

San Diego Center for Children Begins Music Making Study

"It is the supreme art of the teacher to awaken joy in creative expression and knowledge."

Albert Einstein

By Richard Cone

One of the goals, indeed, the primary goal of most music instruction programs is achieving a level of mastery of the instrument. From the most basic guitar class, through intermediate piano lessons and on to advanced theory and composition, students are encouraged to do three things: practice, practice and practice. At the Yamaha Music and Wellness Institute (YMWI) however, the primary goal is to advance a student's understanding of recreational music making, not as a performer but as an effective way of enhancing their life. Part of the program is simply playing a musical instrument without any goal of mastery or performance.

In conjunction with the San Diego Center for Children (SDCC), the Yamaha

Institute has created a program called "Recreational Music Making," a research program designed to help at-risk adolescents improve their quality of life through musical expression. The program, which began in April, starts with assisted drum circles and includes a multi-layered array of activities that help the growth and development of teamwork and closeness among teens.

Dr. Barry Bittman, MD, the CEO of the YMWI, notes that "creative musical expression has great potential for reducing the impact of stress and enables children to move beyond the obstacles they perceive in their lives. We specifically designed a program that focuses on personal strength to encourage and condition a sense of camaraderie." Bittman has published groundbreaking research on how playing a musical instrument reduces the effects of every day stress and this program takes that research and puts it into practice, positively affecting at-risk kids. "We're focused on accept-

ance of others and creating meaningful discussions, a sense of heightened awareness and positive change through musical expression." No prior musical experience is necessary to begin; children are invited to take part in a "group empowerment" drumming program which Karl Bruhn, the board chairman of YMHI, and the acknowledged

"father of music making and wellness movement" calls "An enjoyable, accessible and fulfilling program that unites people of all ages, regardless of their backgrounds, challenges or prior experience. We're pleased to offer creative recreational music making opportunities that help children discover better ways to cope with their challenges."

The music program director for the SDCC, Sundiata Kata has been involved in drumming circles for many years, noting that as early as 1969 drum circles have changed the lives of many disadvantaged kids. "It creates a safe, non-threatening space; it allows youngsters to express their feelings without the fear of being judged." Sundiata has first-hand knowledge of how successful this program can be. "Through many years of working with the Center's most troubled residents, I see that music has benefits that go far beyond verbal expression in allowing kids to tap into their own ability for self-healing."

The program is funded by the National Association of Music Merchants, (NAMM) known mostly for

their annual guitar shows which draw thousands. NAMM also sponsors programs such as the Recreational Music Making study at the San Diego Center for Children. The NAMM Foundation recently conducted research, the results of which were released in early March showing that among other benefits, playing music provides a sense of

belonging for teens, provides the freedom to just be themselves; to be different; to be something they thought they could never be; to be comfortable and relaxed in school and elsewhere in their lives. More importantly, music helps adolescents release or control emotions and helps to cope with difficult situations such as peer pressure, substance abuse, pressures of study and family, the dynamics of friendships and social life, and the pain of loss or abuse.

The research was funded by the NAMM Foundation as part of its Sounds of Learning initiative, a program devoted to studying the associated learning benefits of making music. The findings were published in the Fall 2007 issue of the *Journal for Research in Music Education*.

For more information on the San Diego Center for Children's drum circle program, you can visit www.yamahainstitute.org or contact the San Diego Center for Children, 3002 Armstrong Street, San Diego, CA 92111; telephone 858-277-9550, or www.centerforchildren.org.



acoustic music scene

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