations of songs and so that was just amazing.

I had another teacher **Kerryn Grant** who then taught me how to perform so I started young, I think I was about 15 when I did my first floorshow in a club, and I was on my own. I had to speak to adults. I had to brief a band on how to deliver my music, so in that way I had to understand the charts. I had to know how to thread a show together and what to say in-between songs. I used to get so nervous about speaking between songs I used to think, 'Why do they want to hear me speak?' But she taught me how to thread the songs together and tell a story through a show.

So that gave me a lot of confidence back then especially when you are instructing adults on how to play your music. So, I found that that was another influential teacher. But at school **Aeronfa Haydon** who was my music teacher all the way through school. What I loved about her were the opportunities she gave us.

She never said no. If something came through, she would say, are you interested in this? Would you like to go and perform there? Would you like to represent out school here? Or she would create opportunities at the school for all the students to perform so I really admired her for that.

And **Sue Elliot** who was just this incredible singer. She was a mezzo soprano, and she was a prodigy on the piano. I was in awe of her. She taught me music extension and she also ran the choir so I

couldn't believe that she could say, 'Oh you know that movement from that symphony and she'd just jump on the piano and play it and sing the melody line. I would just watch her and say, 'Wow you can just play anything!'

I just thought she was the most amazing woman in the world. So, I think back then all those teachers they influenced myself, not just as a singer, but as a music teacher, and a musician, and a performer all round. I've had that diverse range of people who kind of influenced me but in different ways and for different reasons.

But I'm so lucky. I think I was just lucky to have those women influence me in that way.

Angela: Yes, lucky but obviously but clearly, you're incredibly talented and you've never wanted to put yourself in a certain box. You're a performer, an educator but also what's interesting to me, a producer, and a director as well. What is your first? Do you have a first love, or do you just love it all? Do you love being behind the scenes creating, on stage? If you had to make a choice, could you possibly?

Eva: To be honest I could not put myself in one box. When I sing, I feel that's a very personal, creative experience and you can't match that with anything. Even when I produce, or if I'm a musical director, or I'm directing and I watch the students up on the stage and they're performing and it makes me so proud, and so happy. To see that vision come to life, that also makes me happy. But I think the actual singing would be the first love, my first love. I think that's there.

But I feel that that love then influences me in the way I direct and the way I guide others to do their best on the stage. And that also influences the kind of experiences I create or offer for students.

So, I guess you could say that the singing is the first love, but everything else comes a very close second because it all influences each other. Seeing people perform on stage, something that I've had an influence on is such an amazing experience to watch the performance come to life.

With my own personal singing and **Fusion Vocal Group** that I work with. My sister and I are in a partnership with that group, and I work on producing that as well. I love to do both, so sometimes I'll perform and sometimes I will produce. So, I get a bit of balance and I really enjoy that because you get to do all sorts of things.

That also helps me to balance my work, my fulltime work with the creative projects that I do on the side. So, for example with fusion we do a lot of corporate events we also get to perform all over the world with different cruise liners so we might be on a ship for a week, and we do back-to-back shows in a fully professional theatre with an amazing band with musicians from all over the world. It's just an amazing experience and I always love doing those and I also try to balance that with my other work.

During the school holidays I might book a gig where I'll go off and do those sorts of things and it revitalise you, going out and performing. Then I can come back with more creative ideas, and more energy, and so I feel like it goes hand in hand.

Angela: Yes, and I think as an artist it's very important that you keep that creative bucket brimming isn't it and so that's a wonderful thing that you are able to balance all those things. Speaking of your career in education, you've taught music and drama at multiple schools tell us a little bit about your role now and the amazing initiatives that you're working on.

Eva: I'm in the most privileged position I think I could ever hope to be in. I'm leading a dynamic team of education officers who have different skills. So, for instance there's music education officers, there's drama, there's dance, the visual arts and so they're all educators in their own right and we work together to plan and develop opportunities for the arts in Sydney Catholic Schools.

We also have a new program this year with Artists-in-Residence. We've employed Artists-in-Residence to be part of our team and to help us go out into schools and mentor students. The industry knowledge that they come with, and add to our team, is just amazing.

I guess in a nutshell my role is to facilitate and to create the direction of 'What do the arts look like for Sydney Catholic Schools?' I work with many different people to come up with that plan. We collaborate and we all have input, and we decide: This year our focus will be...Musical theatre.

For example, this year we're putting on the musical '**School of Rock**' at **Qudos Bank Arena**. There'll be 4000 performers there, drawing from all 150 schools in our system. Our system has about 35 secondary schools and the rest are all primary schools. We stretch out all the way to the Sutherland Shire, we have schools in the North Shore, in the city, in the Eastern suburbs and southwest out to Hoxton. West Hoxton or Austral, out that way is our furthest.

We also have the Inner West, we have the Ryde area, so we have quite a huge demographic of students in different areas of Sydney and so bringing them together in one musical it's a huge undertaking this year.

This year what we then do is, we backward map. So, we say okay well in October we're performing this huge musical so the workshops we provide this year will be musical theatre based. We will train students in how to perform for this genre and we then might look at other genres and different styles and that also informs the Artists-in-Residence that we have working with us so they might be specialist in those areas.

In a nutshell that's what I do. We have a huge plan coming up in the next few years and it's just so exciting. I really do feel it's just a privilege to have this. We just think, 'When I was in school what is it that I would have wanted?' and so, nothing's off the table. We always talk about everyone's ideas, and we consider it, and think about ways we can incorporate different elements into what we offer.

Angela: I think for the students having essentially that performance outcome after doing workshops, and all of the time with their teachers, and the people who are working professionally in the industry coming in and tutoring, it must be hugely beneficial for them because they can apply everything that they've learnt and experience the joy of sharing what they do with an audience which is a really beautiful thing, and which is why so many people do what we do in the performing arts. And even for the people who work backstage, just knowing that you've made someone's day that bit more special is a great feeling.

I truly believe that having some sort of creative pursuit in your life, whether you end up working in it or not, or if it's just something you do for enjoyment is important. And the benefits of having that as part of a curriculum is essential. That is obviously something that Sydney Catholic Schools really aspire to is having those actual curriculum opportunities.

Eva: Definitely.

Angela: Do you see the benefits in other areas of study for students as well? Not just to do directly with what they're learning in the performing arts, but how it affects everything about what they're learning?

Eva: I think that the skills you learn as a performing artist they translate to all the other areas of schooling. You look at collaboration, you look at just giving confidence to students and being able to speak to other people or be able to express themselves. Especially in music, but in all the arts that the students receive very explicit feedback from teachers, so even just changing the way you hold the violin, how do you put your fingers? And the student learns how to take feedback, apply feedback, and try again.

And then the cycle continues. Because we just do that intrinsically as musicians, and as performers, and performing artists and the way we instruct students or work with students. That teaches students to accept feedback and to apply it. And to try and constantly improve, and that can apply to their other subjects, and it can also give them a bit of confidence to say, 'I didn't quite get that, could you explain to me how that works.' I think it does apply across the board.

We just introduced the **Amadeus Program** in Sydney Catholic Schools. That program was launched last year, and we are moving through our networks of schools. Our 150 schools fall into different networks so we are embedding the program through the schools over the next few years so by 2024 every school will be an Amadeus school. Essentially there are three elements to it, so we have every child from year three to year eight will learn an orchestral musical instrument, that's every single child.

So, they have half an hour a week with an experienced tutor who will come out to them, and they have small group tuition. So, they come out and they have their five students their lesson together with their violin tutor and they'll learn their repertoire and their technical skills.

Then they come together once a week for about an hour in an ensemble rehearsal every single week. And then what we've also done, and what we're doing, is providing a classroom music teacher for every school. We already had that for some schools, and we already had that for our secondary schools, but we're committed to ensure every single person teaching music in the classroom is a trained music teacher who provides one curriculum, and the curriculum covers all genres of music, but especially the classical genre, and making sure the students have a broad experience of music.

And we're so excited about that program because we feel music should not be a privilege, it should be for everyone and just as you mentioned earlier, the benefits go across the other subjects too. Because once again, meta cognition, and all the things that students learn: They learn how they learn best, they learn how to take the feedback, they how to collaborate with their peers, all the skills they learn through music can translate to everything else.

You only need to look at all the amazing work of **Dr Anita Collins** she's done all the rich neuro-musical research you're talking about with the left and the right side of the brain and the pathways being strengthened when you learn a musical instrument and the flow on to literacy and numeracy and all that kind of stuff. So, it's undeniable and that's why Sydney Catholic Schools has made a huge investment in this program, because we believe in the benefits on the whole child and all their learning. So, I think that's probably the MOST exciting thing that's happening.

Angela: Yes, and I think that equity, and that access is so important, and I think that it helps keep kids learning, doesn't it? For example, if they're learning an instrument, you want to see them do that all the way through and enjoy it above anything.

Eva: Imagine a child picking up a cello in year three and by the time they get to year eight they've had all these years of mastering the instrument, and whether or not they continue (they might not continue past year eight) they might say, look I've done it, I want to do something else now and

that's okay, but imagine the flow on. I often say to our secondary teachers, these kids you're going to get in the next few years they're just going to be totally music literate by the time you get them.

The first day of music in year seven is always interesting because the students come from all different primary schools and you draw a treble clef on the board and you say, 'Who knows what this is?' and three people will put their hands up and the rest will say, 'Not sure, never seen one.' So, you've got different abilities and different experiences in front of you. So, imagine all those students come in and they've all been learning for so long.

We need to change the way we teach and differentiate even more and extend those students who are advanced and really working well with their instruments.

Angela: So obviously a lot yet to be achieved with the Amadeus Music Program and you've got some great goals that you're working towards. Just reflecting on where you are with it now, if there are teachers listening today who are thinking, 'Oh my gosh I would love to start something like that whether it be in music, or drama, or dance.' Have there been any big learnings to get that. It's such a huge undertaking, I wonder how did it start? How did you pull the tendrils together to even make the first step?

Eva: Oh wow! It's a huge project and it takes a lot of people to work together to make it happen. There's a wonderful team who's working on it now. In our sense, we've got 150 schools and it doesn't look the same in every school. You must contextualise it to your school community. So, I think 1. You must have a good structure in mind and say, 'In an ideal situation this is the way it would work...and what we had to do was see what's happening already. Let's celebrate what's already going really well and how can we build on those things.

You've got different buy-in. Obviously, the Principals need to be supportive because this is something that's going to change their school and the way things work.

The parents need to have lots of information. They need to know why! Why are we doing this? We haven't just had a radical idea; we're doing this for educational purposes, and we talk about that.

The children need to know why as well, and we try to get the children excited about that and we try and give them a little bit of a say in let's play around with some instruments and see which ones you like best.

But definitely, at this scale, I would say the challenge is just trying to make sure it's contextualised for each school community, and it works for them. We had schools who had really established band programs and things like that, so you've got to work with the traditions and experiences they already have and build around it & make sure that it's contextualised to them.

But I would say anyone wanting to start something in their school like that I think you need the parent buy-in, I think the parents need to be really supportive of it and just knowing the WHY. Why you're doing it. Because once people understand...Wow, the benefits are undeniable...we should give this a go and we should try to invent this.

It's like when you put on your first musical and the drama teacher says - we should put on a musical. And everyone says, hmm, how much work will that be and how much will be involved? Once you've put it on for the first time and the whole school gets involved, and then the whole community gets involved and gets excited and says, 'When's the next one?' Taking a leap of faith and trying to get a few believers on board.

Get all the people together who really believe in it and have the passion I think that's going to help with anything like whether you're putting on your first musical or whether you're doing a music program or a drama production or a dance festival. I think you just need the people who have the drive, and who have the passion, but also who can articulate the WHY and the Benefits.

Angela: It's just such an amazing achievement and dare I say this word "During Covid" - how did you do that? You and your team and all the people around you must be able to "pivot" - that's the new word for the last few years.

Eva: That's the word, sure is!

Angela: I'm sure people listening are curious to know how you managed such things, I'm sure it hasn't been much fun has it?

Eva: That's a nice way of putting it, it hasn't been much fun

Angela: It really has been quite disruptive hasn't it.

Eva: Sure has. **Danielle Fuller and Jacinta Adamson** who are leading Amadeus at the moment. I remember having conversations with them once Covid hit and we went into lockdown. I said to them, 'What are the tutors going to do? What are you doing?' And they said, 'We went online!' The students did Zoom rehearsals at home with the tutor so things didn't stop and just like everybody else they couldn't do their ensembles, but they made it work for the limitations that happened.

They did a fabulous job. When we went in the last lockdown, we had just started our first Archdiocesan musical we were going to put on **Fame Jr the Musical**. We put the word out to our schools, and we got an amazing cast of about 40 super-talented students from about 25 schools across the system and we started our rehearsals at Burwood and I think we had two rehearsals face-to-face and then we into lockdown forever and we went into, as you said, pivoting to Zoom rehearsals and who would've thought Zoom would become the centre of everyone's world.

So Zoom rehearsals and bless those students, they just turned up every Monday night on Zoom and they still committed even though there was no end in sight as to how long this was going to go for and we had a bootcamp in January when we came back and they're wearing masks and they're trying to sing with masks and it was so challenging but we filmed it and released it as a filmed version and I think a lot of teachers had to change the way they presented because you can't stop learning, and can't stop performing and just trying to change the way you deliver the performance.

We're just so lucky we were able to film it and we have released it that way. We wanted to do the HSC Showcase for our outstanding students from last year and so we filmed each student, and we produced a filmed version of it. And okay, it's not as exciting to do it that way. You don't get the buzz in the room; you don't get the standing ovations and the cheering from the audience.

So, our policy is we don't want to cancel. We just want to make sure we can still offer our students as much as possible in whatever way we can, so we didn't want thing to stop we wanted them to continue.

We had our first **Sydney Catholic Schools Eisteddfod** last year we fit it in - I don't know how - somebody was watching over us - I remember the very last event we had was the day after the first Bondi case of Covid and we just got in and then the lockdown happened.

I got back to work after lockdown and there were still trophies sitting on my desk from months before we locked down, but we managed to do an eisteddfod in the little amount of time that

everybody was allowed to sing and allowed to play. I don't know how we made it, but you wouldn't believe the joy on the student's faces, coming together, watching each other perform, getting up on stage. The cheering and the happiness and the teachers and Principals that came said, 'Oh my goodness, we really needed this. Our children needed a chance to get up and perform in person and I couldn't believe the excitement and the energy in the room.

That was the highlight of my year I think, just that we managed to do that, and we can't wait to do it again. We're in the midst of planning now and it's happening May/June this year, so hundreds and hundreds of entries. Thousands of students coming in and out of the doors at Burwood in the huge theatre they've got there. I feel like we're so lucky.

I always say the best part of my job is watching the performances, where you just get to sit down and watch it happen and you say wow, this is magic.

I felt that the eisteddfod was a huge celebration of the work that each school was doing. They managed to perform songs despite a disruptive preparation period and all those things. It was just incredible.

Angela: Yes the rewards seem so much bigger when you're doing those things under adversity basically, and I do love how you mentioned how important it was for the kids and how they needed that and I think that one thing that's positive, and there have been positives out of Covid, but I think that sense of community and that acknowledging the importance of coming together is so important and that these are other wonderful life lessons that students and teachers are all experiencing together.

You mentioned the amazing performing arts centre at Burwood, that opened in 2021 is that correct?

Eva: Yes so, the school has been there for about ten years and the facilities were already built within the school and what we did leading up... 2021 was our first fulltime performing arts stream cohort that ever went through the school. SCS decided it was time to have a dedicated performing arts college that's Catholic, so we were so excited to launch that in 2021 of course we know Covid hit, but what I love about the fulltime cohort is that the students do masterclasses with industry professionals, they have the facilities, they have the amazing teachers, so we managed to do that.

Leading up to that we had the **Viva program** - since 2017 it was where if your school couldn't run HSC dance, drama, music one or music two we put it out to all of our high schools in the archdiocese to say if you can't run it and you've got a couple of students who are really keen, send them to us and we will meet with them once a week and we will deliver the course. It was online modules and face to face block lessons, so the school had already started to establish that performing arts education and providing expert teachers and facilities and so we felt it was time to go fulltime. We launched last year and it's building again this year, the cohort's started to grow the students are just loving it. We've had students' slowly coming in because they've heard about the school, and they recognised hey that's my passion.

I distinctly remember a lovely girl on day one who came into the school studying something else and she said I really just wanted to do music as well. So, she came just for the music class, and she loved it so much, so she applied to become a fulltime performing arts student and she did all the musicals and drama and it's like she just found her passion so that's what we do it for we want those students who have that performing arts passion to find their tribe and to be together with each other and to give the students the opportunity to have those industry connections.

What's good about that particular school as well is the students come out of the school with an HSC and a Certificate III in either Musical Theatre (community dance, theatre, and events) OR there's also entertainment industry, music industry, photographic and digital imaging course, we're also starting up Assistant Dance Teaching.

The aim is the student gets an HSC with a full performing arts pathway, but also gets a VET certificate as well so that they come out with extra qualifications or specific training in musical theatre or one of the other areas. The students love it because they spend a block of 2-3 hours each week on that VET course and that's the highlight. They absolutely love doing it and they get the industry experience too. So, it's quite unique and just watching those students grow is incredible.

Angela: I think the value of that industry experience in primary and secondary school is so valuable because often you don't get the opportunity to interact at that level until perhaps at tertiary study so I see these amazing students being so prepared for their next step in their journey, whether they go on to be a performer or behind the scenes, or even if they go off to another occupation altogether it's such a great preparation for their young adult life and beyond. Also, those long-term friendships that they form are integral to everything so it's really an amazing model and a great opportunity and I really hope that this opportunity extends, and the value of this program is spoken about at education across the whole of private and state schools across the board.

So, I suppose looking back on your immense career that you've had to date and the other great things that are yet to come, who are the people who have been the greatest influence on your performing arts journey. You've spoken about teachers in particular have there been other people from other walks of life who have influenced you greatly?

Eva: As I mentioned the teachers are probably the greatest influence. I'm the biggest fan of my sister who is an opera singer. I think she's influenced me as well because I think I watch her, and she's taken the artist' journey. The full-time artist journey, and I admire her for that. Also my involvement with **Fusion Vocal Group** when it all started many years ago in a previous iteration she's the one who got me in in the first place with that, she said guess what they need an alto and so I auditioned and I got in and I kind of had a revitalised passion for my singing because I had been focusing on my teaching so much up until that point and so that gave me a new energy and so I would definitely say she's one of them because she helped me reignite that passion all those years ago and we're still working together and doing different things.

I think even some principals I've worked with in the past that I've been in awe of - **Sr Fidelis McTeigue** who was my principal for a long time at **Marist Sisters College Woolwich** because she believed in educating the whole student and really valued the arts. She always said, why not? I would come to her and say what about this, and what about that and she would say Why not!? Let's try it. Or she'd say to me the P & C want to donate some violins, what do you think you could do with the violins? Things like that, and I'd say ok let's create a program.

People like her have been very influential because it has shown me the different types of leadership, and how they can support what's going on in the arts. It's definitely pivotal, and it's really important to have strong leadership who support you and that's what I'm really lucky to have at the moment. All the leadership in SCS have been so supportive a bit like Sr Fidelis, you know, why not! oh, you'd like to do this, let's do it, let's support it! I think definitely those people.

Angela: Yes, always looking ahead, always thinking outside the box, they're all-important things to promote and see creativity and programs grow. So, what's your big dream for performing arts

education? It sounds like you're living quite a dream actually and you're loving what you're doing but what's the future hold, what's your big dream?

Eva: As you mentioned I feel like I'm living the dream now, but I think my big dream would be that you're not just preaching to the converted. My big dream would be for the whole of society - the community, parents, students, everybody within a school community believes in the value of the arts and arts education. And values it as much as literacy and numeracy and everything else because it actually is as important as those things. So, I think my dream is that everybody would understand why the arts is important to every child and you don't have to be the best musician, or the best performer, or artist to have the benefits of the arts in your education and in the development of every child. So, my biggest dream is that everyone in society would understand the value so we're not just appealing to those who already love it. I think it would be great to appeal to everyone and in this role what I love is that we're trying to provide opportunities for every student, not just those who already have the passion, who already have the drive so we feel like every child can benefit from an arts education. So, my dream would be everyone having the buy in - like utopia!

Angela: Definitely, I really look forward to the day when there's more data and more studies on how creative pursuits, how the arts affect things like health and wellbeing in communities. I think there's no denying that it's there, but it's an interesting space to investigate and look at in the future as well.

Eva: Yes, there's a lot of anecdotal evidence. Even speaking with some principals just in passing who've had specific programs running in their schools and they say for example: one principal said, 'we always had music on a Friday, it was a specific program on music, and the principal said, 'I noticed that attendance went up on Fridays.' that was an anecdotal observation that the principal had made, and I had seen that happen, and other people in the media have been interviewed about things like that and it would be wonderful to have a formal study on things like that. It's out there, I think the data is out there, we just have to target something specific on that.

But there is no doubt that it does affect wellbeing, and the overall experience of a child.

Angela: I think it is so important that we support each other as much as we can, and for children it can be very stressful at school and anything that gives them an outlet to feel comfortable and relaxed I think then it benefits all the areas of their study as well like we've said.

So, Eva, what is the best advice you've ever been given do you think?

Eva: Oh wow, I think the best advice - look I'm going to be honest, and I think this this is probably a common term, and nobody I know invented it, but I was told: 'Build it, and they will come.' I feel like that's kind of become my mantra because if you can dream it students will come to it and will enjoy being involved.

It could be - build a beautiful facility and more students will come and be involved in something you're doing there. But it could be building a program and the students will show up, they will want to be involved they'll want to enrol in that class, or that ensemble, or they might want to be in the musical.

Provide the opportunity and you'd be surprised how many will put their hand up. And maybe not the students you thought. So, you might put the opportunity out and you'll meet students you haven't met before who say, 'Oh I secretly always wanted to do this.'

That's been the one motto that's always stuck with me over most of my teaching career.

Angela: Yes, I think it's important isn't it. It's the baby steps too. Don't look too far ahead, it's important to have the goals but it's about the here and now as well that's quite important.

Eva: Yes, take it in small chunks. Run one little thing and then see what happens. Then you'll build a little community and then you can offer something else, and then something else. One teacher can make a difference.

You don't need a huge team of people. You can start one thing and then build off it.

Angela: It's been so great speaking with you and hearing your insights. It's obviously a very big 2021 for you, a 2022, what on the cards for you in 2023-2024. building on your existing programs?

Eva: Definitely building on our existing programs and working towards other types of performances. So obviously we'll continue the eisteddfod. This year is the second year, and we'll have another one next year.

What we like to do is look back on what we've done and say how can we make this better? Can we refine this? We don't want to do too many new things all at once but what we want to do is refine what we have and look to other opportunities.

So, for example we will be looking at network performances, so groups of schools. This year we're doing the massive one with 4000 performers, but maybe next year we'll do smaller performances.

Students benefit differently from different types of experiences, so looking forward to changing it up a little bit next year and building on what we have.

Angela: Amazing! I look forward to speaking to you in 2026 when it's not 4000, but 80 and I'm sure you'll all be doing amazing things. I'm so grateful to have spoken to you today and to have your insights. They are some very lucky students to have you and all the industry professionals and your amazing teachers and leadership team. I think it's a great program and I really hope that it continues to grow and that we can all learn from it. And hopefully apply some of your amazing discoveries in our own settings as well.

Eva: Thank you so much for having me today it's been so wonderful to talk to you and I look forward to speaking to you again, and hopefully there'll be even more things to discuss.

Angela: And no more Covid! That would be great too.

Eva: Oh, that words banned. We're not using that anymore. (Laughter.)

Angela: Thanks again Eva it was great talking to you.

Eva: Thank you.

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