

Music Man

Jared Cassedy '04 garners national recognition for the job he loves

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Jared Cassedy '04 is a music teacher in Windham, N.H., but he doesn't see the 87 high-schoolers in his band as students. He sees them as fellow musicians.

"With the right guidance and support, these students take ownership in a way that really drives the program forward," he says. "We are in this ensemble together. We work together to make music."

Those collaborative practices in Cassedy's teaching are part of the reason that he was chosen as the 2015 recipient of the Grammy Music Educator Award, which recognizes a teacher's contribution in the classroom.

Cassedy is the director of the Windham High School Band and the director of the Windham schools' K–12 fine arts program. He started off in the school system teaching music at Windham Middle School in 2005, shortly after his graduation from UNH.

Nominated by a former Windham student, Cassedy was chosen from a pool of 7,000 nominees nationwide. To accept his award, he was invited to the Grammy celebration in Los Angeles in February.

Cassedy grew up in Salem, N.H., amid a musical family that included three siblings and parents who wanted all of their children to have a well-rounded education. "We played sports, we played instruments, we were in book clubs, everything," he says.

He joined his high school band and when he came to UNH in the fall of 2000, he knew he had found a place where his passion for music would be supported. He was a member of the UNH Wind Symphony, a member of several campus quintets and was the drum major in the Wildcat Marching Band for three years.

It was here at UNH, Cassedy says, that his passion for music evolved into something more.

"What I loved about the faculty and program at UNH was that it really opened my eyes. It was a paradigm shift from my own personal love of performing, and learning that there was more I could do. I could have a significant impact on students and people around me," he says, adding that he loved his music education classes, especially those that focused on elementary methods and school culture as well as educational structure and change.

What he learned here, he says, is that "music can be a vehicle for having an impact that so far surpasses the actual production of notes with an instrument."

It's an idea he's brought with him into the classroom and performance spaces in Windham. Music education, he says, truly matters so much more than just the music.

"It's not just about performance ... we're teaching them life skills — how to be creative, how to be collaborative," he says. "If you look at this world we live in, whether or not you have a career in the humanities or in science, or really in anything, you have to be creative. Arts and music teach young people how to be collaborative, tolerant, open-minded ... those are the things that are needed to drive our society today."

Collaboration is a common theme in the Windham music classrooms — it's how the school music program started. The school opened in 2009 (Windham high-schoolers previously attended Salem High), and Cassedy was drafted from Windham Middle School to lead the new music program faculty.

"When we started, we only opened for freshmen and sophomore classes, and I sat down with the kids and developed the core values of the program and talked about where we wanted to go together," Cassedy says. "My philosophy is, if you give students

responsibility, give them respect, set expectations appropriately high, they will reach those expectations. The results you are going to get are going to be incredible.”

As he said in a recent CBS This Morning segment about his award: “It’s a wonderful recognition. I see it more as a recognition of the students... Without the students coming back every single day, giving it 110 percent ... Their lips are falling off, and they’re exhausted and they’re studying for midterm exams and they have a lot of pressure on them, but they’re the ones. I could be up there waving my arms around, but they’re the ones making the music.”

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