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Explaining the birth of the blues to the schools

By MARIL SWAN
The Tweed News

Kids love music. The popularity of portable music players shows this clearly. They also love to be involved in making music, clapping and singing along. Music is as much a part of childhood as other types of learning.

Music can also be a type of therapy, allowing children to express themselves, opening up repressed feelings and letting the joy emerge.

That is part of the premise for the "Blues for the Schools" program initiated by the Loyal Blues Fellowship of Quinte. Under this program, local blues musicians such as Rick Fines are invited to the schools to conduct a special class tailored to each age group.

On November 8th, singer/songwriter Rick Fines gave the Grade 5 students a very entertaining and educational lesson on the roots of popular music. With songs and enthusiastic narration, he explained how "Blues" sprang from the songs of black slaves in the American south. The rhythms hark back to Africa but the words and music are definitely about their experiences and sorrows. It was called "field hollers".

In 1903, a musician named W.C. Handy heard a black man in the US south playing a different kind of music. He thought it sounded sad and dubbed it "blues", a name which has stuck with this type of music ever since.

Poor black musicians made their own instruments since they couldn't afford guitars.



The Tweed News/MARIL SWAN

Belting out the blues

Musician Rick Fines entertained and enlightened Grade 5 students at Tweed Hungerford Senior School on Nov. 8th.

One such instrument was called a "diddly-bo" - a simple piece of wood with wires stretched on it and a bar underneath to raise the strings. The player used a metal bar to slide up and down the strings to make different notes. Rock and roll singer Bo Diddley took his name from this instrument.

As time went on, the "blues" became more popular, eventually finding its niche in Rock N Roll, beginning in the early 1950s and reaching the mainstream with major stars like Elvis Presley and the Rolling Stones.

The Grade 5 students at THSS responded

enthusiastically to the presentation as they joined Rick Fines in some tunes that were popular before their parents were born.

The Blues in the Schools is one of several projects by the Loyal Blues Fellowship. Their main objective is to create a cultural awareness of the roots of popular music in the blues genre, to develop a Blues Festival in the Quinte area that will be an annual event, and to have fun listening to and playing their favourite kind of music, and of course, bringing their music to the young so blues will live on into the future.

Tweed students see The Fines side of the blues

BY SHANNON BINDER BRAY

Tweed - Two of Tweed Hungerford Senior School's Grade 5 classes got a touch of the blues Wednesday, November 8, 2006, thanks to Belleville's Loyal Blues Fellowship, Peterborough musician Rick Fines and local parents Vicki McCulloch and Chris Georgiou. The Loyal Blues Fellowship, the Ontario Arts Council and the Canada Council for the Arts together fund a local Blues in the Schools program, originally created in Chicago in 1978 and now a worldwide initiative, which educates students on blues music, including its various styles and musicians.

Blues musician Rick Fines presents the musical sessions which tell a history of the blues and its evolu-

tion into today's music to various schools throughout Canada and this past week had the opportunity to visit ten schools within the Hastings and Prince Edward District School Board who had sponsorship for the program. In addition to visiting Tweed Hungerford Senior, Rick enlightened students from Marmora Senior Public School, St. Peters Catholic School, Tyendinaga Public School, Park Dale Public School, Queen Victoria Public School, Madoc Township Public School, Sacred Heart Catholic School, Kente Public School and Stirling Senior Public School describing his workshop as "far too little music and much too much education."

McCulloch and Georgiou are both blues enthusiasts and Chris, an avid musician himself, also sits on the Loyal Blues Fellowship Board. The couple sponsored the Tweed Hungerford Senior School (THSS) session and opted to divide Rick's time between the two classes, offering a more intimate setting for the demonstration which had the children tapping their knees, counting bars and singing. In addition to shorter sessions, week-long sessions are also available and can focus on guitar styles and instruction or involve a song writing



■ Rick Fines, on his parlour sized guitar, presented a Blues in the Schools music session to Grade 5 Tweed Hungerford Senior School students on Wednesday, November 8, 2006.

workshop. Fines' presentation to Mrs. Buscher's Grade 5 THSS students included teaching them about rhyming patterns and the origin of the blues through field holler work songs which became the inspiration for 12 bar blues and the shuffle rhythm. The heavy-hearted sounds of the slave sung work songs in the Southern United States led to the labelling of the music as the "blues." The 12-bar blues is a familiar rhythm which is still prominent in

much of today's classic rock and country music and the impact of the music also still resonates today. Elvis Presley popularized the blues song "Hound Dog"; blues musician Muddy Waters created the "rock band" through the grouping of two electric guitars, a bass and drums and was also the inspiration behind the naming of The Rolling Stones.

Rick, who travels the world while playing the guitar and singing, describes himself as the "luckiest guy in the world" and says "... I like to show them that everyone has some musical ability and that they can actively enjoy music by listening instead of just hearing." More information on how to access Blues in the Schools programming can be found at the following web sites: <www.blues-in-the-schools.org>, <<http://www.loyalblues.ca/>> and <www.rickfines.com>.