

# Young musicians get symphonic experience

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Thirty-two young string players from Kateri and Karonianónhna schools performed alongside the McGill Chamber Orchestra (MCO) in a classical music concert of a lifetime.

Called *Musique Française*, the students played solo as well last Sunday at the Oscar Peterson concert hall in Montreal, with big smiles on their faces.

In collaboration with the MCO, the *Encore!Sistema Quebec (ESQ)*, inspired by the *El-Sistema* music program, involved approximately 90 students in total of the Montreal area to showcase kids' musical skills by performing four musical pieces, including a stirring "Habanera" from *Carmen*, with Canadian soprano Sharon Azrieli.

"It was wonderful time!" said Azrieli, who performed in many venues before, but never with the children.

She said the kids came very well prepared for the rehearsal and at the concert she decided to surprise them.

"I think they thought they were going to be in the back, and I am going to be in the front, but I refused to do that. I decided to come on their side to make it fun for them, I was playing with them," she said.

Azrieli hoped she could help the kids to feel joy while they were performing.

"I want them to love the music, I want them to have fun with the music," she said.

She expressed her appreciation to the teachers and organizers; she hopes the kids will keep going and will bring the music into all aspects of their lives.

"It doesn't matter if they grow on to be professional musi-



COURTESY ANNETTE WOLOSHEH PHOTOGRAPHY

cians," she continued, "It matters that they keep on making music for joy and teach their children the music; it matters if they bring the music into the community."

Theodora Stathopoulos, director of the ESQ program, thinks the young musicians had wonderful stage presence during the concert and the day before she was encouraged "because they did so well."

"We've been preparing. We had to learn their own piece, and other pieces, which is complicated, because we only had one rehearsal. Yesterday we had to prepare everything in advance by ourselves and then keep our fingers cross when it comes together with the orchestra to see how it is going to work," she said.

Stathopoulos thinks such collaboration is not just an artistic ensemble, "but it is a social and community system."

"This is a unique situation where we have a lot of skills associated with playing instruments, a

lot of thinking, singing, but you also have communication. In an orchestra you need to work together, watching a conductor and communicating with body language, watching for signals when you are performing," she said.

Stathopoulos believes it is very important to be part of a professional ensemble as it opens up kids' concepts of their works' results.

"Then it gives them more power, more motivation to continue doing that," she said.

Stathopoulos spoke about their collaboration with the Kahnawake Education Center since the beginning of the program in both Kahnawake elementary schools.

"Every year it has showcased them in concerts side-by-side with a professional organization. Kahnawake kids are one of our strongest sides, very supportive, and part of the program is really to connect with the community," she said.

Young performers Katsistohkwio Cross, 9, and Kawennóntie Jacco, 8, who have been playing

violin for about five years, were very proud to join the orchestra.

"I feel excited because it's my first big show," said Cross.

The girls added they are willing to move forward and participate more in future musical presentations.

The MCO conductor and artistic director Boris Brott was impressed with the *El-Sistema* organization.

"The marvelous thing about the *El-Sistema* is that they (children) are valued within the program, but if they are coming here in a professional situation and playing, then it further emphasizes the validity of what they are doing in the classes of the *El-Sistema*," he said.

Brott said having had a position with a national art centre for almost 40 years, where he did all the children concerts programs, he thoroughly enjoys turning kids on to the classics.

"They were very excited, and of course they were scared," he

said about the *Musique Française* young performers.

"They know they are playing for people and I want them to feel what it is like to play with the real orchestra and some classical music, and then they were sitting in the audience, they saw how we work hard, because we always try to reach higher and higher for our goals, so that is what we want to teach them."

Brott believes such programs need certain support.

"I don't say just necessarily with money, but emotionally. We don't realize that kids are sensitive beings, the small things can often have really long-lasting reactions. That is why I have such a high respect for Theodora, because she is doing a brilliant work," he said.

The other point of it is music doesn't have linguistic barriers, he said.

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## Dawson embraces Onkwehón:we culture

KAHENIENTHA CROSS  
THE EASTERN DOOR

The month of April isn't only a single day to play simple pranks on your pals at Dawson College - there's a week dedicated to the First Peoples.

The week is jam-packed with culture workshops and guest speakers who join the college for a bit of insightfulness.

Dawson College is loud and proud when it comes to showing how culturally-diverse the student demographic is through the many different events and activities that are hosted by employees and the student body.

The First Peoples Centre coordinator Tiawentinon Canadian is on her second year with the FPC and loves making an impact on the Indigenous presence in Dawson College.

"I think that it's important to have Indigenous representation throughout the college so that we're not just relegated to

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Dawson College invited guests from Kahnawake to share their knowledge and experience for First People's Week at the Montreal CEGEP.