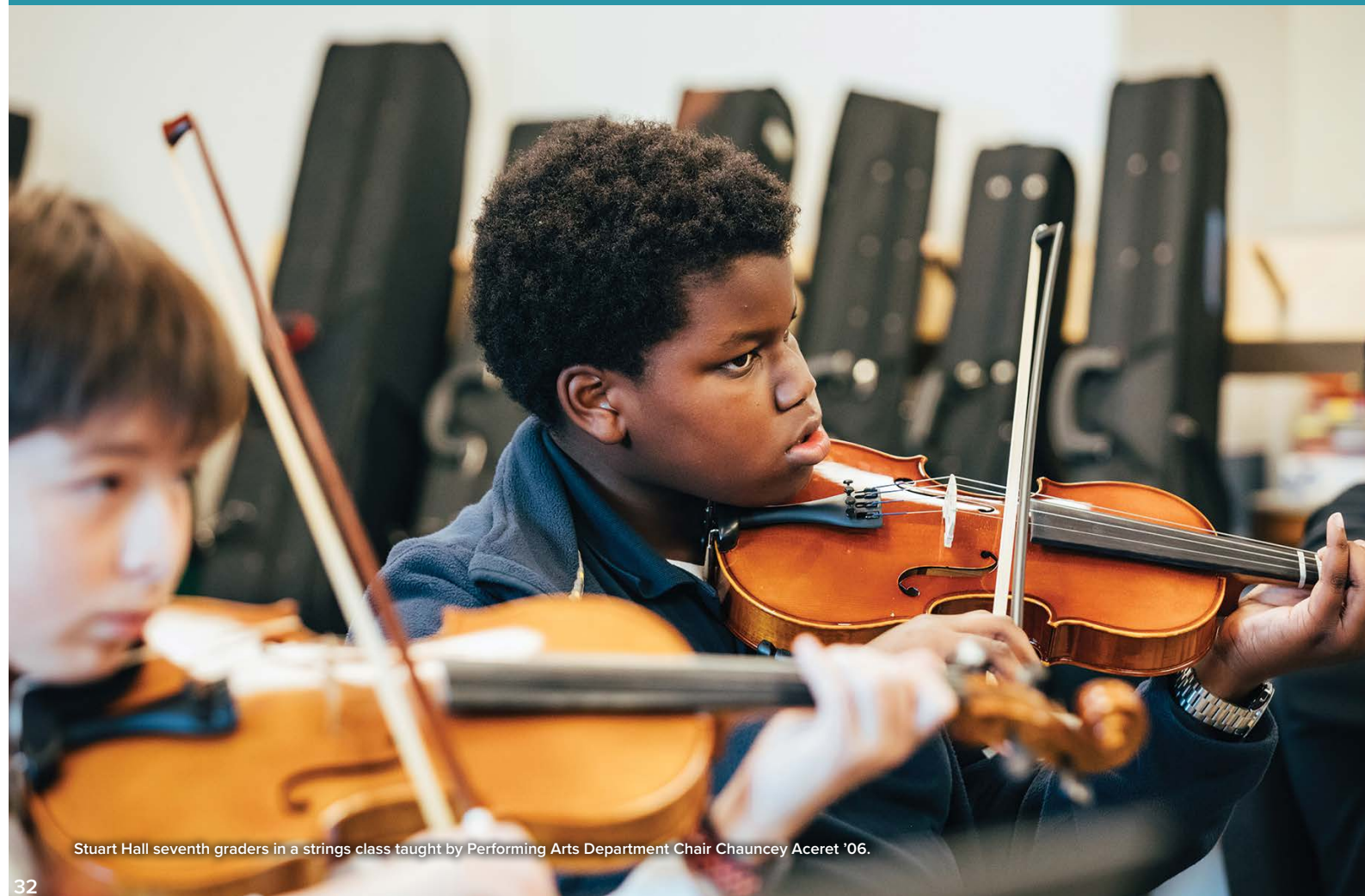


EXPANDING INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC

Q&A WITH
BONNIE FRAENZA AND LEANDRO JOAQUIM



Stuart Hall seventh graders in a strings class taught by Performing Arts Department Chair Chauncey Aceret '06.

We sat down for a Q&A with Music Conservatory Director and multi-instrumentalist Bonnie Fraenza and Instrumental Music Faculty and trumpeter Leandro Joaquim to discuss their teaching journey, the expansion of the instrumental music program with the opening of the Merlone Family Little Theater and their vision for students.

CAN YOU RECALL THE FIRST TIME YOU PICKED UP YOUR INSTRUMENT AND WHAT IT FELT LIKE?

BONNIE: I played flute in fourth grade in a public school music program in New Jersey. I remember asking my father if he wanted to hear the song "Long, Long Ago." He folded the newspaper he was reading, looked at me and said, "No, but do you know 'Far, Far Away?'" The next day I went to Ms. Brekenridge, my band teacher, and asked her if I could learn "Far, Far Away." She couldn't stop laughing! This left an indelible memory. Laughter is important in my teaching.

LEANDRO: When I was 11, I moved to a new school in Brazil and saw the marching band lining up for their first rehearsal. Traditionally in Brazil, marching bands don't play for sports but for public events. Without an invitation, I showed up at their next rehearsal. Everyone was given percussion instruments except for me because I was too small. Disappointed but persevering, I waited until the band director announced: "There are no percussion instruments available anymore, but this year, we are introducing a new set of instruments. Who wants to play the trumpet?" Before he could finish his sentence, I had both my hands in the air and was jumping up and down to be picked. When I looked around, I realized I was the only person volunteering. I think all the other students knew how hard it was to play the trumpet, but I just wanted to play any instrument and be in the band. After trying the trumpet a couple of times without success, I turned to my teacher and, like an expert, said to him, "Nope, not this one. This instrument is broken." I still remember the look on his face, thinking how clueless I was about the trumpet.

WHAT LED YOU TO BECOME A TEACHER?

LEANDRO: It was always natural to me. After a couple of years in the marching band, I became the lead trumpet player and started teaching the new trumpet players in the band. I had my first private student when I was 17 and started my first job as a music teacher at the music school by the time I was 19.

BONNIE: Like Leandro, it was natural for me. I started teaching flute and guitar when I was in high school. I had planned to go to college for marine biology, but in my senior year, my high school music teacher asked, "Why are you choosing to do that? You should be a music teacher — you have the gift!" He helped me change last minute to music education with a major in Band Instruments. I had to learn all string, brass, woodwind and percussion instruments to obtain this degree. My music teacher even gave me a crash course in music theory to get into music school.

HOW LONG HAVE YOU BEEN TEACHING AT CONVENT & STUART HALL? CAN YOU DESCRIBE WHAT YOUR TEACHING TRAJECTORY HAS BEEN AT THE SCHOOL?

BONNIE: Since the dinosaurs roamed! I think this is my 37th year?

Over the years, I've taught flute, clarinet, bass clarinet, saxophone, trumpet, trombone, french horn, guitar and percussion. I created the band program once I realized how many students were taking private lessons outside of school, and I had quite a few private students I taught after school.

Early in Dr. Krejcarek's time at Convent & Stuart Hall, she asked to meet with me. I was a part-time teacher at the time. The first question she asked me was, "What do you think of the performing arts here at the school?" My answer was, "very under-performing." She understood the value of music education. She asked me to come aboard as a full-time faculty member and asked me to be the Director of Performing Arts. I had zero experience and serious doubts that I was the right person. Dr. Krejcarek convinced me that I was, and she gave me support on every level to succeed.

I'm now the Music Conservatory Director, and I'm so fortunate to work alongside inspiring faculty peers and musicians like Leandro.

LEANDRO: It's my fourth year teaching at Convent & Stuart Hall. Bonnie was the one who hired me. I'm the Band Director for Grades 5–8, and this year I started teaching fourth grade music classes. I'm also a part of the liturgical music group, the House Band and am a sixth grade homeroom teacher. The entire experience is very enriching.

WHAT DO YOU LOVE ABOUT TEACHING?

BONNIE: I love figuring out what works for each student to succeed on their instrument. The challenge is exciting for me. The end result of the look in their eyes when they realize that they *can* do this is wonderful. I love sharing in their joy.



Bonnie Fraenza teaches her band class while playing the saxophone.

LEANDRO: I love seeing my students facing the challenge of learning from scratch, and when they succeed, we look back and see all the progress done. The shine in their eyes while playing the first melodies and the curiosity to learn more inspires me.

GENERALLY, HOW MANY STUDENTS PARTICIPATE IN INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC PROGRAMS EACH YEAR?

LEANDRO: The daytime program varies from 90 to 110 students, combining all Grade 5–8 classes.

BONNIE: About 80 students participate in the after school Music Conservatory program.

HOW MANY STUDENTS DO YOU TEACH WEEKLY?

LEANDRO: I see all of the 110 students every week. Some of them once a week or three times a week, depending on the schedule. The more classes per week, the better the program.

BONNIE: It depends on who may need my help, but I usually teach 5–10 students per week.

HOW MANY STUDENTS HAVE PLAYED THEIR INSTRUMENT BEFORE VS. PICKING UP A NEW ONE FOR THE FIRST TIME?

BONNIE: Most of our students start as total beginners. Those who wish to learn another instrument in addition to their initial one take private lessons after school on their second choice.

IN YOUR OPINION, WHAT IS THE VALUE OF MUSIC EDUCATION?

BONNIE: It serves a purpose of self-discovery, discipline, love and joy in creating music. It is an excellent way to build self-confidence and learn how to work collaboratively in a group setting.

LEANDRO: A music education supports the development of other aspects of the learning process, such as creativity, teamwork dynamic, focus, organization, motor coordination, self-confidence, self-expression, awareness of performance skills, etiquette, ability to listen and responsibility.

WE DESCRIBE “SPACE” AS AN INFLUENTIAL TEACHER SUPPORTING OUR STUDENTS’ LEARNING. DESCRIBE THE RECENT EVOLUTION OF THE DIFFERENT MUSIC SPACES ON CAMPUS AND HOW THEY’VE IMPACTED REHEARSAL AND PERFORMANCE OPPORTUNITIES.

BONNIE: When I first came to the school, there was no instrumental program. I started teaching instruments privately after school. I used out-of-the-way rooms, usually below the ground, since band instruments can be quite loud. Once there was a viable band, we practiced in room 5104 in the then-new Siboni building. This room has no windows and is below ground.

LEANDRO: Space is very important. It brings consistency and a sense of comfort and focus for the band. After Covid, the band’s main challenge was returning to consistent practices. Many adaptations were needed to have students play again. We practiced in the following rooms: Siboni 5104, outdoor patios, Syufy Theatre and the Flood entrance — we played music everywhere we were allowed.

LAST YEAR, WE UNVEILED A NEW, STATE-OF-THE-ART REHEARSAL AND PERFORMANCE SPACE: THE MERLONE FAMILY LITTLE THEATER. HOW HAS THIS RENOVATED SPACE OPENED NEW OPPORTUNITIES FOR TEACHING AND LEARNING MUSIC?

LEANDRO: The new Merlone Family Little Theater came at the perfect time. The best result of having such a professional space for the band classes is that now our students are playing better, learning faster and enjoying being in the band even more. We feel more integrated with the community here.

The possibilities in the Little Theater are countless. The room is equipped with the best gear to fulfill all our needs. From the acoustics to the visual aspects, we have high-end audio-visual systems. Even in professional music recording studios, it’s hard to find such a complete room.

DESCRIBE HOW PLAYING MUSIC IN THE NEW MERLONE FAMILY LITTLE THEATER FEELS.

BONNIE: The fact that the bands now rehearse in the new Little Theater is marvelous! Windows! Above the ground! Our students feel quite proud to be in this performing space.

LEANDRO: Fantastic! The acoustics are great. From piano solos to full-section band rehearsals, it sounds perfect.

FINALLY, WHAT INSPIRES YOU?

BONNIE: The laughter, energy and excitement students bring to the table! Each student has their own mystery of what excites them. I love working together to unlock that mystery and find their talents. I’ve taught many students at Convent & Stuart Hall over the years, and I now hear from many former students who are making instrumental music part of their careers. I also hear how being a part of the band made a difference in their lives.

I am often asked, “When will you stop teaching?” I always reply, “When I wake up not liking kids.” Not gonna happen!

LEANDRO: Music is my passion. I’ve had the opportunity to spend the last 30 years of my life playing and teaching music, and I know that I will spend the next 30 years (at least) continuing teaching. It gives me incredible inspiration.



Leandro Joaquim instructing a sixth grader in the Merlone Family Little Theater.



A high school band class.