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Sharing their notes

Newtown students get lesson from Walden Chamber Players

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Never underestimate the power of the bow -- it is the powerhouse behind the sounds coming from string instruments.

That was one of the messages delivered by the Walden Chamber Players on Monday to students in Newtown High School's string ensemble and symphony orchestra. The musicians, who performed in a Friends of Music concert Sunday, were at the school as participants in a Friends of Music outreach program, a cooperative venture between the Friends and the school district.

The program, now in its seventh year, brings professionals to Reed Intermediate School and the middle and high schools to share their expertise with younger players.

That's exactly what the Walden performers -- Christof Huebner on viola, Marianne Gedigian on flute, Irina Muresanu on violin, and Ashina Scripp on cello -- happily did during the two hours they spent at Newtown High.

"It is central to our mission, and we believe it is important for us to be available as a resource to the community," said Huebner, the group's artistic director. "It is important, because given all the budgetary cuts (in school programs), it's hard for students to afford professional lessons. That is why we conduct these master classes."

The advice he, Muresanu and Scripp gave the class was simple: Play with energy, enthusiasm and a grasp of the music.

"Eat the notes," Huebner said -- by getting into the music and playing with a confident abandon based on solid technique. That technique, as demonstrated by Huebner and his two string colleagues, included use of the entire length of the bow, as well the proper use of the arm, wrist, hand and fingers to master it.

Among the students listening intently to the professionals was Josh Milas, a 16-year-old sophomore, who plays the violin and was also taping the class for the school's television channel. "I learned things most people don't think about," Milas said, "like the importance of breathing properly and hold the bow the right way."



Newtown High orchestra cellists Chris Salvatore and Tyler Adams perform for the Walden Chamber Players, professionals who share their expertise with the students.



Dana Metzger's hold on her violin.

Besides the 66 string-instruments students in the room, there were two wind instrumentalists: sophomore Dan McSweeney, 15, who plays the flute, and senior Jill Tevnan, 18, a bass clarinet player.

Walden flutist Marianne Gedigian, after talking to the entire class about the importance of proper breathing and how it contributes to a musician's overall performance, sat with McSweeney and Tevnan and gave them advice about getting the best sound out of their instruments.

"I noticed a difference in my tone and technique because of her advice and different exercises," McSweeney said.

Calling Gedigian "a wonderful lady with unbridled wisdom," Tevnan said she "felt so honored to receive tips and feedback from her."

Students weren't the only ones listening to the Walden players. So were Michelle Hiscavich, director of the school district's music program, and Friends president Ellen Parella.

"The Walden Chamber Players outreach is fabulous," said Hiscavich. "It's such a good experience for the students to hear these things from professionals. It hits home. The students learn that all instrumentalists, whether they are professional or not, have to have the proper techniques to perform well."

Parella's praise for the musical guests was wordless.

She just broke into a smile when asked about them —and that was all she had to do. Everything in her world was on key.

— *Sybil Blau*



Walden Chamber flutist Marianne Gedigian lends a hand (or two) to student Dan Mcsweeney during the Chamber's visit to Newtown High.



Walden Chamber violinist Irina Muresanu demonstrates the neck hold on the violin to Newtown High orchestra members.



NHS violinists from left, Dave Wilkins, Lindsey Jones, Kristina Breuninger, and Chris Fragoso perform what they've learned for the chamber players.