

Elementary students 'compose themselves' onstage

By T. Lee Brown
Correspondent

Sixteen famous composers dressed in black stood stock-still on the Sisters Elementary School stage Thursday night. It was the performance of "Compose Yourself," a musical directed by music teacher Sara Miller.

In came a pack of kids in colorful clothing, banging their heads and dancing to rock music, headphones on. Annabelle Molesworth, Hadley Gloeckner, and others played this group of students that had been assigned to write reports on "boring" music by "old, dead" composers.

The rock music was interrupted by strains of sweet and stunning orchestral strains from the classical and romantic eras. The 16 came to life and jumped in to help the students. Their ranks included Opal Reid as George Frideric Handel, Ryah Nordell as Johannes Brahms, Reese Womack as Joseph Haydn, Sadiee Darst as Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Kyanne Keeton as Johann Strauss, and Brennan Johnson as Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky.

Katharine Cogdill played the German Romantic composer Felix Mendelssohn, known for his wedding march. "I think it's a cool experience to have in my life, because I may not get to do this again," she said.

She learned a lot about teamwork.

"It was really fun to get together with my friends and do this play — super fun."

Learning about music and composers was interesting for Katharine, too: "how they made music and how they changed lives for some people."

Katharine is more aware of classical and romantic music since starting rehearsals a few months ago. "My mom was reading this article about if you listen to a type of classical," she said. "You can get smarter from it."

“ It was really fun to get together with my friends and do this play... — Katharine Cogdill

"Now I play 'Für Elise' sometimes, on the piano," she said, "and my dad showed me how to do this." Here she sang the tune to Beethoven's famous song, with lyrics about hamburgers and fries.

In the show, Für Elise was played on an electric keyboard by fourth-grader Madison Durham. She told Ludwig van Beethoven (played by Gusto Berger-Brown) that he was her favorite composer. His response? "You have exquisite taste."

Beethoven sang a solo, "Can You Hear?" based on the composer's beloved

Moonlight Sonata. Then the play's students explained to the composers that they liked a kind of music called rap. Alex Vitelle ("Mike") and Olivia Lajko ("Sue") busted out with rhymes to show the form.

The "old dudes" gave it a try, too. Played by Weston Bliss, Jesus "Chuy" Luna, Keagan McShane, Jack Baughn, and Josie Jaschke, composers from Franz Schubert to Giuseppe Verdi performed solo raps. Marshall Durham, playing Johann Sebastian Bach, even delivered one in German.

Cameron Smyth got a big laugh as the 20th century minimalist composer Philip Glass. The rap consisted of him intoning: "Glass... Glass... Glass... Glass... Philip Glass."

A full ensemble sang show tunes, waltzes, and lullabies based on themes by various composers. The show wasn't staged, set, and costumed like a full theatrical production; it was set up as a musical performance with risers and microphones.

Other players included Kate Mock, Lydia Davis, Clover Lee, Clara Bilderback, Kole Morris, and Sam Van Paepegem. Ms. Miller stepped in to perform Gustav Mahler's rap, as Aiden Smetzler was ill. Ashleigh Thomas assisted the director, and Russell Moffett was the sound technician.

Parent Stephony Duda chuckled, "It was funny! It



PHOTO BY JERRY BALDOCK

Students portrayed famous musical figures in "Composer Rap" during SES Third Grade Presents "Compose Yourself."

was fun." She was amazed that the third-graders did such a good job performing the play, which was written for sixth-graders.

She enjoyed rehearsing at home with her son Declan, who played one of the students. She read aloud the play's different parts to help Declan learn his lines.

In the process, her son battled fears of stage fright — and won.

"This was a wonderful

experience where he got to participate, get his lines right, build his confidence," Duda said.

Declan said, "It was kind of worrying, since I've never done a play before." He feared that he'd forget his lines, or that he "might just get straight-up embarrassed."

Instead, he ended up having a great time onstage. Would he like to be in another play sometime? Declan nodded. "Definitely."

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