



IU News Room

News Release

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An IU Jacobs School partnership encourages children to become composers

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BLOOMINGTON, Ind. -- For many of us, atom connections in sodium hydroxide are about chemical reactions, but for an elementary school-age Payton, they are making music. Payton's idea of converting a scientific formula into music scores was brought to life with help from an Indiana University composition student and made him one of eight winners in the Kids Compose! competition last year.

Kids Compose! -- co-sponsored by the Bloomington Community Arts Commission, IU Jacobs School of Music and the Community Chamber Music Association -- allows hundreds of



A Bloomington area student is coached on his composition during the Kids Compose! program at the IU Jacobs School of Music.

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schoolchildren between second and sixth grades from Monroe County to use their imagination to compose melodies. At one of the participating schools, St. Charles Borromeo School, IU composition students help the youngsters write the scores and later perform the winners' pieces at an orchestra concert or band performance for children, teachers and parents.

"The main delight in all of this is sitting in the auditorium with hundreds of kids

who are mesmerized by the fact that they are hearing one of their friend's pieces on stage. I hope that's one of those experiences one never forgets," says Don Freund, professor of composition in the IU Jacobs School of Music.

More than 200 melodies, each less than a minute in length, were submitted for the competition this year, reflecting a substantial increase in participation since last year's Kids Compose! kickoff. A total of nine Bloomington area schools and home-schooled children entered the competition in fall 2007.

School teachers at St. Charles, who are "excited about any music project," find the competition valuable for both children's music education and their overall growth and development. They recall success stories of shy children who never thought they could compose, yet ended up writing melodies and becoming active in their music classes after working with IU composition students and participating in the competition.

"It really develops a lot of self-confidence in students. We encourage them to keep a journal of all their melodies -- just like a written diary," says Kathy Gorr, a music teacher at St. Charles. "The children take pride in their melodies and IU students have been wonderful in working with them."



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Teachers at two other Monroe County schools continue to work with the budding composers after the competition, allowing children to perform their melodies at concerts for classmates and parents.

"These follow-up activities are exciting to see. As more and more composition activities take place in schools, we hope to have even more Kids Compose! entries next year," says Ruth Boshkoff, a

composer and music educator. Boshkoff is one of the project's founders.

For IU music students, too, Kids Compose! has been a beneficial experience. By inspiring the youth to compose and by helping them to transfer sounds into notes on paper, they have been training as professionals who need to be able to work within boundaries and with minimum rehearsal.

"This is a professional kind of job for them, which is not about 'how can I write the most interesting original kind of piece,' but, rather, about working with someone else's idea," Freund said. "It's a very important aspect of being a composer -- how, when you need to be efficient, economical and practical, yet still effective and imaginative -- can you do all that and still sound great."

David Farrell, who helped young Payton write his "atomic" music, found the project an interesting opportunity to do something different in his educational career.

"It was a lot of fun, much better than I thought it would be," he said. "Talking to the kids was amazing -- they are so imaginative! The general idea is that writing music is really hard; this project shows that everybody can write."

The parents of fledgling composers have been equally amused by their son's/daughter's creativity and interest in writing music.

"One of the parents said that ever since last year, her son is listening to every single noise outside. This project is sparking the creativity and interest in children, and they listen to music in a whole different way," says Debbi Ponella, artistic director of Youth Stages in Bloomington.

She created Kids Compose! with Ruth Boshkoff. The two came up with the idea while having lunch two years ago. Soon afterward, they received support and encouragement from the dean of the IU Jacobs School of Music, Gwyn Richards, and the school's entire composition department.

Kids Compose! not only enables imagination, encourages creativity in children and allows IU composition students to practice their professional skills, but it also opens up a new world of music to the Bloomington community and a new kind of appreciation for it.

"Composing music is a celebration of our humanity, and having it happen to young people, is probably one of the greatest gifts you can give," said Freund.

The next performance of winners' pieces will take place in the Musical Arts Center at 10 a.m. Wednesday, March 5 as part of a Jacobs School of Music outreach program that brings area students to musical and dance events. The IU Wind Ensemble will play four melodies composed by schoolchildren from second, fifth and sixth grades.

For more information about the upcoming concert and Kids Compose!, please check <http://www.music.indiana.edu/kidscompose/> or contact Ponella at dponella@insightbb.com.

