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Dramatic growth of student musicians displayed at concert

BY SUE ELLEN ROSS
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The Books, Brushes and Bands for Education organization has come a long way since its inception in 2000.

This was clearly evident at its recent 16th annual Spring Concert in the Morton High School auditorium.

"We started with literary and visual arts projects on a grand scale in the schools before starting music classes," Books, Brushes and Bands for Education founder and president Michele Golden said. "We began with a small choir in 2003. A small band program followed three months later."

What has expanded are the depth of programs and the age level that the organization serves, Golden said.

There are two levels of choir, two levels of band



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Members of the Books Brushes and Bands for Education Let's Sing! group were the first to perform at the 16th annual Spring Concert at Morton High School.

and two levels of orchestra.

Also, an advanced group was added, named the Midwest Youth Symphony Orchestra, which is jointly conducted and run by Dave Allie and Rovelli Grib.

This year marked the 101st student enrolled in Books, Brushes and Bands for Education.

Students performing at the recent Spring Concert

belonged to Let's Sing! for those ages 5-7; Midwest Youth Choir, ages 8-18; Midwest Youth Orchestra, grades 2-12; and Midwest Youth Band, grades 4-12.

In the audience at the recent concert was Kenneth Delahunty, of South Holland, Ill.

He attended to observe his niece and nephew, Gabriela Quiroga and Issac Lopez, show their musical abilities

"These kids are really good," he said of Books, Brushes and Bands for Education. "My niece and nephew have gained quite a bit since they started. They have more confidence in themselves."

Many other parents echoed those sentiments.

"I appreciate these people that take time to inspire the kids and see their potential," said Jose Orozco, as he waited for his daughter Victoria, 9, to perform.

"She started two years ago and has gotten more outgoing. It's hard for a child to get up in front of a lot of people, but she's learned to be OK."

The mission statement

of Books, Brushes and Bands for Education is that exposure, experience and enrichment of the literary, visual and musical arts are essential to the potential of every child.

Judging by the concert, the students participating have been enriched in many ways, not just in their musical abilities.

Working together with others and encouraging them along the way is just one of those ways.

While waiting to perform, members of the Books, Brushes and Bands for Education Band were heard whispering to each other that there was no need to be nervous.

They had faithfully practiced their numbers and were ready to stand up on the stage and give it their all.

Keynote events a which the organization has participated over the years included performing as an opening act to the Northwest Indiana Symphony Orchestra, performing as a guest choir with rock group Foreigner, and performing at a Get Out the Vote Rally with former President Barack Obama last year.

Another endeavor the organization takes part in is the yearly Book Brigade: A Call to Action. This program involves volunteers taking little red wagons — loaded with thousands of donated books — throughout Hammond neighborhoods to deliver the various titles free of charge to children.

Sue Ellen Ross is a freelance reporter for the Post-Tribune.