

Entertaining the public is the most obvious thing we do at The Plaza Arts Center. However, we also have a huge heart for finding and creating educational opportunities for students in our community. Dr. Willis and the BOE are very supportive and enthusiastic about our programming, and when we do something that really gets students' attention, it is very gratifying.

In selecting programs to bring to the center, one of our goals is to reach our youth. Various performers do education outreach by going into the schools or having students come to the center for a special show. Usually there is a Q and A session afterwards when students can question them (How much money do you make? How often do you practice? Do you know Soulja Boy?). During our first year students have been exposed to classical piano, classical and whimsical string music, dances of the Latino countries, ballet, and even opera. Each occasion expose our children to the world of performing arts, and it is our hope that they are inspired in some positive way.

One such experience was our Eatonton's Got Talent show last September. All students who auditioned and made it into the show did an outstanding job. While none of them may be quite ready for prime time, such experiences as this are growth opportunities, such as confidence building. No doubt we have future dancers, singers and actors among us who have yet to be discovered. We will hold auditions in May for our next Eatonton's Got Talent contest scheduled for the evening of June 6, Dairy Festival Day. Winners will be awarded cash prizes.

J.R. Beckwith, music director at Putnam County High, is developing curriculum to teach students about the tech stuff that goes on behind stage. It is not uncommon for students to assist with load-in and load-out of musical and stage equipment, help run cables and set up microphones, do sound checks, and help with lighting. Not everyone makes it as a performer, but there are real career possibilities in stage technology. I am impressed and incredibly appreciative of Mr. Beckwith and his students' efforts. Many shows simply could not be done without their help.

Another star at the high school is Paige Barlow, art teacher. She works in the visual arts teaching perspective, drawing, painting, pottery and general art appreciation. I was really wowed by the quality of her students' work that has been on display at the center. If you didn't stop by the center in the last few weeks to see the amazing level of talent in our public schools, you really missed out.

Our resident string quartet, Kazanetti, are regulars at the elementary school where they do short performances with built-in lessons. Their most recent visit was about following directions. A demonstration on how a composer 'directs' musicians segued into a lesson about the underground railroad and Peg Leg Joe, who gave 'directions' through his music to assist slaves fleeing to the north. The children were both entertained and educated, a terrific win-win situation.

For an entire week in April, Drew the Dramatic Fool will bring his unique talent and flair to our community. Drew is all about thinking outside the box, and he conveys that message in programs that teach kids the art of foolery (getting out of your comfort zone), juggling, and film making. Twelve high school students will be selected from Putnam County and Gatewood schools to work with him to create their own silent film. On Friday, April 17, Drew will give a full comedic show for the public, and we will also have the world premier of the students' film. If your children come home and are suddenly prone to doing cartwheels for no reason or if they express an interest in juggling lessons during that particular week, it might be that Drew awakened some hidden talent or interest within them.

Details are being finalized for 3 different camps covering art, music and drama to help get you through the long summer ahead. Educating our youth goes on around here every day of the year. Now how cool and important is that?

I'd love to get you all excited to come see Banks & Shane perform their tribute to the Kingston Trio this Friday evening but we are already sold out. (Gee, I hate when that happens!) Instead, make plans to see the Umpteenth Annual Kiwanis Follies March 28? For the umpteenth time, they will be highly entertaining.

See you at The Plaza!