

Engaging with arts ‘makes everything sparkle’

Amanda Karioth Thompson
Council on Culture & Arts

Henry Detweiler is no stranger to live musical performances. Both his parents are musicians, so he’s gathered a few tips on being a good audience member.

“For starters, when you’re in an auditorium, you should not talk because then you’re going to be more focused on talking than the music,” said the Gilchrist Elementary School second grader.

Figuring out when to applaud can be a challenge and Henry offered a helpful suggestion. “Try to follow along when a whole group claps. That’s always what I do. Not like when only one person claps. Don’t start clapping then because it’s probably not a spot when you clap.”

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Local vocalist Avis Berry led a holiday favorites sing-along. DAVID S WATSON

Dancers from Pas de Vie brought additional artistry to the concert. AMANDA THOMPSON



Ruby Diamond Concert Hall was in full holiday swing. AMANDA THOMPSON

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For good measure, he added “try not to kick the seat in front of you.”

Henry and nearly 2,200 other elementary-aged students and their teachers recently attended the Young People’s Concerts presented by the Tallahassee Symphony Orchestra (TSO).

For more than 20 years, TSO has offered the program to help introduce kids to a variety of musical concepts and TSO conductor Darko Butorac quizzed students about strings, woodwinds, brass, and percussion.

Amanda Stringer, TSO chief executive officer, was impressed with the knowledge the kids brought with them. “There weren’t any wrong answers to the instrument questions. I think that speaks well to both the classroom music teachers and what a great job they’re doing in the schools.”

Audience members represented 25 different groups from public, private, charter, and home schools in Leon, Wakulla, Jefferson and Thomas counties. With a focus on equity, 1,700 students from Title 1 schools were provided with free tickets to the concerts. For students from non-Title 1 schools, admission was just \$8 per child, less than the price of a movie ticket.

The students are bussed to Ruby Diamond Concert Hall for a holiday inspired performance designed just for them. This year, the concert included Vince Guaraldi’s “A Charlie Brown Christmas” and Duke Ellington’s jazz version of the well-known “Dance of the Sugar-Plum Fairy.” Local vocalist Avis Berry led the audience in a sing-along that featured favorites like “Deck the Halls” and “Jingle Bells.”

Ginny Stewart is a second-grade teacher at Gilchrist and she looks forward to the Young People’s Concert every year. “I’ve been taking part in it ever since it started,” she said. “I’m a huge advocate.”

“Students need to have musical experiences like this. It helps them think outside the box of what’s possible. Music makes you smarter and builds your brain. Any time you engage with the arts, it makes everything sparkle,” she said.

TSO General Manager, Mary Kelsay agreed and added “our mission is to engage, enrich and inspire all



Darko Butorac conducting the Tallahassee Symphony Orchestra. DAVID S WATSON



Audience members represented 25 different school groups from all over the area. AMANDA THOMPSON

people at all stages of life and elementary school students are a huge part of that. If you reach them early, they’re more likely to pursue music, learn more about music and be curious. We’re trying to make that impact.”

Amanda Karioth Thompson is the Assistant Director for the Council on Culture & Arts. COCA is the capital area’s umbrella agency for arts and culture (www.tallahasseearts.org).