



AMANDA THOMPSON
Hannah Prasse and teacher Tabitha Peck prepare for a vocal rehearsal.

MUSIC LIFE

FROM STEEL PANS TO ORCHESTRA, LEON 12TH-GRADER FINDS 'MUSIC IS THE FORCE THAT KEEPS ME INVOLVED'

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In many ways, Leon High School 12th-grader Hannah Prasse is just like any other teenager. She is bubbly, enjoys spending time with friends, and is contemplating her future. According to Tabitha Peck, Leon's director of choral activities, Hannah differs from the typical teenager in one significant way,

specifically "her incredible, vast talent in so many different disciplines. She plays bass in the steel pan small ensemble, she's in the orchestra, she's in two choirs, an afterschool ensemble, jazz band, and of course she takes private voice lessons and private bass lessons," said Peck.

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Hannah's innate talent and interest in music can be linked to her upbringing. Both of her parents are musicians and music plays a major part in daily life for her and her two younger brothers. "For a little while, I was thinking, am I choosing music for me or am I choosing music because my family is involved? I feel like part of deciding what you want to do, going into college, going into a career, is figuring out what you enjoy, what you're good at and what makes sense. It's just what I was supposed to do. I can't not have this in my life."

With her sights set on higher education, Hannah is currently preparing her application for the FSU College of Music, which requires an audition. Though she'll likely seek a music education undergraduate degree, her ultimate goal is a master's in music therapy. "That's something that has always interested me. There are studies that show babies nurse better when they're listening to music. Babies don't even have a concept of what music is but, for some reason, it affects them in a physical way. Why, why does that happen? I want to know. There are answers that I've got to find."

Hannah is already exploring the field and completed a summer internship with Tallahassee Memorial Hospital, where she performed for patients. It is because of her initiative and tenacity that Peck considered Hannah an ideal candidate for a special recognition, the Florida Jazz and Blues Festival scholarship.

Last month, the inaugural Florida Jazz and Blues Festival brought internationally renowned performers to town for a weekend-long celebration of music. Every world-class artist started somewhere and supporting the next generation of musicians is an important part of the festival's mission. To honor America's jazz legacy and encourage the sustainability of the art form, scholarships were awarded to local emerging musicians.

Through the support of The Unity Music Foundation, on behalf of The Florida Jazz and Blues Festival, both Hannah and FSUS high school 12th-grader Cameron Hirai, received \$1,000 to help with tuition costs. Hannah said, "I was surprised. I was being supported for doing what I love. It kind of set me on fire, I'm like what else can I do and we've been looking into some other scholarships."

Peck is proud of all her nearly 400 choral students but she is especially impressed by Hannah's "determination, her relentless nature. If she finds herself with an obsta-



Hannah Prasse sings with her choral teacher Tabitha Peck

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cle, she is going to overcome that obstacle, whatever it is." Hannah can easily pinpoint the source of her determination. "I feel like music is the force that really keeps me involved and keeps me focused. I have to be a more regimented person, overall. Every day, I practice what I need to work on. I think that translates to the rest of my life. I have to study, I have to keep up with things, I have

to be intentional."

Though Hannah credits the study of music for elevating her level of concentration, she also recognizes Peck's role in how far she has come. "I would not be the musician or the person that I am if she hadn't been so involved in my life. She's not just a teacher, I don't just come and clock in for an hour a day. She's invested in me, and her other students, as musicians and as people. She just cares a lot."

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