

MusicalMinds reaches instrumental milestone

Written by Lee Sullivan



MusicalMinds students proudly cradle their new violins during Monday's presentation at Blythe Elementary School. *Lee Sullivan*

HUNTERSVILLE, N.C -- They started by just clapping. They progressed to tapping on buckets, then drumsticks on buckets, and eventually they created paper violins just to learn more about musical instruments. They perfected teamwork, cooperation and rhythm while experiencing the excitement of performing and the joy of applause.

And Monday afternoon, beaming the bright, uncontrollable smiles members of the Kiwanis Club of Lake Norman envisioned nearly two years ago, students in the MusicalMinds program fidgeted on stage at Blythe Elementary School, waving to parents, friends, teachers and volunteers and proudly clutching their own, personal violins.

A monumental gift from Davidson United Methodist Church, with hands-on assistance from Frank Albert of Davidson Violins, culminated in the distribution of 25 violins to the first and third graders in the inaugural class of MusicalMinds, an after-school enrichment program combining personal attention and academic assistance with an emphasis on music appreciation and education.

At Monday's ceremony, students turned in their paper creations and were handed the real thing as a crowd including Susie Shoman, executive director of MusicalMinds, Robin Noud, a Kiwanis Club member and chairperson of the MusicalMinds Board, other board members, community supporters, Albert, Blythe Assistant Principal Anthony Perkins and very special guest Eduardo Cedeno soaked in the significance of the program's and the participants' memorable milestone.

Under Albert's supervision, students demonstrated the proper handling and holding techniques they had practiced using the paper models and some of them, understandably, just couldn't resist plucking a few strings while the adults did the talking.

In his comments, Perkins said school faculty members had already recognized the positive impact of the program, which is designed to use continued participation as a motivating factor for success in other school-related categories.

"I would like to express gratitude to the MusicalMinds program," Perkins said. "We have already seen a big difference in our kids' grades and their behavior."

And while the importance of Cedeno's presence may have been lost for the moment on the excited, instrument-cradling students, he was a flesh-and-blood example to all others in attendance of what the program can do.

Cedeno is the principal conductor of the Lake Norman Orchestra, co-founder and former president and principal conductor of the Cornelius Youth Orchestra, founder and principal conductor of the Lake Norman Youth Orchestra, strings instructor and music educator at Mitchell Community College, band and chorus director at Community School of Davidson and conductor of the Gaston School of Arts Youth Orchestra, and has collaborated with numerous performing organizations including the Philharmonic Orchestra of Indianapolis, the Indianapolis Opera, Charlotte Civic Orchestra, The University of North Carolina at Charlotte Opera, Carolina Voices and various orchestras in Caracas, Venezuela.

He has completed university and post-graduate studies in the United States and in Europe and has performed as a conductor, soloist and collaborative artist in the U.S., Europe and South America.

And, Cedeno was in the first class of El Sistema, the program started 35 years ago in Caracas by Jose Abreu and now the blueprint for MusicalMinds and similar programs in place around the country and the world.

"What is happening here is exactly the same thing that happened back then," Cedeno said in his brief statements. "Dr. Abreu had a vision, and a goal to do something special. He wanted to create the world's largest orchestra. It was a daunting task, but the size of the challenge is the size of the dream."

He then proudly, much like the kids and their violins, displayed the medallion he still carries identifying him as a "founder" and original participant in El Sistema.

After leading the students through their quick violin presentations, Frank delivered simply the message every Kiwanis Club member, every board member, every volunteer, every business and individual that has supported the program, every member of Davidson United Methodist Church, every faculty member at Blythe who has assisted in the program and everyone else who has contributed or will contribute to MusicalMinds needed to hear.

"There are a lot of positives in this program," Frank said, looking at the students and then gesturing toward Cedeno, "and among them is the potential that one of these kids might become this gentleman right here."

Source: <http://www.lakenormancitizen.com/news/item/3877-musicalminds-reaches-instrumental-milestone.html>