

Chamber Music Pros to Coach at More Sullivan Schools This Year

by Terry Schommer

In an era when many boards of education with tight budgets view the arts as an ‘unnecessary extra’ and think nothing of cutting them out of their spending plans, some schools take the opposite approach - protecting, expanding, or finding other creative funding for their arts programs. A case in point is the **Monticello Central School District** in Sullivan County, which collaboratively applied for funding from the **Amateur Chamber Music Players Foundation**. **Monticello High School** music teacher **Ann Trombley** began working with just three students 13 years ago in her unusual chamber music program - one in which the students voluntarily give up their lunch period to participate. Two years later, she brought professional, performing musicians from New York City to her school to coach the student ensembles, and this collaboration with the **Weekend of Chamber Music** musicians has continued ever since.

This year the Monticello program serves roughly 52 young musicians, and today, thanks to some creative collaborations and funding, it acts as a model to help other county schools who want to develop chamber programs get started.

Flutist **Judith Pearce**, artistic director of the Weekend of Chamber Music and its *Artist Coaching Project*, is in the 11th year of bringing her artist colleagues to Monticello High School, and this is the first year WCM goes to **Tri-Valley Central School** in Grahamsville. “For me, this expansion of chamber music in Sullivan County schools is very exciting,”

Pearce says. “There are so many positive results: musical, social, psychological and academic.” The project expansion involves collaborations with the Tri-Valley and **Ellenville Central Schools**, in addition to the Monticello program. Tri-Valley music teachers **Lori Orestano-James** and **Matthew Weyant**, several Tri-Valley student musicians, and Tri-Valley Central School Superintendent **Nancy George** recently welcomed Mrs. Trombley’s Monticello chamber music students and the WCM Artist Coaches to their school’s new auditorium for a chamber music workshop and demonstration. Other teachers involved in the chamber music collaborative are **Nancy Wegryzn** and **Linda VanNorman** of Monticello and **David Trombley** of Ellenville.

On demonstration day, Pearce, clarinetist **Allen Blustine**, violist **Lois Martin** and pianist **Marija Stroke** interspersed performances of Mozart, Brahms, Villa-Lobos and Ibert with listening exercises and questions for the student audience about what they saw and heard. The students noticed how the musicians communicated and tuned in to each other as they played, and they talked about their own experiences of the teamwork they need when they play with their own ensembles.

“It’s leaderless. Each player is responsible for the whole,” said one Monticello senior.

“Chamber Music is exactly the place you need to be,” Pearce told them, “to let your personality have full rein.”

After lunch, the students split into four groups for the chamber music model coaching sessions, in which

WCM artists coached the Monticello ensembles (*Funky Shoes*, *Shake Well Before Use*, *Leftover Meatloaf* and the *Auditorium Group*) as they gave the Tri-Valley students a firsthand look at how the project works. The demonstration ensembles included guitarists **Danny Carroll**, **Corey Lubniewski**, **James Michel** and **Cory Waichman**; trombonists **Eric Mayberg**, **Christian Guinta** and tenor sax player **Kyle Raymond**; violinists **Rosie Gray**, **Tanisha Gray**, **Caitlin VanKeuren** and **Corrin Trombley**; cellists **Owen Goodman** and **Iris Robinson**; clarinetist **Danielle D’Abbraccio** and pianist **Ann Joy**. Bassist **Andrew Trombley**, a graduate of the Monticello program, says that chamber music helped him develop the ability to be a leader and a follower.

“Both traits,” he says, are important. “Whenever I have been placed in a group setting...I used my experiences from chamber music to take charge, to listen to other people, and use my time effectively to make the best presentation possible.”

After Christmas, the WCM coaches will visit both schools each month to work with the chamber ensembles, and the young players and the artists will perform a series of concerts together in late May and early June. The Weekend of Chamber Music’s Artist Coaching Project also has a band component, in which a WCM wind quintet will visit Tri-Valley, Monticello and Livingston Manor to work with larger band and orchestra programs in those high schools.



Tri-Valley School hosted guest artists and Monticello High School students on October 31 for a chamber music workshop demonstration.

(Back row, l to r:) T-V Superintendent Nancy George; T-V Band Director Matthew Weyant; MHS Chamber Music teacher Ann Trombley; pianist Marija Stroke; clarinetist Allen Blustine and violist Lois Martin.

(Bottom row, l to r:) MHS Composition Teacher Nancy Wegrzyn; T-V District Music Director Lori Orestano-James and flutist Judith Pearce.