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Tapping into the Younger Generation II

Photos and article by Coline Nitzsche Ebeling

With the resounding strains of Jimi Hendrix, the precision of an Olympic athlete and even some help from some little honey bees the Riverside Symphonia has found ways to reach out to the next generation of musicians.

The Educational Outreach Program adds an additional dimension to the Symphonia, most noted for its orchestral performances and local events. Since its inception a continued effort spearheaded by Symphonia board members and supported by its musicians and patrons has brought enriching musical experiences to local school children. In the recently held Art Deco Dance Gala individual pledges ranging from \$100 to \$1,000 raised funds totaling \$17,600.00 to underwrite these outreach programs. In several Master Classes sponsored by the Delaware Township Community Education Foundation music students at the Delaware Township School were instructed by Symphonia Musicians in their area of expertise. Students studying percussion worked hands on with Principal Percussionist Greg Giannascoli, who immediately captured their attention beginning the class playing Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov's "The Flight of the Bumblebee" on the marimba. He then guided students from one percussion instrument to another showing them how subtle changes in technique can improve the overall quality and sound of their playing. Woodwind students were inspired by Principal Clarinetist Arne Running who emphasized the importance of correct breathing and proper posture. He led them from so-so sounding notes to a wonderful full resonate sound by the end of his session. Mr. Running finished by boosting their confidence telling them they have what it takes to be musicians: "the lung capacity of an Olympic athlete, the brains and analytical skills of a mathematician and the focus of a combination of the two." Principal Tubaist Scott Force held the attention of an enthusiastic group of Brass players. He discussed the importance of playing an

instrument and how it opens doors for students in later years of life. He emphasized how excelling at their instruments can become a “ticket” to certain Universities and/or Scholarships. Each Principal musician left the students with a significant message to carry with them throughout their musical careers.

Through collaboration with the Lambertville Area Education Foundation the Riverside Symphonia held an open rehearsal for 400 Lambertville Area School students. They watched and listened as the Symphonia performed its program for the next evening. The students were a bit surprised when Maestro Mariusz Smolij led the Symphonia in an orchestral version of “Purple Haze” a popular Jimi Hendrix tune. He then compared this to a Dmitri Shostakovich piece enabling students to hear how emotions exuded by a popular tune are actually the very same emotions that can be evoked by classical music. Educational Outreach coordinator Candace Jones Phillips points out that music is such a “Universal Language”. Concert Pianist Antonio Di Cristofano, of Italy, proved this point when he held private performance/master classes for Choral members of the New Hope Solebury and Delaware Township School Districts. In intimate classroom settings students experienced a solo performance followed by an informal question answer session. Despite his broken English Antonio was able to reach out to the students with his performance and was equally moved as students gave back with choral performances of their own.

Educational Outreach efforts of the Riverside Symphonia continue throughout the year. The next event will be a Family Concert on Sunday, April 15. Highly esteemed European composer and artist Linard Bardill of Switzerland, will perform “What is the Moon Up To?” a delightful imaginary story told with spoken-word and songs. Conducted by Maestro Mariusz Smolij the concert will also feature the Delaware Township School Chorus and members of the Riverside Symphonia. “What is the Moon UpTo?” has proven Switzerland’s most successful orchestral work for children often becoming their first introduction to music.

Other upcoming Educational Outreach Programs include discounted tickets to the May concert for students and their families offered and underwritten by the Jonathan D. Krist Foundation. Efforts will also be reaching the New Hope Solebury Upper Elementary School Band and Strings students where master classes will be held this spring.

Peggy Krist of the Jonathan D. Krist Foundation perhaps best describes the wonderful resource we have in the Riverside Symphonia when she said: “It’s a privilege to live along the river, walk across the bridge and be continually enriched by the talented performances of the Riverside Symphonia. To be able to bring professional musicians into our schools and have at least one student inspired to not just practice, but achieve a balanced understanding about the world through music...well, that’s what a civilized community should be doing.”

For more information about the Riverside Symphonia’s Educational Program or to purchase tickets to the upcoming Family concert please call: 609 397-7300 or 215 862-3300. The concert will be held in the First Presbyterian Church, 31 North Union Street, Lambertville, NJ at 3pm on April 15. Tickets for this event are \$10 per person.

