

A major donation and a new name for Queen's School of Drama and Music

Mandy Marciniak

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News – There's a new school for music and drama at Queen's and it hopes to make a name for itself across Canada and around the world.

On April 7, Queen's University announced the naming of the Dan School of Music and Drama in honour of Aubrey and Marla Dan and their generous donation of \$5 million to the school.

"They were inspired by their daughter's experience at Queen's, but they were also inspired by the vision behind the coming together of drama and music at this new school," explained Dr. Alan Harrison provost and vice-principal (academic) of Queen's University. "We are so grateful for their generosity and their belief in the university. It is a wonderful gift for us and we will make sure we shepherd it very well."

Aubrey Dan is the founder of Dancap Productions Inc., a Tony Award-winning commercial theatre company with international and Broadway productions including *Jersey Boys*, *The Drowsy Chaperone*, *West Side Story* and *A Streetcar Named Desire*. He knows theatre and when his daughter was looking for a school to pursue her own dreams of theatre at, Dan helped her choose Queen's.

"Six years ago my daughter was agonizing over what school to go to," he explained at the announcement. "She came to me because I had theatrical experience and we went through all the schools and the process of elimination and it was me who said 'Just make the decision and go to Queen's!' and I had to push the send button for her."

Their daughter graduated in 2014 and while she was at the school, the Dans were inspired by her experiences and they ultimately decided that they wanted to help further the school.

"Here we are six years later and she is in London, England working for the Ambassador Theatre Group after her education with some of the best professors ever," said Dan. "Marla and I would come and visit and then this beautiful centre was built and we were inspired."

Following the development of the Isabel Bader Centre for the Performing Arts and the development of new programming that combined the drama and music programs at Queen's, Dan decided it was time to contribute further.

"We toured the building and we could see the potential," he said. "We wanted to make an investment into the future students and faculty and make the best theatre program possible, incorporate the music and make this a place for passion and excitement."

Craig Walker, interim director for the Dan School of Drama and Music, was thrilled with the donation and he looks forward to seeing the impact it will make.

"We have always been very good at imagining different projects we may achieve here and particularly when we started speaking about amalgamating drama and music, there were many ideas we had," he said. "But it is difficult to achieve those without resources and that is the huge difference the gift from the Dan family will make. It has allowed us to dream big and be highly ambitious."

Dan hopes that his donation will help the school reach its full potential and he looks forward to seeing what the future holds.

"We are just scratching the surface and the potential of what will come out of here will be world-renowned," he said. "I think it is fabulous to give back to universities and I hope we inspire other people to do the same."

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Aubrey Dan (right) shakes hands with Dr. Alan Harrison, provost and vice-principal (Academic) of Queen's University following the naming of the new Dan School of Drama and Music.