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JOMPATHON returns to Joy of Music Jan. 25

By Amanda Roberge CORRESPONDENT



Gabrielle Chona-Senidei of Worcester plays violin during last year's annual JOMPATHON music marathon fundraiser at the Joy of Music Program in Worcester. (T&G File Photo/PAUL KAPTEYN)

WORCESTER — The building that houses the Joy of Music Program sits unassumingly at the end of Gorham Street, a former nursing home that was once a place to wind down one's days and find a quiet serenity.

But in the 13 years since the music school affectionately known as JOMP bought the facility, each room has become fully alive and nearly bursting with musical energy. The buzz is electric, and that same current will run through the JOMP Recital Hall on Jan. 25 when musicians young and old take the stage from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. as part of the school's annual JOMPATHON fundraiser.

The public is invited to pop in anytime and listen, said Associate Director Rich Ardizzone, who added that they are proud to show off the talents of the students to anyone who stops by.

The public is invited to enjoy solo and accompanied piano, voice, guitar, strings, brass and woodwind performances. Some small ensembles will also be performing. Admission is free, although donations are appreciated, said Mr. Ardizzone, with all proceeds going to scholarships, with a goal of \$10,000.

JOMP was born in 1986 with a handful of students and has now grown to occupy the current space with more than 550 students and a dedicated faculty of more than 40 musicians.

"People hear from a friend about a teacher that student loves and will call up requesting that teacher because they heard he or she was really good," Mr. Ardizzone said with a laugh, adding that even if the teacher they thought they wanted is not taking students, they will find that any teacher they choose quickly becomes a favorite. "If you're not a good teacher, you're not here!"

But the high level of instruction provided at JOMP doesn't come without a whole lot of legwork behind the scenes. In fact, a significant fundraising effort takes place every year in order to raise some of the more than \$130,000 that will be used to provide financial aid to students. The goal, said is to make music accessible to everyone, regardless of income or circumstances.

For more than 20 years, Mr. Ardizzone and his wife, Wendy, who functions not only as the school's founder and director but also as a piano accompanist to hundreds of students throughout the week and onstage at JOMPATHON, the event has been a time of complete celebration of music, camaraderie and joy.

But despite the serious dedication of the musicians at JOMP, said Mr. Ardizzone, the goal is not to turn out virtuosos at any cost. The goal is quite simply to foster the love of music.

"We have a lot of people here who don't have any intention of trying to make a career of music," he said. "Most of our students are here to play music, just for the love of it."

And while students at JOMP experience growth as musicians thanks to their involvement at the school, there is a personal component of being among supportive and devoted instructors that is not to be overlooked.

"He has much more confidence in himself," said Rima Abraham of her son, Matthew, who is among the hundreds of students who are able to get instruction at JOMP with the help of financial aid. Matthew, she said, has flourished under the careful tutelage of his JOMP teacher. "When I drop him off here, I feel like this is home."

Matthew, a violin player and singer, is a junior at Burncoat High School and has been recognized by the Massachusetts Teachers' Association for his compositions as part of the All-State Competition Project.

But he is also one of the students who greatly enjoys the annual ritual of JOMPATHON performance, where this year he will perform the third movement of Concerto in A Minor by Bach.

One of the great gifts of his time at JOMP, he said, has been his introduction to classical music.

"There is something about Bach," he said.

Although there is certainly no shortage of classical music onstage at JOMPATHON, part of the fun of the event is experiencing all of the different types of music, according to Massachusetts Academy student Nayana Thimmiah, who attends JOMP for clarinet instruction.

"Every piece is different from the one before," she said. "I like performing, but I also like just sitting and listening."