

# Teaching Instrumental Music in Papua New Guinea

One day you are teaching band in St. Louis, MO, USA, and the next you are transported to Papua New Guinea, a country halfway around the world, and you get to do the same thing! Getting to Papua New Guinea is a story in itself, but I was asked to tell you what it is like teaching band here in Ukarumpa, Papua New Guinea.



Ukarumpa is located in the Eastern Highlands Province of Papua New Guinea. Once you arrive in Port Moresby and go through customs, you are picked up and taken to a plane hangar where you board a Kodiak airplane for an 80 minute flight up to the Aiyura Valley airstrip. Our homes are made out of plywood on stilts to move with the earthquakes, and yes, we do have running water and indoor toilets in case you are wondering! Ukarumpa International School (UIS) is an accredited school under the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC). Every 6 years we have members of this association come to Ukarumpa to review our curriculum to make sure teachers are actually doing what we say we are doing on paper.

UIS exists to support the work of Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL) in Papua New Guinea. This means that the parents of our students may be Bible translators, literacy workers, or some kind of support help such as doctors, nurses, teachers, finance, or computer tech people. The majority of our students are what we call missionary kids.

You may wonder how big our school is and how many students we have in our music program. We have had up to 15 different nationalities in our program, including Canadian, US, Finnish, Scottish, Dutch, Malaysian, Japanese, Aussie, Korean, Irish, Swiss, German, Finnish, Kiwi and Papua New Guineans. As I write this article, there are 114 students in grades 7-12. There are presently 35 high school students in high school band, 10 of whom will graduate in June, and 18 in the Middle School band. There are 44 in the High School Choir and 27 in an Intermediate Choir, grades 5-8.



Our band program begins in our Primary School grade 5. We test students who are interested in band at the end of grade 4, so we can begin as soon as the new school year starts. We use the Standard of Excellence Method book by Bruce Pearson. We have found this to be a good starting program for our students, although we may have to make some adjustments depending on their speed or aptitude at picking up musical concepts. We combine the grade 6 band students with grades 7 & 8 to make a Middle School Band with better instrumentation. In order to get into MS Band, a grade 6 student must know five major scales and then we work from that point during their years in Middle School Band to move them up to 5 flats and 5 sharps.

Our Middle School Band uses a variety of warm-up exercise books, focusing on rhythms, scales, phrasing, etc. At the beginning of our school year, we combine the Middle School Band with the High School Band for a term of Marching Band. We use a lot of music from Arrangers Publishing for this performance at the Medium to Medium Advanced level. Since we teach individual lessons throughout the school day, this gives us time during the marching band season to work with the students on memorizing and playing the music correctly. High School band meets from 7:45am to 8:35am three days a week. During our term of Marching Band we also hold an after school practice from 4:00-5:30pm. The lessons, depending on how many teachers we have available, are taught throughout the day, with students coming out of a class for 25 minutes on a rotation basis each week so no student misses part of a class more than 2-3 times per term. When there is only one teacher doing lessons, we do an every-other-week lesson schedule between the middle school and high school students.



By the time our students reach High School Band, we have raised the bar to a fairly high level. Do all our students meet that expectation? Honestly, no. But, if they have a desire to do the best they can, that's all we ask! I have learned in my years of teaching that students will do what is expected of them or at least give it their best. We perform some university level music at our April and June concerts. Is it challenging for them? You bet! But they love it! When they can accomplish something difficult, it does amazing things for them and for the band. Part of our grading system involves a Practice Report Card. They earn points for practice. Their practice times are written down on this card and each week the parents must sign it and the student turns it in to the band director. They also earn points for whatever grade they are given in their lessons. At the end of the term we have a Self-Grading Form, where the students can put in the points they have earned for that term, including points for preparedness for class, behaviour and attitude. If they perform in a recital or play in other performances outside of band, they are given extra credit points. This form must be signed by parents and turned in on time. We have found that this is a good way for both students and parents to see their ongoing progress, or if they need to step up their practice time. The teacher will have the final say in the student's grade, but it gives the student a more accurate view of what their grade will be.



UIS is a very academic school and for the most part teachers have great parent support and great support from the administration. The students are respectful and friendly even if you don't have them in class. Frankly, I love teaching here in Papua New Guinea. I miss the shopping malls and being able to send my

instruments off to a repair shop, but one learns to do a lot more than they thought they could when placed in a third world country! Last year, for the first time ever, our band went out of the country to perform in Hervey Bay and Brisbane.

This is the group that went to Brisbane June 2012. Our community has an all-purpose Meeting House where we have band and choir concerts, drama productions, skate nights for the kids, and a variety of other things. Every Sunday we have two church services in this building, one in English and one in Tok Pisin, a trade language.



These are some of our classrooms at UIS. I appreciate the chance to tell others about this great school in the Eastern Highlands of Papua New Guinea. If you are interested in knowing more about this school, look us up online at: <http://www.uispng.org>. If you have any questions pertaining to our music program, please feel free to contact me at <mailto:uissc-music@sil.org.pg>

Marlene Schutter

School of Music Department Head  
Ukarumpa International

*Photo 1: View of the town*

*Photo 2: View of the town*

*Photo 3: New music building, built in 2009. We had to do a LOT of fundraisers to provide the funding for this!*

*Photo 4: School Music Facilities*

*Photo 5: UIS Touring Band*

*Photo 6: The school band rehearsing*

## **PNG Project**

**We are still looking for instruments and equipment to be sent to Papua New Guinea so they can start a band program at other schools.**

To arrange drop off or for any further information,

please email: [pngproject@abodaq.org.au](mailto:pngproject@abodaq.org.au)



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