

Jam for arts in education is totally on the money

By Terry DeBoer
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During a special Wealthy Theatre show on Sunday, enthusiasm overflowed for musical arts and education.

A packed house heard several area artists in an Arts Jam concert/fund-raiser for arts programs in the Grand Rapids Public Schools.

"The arts are one of the most human of all activities," violinist Diane McElfish of the Perugino String Quartet told the audience between the group's two selections.

"That's why we want to pass (music) on to our kids — because it's wonderful. It's wonderful to listen to, and I think it's even more fun to do."

The quartet's performance of pieces by Bach and Brahms were just part of the wide variety of musical styles offered on the program. Included were pianist Rich Ridenour, the folk trio Beats Settin' Home, jazz vocalist Edye Evans Hyde, blues artist Roberta Bradley and the Grand Rapids Community College vocal ensemble Shades of Blue.

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SARAE GOLD

"It's incredible how everybody came together for this, and the community that came out to support it," said Sarae Gold, fine-arts supervisor for the Grand Rapids Public Schools.

The roughly 400 tickets sold netted more than \$5,000, according to officials from the GRPS Arts Advocates, the grassroots group that spearheaded the Arts Jam.

Additional donations were received at the door, and gifting envelopes were distributed with the printed programs.

Event host and emcee John Varineau pointed out several needs within the city's public-school music program,



PRESS PHOTO/PAUL L. NEWBY II

Local vocals and more: Edye Evans Hyde performs with her husband, Michael Hyde, during Sunday's Arts Jam fund-raiser at Wealthy Theatre.

which he said is funded by only around \$20 total for a typical-size class of students. The age of the schools' average musical instrument is measured in decades rather than years, according to Varineau, assistant conductor of the Grand Rapids Symphony and part of the Arts Advocates.

The dapper Varineau brought his clarinet and competed with pianist Ridenour in a musically comedic segment. The artists played "one-upsmanship" referencing the Broadway show tune "Anything You Can Do (I Can

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Do Better.)"

After determining which of the two could sing higher, play higher, play longer and play faster, Ridenour was judged the winner — thanks in large part to his education in Grand Rapids Public Schools, as the pianist is an Ottawa Hills graduate.

Each member of the trio Beats Settin' Home works in education.

"When we had a chance to support our two loves — education for the kids and the arts — we were honored and blessed to be here," said banjo player-vocalist Jim Foerch during intermission.

The trio opened its set with the a capella "Gather the Family" before biting into its standard



Roberta Bradley sings for Arts Jam.

"Home Grown Tomatoes."

Shades of Blue put a vocal-jazz spin on tunes such as "If I Only Had a Brain" (from "The Wizard of Oz") and the Paul Simon-penned "Mother and Child Reunion," featuring soloist Brandon Harris.

Reflecting on the purpose of the Arts Jam, ensemble director Duane Davis recalled it was 32 years ago that he and his wife came to Grand Rapids to be public-school music teachers.

Singer Edye Evans Hyde was a choir student of Davis' when she was a student at Creston High School. The jazz singer, accompanied by guitarist-husband Michael, sang memorable club favorites such as "I've Got the World On a String," and "Alright, OK, You Win."

"We love the fact that there is such an outpouring of support here," said the artist.

West Michigan blues talent Roberta Bradley closed the program with her band The Nervous Breakdown.

"We all know how important it is to have the arts in education," Bradley's trumpet player James Daniels said after the performance. "Even the kids (just) getting the chance to express themselves," he added.

Based on Arts Jam's latest



PRESS PHOTOS/PAUL L. NEWBY II

The Nervous Breakdown band gets down during Arts Jam at Wealthy Theatre.

figures for ticket sales, concessions and donations, the show netted an estimated \$6,000. In all, 450 tickets sold were sold, including some late sales of no-show seats in the 400-seat theater.

Arts Jam was dedicated to the memory of David Wilkinson, a local music teacher who died unexpectedly in January.

Alaina Bosze, 13, a French horn player at City High Middle School

and a former Wilkinson student, served as an usher Sunday.

"I think it's a wonderful activity that they've done," she said of the fun-raising and awareness effort. "Hopefully, it will continue."