Backstage

A Monthly Newsletter from EBRPSS Department of Fine Arts

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‘Science will get us out of this, but the Arts will get us through this’

Overview:

- Exciting Changes to the 2020 - 2021 EBRPSS All - Parish Honor Band Series!
- BRCVPA Video Outreach to local Nursing Homes
- Westdale & Woodlawn’s Veteran’s Day Performance
- BRMH LA State Solo Competition
- Woodlawn 8th Grade Band & World Famous Composer
- Tech Bites-Useful Technology Aids for the Classroom
- BelAir and Humanities Amped
- Holiday Performances & Celebrations

EBRPSS Department of Fine Arts’ “Backstage” is our EBR School Community monthly email newsletter celebrating all things Fine Arts in the District. During such an unprecedented time in our global community, Backstage is our attempt to stay connected, informed and united as we push forward during this academic year. We welcome celebrations, and newsworthy events for each issue, and encourage you to send information that you would like highlighted. Each issue includes current and past national news articles highlighting education in the Arts. Thank you for your tireless efforts as Arts Educators. Enjoy this issue!
Exciting Changes to the 2020 - 2021 EBRPSS All - Parish Honor Band Series!

Due to the COVID pandemic, EBR band directors have decided to use a new format for the 2020 - 2021 EBRPSS All-Parish Honor Bands. Instead of the traditional full 50 - 70 student member ensemble, and live, in-person performances, the directors will be forming smaller, chamber ensembles from among their current students, and videotaping the students performing the music. Then, all the various student ensembles will be placed onto a ‘master video’ for viewing.

On the changes for this year, Mr. Andy Pizzo, band director at Sherwood Middle Academic Magnet School explains, “These changes will allow for more specialized ‘coaching’ by area band directors and musical guests and “small group interaction” on a school-by-school basis. Every middle and high school will be represented and allow E.B.R. to truly showcase to our general stakeholders and community members all that the band programs of E.B.R. offer to the individual student’s full educational experience. Band is a cross-curricular subject and by taking the very best we have at each location, we are able to offer a very selective musical opportunity (small group ensemble work) that most programs don’t get the chance to do in a regular school year. We feel this experience will bridge the gap this programs don’t get the chance to do in a regular school year. We feel this experience will bridge the gap this year and allow us to transition back to our traditional honor band experience in the future, improving upon the work that we have already done with these prestigious honor band activities.

BRCVPA Video Outreach to Local Nursing Homes

During the month of October, the 2nd grade Keyboard and Percussion students at BRCVPA learned about the various pieces that make up a musical composition. They took the various elements, the notes and the rhythms, and created their own mini compositions.

The students took the time to make creative decisions, practice note naming, and understand rhythm better. As a class, they decided that they wanted to share their compositions. They reached out to 8 local Nursing Homes/Senior Living Facilities and shared their video with them!

The video was sent to the facilities listed below. We are very proud of their efforts! Truly a kind offering that was greatly appreciated.

- Golden Age of Denham Springs
- Flannery Oaks Guest House of Baton Rouge
- Harvest Manor HealthCare and Rehab of Denham Springs
- Affinity Nursing and Rehab Center of Baton Rouge
- The Care Center of Baton Rouge
- Williamsburg of Baton Rouge
- St. Mary Council on Aging of Franklin
- The Pearl at Jamestown of Baton Rouge

Baton Rouge Magnet High School Choral Department Performs Virtual Vocal Solo Recital

At the end of October, all students in the Baton Rouge Magnet High School Choral Program participated in a Virtual Vocal Solo Recital. While in a “normal” year solo festival would have taken place at a later time when students had more singing experience behind them, choir director Emily DeFoe decided that the first few months of virtual learning, with each student singing alone at home, would provide the perfect instructional setting to start the year off with a solo recital.

Each student chose a classical, folksong, or spiritual vocal solo standard, learned their piece on their own through the use of the Smart Music platform, and made a home video of their final performance of the piece. During the process, Dr. Brandon Hendrickson, a voice professor at LSU, provided feedback through virtual masterclasses, and students evaluated each other to provide constructive criticism and praise. Videos were favored over the traditional live performance format so that the students could perform safely without masks. The videos were shown in class as a sort of “virtual recital”, while a professional adjudicator, Dr. Jason Bowers of LSU, scored each performance and gave live feedback virtually through Google Meet.

The students did a fabulous job, especially given the unusual circumstances! Through this project, choir students from beginning to advanced level had to muster their confidence quickly, learn and practice mostly on their own, and use technology to make the best video they could. As the choir transitions back into performing chorally, the confidence, vocal technique, and musicianship learned from this solo experience will be invaluable. Videos of some of our highest-scoring soloists can be found on our YouTube page (BRMHS Choral Department), along with choral performances from the previous school year.

Students at Scotlandville Magnet High School learned about Monet and Impressionism through a FLEX Curriculum lesson. Ms. Griffin stated, “It was fun! My students liked all the steps, especially the bubble background and making tissue paper flowers. I spent the week introducing Claude Monet’s series on Water Lilies, his life story, and his other vast collection of Impressionist paintings.”
“Woodlawn and Westdale Middle Strings celebration of Veterans Day was a huge success! In these uncertain times, music can bring solace, but also give us back a piece of normalcy. Many schools throughout EBR have the tradition of putting on a Veterans Day program for the community. Mrs. Stefka Madere and her students decided to bring some of that tradition back and share a performance of "My Country, 'Tis of Thee" with the community.

The project presented a logistical challenge, as some of her students are virtual, and others in-person. To adjust, several outdoor rehearsals were held to bring everyone together in a safe way. Despite the challenge, and in true EBRPSS fashion, Madere and her students presented a delightful performance.

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Forest Heights Academy of Excellence’s Visual Art Pumpkin Patch

Because students were not able to go to a pumpkin patch this year, Mrs. Katie Sharp and her FHAEVPA Artists have been feverishly creating Visual Art inspired pumpkins to create their very own Pumpkin Patch. Artists in grades K - 3rd have used artists such as Vincent Van Gogh, Clementine Hunter, Jen Stark, Yayoi Kusama, and more to inspire their pumpkins’ designs. The pumpkins line the stage at FHAEVPA for all to admire and discuss. Mrs. Sharp and her artists look forward to continuing this tradition for years to come. Great idea Mrs. Sharp! Way to geaux!
**Woodlawn High School Mixed Media Portraits**

The art students at Woodlawn High School are full of self-expression. You can see the personality and reflection they used when creating these mixed media portraits. Teacher Kami Griffin enjoys seeing the individuality of her students shine through any art project she gives them. This is one of her favorites because it is so personal. While learning how to draw the proportions of the face correctly, students have the option to choose their medium to use for this lesson. It provides a twist from the mundane self-portraits that students have been given before by asking them to explore and implement more than one medium. She also likes to assign a self-reflection beforehand, so that students can explore their identity, and how to illustrate that through art. They explore their own background, family history, interests, goals and hobbies, and represent these features through their portraits.

LSU MOA has invited students along with the community to submit work to their current exhibit by local artist Letitia Huckaby. They will be submitting their mixed media portraits to the “Community Portrait Quilt Project,” in which LSU MOA staff members will scan and transfer their artwork to the fabric, reminding us—that though we are individuals, we are all part of the same community woven together. See participation info below.

### Call for Submissions: LSU MOA Community Quilt Project

LSU MOA is calling the community to create a collage portrait quilt square to add to the LSU MOA Community Portrait Quilt inspired by our current exhibition, Letitia Huckaby: This Same Dusty Road. Museum staff will scan your artwork, transfer it to fabric, add it to the quilt, and contact you via email to come check it out! For quilt squares and to participate contact LSU MOA educator Grant Benoit at gbenoit1@lsu.edu.

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**Getting Ready to Direct Your First Virtual Play**

One of the biggest challenges and disappointments of the current pandemic situation is the loss of live theatre production opportunities. Shows have been cancelled and postponed and we don’t have a clear idea of when they will be able to resume.

**1. Choose your content.**

Show selection is always one of the first things you must consider, regardless of whether the performance will be online or in person. Will you choose an existing script, or create a new, original piece with your students? Will you do a vignette play, a series of monologues, or a standard script adapted for social distancing? Will your play be full-length or one-act? (For a first-time virtual production, it’s better to err on the shorter side.) Are you moving to an online version of your cut-short school production, or starting from scratch? Many playwrights are adapting or creating new pieces to be performed online. Check out Theatrefolk’s collection of virtual plays here. Remember, when producing an existing script, you must always purchase the rights to perform the play, regardless of whether it’s a virtual production or not. If you’re creating your own original piece, you won’t need to budget money towards the script, but you will need to budget time to write and edit the material, on top of rehearsals.

Musicals are more challenging to produce virtually than plays, due to differences in technology quality and the high likelihood of video and audio lag. If you do decide to tackle a musical, you will need to record and edit the music together. You will need a guide vocal or click track to keep your students in unison, as well as lots of rehearsal time.
2. Choose your cast.

You'll need to make some decisions regarding casting. Will you assign roles based on your knowledge of your students, or have them audition? Or will the group determine who should play what role together? If you choose to have auditions, you will need to decide whether to have students perform their auditions live using a video conferencing program, or have them record audition pieces and submit them to you. If you go the live route, you will also need to decide whether to have your students audition "in front of each other" during a group video conference, or sign up for a time slot and audition "one on one" with you.

Is this a class production, or an extracurricular activity? Will rehearsals occur during school hours, or on evenings and weekends? Will students be graded on their participation and performances, or is it just for fun? Either way, like an "in-person" production, cast members must commit to being available to attend virtual rehearsals, as well as film and submit lines, scenes, and any other material as needed, by their assigned due dates. They must have access to the required technology – while most tablets and phones have webcams built into them, some older computers do not – as well as a stable internet connection. Students may need to create their own costume or prop items. If necessary, have students and their families sign a contract that lays out all the commitments for the virtual production in advance.

For full article and printable tip sheet click here.

Talented Theatre Program:
Westdale & Glasgow Middle

Students from Westdale Middle Talented Theatre Program and Glasgow Middle Talented Theatre students have been working on building the perfect monologue. Through class discussions, video examples and class readings students have explored, analyzed, and evaluated monologues and famous plays and playwrights.

Students have worked at analyzing characters and created a character profile for their monologue. Students have been working virtually, using a camera, lights, and other technical issues, learning how to use camera, how lighting and background effect video, framing a picture and other self-taping techniques to record their monologues for casting opportunities.

Monologues have been performed in class at various stages and will be videoed for showcasing at Debose Festival. In this photo we see the students from Westdale Middle, Inside Studio 56, working as light board, and camera operator and an actor doing a Monologue from Neil Simon’s Brighton Beach Memoirs.

Masked Masterpieces in Morton's Talented Art @ Mckinley Middle Magnet

Students of Mr. Morton's talented art class are documenting these unusual times in our students lives here at McKinley Middle Magnet through a self-portrait project. Only a year ago we would think it very strange for everyone to be wearing masks, and now it is very common. The students decided whether they wanted to draw themselves with their mask or not, and everyone agreed that this would be an interesting way of documenting these strange and sometimes troubling times. In the future when their children see these portraits their kids will ask what “Why were you wearing that mask?” and the conversation may begin like...”Well, let me tell you about the Covid Pandemic of 2020...”

March 7th Jazz and Art Walk

Plans are unfolding nicely for our March 7th Art and Jazz Walk. Student work will be shown at 7 locations including the LASM, LSU Museum of Art, USS KIDD Museum, Old Governor’s Mansion, Old State Capitol, SHAW Center for the Arts, and the River Center Branch Library. Please start sending your work to the Fine Arts Department, Liberty High School, Building D through the pony or email Susan Arnold to make arrangements for pick up.

Don’t Forget to Apply for Debose 2021!!
Celebrations

Several members of the Baton Rouge Magnet High School Orchestra auditioned for the Louisiana State Solo Competition. The Louisiana Music Educators Association organized the event to give orchestral, band, and choir students a chance to showcase their talents during these difficult times.

Nine students from across the state of Louisiana were chosen for this distinction. Five of those are members of the Baton Rouge Magnet High School Orchestra.

The musicians include violinists, Nithya Jones (Sophomore) and Haotian Tan (sophomore), violists Lanie Wang (Senior) and Joshua Jackson (Junior), cellist Celia Watkins (Senior), and bassist Cindy Xu (Senior).

Additionally, LMEA presented a virtual state solo recital on Friday, November 20. The recital was part of the LMEA Virtual Conference and was viewed by attendees throughout the country.

The students included in this recital were Nithya Jones, Haotian Tan, Lanie Wang, Celia Watkins, and Cindy Xu. Mr. Frazier, BRMHS's Orchestra Director, is very proud of these students! Congratulations!!!

CONGRATULATIONS TO MCKINLEY MIDDLE 8TH GRADER KELSI MONTGOMERY!

Her outstanding vocal performance of Stand Up from the movie Harriett won her honorable mention and a cash prize in the National Arts Competition: What BLACK LIVES MATTER Means To Me. There were over 100 applicants from middle school through college. This national competition is sponsored by The Society Incorporated based in Washington, D.C. Kelsi represented the Avant Garde Chapter of The Society Incorporated.

Marthalee Maron’s LWDF art contest winners:

Chris Zhang and Benjamin Xu were both second place winners and won $100 each. Their work is printed in the 2021 Calendar.

Winners in the 2020 Wild Things Youth Art Contest and Exhibition:

Amos Chen - second place winner in the 5 - 7 Drawing Category for his piece, “Ocean Life”.

Ethan Liu - third place winner in the 5-7 Drawing Category for his piece, “A Beautiful Day”.

Contests...

LSBA ART CONTEST

We are still accepting entries for the Louisiana School Boards Association Art Contest. If you have any Louisiana themed student work you would like to submit, email sarnold@ebrschools.org.

LSBA is proud to announce the Louisiana School Boards Association Artwork Contest and Exhibit as part of our Annual Convention. This year, instead of physically submitting original artwork to our office, we ask that school systems submit a photo of the original artwork being submitted in each category.  

Click here for submission details.

Holiday Performances

- 12/4/20 Northeast HS Band - virtual
- 12/9/20 Liberty HS 'Holiday Arts Celebration', to include the Band, Choir, Dance Team and Theatre Department.
- LMHS Black Box Theatre.

Date TBA: Westdale MS/Woodlawn MS Combined Orchestra - Virtual.

Contact the school of your choice for more information on upcoming performances!!
All Together Now
In its tenth year, Kids' Orchestra continues to bring Louisiana together through music

BY JORDAN LAHAYE FONTENOT

On an afternoon in early March in Mid City Baton Rouge, down a back hallway of Dufrocq Elementary School, and inside a classroom with the desks shoved elsewhere, eight children under the age of seven banged on buckets with drumsticks, screaming at the top of their lungs, “Tee tee tee tee tee tee tap. Tap. Tee tee tee tee tee tee tap!” It was a recipe for ruckus, a war on peace, a homemaker’s nightmare. It was music.

Music is, after all—at its most basic form—organized sound, a definition to which I’d argue the amendment: evoking an emotional, physical, or cognitive reaction. Think: perfectly crafted oldies playlists drawing out our most precious nostalgias; a saxophone’s sonorous dribbling pouring into the busy street; the unsurpassable intricacy of Hendrick’s “Little Wing”; an iPod nano you can’t throw out because it holds the soundtrack of your youth; tripping over ankles to match a fiddle’s melodic line; sitting in the back of a dark auditorium, every particle of air vibrating within you and without you with a Liszt Concerto; the one single lullaby that will get the baby to sleep, every single time. The list goes on, mine and yours too, of the instances that music has elevated our individual existences, even shaped them. What is the bumper sticker? “Music is life.” Children banging on buckets, screaming to the heavens in imperfect, ecstatic rhythm.

Over the past decade scholars, doctors, and educators have striven to get to the core of something that’s been universally understood for millennia: Music enriches our lives. Studies have shown that simple exposure to music, as early as in utero, can assist in building neural bridges, stimulating brain waves, and developing perceptual skills, spatial reasoning, and fine motor coordination. It can also help in building relationships. And that’s just listening to it.

Founded in 2010 on the belief that music education can positively influence children’s lives, the organization has since grown into what was once one of the largest after-school music programs in the country, serving over three hundred fifty elementary-age students across East Baton Rouge Parish.

In the organization’s “Foundations” class at Dufrocq last March, the teaching artist leading the class began with movement, encouraging each student to stand and demonstrate a dance move for the rest of the class to imitate. In short order, eight tiny bodies were throwing their arms in the air, jumping up and down, bobbing their heads. Built on the teaching methods of the Gameplan Curriculum, Zoltán Kodály, and Carl Orff—who once said, “Since the beginning of time, children have not liked to study. They would much rather play, and if you have their interests at heart, you will let them learn while they play.”—Kids’ Orchestra’s “Foundations” class is where it all begins. Through songs, games, and exercises, young children are infused with the musical tools of rhythm, harmony, and melody—as well as in proper musical etiquette, such as sitting up straight with your drumsticks folded into your lap when you are not playing.

After “Foundations,” Kids’ Orchestra offers group lessons in violin, viola, cello, double bass, flute, clarinet, trumpet, trombone, and percussion for grades second through fifth. Students are given the opportunity to try out all of the available instruments and to choose the one they’d like to pursue. Then, the organization provides the instrument on loan to each child for the entirety of the program year.

“That is probably one of the most exciting parts of the program,” said Education Director Sam Trevathan. “Seeing how a child gets to experience an instrument for the first time.”
In classes, which normally take place twice a week from 3:30 pm to 5 pm at six elementary schools across East Baton Rouge Parish, area musicians teach students technique, instrument care, and performance, as well as a collection of beginner repertoire. Students who demonstrate especially aptitude in certain instruments are invited to audition for additional classes in the Kids’ Orchestra Honors Program, which includes a wind ensemble, a string orchestra, and a symphony orchestra. Honors student Treasure Flowers has been attending Kids’ Orchestra classes for three years, starting in violin, then moving to flute—her favorite—and then last spring, she picked up the clarinet. “She’s trying to learn all of them,” said her mother, Shalese. “But she was really intrigued by the flute. I think she’ll stick with that one.”

Shalese described her daughter as a “spit of fire,” brimming with confidence and energy and an inclination towards leadership. “But a great leader requires being able to follow,” she said. “Those qualities can either hinder her in life, or they can make her more successful.” Kids’ Orchestra has really channeled that energy into something positive.” In addition to a growing passion and knowledge of music, Shalese has observed in her daughter an increase in perspective, listening skills, and thoughtful reaction. “The teachers take more time with her than they are able to in her regular classes,” she said. “And the experience has taught her teamwork, how to help others—not just herself—to succeed. She’s more relaxed, more free-spirited. Her self-esteem is through the roof. She said her mother, Shalese. “But she was really intrigued by the flute. I think she’ll stick with that one.”

Kids’ Orchestra also strips away the elitist perceptions of who classical musical education is for. The emphasis on inclusion is what most attracted its current Executive Director Jody Hanet to the organization in the first place. “This is not a conservatory,” she said. “A lot of kids don’t get this experience if their parents can’t afford private lessons. We can offer these great musical opportunities to any child that we can reach, regardless of ability, socio-economic status, household income, or where they live.”

Tuition for Kids’ Orchestra works on a sliding scale, striving to meet the specific needs of each child and their family so that the program doesn’t have to refuse anyone on the basis of affordability.

In addition to just giving everyone access to music education, it’s been amazing to see all of these kids coming from all the different areas of Baton Rouge, all these different backgrounds, for the sole purpose of making music,” said Hanet. “Everything else goes out the window.”

Since March, of course, coming together to make music—or at all—has become somewhat wistful thinking. With schools closed and gatherings banned, Kids’ Orchestra spent the first few weeks of the COVID-19 lockdown coordinating with its twenty-five teaching artists—many of whom returned to their home state or country for the quarantine—to launch KO@Home. The virtual learning platform, rolled out in mid-March, delivered one hundred and fifty pre-recorded mini-lessons from teaching artists to Kids’ Orchestra students.

Going virtual also presented an opportunity, explained Marketing and Communications Manager Kristina Pepelko, to engage a wider community all around the world. “We provided instrument care guides, which were originally made for our students’ use, and realized that they could be used as a resource for the community,” she said. “We also shared social-emotional learning lessons for parents, with resources on how to talk with kids about managing emotions, especially during difficult times; as well as activities, projects, and games for the whole family.” The virtual platform also opened the door for collaboration with LSU School of Music’s Sunshine Project to create “Music for All” videos, designed as family-friendly musical exercises and activities for all students, especially those with different learning needs.
For their final mini-lesson, the Spring 2020 Kids’ Orchestra students focused on performance, and in lieu of their traditional Spring Neighborhood Concert Series, learned how to put on a concert at home for their families, dubbed KO@Home Concerts. “The teachers guided them on how to bow, how to introduce themselves, and encouraged them to showcase the music they’d been working on all semester,” said Pepelko.

Across Baton Rouge, families sat down in their living rooms to celebrate the achievements of their tiny musicians. Each family was invited to submit a video of the mini-concerts to be featured in a final virtual Showcase on July 31.

Miguel Garcia, a fifth-grade honors student, kicked it off with Suzuki’s “Allegro” on cello. Payton, a “Foundations” student, followed with a rendition of BINGO, featuring spoons as ornamentation. Student after student: “Twinkle Little Star”, the LSU fight song, even a rendition of “Billie Jean”. Moms interjecting “You’re doing great!” and “Keep Going!” And viewers from all around the community, and beyond, applauding from their homes.

For the fall, with COVID-19 unfortunately still lingering in the air, Kids’ Orchestra maintains its commitment to bringing the richness of music into young people’s lives, and plans to build on its first-ever virtual season. Still in the works, the fall promises a more fine-tuned program, offering options for live group and private lessons via Zoom in addition to weekly pre-recorded lessons for each instrument. “Private lessons have been a request for many years,” said Trevathan. “And now—working virtually—we have more bandwidth, with staff spread all out throughout our community in Louisiana and beyond. And in this virtual setting, some kids don’t thrive in a group. They need specific moments of instruction directed to them, and we want to try to help every kid be enriched in this educational sphere.

“While music education has—in so many instances—come as an “extra,” a “bonus” segment of the curriculum, Trevathan thinks that the challenges of the pandemic highlight its significance in a new way. “Now more than ever, people are going back to what they know makes everyone feel good, or makes their child excited in engaging in learning,” he said. “Music and culture come together in this beautiful way that reminds people—‘I can feel good in this moment.’ We want to be a part of that.

“Like so much in these utterly reframed days, music is now heard differently, made differently, taught differently. But thanks to the innovations of our digital age and—even more so—to the determination and creativity of organizations like Kids’ Orchestra, the power music holds is as potent, as universal, as ever. And the children of Kids’ Orchestra—growing up in this sure-to-be generational shift—will hold their own lists of musical moments. Starting with Suzuki in the living room, family gathered all around. kidsorchestra.org

“NOW MORE THAN EVER, PEOPLE ARE GOING BACK TO WHAT THEY KNOW MAKES EVERYONE FEEL GOOD, OR MAKES THEIR CHILD EXCITED IN ENGAGING IN LEARNING. MUSIC AND CULTURE COME TOGETHER IN THIS BEAUTIFUL WAY THAT REMINDS PEOPLE—’I CAN FEEL GOOD IN THIS MOMENT.’ WE WANT TO BE A PART OF THAT.”—SAM TREVATHAN