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Office of University
Communications

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Gardner-Webb University Orchestra Teaches Students About Music in Special Concerts

By Mallory Moore '18 Intern for Communications

At the GWU Orchestra Concert for school children, a turtle directs one of the numbers.

Special guests make appearances during the orchestra concert

Special guests make appearances during the orchestra concert for fifth-graders in Cleveland County, N.C.

BOILING SPRINGS, N.C.—Every fall semester, the Gardner-Webb University Orchestra travels to local schools to perform a special concert for fifth-grade students in Cleveland County, N.C. An annual service project for the music department, the program began several years ago with just a few of the GWU music faculty, who performed for students at local elementary schools to get them excited about joining band and orchestra. In the fall of 2014, the GWU Music Department partnered with the Cleveland County Arts Council in Shelby, N.C., to expand these concerts and include the entire orchestra. “We believe music changes lives,” shared Dr. Patricia Sparti, professor of music and director of the orchestra. “To hear the kids cheer and get so excited by our performance is amazing.”

Before the concert, music teachers in the county's elementary and intermediate schools spend a few weeks teaching their students about orchestral instruments and famous composers. The children get to see everything they learned played out in a live orchestra. Amanda Buchanan, a teacher from Shelby Intermediate, said, “the students are so excited to see something different and new. They not only get a fun time from this experience, but also a good picture of things they can be involved in.”

Sparti incorporates costumes and acting to keep the atmosphere fun and entertaining. The enthusiastic audience is treated to a wide variety of special “guests” including a pirate to conduct music from “Pirates of the Caribbean,” a tortoise to sing along to Camille Saint-Saen's “Carnival of the Animals,” and several movie characters, including Darth Vader, Superman and the shark from Jaws. The concert repertoire includes popular orchestral music that the children will recognize as well as patriotic songs and movie themes. The

children are also introduced to vocal music with a special operatic performance by GWU Voice Instructors Jondra Harmon and Dr. Stafford Turner. Sparti even invites one lucky student up to the stage to conduct one of the final pieces.

These concerts provide an important service as they inspire kids to get involved with music. “When children make music, they are working with both sides of their brains,” Sparti noted. “They learn how to use teamwork and develop into creative adults with compassion for others.” Gardner-Webb music students also benefit from these concerts. Christian Jessup ('18), who plays string bass and piano in the orchestra, noted, “to be able to give something to the kids is a wonderful opportunity.” Chris Coffey ('17), a music major with an emphasis on music business and industry, is now an intern with The Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington D.C. His experience with children’s concerts prepared him to work with the Kennedy Center’s school programs, which bring music to the elementary students in D.C. public schools.

Soon, the orchestra may have a chance to perform for students outside of North Carolina. The group recently received an invitation from Project Listen to bring the concerts to schools in Jacksonville, Fla., and Sparti is working out the details for a future trip. “We have so much talent and so many great students here at GWU,” Sparti added. “I like to see us all come together to give these kids the gift of music.”

Located in the North Carolina foothills, Gardner-Webb University is a private, Christian, liberal arts university that prepares students to become critical thinkers, effective leaders and compassionate servants in the global community. Emphasizing a strong student-centered experience and rigorous academics, Gardner-Webb ignites learning and service opportunities for undergraduate and graduate students. Ignite your future at Gardner-Webb.edu.