

By Henry Bury

The Intelligencer

Fifty cent piano lessons have led Doug Aselstine on a musical journey spanning more than a half century.

And for 44 of those years, he's earned an income doing what he loves best — playing and teaching music.

The 62-year-old Aselstine has played saxophone, clarinet and piano/keyboards. He's conducted numerous bands. And, he's taught instrumental music to Quinte Secondary School students for 35 years.

His professional music career is still going strong even though the Edgehill Road resident retired from teaching a few years ago.

Aselstine is involved with several musical groups like the Commodores Orchestra and Stan Wiggins and the River City Jazz Band and some of his former students perform alongside him.

"Music is like a tonic to me," he acknowledged.

"You can have a rough day or week at work and be stressed out but when you start performing with a group, there's just this total release and you enter a new world.

"Music has a calming effect and when you plan as long as I have, you look forward to each engagement."

Aselstine picked up his love of music at a very young age from his grandparents.

"It was pretty much a generational thing because my grandparents were heavily involved in music in Belleville from the early 1900s on with the Griffith Opera House and on silent movies," he recalled.

Aselstine was eight when he started taking piano lessons with Emily Veley. Two years later, he learned how to play the saxophone and clarinet. His teacher was his grandfather, Walter Aselstine.

His first paid job as a musician came at the age of 12, when he joined his grandfather's nine-piece musical group, The Nightowls. He played the saxophone and clarinet at a New Year's Eve dance at the Deloro Community Centre and received \$5 and all the food he could eat.

Aselstine was 14 when he joined The Commodores Orchestra in 1952. Both his grandfather and father had played with the orchestra in the 1930s.

He played with the orchestra every Friday and Saturday night throughout his high school days at Belleville Collegiate Institute.

"I also performed lip synch to Spike Jones records at this time. I still enjoy doing that," Aselstine laughed.

He turned professional shortly after graduating from BCI. He joined the RCAF Air Transport Command Band based at CFB Downsview and spent the next six years touring across the country as well as Europe and playing at military bases and embassies in Paris and London.

Aselstine also spent a year with the RCAF Central Command Band in Ottawa and it was during a performance at Quinte Secondary School that Aselstine's career hit a musical note with teaching.

"The principal at that time, Les Reid, approached the band after the performance and said the music teacher was leaving Quinte and asked if anyone was interested in teaching instrumental music for the school," he recalled.

Within a year, Aselstine was teaching. But first he had to get his release from the RCAF and then complete his teacher's training over the summer at the Ontario College of Education.

He began teaching music in the fall of 1961 and spent 35 years at Quinte — 30 years as director of music and the last five as co-op education teacher. He retired in 1996.

Aselstine said he enjoyed "tremendously" his teaching career and some of the students he's taught are now performing in groups long linked with the retired teacher.

"How many people have that pleasure to perform with former music students," he said.

It was in 1965 that he helped start what has become the extremely popular 'concert in the park' series. Aselstine was president of the newly-formed

Belleville

Federation of Musicians

which subsequently started the free weekly concerts with funding from the Music Performance Trust Fund and Myles Morton, former publisher of The Intelligencer.

"I'm extremely proud to have been part of the establishment of the series to promote live music for the general public," he said.

Even in retirement, Aselstine is playing full steam ahead.

"I wouldn't want it any other way. I'm just so lucky to be able to do the things I love doing and have the support of my wife, Helen."

He's currently performing with the following groups — Doug Aselstine Trio, Doug Aselstine Quintet, Commodores Orchestra, Bruce Parsons and the Little Big Band, Stan Wiggins and the River City Jazz Band, Jack Fortin Quintet from Trenton and the 8 Wing Concert Band at CFB Trenton.

He joined the 8 Wing's concert band three years ago as a volunteer, not a paid member.

He plays clarinet for the 35-piece band that recently returned from a weekend concert series at the NATO base in Germany after representing Canada at the international cultural festival. Another concert highlight came last March in Goose Bay when it also performed for four days during the Labrador Winter Games.

"It's almost like a script," Aselstine said, "because I started off as an RCAF musician and here I am 50 years later playing again for an RCAF concert band. You can't ask for anything better than that."

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