



MUSICIANS AT PLAY

Connecting youth, mentors and community through music

by Linda A. Rapka

Recognizing that music and the arts are a vital part of a young person's overall education — and with these essential aspects of learning severely lacking in Los Angeles public schools — a determined, music-minded couple set out to make a difference.

Their vision to enrich young lives was realized in 2015 with the launch of Musicians at Play. Co-founded by April and Don Williams, the nonprofit arts and education foundation boasts a robust array of programs partnering students with Oscar-winning film composers, jazz greats and world-class Los Angeles musicians.

"The constant cuts and lack of exposure to music education in the schools is a social injustice, and the willingness of the music community to give back to the youth to foster the next generation of musicians was — and is — inspiring," said Don Williams, who also serves as program director. "It was a very organic evolution."

Their deep roots in the industry — Don being a classically trained timpanist and member of a multi-generational family of successful musicians including prolific film composer John Williams, and April's experience in musical theatre career with the L.A. Civic Light Opera, establishing of "Upstairs at Vitello's" as a major Los Angeles jazz venue, and active service on numerous music boards

including the California Jazz Foundation — served as a welcoming springboard for the foundation's quick rise.

Musicians at Play provides instrumental and vocal training to students through sequential workshops that align with California visual and performing arts standards. Core programs span Film Music, Jazz, Classical, Big Band, Vocal, Chamber Ensemble and Orchestra that include professional development workshops, student performances, master classes, panel discussions, community concerts, and an afterschool youth orchestra program which reach 4,500 children, parents, teachers and community members each year.

"The students that I worked with through the Musicians at Play Foundation in March left feeling so inspired by the music that we as educators were coaching them on," said flutist Catherine Baker. "Students hear so many of us playing in concerts or in film scores, and this program really allows them to have an immersive experience that the arts are not only alive and well, but thriving. They benefited in ways that will go further than just their instrument, but in their professional and personal lives with skills that are so commonly achieved by the arts like perseverance, discipline and responsibility."

Musicians at Play is made up of entertainment and music profes-



All photos by Tom Pease

Students from the Burbank school district rehearse with professional musical mentors as part of the Musicians At Play mentorship program, February 2019.

sionals inclusive of a board, staff and volunteers, artists, filmmakers, composers, educators, and historians who each make significant contributions to the diversity of the Los Angeles music scene. Celebrated conductor, bassoonist and educator Anthony Parnter serves as artistic director and conductor for the organization. As part of the Film Music program, the Los Angeles musicians who record for popular film composers including as John Williams and Michael Giacchino are the primary mentors who work with students.

“Students are more interested and engaged in school in all academics and music education,” said managing director Cindy Pease. “Each year the participation grows and the students’ skills have blossomed. Many high



Artistic director and conductor Anthony Parnter and composer Michael Giacchino with Peggy Flynn, Arts and Career Technical Education coordinator for the Burbank Unified School District.

school graduates continue on with private lessons with our AFM mentor musicians and have gotten accepted into coveted schools continuing on as music majors.”

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Musicians at Play Mentors

Violin

Fernando Arroyo
Lascurain
Lisa Dondlinger
Garcia Laslukhin
Shigeru Logan
Helen Nightengale
Joel Pargman
Sara Parkins
Ben Powell
Lydia Reinebach
Isabella Reyes
Albert Romero
Roger Wilkie

Trumpet

Nathan Johnson
Chris Lawrence
Barry Perkins
Bryce Schmidt
Chad Willis

Horn

Dylan Hart
Paul Klintworth
Kristy Morrell
Preston Shepard

Viola

Brian Dembow
Andrew Duckies
Shigeru Logan
Corinne Olsen
Sharon Ray
Stefan Smith
David Walther

Trombone/Tuba

Noah Gladstone
Steve Hughes
Lori Stuntz

Cello

Mark Bassett
Stephen Erdod
Trevor Jarvis
Armen Ksajikia
Joo Lee

Percussion

Eddie Hong
Sidney Hopson
Pete Korpela
Don Williams

Bass

John Belzaguy
William Johnson
Greg Osika
Jonathan Richards
Adrian Rosen
Dave Stone

Guitar

Jamey Arent

Harp

Jillian Lopez

Flute

Catherine Baker
Heather Clark

Piano/Keyboards

Mark Levang

Oboe

Claire Brazeau
Jessica Wilkins

Artistic Director/ Conductor

Anthony Parnter
Vinny Oppido
(composer)

Clarinet

Gary Bovyer
Donald Foster
Juan Gallegos

Program Director/ Co-Founder

Don Williams

Bassoon

Anthony Parnter
Theresa Truenfels

Saxophone

Keith Fiddmont
Dan Higgins
Bob Sheppard

President/ Co-Founder

April Williams

Musicians at Play

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In addition to serving students through one-on-one mentoring, the foundation promotes awareness of Los Angeles' diverse musical heritage to the public at large through its live performances. The concerts aim to strengthen and build diverse communities, highlight the musical heritage of Los Angeles, and also raise funds for the organization's music mentorship programs and to benefit selected community nonprofit partners that serve vulnerable and disadvantaged people across Los Angeles.

President and co-founder April Williams notes that everyone involved is committed to giving back to the community and working together to present the composers, musicians, and vocalists who make L.A. the international music capital it is today.

"We always rely on our wonderful volunteers for all of our events: public professional concerts, school concerts," she said. "Our board of directors is always welcoming in folks with their individual talents to help spur us along. We are looking for additions to our education committee as we expect expansion to additional school districts in 2020. The success of our program is always because of the amazing brilliant musicians involved. We are very grateful. And of course all musicians are paid for their services!"

Helping to fill the musical void in underserved schools and communities, Musicians at Play creates diverse community partnerships in order to inspire careers, establish social bonds, and celebrate culture.



Photo by Tom Pease

At the second annual Reach for the Stars concert last March, students from the Burbank Unified School District Symphonic Orchestra and Choir performed works by John Williams, including his iconic scores to "Star Wars: The Phantom Menace" and "E.T. the Extra Terrestrial," along with music from Michael Giacchino's electrifying scores to "Star Trek: Into Darkness" and "Star Trek: Beyond." Special guests included Hollywood studio percussionist and timpanist Don Williams, the Musicians at Play Foundation mentors, and maestro Anthony Parnter.

Partnering organizations include AFM Local 47, Music Fund of Los Angeles, California Arts Council, Los Angeles County Arts & Culture, Disney, Burbank Unified School District, AFM & SAG-AFTRA Intellectual Property Rights Distribution Fund, Pacific Federal, Keep Arts in Schools, the Broad Stage, Materia Collective, the Alex Theatre, and the Moss Theater. Those interested in participating are welcome to contact April Williams at april@musiciansatplay.org.

In January 2015, Musicians at Play officially partnered with AFM Local 47 by signing

onto a collective bargaining agreement and looks forward to expanding its already impressive reach in 2020. Upcoming community performances include two concerts in Burbank: the Third Annual Music is Instrumental Benefit Concert, "A Far Off Place," at John Burroughs High School on Jan. 11, and "The Scoring '20s: Five-Year Anniversary Event," honoring Burbank Unified School District arts educator Peggy Flynn and music director Anthony Parnter, at Nickelodeon Animation Studios on April 4. For tickets and more information, visit musiciansatplay.org.

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