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Music Brings Us Together

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By Chelsea Whyte

"Somerville benefits from its diversity," says Rick Saunders, Music Supervisor for Somerville Schools. He's talking about the changes in the music programs that have happened in the last three years under his supervision. His inclusive point of view was immediately visible at the Somerville High School Winter Concert, which included a creative mix of traditional band and orchestra repertoire with jazz, samba, pop, and rock pieces.

And the students of Somerville High School are responding to the diverse musical selection with enthusiasm. The auditorium was filled with students and their friends and families clapping along with songs, singing the lyrics they knew, and supporting their classmates as they performed.



Bridget Lindstrom, a senior at Somerville High School, shined with her flute solo during the SHS Band performance. ~Photo by Chelsea Whyte

The concert was energetic, almost rowdy, with students shouting encouragement to their friends on stage. The SHS Orchestra played a traditional set, and finished with an orchestral version of Michael Jackson's Billie Jean. The audience quietly sang along, clapping along with the string instruments. The Beginning and Advanced Guitar Ensembles took the stage next with blues, rock, and pop songs, and the Beginning Guitar students were joined by Beginning Piano students in a moving performance of Silent Night. The SHS Band followed them with an accomplished performance, with flute soloist Bridget Lindstrom standing out. Lindstrom also accompanied the SHS Chorus, who performed African and Native American pieces.

Saunders says, "When diversity can be acknowledged through music, the students can take ownership." They did just that. The World Percussion Ensemble students wrote a story to accompany their piece, making it more like theater than just a musical performance. The SHS Band had a student conductor for their Lady Gaga piece. And the SHS Dance Club members were so inspired by the final performance that they spontaneously ran up on stage and danced along to the percussionists playing their final piece.

The music programs have also expanded to include a World Percussion Ensemble and Advanced Guitar classes. For the teachers of the programs, Saunders has tapped the area's music schools, including Berklee College of Music, New England Conservatory, and Boston Conservatory. Saundser's says he has also incorporated instruction styles that came out of a collaboration with Somerville's own Honk Festival.

Two years ago, musicians from the Honk Festival did a clinic with the Somerville High School music students, with instruction given by playing alongside the students. Saunders has adopted this technique and many of the music teachers could be seen playing with the band, orchestra, and percussion ensemble at the Winter Concert. "Honk taught us a lot," Saunders says. "When you play with a student, you take away a barrier and the experience becomes more interactive." Not only are the students learning from the teachers, but the

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17	18	19	20	21	22	23
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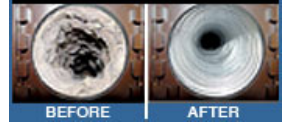
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teachers learn from the students every time they play together. The concert showcased not just the talent of the students, but the partnerships between the students and the teachers. The concert included teachers playing along while they conducted, as well as giving up the podium all together and playing as a member of the ensemble.

A crucial partner in the improvement of music programming at Somerville Schools has been Mayor Curtatone, a trumpeter himself. Over the past few years, Somerville Schools have been given \$100,000 by the city to purchase school instruments. Without these, many of the students in Somerville Schools wouldn't have access to music programs, and Somerville would be without inspiring performances like the Winter Concert. With winter storms coming through, there's nothing better than a musical performance to warm your spirits. Saunders began the evening by saying, "The weather outside is frightful, but our music tonight is delightful." I couldn't have said it better myself.

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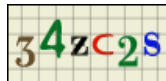
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