



Poughkeepsie puts talents on display

Despite practicing her performance for weeks, the energy of the crowd inside Poughkeepsie High School's auditorium affected Maelia Vasquez.

Nerves crept in as the senior stood on stage singing Jennifer Hudson's "One Night Only." She said she could feel her knees begin to shake. Her fellow students in the audience couldn't see that, though. She was enveloped in an oversized shawl as she tried to convey a meek character. It was only after she tore off the shawl and revealed a floor-length, sequined red dress that she cranked up the energy on her performance and turned the raucous energy of the room to her advantage.

Vasquez was one of 20 students last week who performed at the annual Poughkeepsie's Got Talent event, orchestrated by the high school's Culture Shock club.

The acts ranged from singing and dancing to electric guitar and a boxing demonstration. Most elicited boisterous responses from the students in the audience, eager to cheer and sing along.

"This year the show was very diverse, as far as what was on the stage," said Nashan Anderson, Culture Shock's faculty adviser, calling it her favorite edition of the show in a decade at the school.

"We didn't just have dancing and singing. We had a boxer. We had kids playing the piano. We had a kid playing the guitar with his teacher. Those are moments you'll never forget."

Vasquez said she was inspired to sing "One Night Only" after seeing a video of herself watching

"Dreamgirls," her favorite movie, as a child. She said she wanted to play the role of a wife helplessly waiting at home for her husband while softly singing covered in the shawl, before transitioning to a disco version of the song with the costume transformation.

"When I rip it off, it's like, 'You know what? I don't have time for that. I'm going to do me,'" said Vasquez, who in the end was tied for second place in the judging with Javon Aiken-Young, a junior who presented a poem.

The Trinity & Crew dance team, which closed the show, was awarded first place.



Above: Amir Shell and music teacher Joe North perform a song from "Doom;" Right: Maelia Vasquez sings "One Night Only;" Below: Emani Stackhouse puts on a blindfolded boxing exhibition during Poughkeepsie's Got Talent May 22 at the high school.



"I think we did really good," said Zoe King, who danced alongside Natalia Lopez, Kaylin Rodriguez and Trinity Majors. She said it was "nerve-wracking" preparing to get on stage, "but once I got up there and heard the music, I was good."

"It's very fun ... we get to see talent within our school," King said.

Her favorite performance to watch, though – and the favorite of many who spoke after the show – belonged to Amir Shell and Music Department Chair Joe North.

Shell, a junior, with North on drums, delivered a crackling guitar performance of a theme from the 2016 video game "Doom" that injected the crowd with an electricity that built as he tore through grungy riffs.

"When the crowd is rooting for you, it makes you feel more pumped," said Shell, who placed third and is in his second year playing guitar. "They were supporting me. That was nice."

Other performers included songs by Raheem Webb, Siyanna Wise and Allysha Anderson, a piano performance from Noah Hampton and Davon Smith, a boxing exhibition from Emani Stackhouse, and the step team of Danasia Powell, Jannete Akerele, Kaniyah Carr, Kieara Thomas, Key'Sean Johnson, Amyah Canaday and Izahyia Blake. Gianna Velasco-Innello, Culture Shock President, said the show was the product of weeks of work from more than a dozen Culture Shock members, between coordinating tryouts, rehearsals, decorations and stage directions. Each performance was given personalized care in terms of what lighting would be used and what other elements were needed on stage.

"I just got to see everyone's talent and how much everyone loved it. It was great," she said. "It's a good way to get all the students together and support each other as a community."



Above: Trinity & Crew closed the show and earned first place; Right: Raheem Webb was the first of four singing performances.



Fifth-grade orchestra students practiced together for an instructional event May 22.

"It's a big, fat red juicy tomato. If you squash it, the seeds and juice goes all down your arm, all over your clothes and sits in your shoes and you walk around school all day going, squish, squish, squish" she said as some of the students giggled. "It's not the best look."

The students were treated to a day of expert instruction and individual attention before performing at the Family Partnership Center on the district's first Fifth Grade String Day.

The event was a collaboration between the district and Stringendo and an opportunity for the students from different elementary schools to play together in advance of the all-district concert June 4.

Elementary strings students learn together

The fifth-grade orchestra students of the Poughkeepsie City School District got together last Wednesday to talk about tomatoes.

Sitting on stage at the Family Partnership Center, they listened as Dr. Emily Schaad, director of orchestral activities at SUNY Fredonia, told them to picture a tomato where the neck meets the body of violins and violas. The proper way to hold the instruments while playing, she illustrated, was to leave space for the tomato.



"It's a good opportunity for them to see friends they don't see very often," said Stacy Kalbfus, one of two elementary orchestra teachers in the district, along with Noah Lundgren. "Also, these kids will all be together in orchestra next year in the middle school, so they have the opportunity to build bonds with anyone they might not know." The group worked on the pieces they plan to perform at the district concert, including "Lightly Row," "The Lair at Midnight" and "D String Rock." In addition to practicing as a group, they had "sectional" practice sessions grouping everyone playing the same part, and individual instruction. Stringendo Orchestra School of the Hudson Valley, a nonprofit committed to developing students' interest in music, has worked with the district on programs in the past but could not hold its after-school program this year. Instead, Carol Schaad said she worked with Kalbfus to create the instructional day. "All the schools practice separately and they get together for one concert. That's really difficult," said Carol Schaad, creative director for Stringendo. "It's always good for the musicians to get together and play together and to meet new people who are doing the same thing that they are." Kalbfus said roughly 50 students took part Wednesday. In addition to Carol and Emily Schaad and the Poughkeepsie teachers, three college students helped provide instruction and individual attention. Midway through the event, Kalbfus said a moment confirmed the practice was paying off. "I just had a student who left our first performance saying, 'Ms. Kalbfus, I just played the best I've ever done! This is the best?'" she said. "It really does boost their inspiration to want to achieve when they get to play with the whole group and hear all the parts come together."

Inaugural eSports season successful for Pioneers

The Pioneers eSports teams made an impact during their inaugural season, including a first-place finish. eSports are competitive video games, for which many colleges are beginning to offer scholarships and recruit players. The MidHudson eSports league at Contender eSports consists of both middle and high school teams, with representation from schools throughout Dutchess County. Poughkeepsie has representation for two events on the high school team, and one event on the middle school team.



Members of the Pioneers eSports team huddle together.

Despite coming into the league late. The high school Rocket League team finished the season undefeated, 7-0, to take first place. The team, consisting of senior Leechin Lodge, junior Charles Dandridge, junior Sagiy Baker and freshman Seven Green-Tissiera, won a close game against Roy C. Ketcham in the championships. Green-Tissiera originally joined eSports because he likes gaming, but said, "It gave me something good to do and it motivated me to get my grades up. He said he has gained skills in "socialization, meeting new people and being competitive in a friendly way."

The high school Super Smash Brothers team of seniors Raheem Webb and Tymon Yard Jr.; juniors Isaiah Andrews, Malachi Russell-Anderson and Nyhkaii Tissiera; and freshman Lander Perez-Gonzalez (Fr) finished in the middle of the league, though Tymon tied for 7th among 41 participants in the championship, with the rest of the team not far behind. Yard said joining eSports has helped him gain sportsmanship skills, and "It's a great opportunity to meet new people." Andrews noted he "learned how to be a team player," gaining "social skills through interaction with people from the other schools."

The middle school Super Smash Brothers team of seventh-graders Jordyn Hodge-Angevine and Urie Aquino, and sixth-grader Alexis Aquino went into the championship weekend undefeated and finished second overall. Urie Aquino took second, Alexis Aquino was fifth and Hodge-Angevine placed seventh.

eSports is a three-season sport, in the fall, winter and spring. Interested students should sign up using Final Forms, and email or stop by the high school library to speak with Dr. Shannon Mersand, smersand@poughkeepsieschools.org.