

**Project STEP in the City Weekly section of *The Boston Sunday Globe***  
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**MUSIC TRAINING PROGRAM TURNS 25**



## Music training program turns 25

By Billy Baker  
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

For young African-Americans and Latinos who have musical talent, but not the means to develop it, there is reason to hope.

Students with world-class potential can get world-class training from Project STEP, which last Sunday celebrated its 25th anniversary with a gala performance at Symphony Hall. The event featured a performance by the Grammy-nominated Eroica Trio, along with some top Project STEP alumni who shared the stage with the program's young stars, including cellist Tony Rymer of Dorchester, who was honored as the 2007 Project STEP Scholar.

Rymer, 17, is a Walnut Hill School senior who began Project STEP at age 5 and will graduate this year to study at the New England Conservatory on a scholarship.

"The program is about realizing that there are many talented youngsters who haven't had the exposure to top training, but have the ability to do great things," said William Thomas, artistic director of Project STEP, which stands for String Training and Education Program. "We're dedicated to finding those who have the talent and providing the education to make a go of a career."

Project STEP, which funds the training for 42 local students, was founded in 1982 because the Boston Symphony Orchestra, Boston Youth Symphony Orchestra, and Boston University School of Music were having trouble filling vacancies with blacks and Latinos.

"For two years, we tried to address the problem by increasing notice of the vacancies," says William Moyer, a former BSO trombonist who was instrumental in the founding of Project STEP. "So we met with Louis Krasner, an accomplished violinist who was teaching at Tanglewood at the time, and he said, 'You're starting too late; we need to start early, with first-graders, and build a program that will be long and of high quality.'"

Twenty-five years later, Project STEP has graduated only 30 high school seniors because of its high selectivity and the natural attri-

tion of the long training. Many start the program in first grade, when Project STEP selects six students from an intensive kindergarten violin program of 80 children; others audition in later years.

Project STEP is headquartered in a rent-free office in the basement of Symphony Hall. The students study with established teachers, and the program receives huge support from the BSO and the New England Conservatory, which help provide facilities and training.

While classical music training is famously demanding for both the students and their parents,

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WILLIAM THOMAS  
Project STEP

100 percent of those who have made it through Project STEP have gone on to conservatories and universities, including prestigious institutions such as Juilliard, Oberlin, the New England Conservatory, Harvard, Yale, Princeton, and MIT. Two-thirds of graduates

make a living through classical music, according to Mary Jaffee, executive director of the program.

"Even those who have not gone into the profession have used classical music training — the discipline and values and determination that it requires — to succeed in other careers," says Jaffee. "We have a couple of doctors and an architect; all of our graduates get enormous life skills from the program."

During the finale on Sunday, the older students and alumni were joined by the Boston Children's Chorus, Handel and Haydn Youth Chorus, soprano Louise Toppin, and baritone Robert Honeysucker for a special arrangement of "Lift Every Voice and Sing."

The arrangement by Julius P. Williams was tailored to include some of the program's youngest students, the 6- and 7-year-olds who made the journey down stage, nervously fiddling with their bows and violins as they prepared to steal the show.

"The opening was in D major, which is a fairly accessible key for the young ones," said Thomas. "And he closed the piece in E flat, which is very challenging. It was quite a coup to see some of them pull it off."

"There may have been one or two who weren't allowed to play at the end," he said. "But we'll make sure they get it."



Lauren Brown (left), 12, practices with the orchestra at Symphony Hall last Sunday.