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Boston String Quartet's Ethno-Urban Orchestra Brings Musical Melting Pot to Miami Schools

By Camille Lamb Tue., Jan. 17 2012 at 12:00 PM
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A spoonful of Nintendo helps the Beethoven go down. That's the philosophy that the Boston String Quartet has applied to getting high school students excited about classical music with its Ethno-Urban Orchestra.



The Boston String Quartet

Through this initiative, the BSQ will invite about 100 high school students from around Miami to collaborate with them and a professional rock band in an energetic performance that will incorporate world music, rock and roll, film soundtracks, and video game music -- all on a single stage. The show goes on at 7:30 p.m. Saturday, January 21 at The Julius Littman Performing Arts Theater in North Miami Beach. Half the show will be dedicated to showcasing the young talent alongside the pros; the other half will feature only the BSQ and a professional, albeit very young, family rock band, Scarlet Fade.

The Boston String Quartet was founded by lead violinist Christopher Vuk while he was still in college. This innovative chap also founded The School of Groove music institute in Cambridge, Massachusetts as soon as he graduated from Berklee College of Music. On top of all that, he's the driving force behind three musical initiatives, including the Ethno-Urban Orchestra, that invade schools and turn ambitious high school musicians into performers at serious high-class venues in a matter of days.

Vuk has been playing violin for about 20 years. He started with the instrument as a child growing up in northeastern Iowa. His focus was on classical music until he transitioned to college and began exploring other genres, among them world music, jazz, and country.

"So once I finished college, I realized these alternative music styles were what I really wanted to pursue," said Vuk. "So I started touring with a number of world music artists throughout the United States, playing that kind of music. And I got involved with coaching

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a number of students as well."

Through its outreach programs, the School of Groove was soon working with thousands of students across the country. The unique situation merited some unique musical compositions, Vuk thought.

"So we commissioned composers throughout the world to write music for a string quartet and a symphony orchestra. And then we would go into schools for two days, and we would have these workshop classes, but we would also do rehearsals, where we would perform our custom music with the students."

The first performances were limited to rock and roll and classical music, but have since expanded to include Disney scores, video game (*Super Mario Bros.* and *Legend of Zelda*, for example) and movie soundtracks, Vuk said.

To apply, students submit essays explaining why they think they're qualified. They also send in recommendations from their music teachers. How can these written sources reveal a student's musical talent?

"We've worked with a lot of music directors, and we've put together this idea that if we can get a list of students' past experiences, we can get an idea of what level they're at. We also go on the idea that students who are more experienced with music and have a greater interest in music are going to speak more passionately about it."

This is the ensemble's first time performing in Miami, but they already have plans to return. "Our goal in any town to go to is to create an engaging and sustainable program that can occur year after year," Vuk said. "We like to lay the foundation so that we can come back the next year, work with some of the same students and some new students, and create a different program every year."

Although the impact on the students involved is indubitably the most life-changing, audience members will enjoy both the youths' performances alongside world-class musicians, and the portion of the show where the pros take the stage solo.

"For people coming to the concert, we want it to be more than just students playing," Vuk said. "They can expect it's going to be a professional concert. We're booking venues like Carnegie Hall, Symphony Hall, places that everybody knows, so our intention is to put on a really great show."

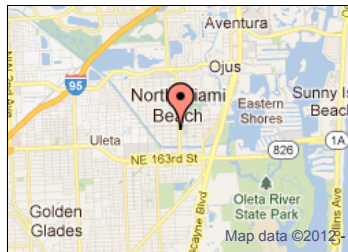
The other members of the quartet hail from Texas, Taiwan, and Bulgaria, driving home the motif of eclecticism. Vuk hopes the Ethno-Urban Orchestra will open up a world of music for the students involved."

"We're hoping that kids will walk away and look at their violin or clarinet and say, wow, there's a lot more here. I don't have to just play classical music. I can play rock and roll, I can play Middle Eastern music. Just to open up their eyes to what's out there."

The Ethno-Urban Orchestra will go on at 7:30 p.m. at the Julius Littman Performing Arts Theater. Tickets cost \$26 to \$36 and can be purchased by calling 888-71-TICKETS. High school musicians interested in applying to the program can do so at xibus.org.

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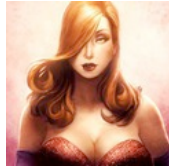
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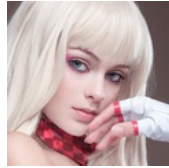
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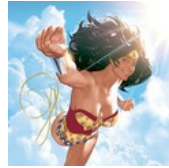
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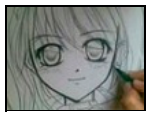
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