

The Wilson School Composer of the Year Program

The Wilson School's commitment to the arts is exemplified in its "Composer of the Year" program, initiated four years ago by Music teacher JoAnn Behr.

Each year the Wilson School chooses a composer as the center of an interdisciplinary thematic unit for all students. Rather than simply listening to the music of the selected composer, all students from Pre-K through eight grade perform the music. Behr chooses a famous composer with a wide range of music, so the youngest of children and the oldest will be challenged.

This strong emphasis on the integration of a subject throughout all of the grades is not found only in the music program but also extends across other subjects. The students' other teachers find ways to integrate the composer into their lesson plans and class activities.

In art, the students help to build sets for the performances and a study of the composer's life or time period [is] incorporated into lesson plans within the core subjects. By reinforcing information through a variety of different ways, students are able to gain a broader, more ingrained understanding of a subject.

"The first year, 2006, we focused on **Mozart** and had a recital at the end of the year with 30 pieces. There were piano solos of all different levels. The band and chime choir played Mozart selections and students performed a period waltz accompanied by the recorder consort. As a finale, the whole school sang "Ah vous dirais-je, Maman" (better known as "Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star,") in French, and performed Mozart's variations on this tune." Behr said.



2006 Mozart Recital



"Trepak" Dance from the 2008 Nutcracker performance

The 2007 composer, **Beethoven**, was also the focus of a spring concert again involving all students in a mix of instrumental and choral performing ensembles and solo recitals, culminating in an all-school performance of the Chorale from the 9th Symphony.

In 2008, **Tchaikovsky's** music was celebrated both in a Christmas performance of "The Nutcracker Suite" arranged for students. In the Nutcracker performance, students choreographed several of the dance numbers, including the Russian Dance ("Trepak"), the battle between the Rat King's Army and the Wooden Soldiers lead by the Nutcracker, and the Waltz of the Flowers ballet.

The spring concert, again featuring choral and instrumental selections of Tchaikovsky's music by the entire school, culminated with a choral arrangement from the finale of the 1812 Overture.

The 2009 Composer of the Year is **Haydn**.

"In these performances, the students get so much stage experience that they gain an ease of speaking and public performing," Behr said when asked about the benefits of this program to the students. "Playing and singing in front of audiences both inside and outside the school develops a high degree of discipline and responsibility. And all the while, they're having great fun with music."

Portions of this article appeared in a story by Elizabeth Martin in "The Neighbor News," December 26, 2007.