



COLLABORATION AND LEARNING: DEMOCRACY IN ACTION

For three days in early November, the minds and imaginations of roughly 200 Sullivan County junior high and high school students were fueled by art, literature, music and history in a ground-breaking Weekend of Chamber Music project inspired by wallpaper. In fact, a modern art exhibition, two unusual public chamber music concerts, and six visits by student groups from Sullivan County schools were inspired by wallpaper.

What's so special about wallpaper? Installed at Livingston Manor Central School during the 1930s, the wallpaper with scenes of America were created by Jean-Julien Deltil in the 19th-century, and produced by the Zuber Company of France. Deltil's murals portray a utopian view of the New World; a view typically held by Europeans of that era. To them, America must have been an ideal place of economic, racial and social peace, prosperity, and equality. The wallpaper panels were installed when the school was built as a Works Progress Administration project, during a time of deep depression in America, and when President Franklin D. Roosevelt knew the country needed jobs, hope and inspiration. Under him, the WPA created the jobs, and along the way it championed artistic endeavor, because that is where people find hope and inspiration.

In Part III of WCM "Music in America" series, student groups from Eldred Central, Monticello High and LMCS began their adventure in the two-story, marble grand entrance at LMCS on Nov. 8, 9 or 10. Encircled by staircases with ornate balustrades, carved oak paneling, and decorated with the historic Zuber panels, the young people were given short-answer questionnaires to help them discover and personalize the meaning behind the murals, and WCM artists introduced and performed music that people from several centuries ago might have enjoyed, including pieces from Thomas Jefferson's personal collection. Among the composers represented were black musicians, celebrated in their day, but little known now.

Next, the students traveled back to the 21st century, walking to the nearby Catskill Art Society galleries for a tour of "Utopia and Wallpaper," the recent modern art exhibition there. Among the works they saw were larger-than-life portraits of young black men; a nautical "diorama of discovery," and a large panel that juxtaposed lower Manhattan of a different century with the island as it looks today. Completing their time-travel return to 2010, students heard WCM perform music based on African-American life in America, including a piece by composer Andrew Waggoner, commissioned by especially for this project. Students have been invited to write essays on their experience, and three winning entries will be



Oboist Matt Sullivan talks about his English horn with a group of students at CAS in early November, 2010.

announced in mid-January. As a bonus, the winners will each receive \$50 cash prizes, sponsored by IABP.

The collaboration that made this three-fold initiative possible was a meeting of the minds of Weekend of Chamber Music artistic director Judith Pearce, who first encountered the murals over six years ago; Catskill Art Society executive director Kathryn Tufano, and Livingston Manor Central School superintendent Deborah Fox. It incorporated moveable concerts; an art exhibition that called for artists to take inspiration from the 19th century Zuber wallpaper panels at the school; and finally, a program open to all of Sullivan County's school districts that brought students to both the school and the art gallery.

Tufano and Pearce hope this exhilarating program represents the beginning of future partnerships as wide-ranging and unfettered as this one has been. Alexis deTocqueville – a 19th-century French expatriate and author of “Democracy in America” – surely would have celebrated this event. It was a triumph of just the kind of coming together that is sought by democratic institutions throughout history.



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