

Area music students participate in a workshop by Brooklyn Rider at the Shalin Liu Performance Center.

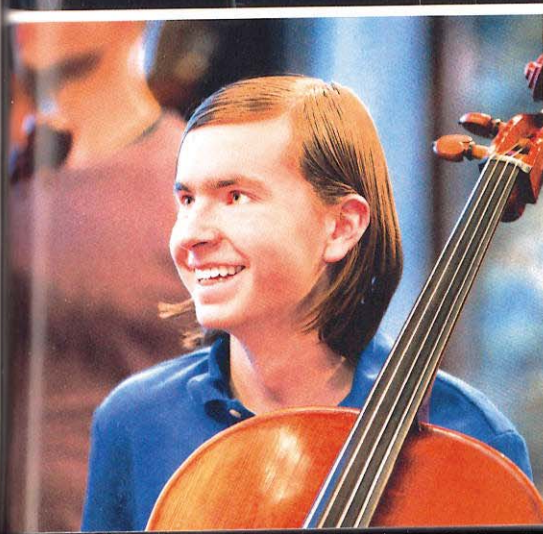


KIDS ROCK



EXPERIENCE MUSIC TO YOUR EARS AT THE SHALIN LIU PERFORMANCE CENTER.

BY **LAUREN TORLONE MAHONEY**
PHOTOGRAPHS BY **JOEL LAINO**



Music is perhaps one of life's greatest common denominators. No matter the language, it somehow manages to speak to most everyone. While today's technology easily allows for listening virtually anywhere, be it during a daily commute or during a day at the beach, there is no substitute for the real thing. Experiencing live music is something that cannot be replicated, even with the most refined pair of earbuds.

Nowhere is this lesson better on display than at the Shalin Liu Performance Center. Situated on Cape Ann in the seaside town of Rockport, musical performances (the center is designed to showcase chamber music) simply don't get more stunning (or oceanfront) than this. As Rockport Music director of education and outreach Stephanie Woolf succinctly puts it, the center has "amazing views and superb acoustics."

Built and owned by Rockport Music, the facility opened in 2010 and has been making an

impression on visitors ever since. In 2015, the center drew more than 30,000 music fans to concerts in a variety of genres.

While the center itself is a more recent addition, the educational offerings from Rockport Music are not. The organization offers over 80 yearly programs to 10,000 local children and adults. From the well-regarded Rockport Chamber Music Festival to an array of adult classes and lecture series, there is likely a fit for every musical preference. Notable adult programs include its “Diploma in a Day” workshops, concert/lecture series, jazz chats, après opera discussions, and “101”-type classes. Last year, the center organized a trip to the Metropolitan Opera, and it has plans for similar trips in the future. While the group has long focused on the quality of its educational offerings, Rockport Music executive director Tony Beadle says that both the “quality and the quantity of educational activities have only been amplified” since the opening of the performance center.



Woolf says the center “reaches adults and children in equal amounts,” noting that while demand can be high and some adult classes accommodate 90 people, programs for children are kept intentionally small to “remain up-close-and-personal experiences” for students and budding musicians.

One of the center’s goals is to bring innovative, quality music education to area children, and the Rockport Jazz Camp, originally created by Woolf and saxophonist



Alexa Tarantino in 2014, is one of its hallmark offerings. The camp has become so popular that this year’s summer sessions will expand to two weeks, with additional faculty, classes, and performances. Time-tested highlights of the camp include a small ensemble and big band, jazz theory class, master class sessions put on by professional musicians, and even a student-led musical flash mob at the close of the session. The camp accepts all instruments, and students of any age and skill level are encouraged to apply. An apt comparison given the location, Beadle notes that a “high tide raises all boats,” and that year after year, students regard the camp as a “confidence-building experience,” both musically and in general.

Clockwise from top, Rockport Music executive director Tony Beadle, Colin Jacobsen of Brooklyn Rider, and Rockport Music director of education and outreach Stephanie Woolf.



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The center is undeniably impressive for its location, architectural details, and acoustics, but the dedication of Rockport Music to the surrounding communities of Rockport, Gloucester, Essex, Manchester, and Salem is just as inspiring. Because the center feels that making music an accessible and important part of young people's lives is so important, it has collaborated for many years with local school systems on cross-curriculum projects, field trips, and other events.

As much as students of every age benefit from their involvement with the center, it is also a venue for professional as well as aspiring musicians. Renowned cellist Yo-Yo Ma has graced the stage, and turned his chair around on stage to take in the ocean views before turning it back to face the audience to perform, to the delight of those in attendance.

Woolf is always on the lookout for new musicians and loves the mutual benefit that results from student performers who come from the Berklee College of Music, the New England Conservatory, and the Boston Conservatory, among others. The proximity to Boston provides more than just music students; the Boston Children's Chorus puts on yearly concerts that are a hit with audiences, especially children. Beadle cites the sense of pride that "comes from feeling as if we are adding to these children's lives, creating future listeners and sometimes a professional musician also."

In keeping with the center's view of itself as an integral part of Rockport and the surrounding areas, a heavy emphasis is placed on giving back. Beadle describes the center as a "community builder,"



which is reflected in many of its initiatives. From making the center available gratis on New Year's Eve to First Night Rockport to a holiday sing-along concert, it is not unusual for staff to be thinking about how

Above, Brooklyn Rider performs at the center. Below, Johnny Gandelsman of Brooklyn Rider instructs students in a workshop.

they can better serve the communities of which they are a part. Its program Healing Arts at Rockport works with Union Hospital's inpatient Child Psychiatry Unit and with the residential brain injury programs at Supportive Living, Inc., and involves some of the most fulfilling work the center does. As Woolf describes, "the staff love to have us, and we love to work with them. We are always looking forward to our next event in the community."

Age is just a number, after all, and the center really believes this. No matter your level of musical skill or exposure, if you find yourself curious about a type of music, this is a smart place to start. Perhaps consider checking out part of the Rockport Chamber Music Festival. For children, a visit to Rockport Music's instrument "petting zoo" and its make-your-own-instrument workshops are annual highlights. Last, viewing the venue as an audience member is a worthwhile experience, no matter the time of year. Not only will you be able to choose from a diverse selection of performances, but you are guaranteed an amazing view as well. n|s