

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN TWO ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS MEET A SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA?

BY LARRY SCRIPP

On Friday morning in late March, school buses arrived at Jordan Hall carrying virtually every student and teacher from the Johnson Elementary School and the Conservatory Lab Charter School. But this was no ordinary lesson in music appreciation — either for the young school children or for the NEC student orchestra on stage.

By the end of the day, the school children had joined the musicians on stage during Shostakovich's *Festive Overture*, *Fifth Symphony* and *Violin Concerto in A minor* with soloist and Conservatory student Rimma Yermosh. They had met their NEC student "pen-pals" during a rehearsal break and, finally, they joined the orchestra, playing their violins, recorders, and singing a special arrangement of Pachelbel's *Canon* to prepare for a concert the following week. For Conservatory college students and their conductor, Richard Hoenich, the events were a reminder of how music can become an unforgettable learning experience in every child's education.

The photographs and quotations preceding this interlude document the flavor, energy, and look of this annual Learning Through Music event at New England Conservatory.

This kind of event requires no ordinary level of preparation and teamwork. Throughout this year's Learning Through Music partnership program, Elementary School teachers and New England Conservatory faculty have worked together to discover ways in which music-making and listening processes can be integrated with classroom learning. The Jordan Hall rehearsal event was designed to allow every young student to be unusually close to the music-making process as a listener and as a participant. Since the children had begun their violin lessons, played their recorders, studied singing and keyboard, worked with computer-assisted music projects, and had created their own musical instruments throughout the school year, they had no trouble fully engaging in the musical events at Jordan Hall. Because the children had written "pen-pal" letters to orchestra members in which they asked about their lives as music students and about the music they were playing, learning through music became a *personalized* experience, interactive and musically exciting for all. Finally, because Johnson and Conservatory Lab Charter School faculty have worked tirelessly to create new ways to incorporate music into the classroom and into personal learning portfolios, these children will have a life-long reminder of their personal Learning Through Music experiences.

Samples of pen-pal correspondence now included in the students' Learning Through Music portfolios are another reminder of the event. The following, for example, is a typical correspondence between a first grader at the Conservatory Lab

Charter School and a member of the New England Conservatory orchestra (Gabriel) — typical because the elementary student introduces herself, describes her interests, and then asks questions about music. Gabriel's response is respectful of the child's interests, yet extends the conversation to include Mozart, a new topic for the child that will be explored more as she continues her musical studies.

Dear Gabriel

My name is Juanita. I like to read and I like to play and I like to watch Rocket Power it's on Nickelodeon and I play the violin. You play the violin. What song do you know?

Gabriel answers,

Dear Juanita,

Thank you very much for writing to me! I have never seen "Rocket Power" on Nickelodeon. It must be a cool show, because you like it. I like to play the violin. It is very fun. I like to play songs written by Mozart. Have you ever heard of Mozart? I hope you have fun with the violin.

Juanita writes back,

Dear Gabriel,

I don't know Mozart. I hope you tell me about him please.

For elementary school students in Learning Through Music Programs, these conversations and related events can change their relationship to classical music from something completely remote from their lives to a rewarding personal experience. Such activities communicate to every child that they, too, can participate in this particular aspect of American culture, and, by implication, any other aspect of American society.

Students' reflective writings in response to all phases of the Learning Through Music event in Jordan Hall reveal how music engages their young imaginations, rewards their hard work in school, and contributes significantly to their self-esteem.

What was it like to meet your pen-pal?

It was fun to see her play. Her name was April. She was pretty and nice.

It was fun to meet Gabe. He knows some people who like Pokémon.

When I met my pen pal, I was surprised that ...

I am going to play with her.

She had a shiny cello and long shiny hair.

Pachelbel Canon: All Connecting Patterns
Time Sequence

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	
8	Re		Re		Re	Re	Re		8
7		Do#		Do#				Do#	7
6			Ti		Ti		Ti		6
5	La	La		La		La	La		5
4					Sol		Sol		4
3	Fa#		Fa#	Fa#		Fa#			3
2		Mi					Mi	Mi	2
1	Re								1
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	

A music-math representation that represents most of the harmonic possibilities of the eight-measure ground bass (shaded squares) of Pachelbel's Canon.

Time Sequence

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	
8	Re								8
7		Do#						Do#	7
6			Ti				Ti		6
5				La		La			5
4					Sol				4
3			Fa#	F#		Fa#			3
2		Mi					Mi	Mi	2
1	Re								1
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	

A representation of a pattern of crossing scales that many children at the Conservatory Lab Charter School chose to sing and play along with Pachelbel's Canon in concert with the New England Conservatory String Orchestra.

As I sat on stage and watched my pen pal play his/her instrument, I was thinking...

That she played really well and she went down on the cello fingerboard not like the violin.

What was it like to be in the orchestra (listening)?

I was happy to be with the orchestra.

It was exciting to listen up close.

It was fun and a little scary.

What was it like to play with the orchestra?

It was great when the audience clapped.

I was kind of shy.

It was cool because we were on stage.

After listening to the orchestra and playing my violin today, something new that I have learned is ...

It is not scary so I don't have to be shy.

I want to play like she did.

As indicated by the quotations in the previous pages, New England Conservatory students also responded to the Jordan Hall event very

positively and with renewed interest in how an orchestra can contribute to public education. Many students communicated to Conservatory faculty that they will never forget entering Jordan Hall and seeing their own names on the placards held up by excited elementary school students and then meeting these students during the break in the rehearsal. Conservatory Lab Charter School and Johnson School faculty spoke about how the expressions on students' faces — from the moment they entered the hall for the first rehearsal to the look of accomplishment after the performance a week later — revealed the power of music to capture the hearts and minds of these spirited young children.

PORTRAIT OF A LEARNING THROUGH MUSIC SPECIALIST

The next article reports an interview with New England Conservatory faculty member John Tyson who describes his role as a Learning Through Music Specialist in terms of the impact a musical artist can have on school communities. Besides preparing students for the Jordan Hall event described above, John provided a Learning Through Music recorder program for all grade levels, K-6, which included improvisation, composition of "Renaissance Raps," and the study of the relationships that exist among music, dance and art in the Renaissance period. He also organized student/parent recorder ensembles, concerts by his group *Renaissomics*, and music and dance nights for the whole community in Nahant, Massachusetts.

From Tyson's point of view, professional musicians and conservatory Music-in-Education interns can use Learning Through Music programs in elementary schools to create self-sufficient musical cultures that can be sustained by students, teachers, parents, and other community members making music together.

Rather than using the recorder as a stepping stone to participation in bands or orchestral ensembles, Tyson uses the instrument as a resource for all students to experience instrumental and vocal repertoire through a wide range of musical styles (from Renaissance to classical, popular, and world musical literature) and musical processes (call-and-response, part singing, performing rounds, trading fours in improvisation, etc.). At the same time, these musical activities represent an opportunity for young children to develop "language skills, listening skills, physical coordination skills, creativity development, and group dynamics."

This interview illustrates why Learning Through Music programs depend upon the artistic skills and dedication of mature musical artists and their guided interns to create rich instrumental musical programs that take time to explore authentic entry points into other subject areas. As Tyson reflects on his work in Learning Through Music programs, we can see that he is breaking down barriers between the practices of formal music training and the goals of an elementary school community. To this end, both perspectives, from his point of view, will share the goal of "developing children's imaginations and their openness to possibilities," which will in turn enact positive change in our society. ¶