This Year’s Step Graduates

Project STEP graduated two seniors this year, both headed off to conservatories. With many options and after lengthy deliberations and soul-searching, Barbara Vanté, viola, chose to attend Oberlin Conservatory next year. Among the highlights of her year were earning Honorable Mention at the finals of the Sphinx Competition, performing on the Winsor Concert with Marcus Thompson, viola and Peggy Pearson, oboe, and her final recital at Walnut Hill. Barbara was accepted to every conservatory to which she applied, turning down Juilliard, New England Conservatory, Bard, and Mannes to finally reach her decision to attend Oberlin Conservatory in the fall. Barbara graduated from Walnut Hill School in June and has been part of Project STEP for twelve years. She studies with James Rowell.

Marta Rymer was home-schooled and also entered Project STEP at age six. Multitalented as a word that Marta defines with her life. Not only has she played the violin stunningly with Project STEP for the past twelve years, she is also a dancer and a singer. Marta has juggled her music training with dance, theater, and voice study for many years, and finally chose to attend the Academy of Musical and Dramatic Arts in New York City next year,throwing her exceptional talent into musical theater.

We are terribly happy for Barbara and Marta. They head off to the next level of professional preparation armed with outstanding training from Project STEP. Both of these young girls have blessed Project STEP with their hard work, their talents and smiles for twelve years now. The staff, board, teachers, and families wish them all the best, and expect to hear all about the adventures they will encounter.

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A Message From Our Lead Benefactor

Gregory E. Bulger is a leading benefactor of Project STEP and in our efforts to ensure the program’s permanence. Mr. Bulger supports Boston’s rich musical life as an Overseer of the Boston Symphony Orchestra and with additional board affiliations. Currently he is Vice President of the Board of Directors of Project STEP. Mr. Bulger is a graduate of Boston College, Northeastern University Graduate School of Business Administration, and the Harvard Business School Program in Health Systems Management. He founded Health Care Value Management in 1990, sold it in 2002, and remained its CEO until 2004. He is a Trustee of the Gregory E. Bulger Foundation. Mr. Bulger is Past President, Massachusetts League of Community Health Centers, and Past Trustee, Brigham and Women’s Hospital.

“I have very much enjoyed underwriting the spring recitals for Project STEP students the past two years. These recitals allow the students of all ages to perform and demonstrate the progress they have made during the year. It is especially meaningful for the graduating senior students and to see what a significant contribution Project STEP has made in their young lives.”

– Gregory Bulger

Vice President, Project STEP Board of Directors

This Year’s Step Graduates

Two Barbaram Vanté and Berger

The Graduates with Margaret Williams-DeCelles

D Anna Fortunato, center, with her student Marta Rymer and Marta’s mother, Cheri Robartes

FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

During this past year, by far my first at Project STEP I have come to know what is behind this worthy mission. What it does is to provide the best available training on string instruments to students of color. But on closer inspection, it is a carefully designed, highly personal, and deeply moving program. The commitment of the parents, the board, and the students inspires nothing less than awe. Our program’s wonderful sponsors, the Boston Symphony Orchestra, the New England Conservatory, and the Boston University School of Music, give professional expertise and strong financial support to Project STEP. Our home, in the basement of Symphony Hall, is at the vortex of the greatest music community in the world. We are proud to be part of these institutions, and we know that our students make every one of our supporters proud to sustain our programs.

Things will change when Jennifer Harvey heads off for New York, and we will all miss her sunny, vibrant personality in the office. We will welcome another Jennifer, Jennifer Lee, who comes to STEP after graduating from Berklee and working at the Boston Pops, an arts program in London, and the Seattle Symphony Orchestra.

We wish you all a beautiful summer. Stay tuned – we have a big year ahead.

– Mary S. Jaffee, Executive Director

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1. 2005 Honors String Quartet. Marta Rymer, Barbara Vanté, Tony Rymer, and Danielle lennox-hechtkman are ready to perform at Symphony Hall’s opening Doors Day.

2. Tuning Up and Getting Ready. Artistic Director William Thomas tunes the tiny violin of young STEP third grade student Diane Pepe, just before she performs in this year’s 14th annual spring recital.

3. Polished Performance. Felicia Simmons plays from the heart during the 14th annual Project STEP Spring Recital on Mother’s Day. Felicia just finished sixth grade and studies cello with Jennifer Locht.

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The First Year of Project STEP

1. MENTORS AND STUDENT. Barbara Vanté, viola and Project STEP graduating senior, plays with professionals Marcus Thompson, viola and Peggy Pearson, oboe, at the Winsor Benefit in February. Project STEP students relax the opportunity to play with professional musicians such as these and many others each year thanks to Peggy Pearson’s organizing the WINSOR / Project STEP Benefit honoring the STEP program and its students.

2. ARTISTIC DIRECTOR WILLIAM THOMAS, a cellist and conductor, is a graduate of Oberlin Conservatory of Music and Pennsylvania State University. He has been on the music faculty at Phillips Academy, Andover since 1974, and is Music Director of the Cambridge Community Chorus.

The unique program helps talented music students and their families deal with [the] barriers that may get in the way of preparing for a career in classical music. Project STEP provides more than 30 students with instruments, private instruction and theory classes every year. Later, when students become more advanced, Project STEP adds chamber music, orchestra, and performances to their routine. Since the program’s creation, every STEP graduate has continued his or her education or music career by attending college or conservatory.

- Bay State Banner, May 18, 2006

3. HELP FROM AN OLDER SISTER. Sarah Lamour’s older sister Nadeerah, in STEP for First Night Concert. Njeri “making music!” They gain mastery in the craft of determination and perseverance as they gain mastery in the craft of making music!

4. PERFORMANCE OPPORTUNITIES

5. ONE MORE RUN-THROUGH. Sarah Lamou and Rhouandoh play a duet just before their lessons, as their fathers look on. Family involvement in lessons is a vital part of Project STEP’s early training.

6. READY. The young girls of the Project STEP first year group have worked hard for their teacher Mariana Green-Hill. Now they are dressed for success, confident and ready to perform.

1. 2. TEACHER. Mariana Green-Hill, a 1997 Project STEP graduate and winner of the Boston Symphony Youth Competition, went on to Juilliard to earn Bachelor and Master degrees in violin performance. She returned to Project STEP this year to teach a first year class of six-year-olds in the Gables Room at Symphony Hall.

3. HELP FROM AN OLDER SISTER. Sarah Lamour’s older sister Nadeerah, in her fifth year with Project STEP tunes Sarah’s violin for her. A great example of the mentorship provided within the community of STEP. Sarah is in Mariana Green-Hill’s first year class.

4. PRACTICE PRACTICE PRACTICE. Rhouandoh Abrahim practicing his pizzicato before his lesson.

5. SIXTH GRADERS WARM UP for First Night Concert. Njeri Grevious, Lauren Brown, and Nadeerah Lamour.

FROM THE PRESIDENT OF THE BOARD

We regret to announce Jennifer Harvey will leave Project STEP this summer after two years of dedication and commitment to our families. We extend our appreciation to Jennifer, and we wish you well as you pursue your dreams in grad school. We were delighted to welcome William Thomas as Artistic Director and Mary Jaffer as Executive Director last summer. They have led Project STEP through its twenty-fourth successful year. We are all united by our mission to provide excellence in string instrument training and education to our students. As we look forward to celebrate our 25th Anniversary in the coming year, we invite you to share in the joy of music by supporting our talented students. Please attend an upcoming event and consider making a financial contribution to ensure the future of this special program.

-William Thomas DeGellics, President, Board of Directors

GOOBYE FROM JENNIFER HARVEY

What a wonderful adventure it has been to work with Project STEP for the past two years. I could never express just how much I will miss the STEP community and all of the wonderful people who have influenced my life during my time here. I want to wish each and every student in STEP the very best and encourage you all to reach for the stars in whatever you attempt to accomplish in life. Don’t ever let anyone tell you it can’t be done because it can, and you will want to also thank the staff of Project STEP because I shall never forget the week that you all do so diligently, and I will take that example with me wherever I go. With all of my heart, Jennifer Harvey, Program Coordinator, Project STEP.

“My greatest joy and wonderment came when I saw Mariana [Green’s] beginning class play at the Senior Tribute for Barbara Vanté and Marta Kryner... Barbara played her viola beautifully and Marta’s voice illuminated her love of music and the arts, but to see those sweet 5 and 6 year old kids being coached by one of STEP’s most accomplished graduates made me realize we are providing our students with much more than the highest quality string instrument music education money can buy. We are also instilling a sense of community, a sense of belonging in this wonderful world of music. That Mariana, a much sought-after Juilliard graduate, has chosen to devote her efforts to helping other children achieve the same success she herself has achieved is a remarkable testimony to the value of the STEP program. The program is not simply creating high-caliber African American string instrument instrumentalists. I realize now that to successfully work through the STEP program requires a dedication and a discipline that will serve other children well in whatever endeavor they ultimately choose. To see Mariana choose to share her gifts with the youngest members of the STEP family made my heart sing.”

-Randy Hiller, Executive Vice President of the Board of Directors and violinist