



# Strings Attached

July 6, 2009

Sometimes I wonder about my sanity...

Late in May, I got an email from Melissa Boeckman, Office Manager of the Lafayette Symphony Orchestra, asking if Amanda Baer (my partner in crime for LSO's Strings Attached program) and I would be available to participate in Purdue's PALS program this summer. The PALS (Purdue Athletes Life Success) camp is something Purdue sponsors each year through its Department of Health and Kinesiology for hundreds of underserved children from all over the local community. They attend this month-long camp every day and get to participate in all kinds of sports and other activities to help them grow their bodies and minds. This year, they decided to add arts and music, and had contacted the Symphony to see if we could present our Strings Attached program. Of course, Amanda and I said yes... and then the details started coming in.

It would be a two-day commitment (June 30 and July 1), and we would have approximately 250 eight-to-ten year olds rotate through our "station" each day. Oh yes – and it would be the same students both days, so we needed to come up with something different for the second day. Undaunted, Amanda and I got to work (via email). Since the LSO only owns 40 half-size violins, we decided to split each group up. Half of the students would get to see a quick powerpoint presentation and join in a discussion with me about what it's like to play in an orchestra, what is classical music (complete with Elmer Fudd and Bugs Bunny), and what a "typical" string player is like, and the other half got to dive in immediately and play the violins. They learned "the A-E song" and "B-I-N-G-O" under the careful tutelage of Amanda. Halfway through each session, we switched students. This meant that Amanda and I got to do the presentations four times in the morning, take a 45 minute lunch break, and then do four more presentations in the afternoon. Thus, we dubbed the first day the "Strings Attached Marathon." As we have experienced in doing the program before, the students had a ball! They absolutely love getting a chance to play a real violin, and we were besieged with requests to let them take the violins home! Several students remarked to the staff that they were going to play the violin when they got old enough. (Talk about music to our ears!)

The second day, we decided to do something completely different, and were granted permission to use the Purdue Bands practice field. We decided to give the students a chance to see what it's like to be a part of the Purdue All-American Marching Band, and to test them to see if they were Big Bass Drum

Crew material. According to the official drumline packet, BBD crew must be able to do 100 sit-ups in 2 minutes, 66 push-ups in 2 minutes, and run 100 yards in 13.5 seconds. So, we started each session with the physical tests, and then marching drills (teaching 8 steps per 5 yards, until they could pretty much keep in a straight line, even with their eyes closed). After they got the marching technique down, we added the instruments. Please pause a moment here, and visualize 50-60 eight-year-olds, marching in formation, playing Wagner’s “Valkyrie” (which they think of as the “Kill the Wabbit” song, thanks to Elmer Fudd) – on *kazoos*. Now you understand why I doubt my sanity! Again, the kids had a ball, and they got to keep the kazoos (which I’m sure made the students happy, but I’m not sure about the parents!)

I’ve included a few of the over 80 photos Amanda took of the second day, so you can see how much fun we had, despite the persistent drizzle. Will Purdue invite us back again? Only time will tell. (I do still have about 250 kazoos left over...) Will Amanda and I be willing to do it again? In a heartbeat! We’re constantly learning what does and doesn’t work in introducing music, especially string playing, to young people, and keep refining our presentation. Exhausting as it was, it was an incredible amount of fun for Amanda, myself, and the students. Who knows – in several years we may have some of these same youngsters playing in Purdue Bands or the LSO!

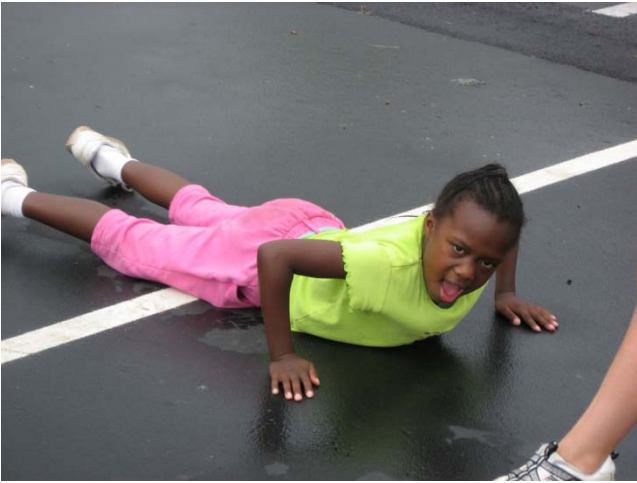
*Jo Gelfand*  
*Strings Attached Co-instructor and*  
*Purdue Band Alum*



Here’s what a box of 500 kazoos looks like!



Sit-ups first – for two minutes



Push-ups aren't for wimps!



A lost shoe doesn't slow this kid down!



They really liked the running!



The Purdue All-American Marching

*Kazoo Band takes the field!*



A little extra practice never hurt anyone! (I didn't have the heart to tell him he was holding it upside down!)