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Classical music with a twist



The Boston Quartet will present an EthnoUrban Orchestra performance at Troy Savings Music Hall on Saturday, Oct. 1, with local high school musicians. Submitted photo

By [Alyssa Jung](#)

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#Saratoga — The Boston String Quartet is taking its unique EthnoUrban approach to orchestra music and showing high school students around the country that music education can be more than just Beethoven and Mozart.

#“I think music education is generally behind in terms of students are primarily only working on a classical repertoire, which is great, but students aren’t listening to that music, so music education needs to evolve to learn traditional music and stuff they’re hearing on the radio,” said Christopher Vuk, first violinist and founder of the quartet.

#The quartet presents workshops, classes and wraps it all up with a public performance during its traveling program. Students at Shenendehowa and Albany high schools spent time with the Boston String Quartet on Wednesday, Sept. 21, and were given the chance to sign up to perform alongside the group on Saturday, Oct. 1, at Troy Savings Bank Music Hall.

#“When I was a kid, we had a local French horn player come play with my youth orchestra and it was a great experience for me and so inspiring and exciting,” said Vuk. “I’ve taken that idea with this project and want to give students the opportunity to perform side by side with a professional musician such as ourselves.”

#Joseph Gumpper, orchestra director at Shenendehowa High School, said 11 or 12 of his students signed up to take the stage with the pros.

#“They’re going to be spending the weekend practicing and involved in a concert,” said Gumpper.

#A total of 165 students in grades nine through 12 make up the orchestra at Shen, but the Boston String Quartet only spoke with about 115 during their visit.

#“The response was pretty good. The students seemed pretty excited about it,” said Gumpper.

#The EthnoUrban Orchestra “genre” might be new to many high school musicians, but Gumpper said his students already get a taste of that in class.

#“I do a little bit of improv every year, we do a jazz piece and some rock pieces that I arrange so some of the stuff is stuff they’d heard already, but certainly hearing it from a different source is always good,” said Gumpper.

#Quartet members showed students how to fuse world music, rock, movie soundtracks, Disney and video game tunes into a cohesive performance, like the one they’ll see or participate in on Oct. 1.

#“Personally, I grew up a classical violinist and when I started college and went to a summer music camp, I realized rock ‘n’ roll could be played on the violin, jazz could be played, Chinese music could be played and I had no idea you could do that,” said Vuk. “I think most kids don’t realize you can do that. This is an inspiring program.”

#It’s only the first year the EthnoUrban Orchestra has been offered to schools but Vuk said it’s already been successful.

#“We’ve had a lot of students that have been exposed to this music through our program say, ‘Wow, I didn’t realize you could play more than Mozart on the violin’ and by playing rock or jazz they want to continue their studies,” said Vuk. “Many students are ready to quit and this reenergizes them.”

#Students spent a good chunk of their workshop experimenting with improvisation.

#“They talked to the kids about how to improvise and use their instruments in alternative styles,” said Gumpper.

#The workshop’s scope is what sets it apart from other educational programs, said Vuk.

#“The integrated approach is the most rewarding. There’s a lot of musicians that go out in schools and do workshops, it’s not a new idea, but we find our program really stands apart because we fully integrate the student in the performance and workshops,” said Vuk.

#Learning from and interacting with professional musicians is an invaluable learning tool, said Gumper.

#“I think as many positive playing experiences that young people can have is a good thing and certainly the Boston String Quartet members were very positive, they were very nurturing and gave a lot of reinforcement to what students were doing,” said Gumper. “Anytime that young people are interested—already their schedules are very busy—but when they’re interested in doing something extra on top of that it’s a good thing. It means they’re really into it and they want to create something special.”

#The Boston String Quartet and 104 local high school musicians will take the stage for an EthnoUrban Orchestra performance on Saturday, Oct. 1, at 7:30 p.m. at the Troy Savings Bank Music Hall.

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