

# Striking a chord

*Aspiring guitarist credits success to St. Anne music teacher*



*Gabe Gagnon, left, and his former student Tyler Sasso get in some practice time together in the music room at St. Anne Catholic High School.*

(Windsor, Ontario, Sept. 10, 2014) – Tyler Sasso has big aspirations that include moving to Los Angeles in the near future and making it as a guitarist in the world of contemporary music.

If those dreams come true, the 23-year-old graduate of St. Anne Catholic High School says much of the credit will belong to music teacher Gabe Gagnon.

“He just created a really great atmosphere here,” Sasso said of his former instructor, who has taught at St. Anne for 29 years.

After graduating high school in 2009, Sasso went on to study music at the University of Windsor. When he finished his undergraduate degree, he completed a master’s degree at the Boston-based Berklee College of Music’s campus in Valencia, Spain.

“It was amazing,” he said of the experience. “It was 12 months, but it really flew by. There aren’t a lot of schools like that for contemporary music. The program was based on jazz, but the focus was really on song writing and production, so it was a really good fit for me.”

Gagnon, whose daughter Lisette is now dating Sasso, made a point of travelling all the way to Spain with his family in the spring just to see his former protégé graduate, an especially proud moment for him as a teacher.

The atmosphere created at St. Anne by Gagnon that helped Sasso thrive is largely modeled on the Musicians Institute, known formerly as the Guitar Institute of Technology, in Hollywood, California where the core mission is to provide a comprehensive, innovative and artistic education in contemporary music.

“I try to give the students a wide variety, and expose them to all kinds of genres, everything from bluegrass and jazz to classical,” Gagnon said. “You expose them to all this, and eventually their own personality comes through. Tyler really took to that.”

Sasso says he likes to play a lot of classic rock and jazz, but that he’s currently been writing some of his own material. He hopes to move to California where he can try to make it as a session player as well as landing some live performance work.

Gagnon, meanwhile, wishes all the best for his former student, but doesn’t necessarily want him to go too far away.

“I want to bring him back to do a master class for my current students,” he said. “It’s neat, because now I can tell all of my other students that you can actually get a master’s degree in guitar. Tyler is a real role model for them.”

Mike Seguin, the superintendent who oversees arts education, described Gagnon as “a gem.”

“Arts are such a critical part of any well-rounded education, and we place a premium on having passionate, dedicated teachers like Mr. Gagnon to provide high quality instruction in the arts,” Seguin said. “We’ve been extremely fortunate to have him for as long as we have.”