

PORTRAIT OF A LEARNING THROUGH MUSIC EVENT AT JORDAN HALL

**“THE PLACE WAS HUGE, THE MUSIC
WAS GOOD, AND MY PEN PAL
WAS VERY NICE.”**

“I liked it when we got to sit on the stage and listen to them practice. It was like a front row experience. I think they played really well even when they practiced. If they messed up I wouldn’t know because they sounded so good.”

“I’m going to tell you a little bit about Jordan Hall.... Jordan Hall is smaller than Symphony Hall but I like it much better. The Jordan Hall orchestra is made up of students at the New England Conservatory who are interested in playing in a symphony orchestra. I really enjoyed the performance a couple of weeks ago. I liked it because they played great music like “Romeo and Juliet” (Prokofiev). Jordan Hall has a great composer who teaches great musicians! If you have never gone to Jordan Hall you should or you’ll be missing out on a lot!”

— Reflections by fourth grade students from the Johnson Elementary School in Nahant



JEFF THIEBAUTH

Richard Hoenich leads the New England Conservatory Symphony Orchestra for a marimba concerto while the musicians’ elementary school pen-pals listen attentively at floor-level.

“It brought the orchestra together. We had more of an ensemble feel. I personally think that was the best and most exciting concert I performed in all year. Mr. Hoenich’s (conductor) talk left a big impression on the kids, but I think the same could be said for us, that is, it left a big impression on the orchestra members. I talk about my pen pals all the time, and I plan to keep in contact with them. It was a very positive experience and everybody had a good time. It was new and unexpected. I think it made everyone feel good knowing that they were involved in something good, rather than the same old concert routine. And the community involvement was impressive, and important...there was a sense of the orchestra being a part of the community.”

— Reflections by a student in the New England Conservatory Symphony Orchestra



Rimma Yermosh, student concerto competition winner, performs Shostakovich's Violin Concerto in A minor with the New England Conservatory Symphony Orchestra led by Richard Hoenich for her Learning Through Music pen-pals during a dress rehearsal.

“THE OPEN REHEARSAL PROVIDED A WONDERFUL OPPORTUNITY FOR ALL OF THE STUDENTS OF THE JOHNSON SCHOOL TO GET A TASTE OF WHAT IT IS LIKE TO BE PART OF AN ORCHESTRA. THE STUDENTS WERE ABLE TO EXPERIENCE ‘UP CLOSE AND PERSONAL’ THE MAGIC OF COMBINING MANY INDIVIDUAL TALENTS AND ENERGIES TO BLEND INTO A POWERFUL CREATION GREATER THAN THE SUM OF ITS PARTS. HOW EXCITING! WE ALL FEEL GRATEFUL TO BE ABLE TO PARTICIPATE IN SUCH AN INSPIRING PROGRAM.”

— Reflection by a fourth grade teacher at the Johnson Elementary School in Nahant



“THE DAY I FOUND OUT WE WERE GOING TO MEET OUR PEN PALS AT NEW ENGLAND CONSERVATORY I WAS VERY HAPPY BUT VERY NERVOUS. BUT WHEN I MET HER SHE WAS SO NICE I FELT SO COMFORTABLE TALKING TO HER. AND IT WAS SO AMAZING HOW SHE PLAYED. I DID NOT KEEP MY EYES OFF HER INSTRUMENT. I LEARNED A LOT ABOUT THE VIOLIN AND MY PEN PAL. I HOPE SOMEONE ELSE WILL GET THIS WONDERFUL EXPERIENCE LIKE WE ALL DID.”

— Reflections by an elementary school student

Top: Students experience an entire range of musical effects in the string section as they sit near their pen-pal during a rehearsal of Shostakovich's Festive Overture.

Bottom: The Finale from Shostakovich's Fifth Symphony provokes astonishment from the French horn player's pen-pal.

JEFF THIEBAUTH



“We in the orchestra tend to play music for ourselves but this concert and rehearsal made me realize the importance of playing for others. Also it took on a different focus. It made me realize that I, personally, might be making impressions on others.”

— Reflections by a New England Conservatory Orchestra member

"I think the letter writing was the best part of the event because it was the most personal. The kids wrote personal letters asking specific questions, and got personal letters back, so there was already a connection there... some kind of foundation. And it was that personal connection that made it special for the kids, I think. When the concert came, a few of my kids were there and they were waving at me from the audience. It was very different, the connections were very tangible. Usually when we do outreach concerts we don't know any of the kids."

— Reflections by an elementary school teacher



JEFF THIEBAUTH

Elementary students discuss their letters with their pen-pal during a break in the dress rehearsal.

"HAVING A PEN PAL IS GREAT BECAUSE YOU GET TO SHARE THOUGHTS OR PERSONAL THOUGHTS. YOU WOULD HAVE A CHANCE TO ASK WHAT THEY DO FOR A LIVING, OR WHAT THEY LIKE TO DO."

"When we first found out we were getting pen pals we were excited. But when we found out they were from the New England Conservatory we were more excited...When we heard the names of some of the pen pals, we knew right away that they were not from around here. Then I got very interested. When I wrote my first pen pal letter I was writing away about things I wanted to know and things I already did know."

— Reflections by a fourth grade student



Fascination with an instrument like the harp makes for lively discussion and opportunities for demonstration for four elementary students and their New England Conservatory Symphony Orchestra pen-pal.

JEFF THIEBAUTH



**“I THINK US HAVING PEN PALS
WAS A GOOD IDEA BECAUSE WE
CAN LEARN ABOUT THE
SYMPHONY AND WHAT IT’S LIKE
BEING IN IT AND HOW HARD
THEY HAVE TO WORK.”**

Top: New England Conservatory student gives impromptu instruction on playing the marimba and reading music to a pen-pal during intermission of the rehearsal.

Bottom: Curiosity abounds during the rehearsal as a New England Conservatory Symphony Orchestra member shows his pen-pal how his trombone works.

JEFF THIEBAUTH



**“HAVING A PEN
PAL IS GREAT.
WHEN YOU HAVE
A PEN PAL FROM
JORDAN HALL
YOU LEARN A
LOT, ESPECIALLY
ABOUT MUSIC.”**

— Reflections by fourth grade elementary school students



After only five months of violin instruction at the Conservatory Lab Charter School, Kate Vincent's and Mona Rashad's (graduate students at New England Conservatory) beginning violinists are able to rehearse successfully with their conservatory string orchestra pen-pals in preparation for a performance of Pachelbel's Canon the next week at Jordan Hall.

“WHEN YOU THINK ABOUT IT, PRACTICING IS A LOT HARDER THAN PLAYING FOR REAL. WHEN I WAS ON THE STAGE PRACTICING, THE LIGHT WAS SHINING ON ALL OF THE PEOPLE AND THAT MADE ME REAL SCARED. BUT IN THE NIGHT CONCERT I COULDN'T SEE ANYTHING SO IT WAS NOT AS SCARY. YOU MAY THINK PLAYING FOR REAL ON STAGE IS HARD, BUT IN MY OPINION IT'S NOT.”

“I loved to go to the concert and to get to play in it. It was so exciting!”

“Watching the concert was very fun! I loved the music a lot! Hearing brave students on stage was the best part of all! I had a great time!”

— Reflections by elementary students

“Well for me, the most powerful images came from the concert. When they started improvising vocally, like when Rhoda Bernard (NEC faculty) was walking around doing all that improvising. And when John Tyson (NEC faculty) started playing, they understood their teacher. He would play one thing, and they would answer it. That was amazing! I wonder if I could do that with my own instrument, you know? Yeah, I thought the concert was magical.”

— Reflections by a New England Conservatory Symphony Orchestra member

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