

## **SCL Conference Arts Channel**

### **Panel: What We Desire for our Graduates**

**Friday 26 June 2020 3:30-4:15pm**

#### **Panelists:**

Janet Thompson (Music; harp; performer/teacher)

Jennifer King (Music; flute; performer/teacher)

Phil Dickerson (Theater; performer/teacher)

Jerry King (Vis Art/Vocal Music/Theater; teacher/director)

#### **Introduction:**

As Christian educators, we are involved in a high and holy enterprise: participating in the crafting of young lives. We get front-row seats in observing --- and Yes, participating in --- the emergence of credible, whole, healthy and “dangerous for good” young people who, upon receiving one of our diplomas, can be reasonably expected to get out there and live well; thrive; to “leave their mark;” to “make this world a better place for having been there;” dare we hope, mediate the gracious presence of God to this broken-but-beautiful world of ours, to be Jesus’ redemptive hands and feet.

What we do as educators – and Arts educators in particular – really *does* matter.

But how well are we gauging the quality of the “product” we are sending out the door? Are they the kind of young women and men that we would like to do life with? Sing with? Be on stage with? Hang an exhibit with? Walk through hard events with? Even log years of friendship with? Do they have what it takes to move on from our CCE K-12 schools and participate in the “real world” of music-making? Theater? Dance? The Visual Arts? (“real world” here meaning either “college-level Arts” or professional or amateur Arts activity). Are they well equipped with what they will need to thrive? To contribute in substantial ways? Do they have the character needed to be a truly *good* working artist? Or will our graduates be “that guy/girl” that is steered around, consigned to the “never again” list, or such a weak practitioner as to be a drag on the whole operation? Do they have the goods simply to last? And to last as a blessing and not a muttered curse?

Funny – scary, actually! – how seldom we assess our own outcomes. An alum here or there might report back on a noteworthy success. You rarely hear about the less-than-successes, the quiet flame-outs, even the eventual college graduate who just cannot seem to get cast, hired, invited. We all, even schools, do love a “best foot forward.”

But it's high time we take stock and unpack the evidence, "good, bad and sideways" as to the quality of our CLAS/CCE Arts graduates. In this panel session, we will hear from three Arts educators who, themselves have not only been on "both sides of the desk," as students, then teachers, but who have also logged a good amount of time in the working world of the professional musician or actor.

Janet Thompson is a career harpist who has taught all ages from the littlest ones (including her own!) up through decades of harp instruction at Kenyon College, a liberal arts institution in Ohio. She has also worked as solo musician and as part of ensembles large and intimate. She makes her home in east-central Ohio.

Jennifer King is an award-winning flutist, with a long career of performing, arts administration and private student instruction. She also home-schooled all four of her children at the same time. Jennifer has been a competitive Irish Step Dancer and has led Catholic-Protestant Youth Connection events with students from Northern Ireland. And she plays a mean pennywhistle! She makes her home in Cincinnati, Ohio.

Phil Dickerson has worked in the Washington DC area as a professional actor and has taught high school-level theater and debate for St. Anselm's Abbey School in DC, and now, for the Covenant School in Charlottesville, Virginia. He makes his home in central Virginia with his wife and.... growing family! Baby due in....?

Let's get started. First we'll give each of our panelists the chance to introduce themselves a little more and say why this topic means something to them. Then they will share some of their ideas about what they would like to see in terms of the quality of graduate in the Arts that could be coming from Classical Christian Schools, and some ideas for how to get there.

Janet...

Jennifer....

Phil...

And now, I'd like to say a few words about what I would like to see more of in students in the Visual Arts....

- Sharply observant
  - Conversant in several different visual languages, not just "realism"
  - Thoughtful about the ideas beneath the visual forms
  - Respectful and genuinely interested in art from other times, places and cultures.
  - Able to speak articulately about their work --- and others'!
  - Courageously curious and humble creative.
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Thanks. Now I'd like to pose a few questions on this topic to tease it out a little more:

1. How important is excellence and a high level of skill in your craft or discipline when it comes to young artists? Is it a cutthroat, Darwinian world where only the most fit survive, or is there room for a learning curve, some latitude to grow into one's place in the field?
2. Does it make any difference at all in the world(s) of the Arts if a person is known to be a Christian or the graduate of a self-described Christian school? I.e., does one's faith impact one's experience in the arena of the Arts, positively or negatively? Do expectations generally run higher or lower when someone sees "Christian" attached to you?
3. Artists sometimes actually get a "Get out of Jail Free" card when it comes to issues of morality, character and ethics. Sometimes! The old trope of the wild, dissolute, eccentric, Bohemian artist dies hard. But how have you found character issues to bear on one's life and work as an artist? Or do they?
4. How important is it that our students in the Arts have a sound business sense?
5. What are some of the more common pitfalls, blind spots or formational gaps in, say, this year's crop of Classical Christian graduates in the Arts? And how might you coach us, the educators, to improve or even fix these gaffes?

And now, we have time for a few questions from you, our "zoomio audience..."