

Music kids ready to JOMP on it

Written by staff

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By Rachel Burke

Worcester's Joy of Music Program, better known as JOMP, will bring together students of all ages to celebrate its 21st anniversary with JOMPATHON 2009. More than 250 students from the community music school will unite on Saturday, Jan. 24, to perform their favorite classical, jazz, folk and contemporary pieces in an inspiring day-long celebration of music.

JOMP was founded in the fall of 1986 by its current director, Wendy Ardizzone, as a way to bring music to preschoolers. The school was incorporated as a non-profit in 1989 to meet the growing community demand and to raise funds for its operation. Over the next 10 years, the school grew from its initial 12 students to over 500, and opened its new site in January of 2002. The school is now a cultural resource in the city, with ample space for its projected growth.

"The JOMP program serves two purposes," says Associate Director Rich Ardizzone. "One is that it's a mid-year performance opportunity for students, but also, it's a community music school. About twenty percent of our students receive financial aid, and we've raised an average of \$100,000 over the last several years. That's a huge effort.

"The other purpose is to make the JOMP students aware of the financial aid program and the involvement to help raise money for it."

On average, nearly 1 out of 5 students receives financial aid while attending JOMP. Since 1992 over \$880,000 has been raised and awarded to students participating in the program. In the last three years, more than \$93,000 has gone to over 85 low- and lower- to middle-income students. This year's goal is to earn an additional \$8,000 so the school can assist an average of 95 students.



For the JOMP participants, there is simple joy in seeing the young students do what they do best.

"At the JOMP recitals, the audience and students come and go all day long," Ardizzone says. "People can drop by anytime between 7:30 a.m. and 8:30 p.m. We've had people come and sit in the audience and say that they were just going to stay for a few minutes to see what it was like and they couldn't leave. They'd end up calling home and saying that they were going to be late and they'd end up here for hours! It's just so much fun.

"You'll see the young 6- and 7-year-olds play and you can see the terror in their eyes when they turn to face the audience. But then they play their piece and everybody applauds and they just light up like a candle. You can see the big grin on their face and it's great. We also have senior-level students who play solo cello pieces and it tears your heart out with how beautiful it is."

The JOMPATHON recitals have become a major part of some of the students' lives, as well those of their family and friends.

"I've been performing at Jompathon since I was about five years old," says Ana Apostoleris, one of JOMP's senior flautists. "I spend hours at JOMP waiting to perform and watching others perform, and it's become a sort of a ritual in my family. It's basically like a holiday to us."

The JOMPATHON 2009 music recital will take place Saturday, Jan. 24, from 7:30 a.m. to 8:30 p.m. at the school's Recital Hall at 1 Gorham St. in Worcester. It is free admission and sponsored by Living Earth and Evo Café. The public is invited to drop in anytime during the day to enjoy solo piano, voice, guitar, strings, brass, percussion and woodwind performances. Some small ensembles will also be

performing.

For more information on the event, please visit jomp.org.