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Laurier's new undergraduate community music program strikes a chord with students

WATERLOO – Wilfrid Laurier University's new Bachelor of Music program in Community Music is providing students with new opportunities to make positive social change by performing the music they are passionate about.

Launched in the fall at Laurier's Waterloo campus, the undergraduate Community Music program is one of a kind in Canada and has been receiving positive feedback from students. The university has offered a masters-level Community Music program since 2013.

"The Bachelor of Music in Community Music is everything I wanted, but couldn't find in other post-secondary music programs," said Justis Krar, one of 36 first-year music students enrolled in the program at Laurier. "It combines my love of improvisation with the idea that music should be accessible to everyone."

The Laurier program aims to improve student's musicianship and leadership skills, preparing them to use music to enact positive social change in various communities. Students, who will become multi-instrument proficient and comfortable with performing and improvising, will explore principles of community music that form the theoretical framework for the discipline. In fourth year, students will organize a community music based event or research project that aligns with their interests, strengths and career goals.

"Community Music offers flexibility in musical expression, creating a path to inspire a student's personal musical interests," said Kevin Swinden, acting dean of the Faculty of Music.

"With input from prospective students, Laurier's Master of Arts in Community Music graduates and current faculty, the Bachelors program in Community Music opens the realm of possibilities for post-secondary music education," said Swinden. "The program is a natural evolution designed for students looking beyond the typical conservatory model and classical programming of most Canadian university music programs."

The origins of community music can be attributed to work in the United Kingdom, where the intervention of music amongst at-risk youth is a means to create positive change in their development. Laurier is becoming an advocate for Community Music in Canada and is hosting the International Community Music Conference on its Waterloo campus, May 11-13, 2017. This will be the first time the conference will be held on Canadian soil.

Laurier's Faculty of Music is currently accepting applications to the Bachelor of Music in Community Music. Auditions for the program can be performed on any combination of instruments within any genre — welcoming electric guitarists, musical theatre enthusiasts, folk artists and more. Laurier's Master of Arts in Community Music is also accepting applications to a full-time program for September 2017, while continuing its popular part-time option. Contact choosemusic@wlu.ca for details.