

Turkish Music and Dance Unit at BSI, TAOTS and 370

The Lucretia Marcigliano (PS/IS 237) Campus is a prototype of the new wave in city educational settings, a single home for three small, yet diversely specialized schools, each with its own administration, program options, and population. This trio is composed of The Jim Thorpe School (PS 370), a District 75 K-8 self-contained program for students with cognitive disabilities, mainly autism, The Academy of Talented Scholars (20K682), a choice K-5 school, and the Brooklyn School of Inquiry (20K686), a K-8 citywide gifted and talented school. While each school maintains its own highly qualified pedagogical staff, they share a single music teacher and two dance teachers. Funding from the American Turkish Society will enable the development of the Turkish component of the planned common music curriculum: Around the World in 180 Days. Students from all three schools will learn about Turkish culture through music and dance with the help of talented musician, Tom Chess and the shared music and dance teachers.

Indeed, we are a unique campus. One that is fortunate enough to house three diverse schools. Yet we remain a traditional elementary school setting. Like most other traditional New York City elementary schools, we routinely face the budgetary challenges set forth by our governing administration. Despite the constant threat of looming budget cuts and the pressures of raising educational pedagogical bars to meet and exceed the academic rigors intended to prepare students to face the global work force in years to come, the Arts including music and dance remain a priority in the eyes of all three of our campus Principals. The three campus schools employ one music teacher who is responsible for a general music program and share 2 dance teachers between the three schools.

The Around the World Music curriculum has been developed by Brian Wagner, general music teacher to all three schools. The students in all three schools will devote several weeks of music class to learning about music from each of several different cultures. The students will “travel” to America (traditional folk songs) Latin America, Jamaica, Turkey, Russia, China, India and South Africa. The musical tourism will feature several festivals and performances, building instruments such as maracas, replicating the sounds of instruments such as garbage can lids for steel drums and learning songs. Some of the curriculum will be built on Daria’s music (www.dariamusic.com) and some, including the Turkish Music and Dance unit will be developed from scratch.

The Turkish Music and Dance unit consists of 4 parts that will be developed for the 2nd and 3rd grades of BSI and TAOTS and modified for the general student population of 370. Two of these parts, an in class workshop and an in class performance will be implemented by Tom Chess, a highly respected and accomplished musician specializing in traditional Turkish music. The other two parts will be developed in coordination with Tom to provide background and preparation for the in class workshop and performance. The background parts will be implemented by Brian Wagner within the music curriculum and dance teachers Diane McCarthy (BSI and 370) and Samantha Chan (TAOTS and 370). The intimate format of the in class workshop will permit the students to learn about the Oud and the Ney flute and the in class performances will allow the students to experience the rich sounds and vibrant rhythms of Turkish music.

As background and preparation for the in class workshop and performance, the students will have an introduction to Turkish music and culture and learn traditional children’s folk songs and basic folkdances. The in class workshop will focus on the Oud and the Ney flute. The sophistication of the workshop will be tailored to the age and abilities of the students. The basic content will include an age appropriate

historical overview of Turkish music and details about the Oud, the grandfather of all stringed instruments, and the Ney, an end-blown flute figured prominently in Turkish music. Among other details, students will learn what kind of wood is used to make the Oud and the Ney, how they are made, when they are traditionally played, their cultural significance, who traditionally plays them, and the region, time period and ethnic group associated with them. Other elements to be covered are basic similarities and differences between Turkish and western music including the introduction to such concepts as the importance of improvisation in Near Eastern music. The in class performance by Tom and other artists will include student participation. The artists may include a Turkish singer, a percussionist, a Baglama (Turkish Long-Necked Lute) player and a Kanun (Turkish Zither) player depending on availability. The students will participate by singing the Turkish folksong they will have learned and dancing the folkdances they will have learned in dance class.

Being a multi-instrumentalist Tom brings experiential insights from playing reeds, winds, strings as well as electronically produced sounds. He has studied Middle / Near Eastern and West African music, spending time in West Africa playing and performing. He has studied with Bassam Saba, Tidiani Bangoura, Abdul Aziz Tourè and Mohammad Camarra. He has also conducted workshops and master classes / lectures and performances in the NYC Public school system as well as New Jersey and Universities and institutions such as Asia Society NY, Johnson State College Vermont, Columbia University, SUNY Fredonia College, McDaniel's College, Carrol Community College, Md and Gettysburgh College, PA. Tom currently lives in NYC where he performs with his various ensembles and works as a freelance musician. He has performed at the Turkish Embassy, the Pakistani Embassy and the Asian Society among countless other venues in NYC and the United States. He has also performed in Africa, Canada, Holland, and Italy.

All three schools have found that joint activities foster a sense of community and are enriching for all students and staff. Certainly music is accessible and enjoyable to all and this type of common experience builds a positive culture as the student body expands and grows in number. This year the schools participated in a campus wide Autism Walk-A-Thon where a considerable amount of money was raised for an autism awareness fund. BSI and students from 370 have had joint dance classes and first grade BSI and 370 students have joint recess. The Jim Thorpe School, a District 75 K-8 school, will have 75 students at capacity, The Academy of Talented Scholars (20K682), a choice K-5 school which will have about 450 students at capacity and the Brooklyn School of Inquiry (20K686), a citywide gifted and talented school, will be a K-8 school on which will have about 500 students at capacity. In SY 2011/2012 both BSI and TAOTS will be K-3 schools.

All three schools at the PS/IS 237 campus are deeply committed to cross-curricular learning and are working diligently to instill an eye toward global awareness in each of their students. What better way to foster the love of music, awareness of music from around the world and a deep appreciation for the differences that make us uniquely human? This is a perfect campus for the Around the World Music Curriculum!