

Kids on Stage— Connecting Children and the Arts

BY BECKY BAUER

Arts programs in public schools have commonly been regarded as less than of equal importance and sadly the first to go in a budget crunch. The Kids on Stage (KOS) program, however, thrives as a normal part of the arts-based curriculum at the Hillsboro School in Leiper's Fork. Every child in the school's K-8th grades encounters a creative approach to learning and takes a music, theater and technology class.

Mimi Johnston, director for the past year, shares her passion about the learning process. "The (arts) disciplines are not treated like a peripheral part, but a core part, they're very important," says Johnston. For the kids, subjects turn into an artistic experience where, for example, learning African history can be in the form of creating a piece of decoupage art or a drum lesson.

As a response to Hillsboro's low performance rating among the rest of the county, local residents Gene Cotton, Aubrey Preston and others came together in 1996 to help revamp the school with this new program. State of the art recording equipment and musical instruments donated by major distributors were brought in creating a top notch learning facility.

This artistic approach to teaching led to the two-week long KOS Summer Academy held every June with classes in the visual, performing and technical arts. Not only has it served the local community well, but it has attracted children from as many as 20 different states and as far away as France. Local families have nieces and nephews and grandchildren who love to visit and make KOS part of their summer experience.

Kids On Stage is, undoubtedly, a one-of-a-kind opportunity given the lower than average summer camp price, available scholarships and an impressive list of teachers. Talented mentors include, to name a few, legendary singer/songwriters Michael McDonald and Bonnie Bramlett and jazz guitarist Larry Carlton, all Grammy winners. Miley Cyrus, members of Paramore and Meg and Sophie Boes (songs from MTV shows *The Hills* and *The City*) make up popular alumni.

Emerging out of the summer program, are classes and performances

now held throughout the year. Guitar, voice, keyboard, stage performance and art instruction is available after school and Saturdays at the KOS space in the Leipers Fork Galleria. Kids can also relish performance opportunities at venues like Puckett's Grocery singing alongside special guest artists. "We are the opportunity for kids to dip their toes in the water so a parent doesn't have to commit to a whole semester; it's for the child who says, 'Oh, that was really fun now I want to try something else,' or 'I want to keep doing that,'" says Johnston.

The 2009 Summer Academy begins June 8th and is nearly full with over 600 kids enrolled. A music and art festival will be held on each Saturday during the two sessions. Lighting Designer, Jonathon Smeeton, who is responsible for setting up Taylor Swift's tour, will bring along sponsors for the concert production and tech support equal to \$30,000 worth of sound, lighting and video equipment. "We end up having a gym that sounds, looks and feels like a major concert venue and the kids are running it," says Johnston.

Future growth of KOS will see more classes, shows and a new partnership with the Williamson County Parks and Rec. Johnston is most excited about the artist development and mentorship program which joins together industry experts and budding performers who are serious about becoming professional artists. Johnston assures, "They will be armed with knowledge," as they are guided on the right career path.

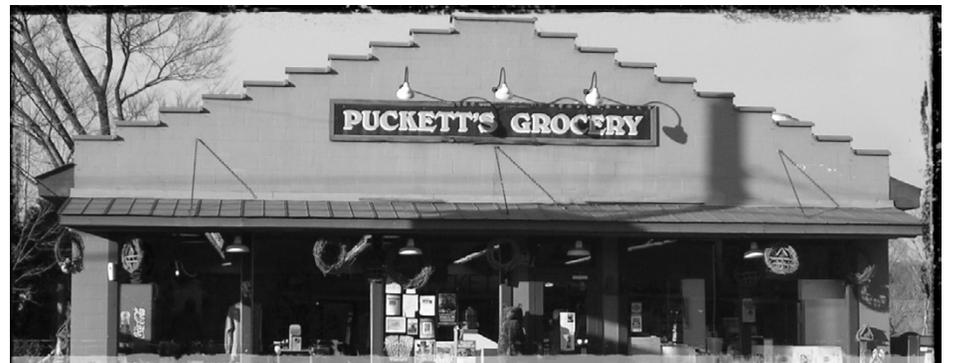
Having been a professional musician herself for many years, Johnston now knows her calling is acting as a medium. "My job is to connect kids with the people who can help them, and I can't think of a more rewarding job," she proclaims.

For more information on classes, events and volunteer opportunities visit www.KidsOnStageTN.com or contact Mimi Johnston at 615.599.5437. 🌸

Becky Bauer lives in rural Williamson County. A songwriter, poet and equestrian with interests in graphic and Web site design, her various talents make her a multi-faceted contributor to this publication.



Award-winning singer Linda Davis sits surrounded by some of her KOS students before performances at Puckett's in Franklin. PHOTOGRAPH PROVIDED.



Make reservations now for our June shows!
All shows at 8:00 p.m. | \$10 Cover

Thursday Nights in June – Open Mic 6-8 pm

Thursday, June 4 - Songwriters Open Mic 6-8 p.m.

Friday, June 5 - Clint Ingersol and Trent Willmon

Saturday, June 6 - Chris Janson

Thursday, June 11 - Songwriters Open Mic 6-8 p.m.

Friday, June 12 - Al Perkins and HiPower

Saturday, June 13 - Tim Nichols, Troy Olson
and Marv Green

Thursday, June 18 - Songwriters Open Mic 6-8 p.m.

Friday, June 19 - Cole Degges

Saturday, June 20 - Leslie Satcher, Wynn Varble
and Erin Enderline

Thursday, June 25 - Songwriters Open Mic 6-8 p.m.

Friday, June 26 - James Slater

Saturday, June 27 - Rob Robinson, Jack Pearson,
Jack Williams and Johnny Few



Jack Williams, live at Puckett's
Photo by: Anthony Scarlati

Weekend Breakfasts!!! Cosmopolitan Eggs Benedict

Puckett's Grocery Section features Hatcher's Dairy Milk
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