



JOMP

for music joy

Joy of Music program, JOMPATHON event, mark 20th anniversary

By Richard Duckett
TELEGRAM & GAZETTE STAFF

They were small steps back in the fall of 1986.

Wendy Ardizzone, a piano teacher, started the Joy of Music Program as a program of music and movement classes for preschool children. She had developed an interest in eurythmics and the concept of giving youngsters a foundation for a lifetime of enjoying and playing music. In a space in the basement of First Unitarian Church, 90 Main St., Worcester, the program began with 12 children — three classes of four children each.

At the time Ardizzone had no idea that the program was about to take some big leaps — or, so to speak, “jumps.”

On Saturday, the Joy of Music Program (or JOMP as it is widely known) will hold its annual JOMPATHON, a marathon student recital involving more than 260 participants who will perform classical and jazz music, play the piano, harp, strings, bass, woodwinds, recorders and drums, and sing and dance.

All told, JOMP now has about 500 students of all ages, a faculty of 40, and its own home at 1 Gorham St. (off Lincoln Street) in Worcester. The JOMPATHON, which runs there from 8 a.m. to 9 p.m. and is free to the public, is a fundraiser for the music school's financial aid and outreach program with students getting family members and friends to sponsor their performances.

The goal is to raise \$10,000; the school's total “financial aid need” this year is \$110,000 which goes to 25 percent of the student body.

There are responsibilities, a mortgage to pay, a steadily increasing student enrollment, and lots of music. Wendy Ardizzone is director of JOMP; her husband, Richard Ardizzone, is now associate director.

In short, JOMP has come a long way as it starts looking toward its 20th anniversary.

Wendy and Richard Ardizzone met when they were music students at Oberlin Conservatory of Music. Back then they had talked about the dream of forming a music school. “It was one of those dreams we forget about,” Wendy Ardizzone said. (Speaking of anniversaries, the couple will celebrate their 40th wedding anniversary in June.)

So 21 years ago, Richard Ardizzone was director of the Rainbow Child Development Program while Wendy Ardizzone was studying music and movement.

“It was a time in my life when I was interested in teaching that,” she said. “It was an area of growth I wanted to explore as a teacher.” The music and movement classes were predicated on the notion that children naturally tune in to the sounds and actions around them and spontaneously respond to them with their own voices and body.

“It was a wonderful experience for me as a teacher. As a piano teacher I was seeing so many children starting individual piano lessons before they were really ready for that,” she said. “Even when kids get excited about playing a particular instrument they aren't necessarily ready to play it.” With the music and movement program, “they've internalized rhythm, pitch and phrasing,” said Richard Ardizzone.



T&G Staff Photos/PAUL KAPTEYN

Wendy Ardizzone of the Joy of Music Program provides piano accompaniment as Wilfred Hsei of Northboro, 13, plays the cello during a music lesson at the JOMP studios in Worcester.

It was a concept that parents could evidently understand and children taking part obviously enjoyed. By the end of its second year, the Joy of Music Program had grown from 12 preschool students to 100.

“Word of mouth was important. It grew fast,” Richard Ardizzone said.

By the start of the third year, Wendy Ardizzone was seeing the need to expand. “I thought ‘Oh, boy, they really need something beyond music and movement,’” she said.

Madeline Browning came on board to play and teach the recorder. She is still a member of the JOMP faculty.

Richard Ardizzone could see that JOMP had moved beyond baby steps.

“When we told Wendy in 1988 that she had a school on her hands, she said ‘what?’” he recalled, only half-jokingly.

“I was in denial,” Wendy Ardizzone acknowledged.

In November 1989, the Joy of Music Program was incorporated as a nonprofit community music school.

“It was a real coming together of a dream we had thought about even before we were married,” Wendy Ardizzone said.

“There were two reasons why Wendy decided to incorporate,” her husband said. She wanted to be able to raise funds for financial aid for students in need, and also had the dream of creating “a music school that would last beyond her,” he said.

Richard Ardizzone also taught at the school, and in 1994 started to work part time administratively as JOMP continued its growth. A year later he gave up his job at Rainbow and joined JOMP full time.

“It was a big decision on a lot of fronts,” he said. For one thing, “It meant taking a huge cut in pay.” There was much family discussion.

Like most arts and education nonprofit organizations, JOMP has had its downs as well as ups. A fire at First Unitarian Church in 2000 forced some relocation of activities. For a while the school was simultaneously leasing space in three different



Wendy Ardizzone accompanies Andrew Salo of Sterling, 17, during his violin lesson.

buildings. But a plan was also afoot for JOMP to own its own home. A capital campaign raised \$1.12 million in three years, and in 2002 the school moved to 1 Gorham St. Located on 2-1/2 acres, the building had previously been a school as well as a nursing home. There have since been extensive redesigns and renovations.

The financial tide continues ebb and flow. For example, the Performing Arts School of Worcester has been forced to pare down or give away many of its programs. On the other hand, there are many busy music schools in the state, including, locally, the Pakachoag Community Music School in Auburn and the Royal Academy of Music and Performing Arts of Worcester and Shrewsbury.

At JOMP, plans for the completion of a recital and educational hall at 1 Gorham St. are on hold.

“It's not the time for us to do this,” Richard Ardizzone said. However, “our indicators are good,” he added, including enrollment and contributions.

So in 2006, JOMP still jumps. Regular class activities held throughout the week include dance, music and movement, private instrument lessons, voice, and participation in classical, jazz and chamber music ensembles.

Wendy Ardizzone said the school wants music to be an important part of the lives of all of its students.

“JOMPATHON reflects this goal,” she said of Saturday's event. “There is a terrific atmosphere of mutual support and encouragement among the students, faculty and audience. Every performance and every student is valued equally no matter their age or level. There's a great sense of celebrating music all day long.”