

The rhythm of yesterday and today

By Janis Leering
The Mirror

Brent Robitaille never had dreams of becoming a huge rock star. He was always more focused on behind the scenes, as a composer.

The local guitar teacher has influenced many students through his 15 years, and continues to learn about playing guitar.

"I grew up here and when I wanted to find a composition teacher, there were none listed in the phone book," said Robitaille.

But when he approached the Royal Conservatory of Music, he found a man from Midland was the first name on the list.

"It ended up Samuel Dolan lived three blocks away from me and was one of the leading Canadian composers at the time."

Robitaille studied with him for three years and he said Dolan was a major influence in his life. After learning from a variety of teachers, Robitaille graduated from McGill University and wanted to become a composer.

"I never wanted to be a rock and roll star. I have friends and students who are on tour now."

Robitaille did some touring himself as a youth, playing 200 times a year, but said it became difficult after awhile. He also wrote and recorded for television but learned "you can't make money as a composer."

While still composing on the side, he became a teacher and has used a variety of techniques to share his passion for music with other students.



Janis Leering/THE MIRROR

Brent Robitaille uses both contemporary and traditional methods to teach his students how to play guitar.

The basis for his teaching comes not from the pages of a music book, but a biology text.

"The book on anatomy I got from Dolan was the best. Composers can play as well as Mozart, as long as you understand how the hand works and how to move the fingers properly."

There are physical and mental aspects to playing guitar and Robitaille teaches everyone the basics before moving onto more complicated pieces.

"When people first learn, their movements are jagged. But I'm not expecting someone to come in off the street and know the best way of moving their hand, they have to be trained how to move in the most efficient way."

Through the years, he has helped people with different challenges, including arthritis and other physical and mental

disabilities, including students with special needs.

"Those are the most motivated students because they don't take no for an answer, they push me. I've also taught an 80-year-old and the youngest was a five-year-old."

While music is no longer part of the school curriculum, Robitaille said it is good for children. He said guitar has increased in popularity, replacing the piano lessons for many families.

"There have been studies that people who play music in general have good short-term memory. It's also good for the body, for co-ordination."

He has just released a compact disc, called *After All this Time*, with Louis Lefaive and Rick Patenaude, and plans to release another CD in the fall.

For more information, check out his Web site at www.brentrobaille.com.