

# **Divine connection: Baltimore School of Music follows lead of St. Ignatius parishioner**

While James Lowe's beloved guitar sits untouched more than he'd like, he nonetheless shares his love of classical music as director of the Baltimore School of Music, where he oversees a faculty of 15 who teach some 250 students of every age.

"I always felt passionate about music education," he said.

Lowe came to Baltimore 10 years ago to study with renowned guitarist Julian Gray at the Peabody Conservatory. He had earned a bachelor's degree at the University of Nebraska Omaha in guitar and religion, with a religion thesis focused on the theology of Olivier Messiaen, a French composer who used Catholic influences in his work.

Lowe said he feels a "divine connection," both in his Catholicism and his music, adding, "I feel that inspiration all the time."

He grew up playing and teaching rock guitar - until his Marine father studied classical guitar during a posting to Okinawa, Japan, far from his family in North Carolina. Lowe was inspired by his father's videotaped performances.

"I fell in love," he said. "I sold all my electric guitars."

Lowe, 33, a parishioner of St. Ignatius Church in Baltimore, along with his wife, Elizabeth, a former staff writer for the Catholic Review, started planning his school while still a graduate student teaching guitar lessons.

In June 2012, the school's first classes were held at Lee Street Memorial Church in Federal Hill. He found BSM's current home at Second Presbyterian Church in Guilford during a workout in support of Back on My Feet, which promotes running among those facing homelessness and addiction.

“James and I were teammates on the Back on My Feet running team,” James Woods said of the philanthropy. “We happened to be on a run together going by Second Presbyterian Church, and I mentioned it was my church.”

“I looked at a million spaces,” Lowe said. “Nothing would have worked out as well as this.”

BSM occupies eight rooms and uses the chapel for piano lessons and recitals. Pastor Thomas Blair said the school has been a good fit.

“Our congregation considers music as one of God’s gifts to use and enjoy; we consider the music school to be part of our ministry to the larger community,” he said.

Don’t look for classes in rock or jazz at BSM. Everything is strictly classical – at least until this fall when Mini Maestros is introduced for toddlers, featuring singing and games. Other classes for younger children will include an introduction to musical instruments and classes in violin and guitar.

Lowe said Mini Maestros resulted from his study as part of Goldman Sachs’ 10,000 Small Businesses program to assist small business leaders. He graduates Aug. 2.

Lowe strives to create a sense of community at BSM, which he describes as a mission-driven, for-profit organization. “We try to collaborate and work together,” he said. “Our mission is more important than our profits.”

While the school thrives, it does keep Lowe away from his guitar.

“I had to put it on the back burner for a while as the school was growing so much,” he explained.

*Two concerts in nearby Sherwood Gardens are set for this fall: Saturday, Sept. 16, at 10 a.m., and a concert with yoga Saturday, Oct. 14, at 10 a.m. Lowe will play guitar at both.*