

EDUCATIONAL EXCHANGE

By S.C. Torrington

Transforming Students' Education through the Arts

It was 1950 when Nina Wood Collier hosted a well-known violinist, Yehudi Menuhin, to play for and talk with a group of children in her Baltimore home. Noticing how much the children enjoyed meeting and listening to Menuhin, Collier began to think about how other children might appreciate such an opportunity as well. That thought inspired her to organize a series of 20 chamber music concerts for Baltimore City elementary school groups.

Little did Collier realize at the time that her efforts would mark the beginning of the Young Audiences Arts for Learning network, now the nation's largest nonprofit arts-in-education organization with 32 chapters in 24 states. The network employs 4600 professional teaching artists, who reach more than 7 million students in 7600 schools across the United States.

In Maryland, Young Audiences partners with 400 schools and communities to provide art experiences through assemblies, workshops, and artist-in-residence programs. The organization additionally offers grant assistance, arts integration consultation, and professional development for educators and artists.

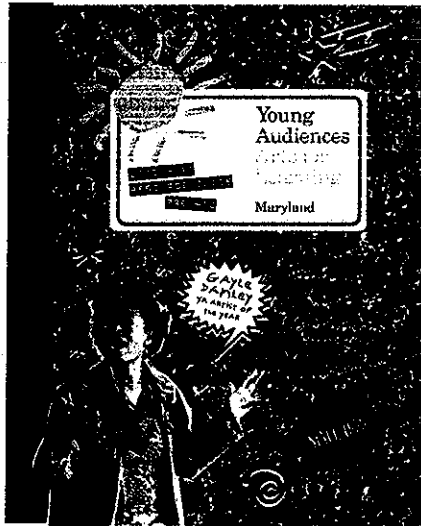
"Today, Young Audiences performs in schools and venues across the state an average of 13 times a day, every day of the school year," says Adenike Akintilo, marketing and public relations associate for the Maryland Chapter of Young Audiences.

"We envision a Maryland where the arts are valued for their capacity to transform lives," explains Akintilo, "and where every student is immersed in opportunities to imagine, to create, and to realize [his or her] full potential through the arts."

Akintilo says the arts have the natural ability to engage students in learning, thereby enhancing the curriculum. She also believes that ongoing participation in the arts helps to keep students involved in school and less likely to drop out.

Enhanced Learning

Arts integration—a teaching method



using the fine and performing arts when presenting an academic subject—can make learning fun and can be an effective way of engaging students who struggle with traditional and less interactive teaching methods, says Akintilo.

The Young Audiences programs often involve artists working in the classroom with teachers to develop a customized series of workshops in which children can experience, create, and share through a particular art form while also learning core curricular concepts such as mathematical equations, story structure, or the scientific method.

For instance, for the past three years Young Audiences has partnered with Edgewood Elementary School in Harford County and will continue to do so into the 2009-10 school year. As part of this partnership, Amanda Pellerin, a local ceramic artist, has been an artist-in-residence at the school since 2007. This past school year, Pellerin worked with students in kindergarten through second grade to create a ceramic mosaic mural depicting the nature that surrounds the school.

Through this experience, students gained skills in ceramic arts—including firing, painting and glazing, grouting, and overall mural design—while also gaining scientific knowledge through the study of local flora and insects.

Akintilo adds that the partnership

Educational Exchange

◁ from page 17

with Edgewood goes beyond hands-on work in the classroom to include a series of performance art programs, as well as professional development workshops for the teachers on how to infuse the arts across the curriculum. Edgewood principal Lisa Sundquist sums up her school's partnership with Young Audiences this way: "Working with Young Audiences helps us accomplish our school's objective of building respect, self-esteem, and a global viewpoint within our school community—and promotes successful learning for all students."

Along with Edgewood, a Title I school

(a designation based on the income level of the families who live in the school community), Young Audiences raised the funds to cover most of the cost of their partnership.

More than half of the Young Audiences programs in Maryland are arranged and paid for by school PTAs. Akintilo says that PTAs have always been essential in keeping the arts alive in schools, and many of them have cultural enrichment committees charged with coordinating field trips to cultural institutions and establishing visiting artist programs.

"If you're concerned that your school doesn't offer enough arts learning opportunities, reach out to your PTA and become involved," Akintilo suggests to parents. "If you're concerned that Young Audiences isn't currently partnering with your child's school, give us a call directly, and we can help you start the

conversation with your administration or PTA." **BC**

For more information, contact the Maryland Chapter of Young Audiences/Arts for Learning, 927 N. Calvert St., Baltimore, 21202, 410-837-7577, www.yamd.org.

Baltimore's Child
(August 2009)

▷ to page 18