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# BRAVO!

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# A PIECE OF CARNEGIE HALL COMES TO MARYLAND

BY DR. CANDICE MOWBRAY

When asked to describe the sound of more than a thousand children simultaneously playing recorders, Maryland Symphony Orchestra flutist Susan Mott paused, thoughtfully looked upward, and replied, "It was like magic." For MSO operations manager Megan DuBois, it was not the sound of the recorders that left the biggest impression; it was the sound of the children's voices. She recalled being backstage and said, "When they first started singing, I got goose bumps." Maestra Elizabeth Schulze described the experience as thrilling. She said, "We couldn't stop smiling and tearing up at the sound of the students' voices and instruments confidently making music with the orchestra."

In collaboration with Carnegie Hall's Weill Music Institute (WMI), the Maryland Symphony Orchestra began participating in WMI's Link Up program during the 2012–2013 season. Link Up pairs orchestras across the country with schools in their local communities, inviting them to learn about orchestral repertoire through a year-long, hands-on music curriculum. Students explore a core musical concept in one of three distinct curricula. The curriculum chosen by the MSO for 2012–2013 was *The Orchestra Sings*, through which students learned about melody. Other available curricula include *The Orchestra Rocks*, an exploration of rhythm, and *The Orchestra Moves*, the study of melodic motifs.

When the opportunity arose for the MSO to partner with WMI to present Link Up, Maestra Schulze happily approved. She conducted concerts for an earlier stage of the program in New York City during the 1990's and intimately witnessed the way in which the program "captured the imagination of the young listeners."

She realized the "interactive, hands-on collaboration between orchestra and student was a winning formula."

After attending a training session in New York, DuBois presented informational meetings about the program to teachers and administrators in local schools. One of the added benefits of participating in Link Up is the relationship that is fostered between the schools and the MSO. The program is truly a collaborative effort and DuBois expressed that she felt more connected to the teachers after working to realize this program.

Utilizing materials provided free-of-charge by WMI, teachers guided students in exploring music through a composer's lens, with students participating in active music making in the classroom, performing repertoire on recorder, violin, voice, or body percussion and taking part in creative work such as composing their own pieces inspired by the orchestral music they have studied. Cooperation from local music educators was a key element to implementing the program. Preparations began early in the school

year as teachers incorporated the Link Up curriculum into their existing plans. Some of the instructors' responsibilities included teaching recorder techniques, familiarizing students with specific compositions and teaching new songs. They planted the seed of enthusiasm, which blossomed during the culminating concerts.

The program concluded with approximately 3,400 students from Washington, Frederick and Franklin counties attending one of three special MSO performances. The concerts were sponsored by Citi and held at the Maryland Theater on May 8th and 9th, 2013. The students did not just *attend* these concerts; they *participated* by singing, playing recorder and/or playing string instruments from their seats along with fifty-five members of the professional orchestra. During the concerts, educators chaperoned and helped guide student participation. A slideshow that projected on a screen behind the orchestra offered visual aids. Guest artists Brendan Fitzsimmons and Katie Groh Fitzsimmons served as



Students got the opportunity to play their recorders with the MSO.



*Barbara Ingram School for the Arts students helped to lead the audience through the performance.*

narrator and soloist for the productions while students from the Barbara Ingram School for the Arts provided additional choral support. The orchestra played excerpts from masterworks by some of history's greatest composers including Antonín Dvořák, Ludwig van Beethoven and Igor Stravinsky.

MSO trombonist Dr. Wayne Wells stated, "I was blown away by the sound...The kids' singing and playing throughout the [performance] raised the idea of audience participation to a new level and I'm sure they took a whole new meaning from the experience that goes beyond a typical symphonic concert." Clarinetist Michael Hoover echoed the sentiment, saying the program "is fantastic because it really gets the students involved."

As a musician, parent, dedicated music educator and former coordinator of educational outreach for the MSO, flutist Susan Mott had a unique concert-day perspective. She was onstage for the concerts and shared a profound moment: "We began the opening measures of the 'New World' Symphony. It wasn't a simplified version made for children; it was the actual score. Maestra Schulze turned to the audience of children, motioned with her baton without speaking a single word and suddenly the room was filled with the beautiful sound of the children playing recorders. It is hard to describe the experience and it was

like nothing I had ever heard before. The simplicity of the melody and the unison of so many children made a sound that was other-worldly."

In addition to classic repertoire, songs written by contemporary composers, like New York City based composer Jim Papoulis, resonated with the students. Mott stated that on two separate occasions she observed groups of students continuing to sing Papoulis' "Oye," the song that served as the concert finale, on their way to transport. Music educator Brenda Slick also witnessed the children's post-concert enthusiasm. She said there was a general "buzz" among the students as they attended music class in the days following the concert. Slick expressed, "This may have been one of the best educational concert programs given by the symphony."

Enjoyment was conveyed through thank-you notes written by students and sent to the symphony. Student comments included, "I thought the Maryland Symphony was great!" and "I thought the Maryland Symphony was really fun and exciting!" (The use of exclamation points was plentiful!) Many children expressed how much they enjoyed playing and singing during the concert. Specific references to Maestra Schulze, the guest artists and particular musical works revealed the memorable impact of the experience. One student said, "My favorite

part was when we were singing "Oye" [and] the teenagers came in and started dancing and singing. I also liked the conductor and the lead singer. They were both really good at their jobs! I'm glad we went there."

Cultivating enthusiasm for music is a primary objective of many educational concerts. Events like these often serve as students' first concert experiences and participation in the Link Up program helped to provide a memorable start to what will hopefully be a lifetime of involvement and appreciation for music. The success of the program was widely evident through the sheer excitement and energy that infected students, musicians and educators. Mott stated, "I couldn't have been more impressed. It's what music is meant to be: All of these people cooperating and communicating together. I came home and talked about it for at least three days."

The MSO and local schools will continue to take part in Link Up for the 2013-2014 season with the goal of having almost 4,000 student participants. There will be an added element to the new curriculum, *The Orchestra Moves*. DuBois shared, "Not only will students sing and play along with the orchestra, they will also dance. It will be quite a sight to see!" 🎭