

SchoolScene



Katha Jarka of the Chamber Music Society from Lincoln Center helps Lafayette Mills School fourth-grader Riddhi Desai, 9, position her bow on her cello. (PHOTO: BRADLEY J. PENNER/STAFF)

Manalapan school gets visit of notes

BY JONATHAN RIFKIN
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Professional musicians from Lincoln Center at the pinnacle of their careers played for and mentored aspiring counterparts recently at Lafayette Mills School.

Six members of the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center visited the school last week and performed for students, school and township officials, kicking off a three-year partnership between Lafayette Mills and the Lincoln Center group, Principal Scott Taylor said.

Taylor said the program is the first of its kind in the nation, and that he feels Lafayette Mills will benefit from its existence.

In addition to performing a sampling of various classical

MANALAPAN and modern pieces, the musicians also spent time playing with and coaching students involved with one of the school's five bands and orchestras.

ways to express themselves and love music," Stroke said. "In some schools, you feel as if you are saving people's lives by giving them something meaningful and soulful to strive for."

Bari Sprecher, 11, a fifth-grader at Lafayette Mills, said she thought the performance by the musicians was excellent and sent a strong message.

"If you really love doing what you do, you should try and pursue those goals," she said.

Tuesday's program was funded in part by the school's Parent Teacher Association and a grant received by the Chamber Music Society from the Dodge Foundation.

"This is an excellent opportunity for the kids," said David Geltch, band director at Lafayette Mills. "These kids are quite awe-inspired by what (the Lincoln Center musicians) can do."

Melissa Fathman, director of education for the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, said the main purpose of her group is to put on adult performances. However, the society also has a strong educational-outreach program.

"We've done a lot of outreach, where children come to Lincoln Center to see the musicians," she said. "But we put this together to bring the musicians to them. We don't usually offer that, but we really want to continue it."

The program began in the morning and continued throughout the day. At one point, the chamber musicians, known as the Elastic Band because of the eclectic array of musical instruments and genres they employ, performed for the children. Soon after, they played alongside students in the band.

Jodi Wolff, mother of Michelle Wolff, a sixth-grader in the school band, said seeing musicians of such a high caliber playing side by side with her daughter was a good experience for all involved.

"This is so exciting," Wolff said. "They sound very good."

To capitalize on the opportunity for schoolchildren to interact with professional musicians, Taylor said, students from surrounding schools were bused in for smaller class music workshops.

Marija Stroke, piano player with the Elastic Band, said she and the other musicians love doing outreach work because of its rewarding nature.

"It's really great to feel like you can be a part of a child's inspiration — to give them more