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Philbrick kids take it 'From the Top'

By David Ertischek

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ROSLINDALE - National Public Radio's "From the Top" show features young musicians from all over the country showcasing their talent. Recently hearing and watching musicians as young as 13-years-old play their instruments inspired Philbrick Elementary School students during a live taping.

"I thought it was very exciting and with the chicken..." said Angele Errie, 9, of West Roxbury.

Wait a second, Angele? A chicken at Jordan Hall?!

Yes, a chicken. Well, sort of.

Errie and her fellow fourth-grade classmate, Hazel Hallas, explained that the ON-AIR sign did not work on purpose, and that a stagehand came out with a fake chicken and hit the sign on.

Hallas, whose father works as a sound engineer for the show, said the chicken gag happens every week, but the boy still gets a kick out of it.

Errie, who plays trumpet, enjoyed hearing the performers interviewed, as well as the music. The well-spoken girl said, "I like the violin and the clarinet ... [During the interviews] they're asking them personal questions about what their instruments' names are and what their experiences are like."

Errie said her trumpet is named Kacey. Hallas plays drums and said his percussions don't have a name.

This was the second year in a row Philbrick students have attended a taping of the show. The show has also sent musicians to the school to talk and play for the school. Along with several other Boston elementary schools, the Philbrick is a participant in the "From the Top" residency program. The program highlights the importance of creative learning and arts opportunities for young people.

Both Hallas and Errie said they found the music very soothing, almost to the point of putting them to sleep. Albeit they kept their eyes open and their minds awake.

"I liked the bassoon because it was so low and had good rhythm," said Hallas about 16-year-old Sarah Abraham's instrument.

Abraham, who is from Atlanta, was playing the first movement from an Alexandre Tansman sonatine.

Errie said she liked clarinet player Joseph Morris from California. Before he performed, Errie said she asked him if it was hard to play all the notes in songs because he plays really, really fast.

Hallas asked the performers if there were times when they wanted to give up. Morris told the audience it's harder to play clarinet in Boston because of the humidity change.

The students' music teacher, Elan Trotman, was present and enjoyed the performance as well.

Listen in

Tune in to "From the Top" on WGBH 89.7 every Sunday at 6 p.m. The program that Philbrick School students attended is scheduled to air on April 20.

"I'm always impressed with the level of musicianship. They're phenomenal. They're all child prodigies. To win a national competition, you have to be. They are way above their years," said Trotman. "Then when you hear them talk their level of maturity can be seen through the way they speak. Some of them have taken colleges classes."

Trotman, a music teacher at the Mozart School, said that for his students, the most important thing is to hear what the performers' respective instruments sound like and how much musicians practice.

As a teacher, Trotman educates his students about basic music theory and working on their craft. The students sing and perform at several concerts throughout the year that consist of Christmas carols, spirituals or patriotic melodies. But Trotman said his students really dig hip-hop, "High School Musical," the Jonas Brothers, Alicia Keys and the "Solider Boy" song.

Trotman said he was very happy to have the musicians come to the school the past two years, one of whom the students got to meet on one day and then hear at Jordan Hall later at a performance.

Errie reminisced about an accordion player named Sam who came to the school last year.

"I know it inspired people in my class. It showed them they should play an instrument. This year when we got the choice [to play an instrument], I wanted to play the trumpet because it was challenging."

"I really like classical music," said Errie. "I like jazz a lot. That's of the types of music that I like. It's soothing."

"I like rock music," said Hallas. "I like to rock. I like loud songs. I like banging."

Both students took away many things from watching and hearing the performance at Jordan Hall.

"I'm not so good at music," said Hallas. "If I really tried to, I could be good at it. They've been doing that for a long time."

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