



Danbury High and Boston String Quartet join forces

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Todd Sullivan, conductor of the Boston String Quartet, right, leads the Danbury High School orchestra during a rehearsal, Wednesday, Nov. 17, 2010. A combined performance of the quartet and students will take place at the high school on Thursday night as part of the Boston String Quartet's Xibus tour. Photo: Michael Duffy / The News-Times | Buy This Photo



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DANBURY -- The stage was rocking Wednesday afternoon at Danbury High School. Orchestra students cut loose with new voices from their violins, cellos, drums and trombones in an improvised conclusion to a four-hour concert rehearsal with the famed Boston String Quartet.

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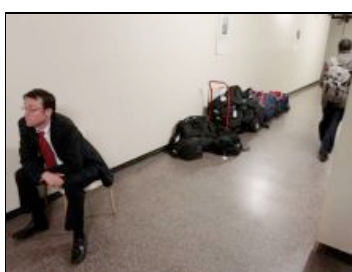




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practiced for a concert during the two-day workshop the quartet calls the Xibus Residency.

It ends Thursday at 7 p.m. with a concert at the high school. The Boston Sting Quartet will join the Danbury High musicians in a program that includes Vivaldi's "Fire Storm," the Beatles' "Hey Jude," Led Zeppelin's "Kashmir," and original music by the string quartet.

"It's a whole new perspective on how to play," 16-year-old, junior cello player [Evan Lunt](#) said Wednesday afternoon. "You see things you might not have thought of doing and you hear how it's supposed to sound."

Sophomore Grace Kuell, 14, has played violin for seven years and taken workshops before, but called this experience unique.

"It is really cool, unlike anything I've ever done before. It's by far the best experience to have such great musicians here and to do this improvisation," she said. "The music is a bit tough, but having tougher music makes you so much tougher."

The [Danbury High orchestra](#) of 45 students and the symphonic band of about 60 will perform with the quartet and a couple of soloists from the school's Madrigals.

The six-year-old Boston String Quartet created the educational program that is underwritten by the [Music Makers](#) Foundation. The quartet works with about 20 high schools a year, chosen for their capacity to perform music arrangements in a rehearsal schedule the quartet uses with professional orchestras.

"The students are bringing their 'A' game to this," said [Michael Obre](#), chairman of the school's art department, who organized the program with orchestra director [Mary Peters](#).

Chris Vuk, the first violin in the Boston String Quartet, designed the Xibus Residency.

"Our goal in creating this program is to allow kids to explore music, show them what's available," he said. "They see that their instrument can play all kinds of music and it's really empowering."

He said the Danbury students were among the better groups the quartet has worked with.

"These guys have a handle on the different rhythms and are stronger musicians," Vuc said. "The music is really set for a string quartet concerto, so there is a lot more open space, a lot of solo spaces. It's rhythmically quite complex."

One value of this workshop is that the quartet reinforces what students are learning in class every day, such as the aspects of ensemble play and what is tone, color and balance, band director [Paul Riley](#) said. "And, many of these children will never get another opportunity to play with musicians of this caliber. Everyone is going to go away from this with an enriched musical life."

In fact, students can handle being pushed further than adults around them think they can,



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said [Todd Sullivan](#), conductor for the program. He said the improvisation is an example of one lesson they want students to learn.

"We tell them, you have to say something with your instrument," Sullivan said. "You have to communicate, if there is one thing they get out of this I hope it's that, to connect with the audience."

Vocalist [Zach Jackson](#), a 16-year-old junior, was asked to perform a solo of "Hey Jude" with the orchestra.

"It's awesome to see the people who are older who have pursued the passion we have now," Jackson said.

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