

SCOW and Choate's music program back in Wallingford

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By Crystal Elescano, Record-Journal staff

WALLINGFORD — After a three-year hiatus, the Teach Music Program between the Spanish Community of Wallingford and Choate Rosemary Hall is back in session.

Choate students teach piano, guitar, violin, and trumpet lessons every Wednesday at the Ann and George Colony Hall on the Choate Rosemary Hall campus, located at 333 Christian St, from 4:30-5:30 p.m.



The 14-year-old music program has been collaborating since 2009, after SCOW Music Director Evangeline Mendoza Bourgeois started her first private music school called Escuela Guadalupana de Música. The school opened in 2008, and Javier Cerna, owner at the time of San Juanito Mexico Store in downtown Wallingford, let Bourgeois use his storefront, free of cost, in order to practice.

The school was originally going to teach classical music, but Bourgeois quickly realized there wasn't enough community interest.

According to Bourgeois, Cerna asked her "Why don't you teach mariachi?" and so she decided to enroll in a mariachi program

where she received instruction on how to successfully teach the music to her students. Bourgeois kept returning to the program every summer for five years.

In 2009, Bourgeois called the then director of Choate and asked if there were volunteers available to teach violin to her students. Two students would walk down from Choate and teach the students how to play.

In 2010, Maria Campos-Harlow, then executive director of SCOW, invited Bourgeois and her students to be part of the non-profit organization. It was then that the Teach Music Program became official, with students from Choate coming to SCOW. Her music school's name also changed and was then called the Mariachi Academy of Connecticut.

"We then realized that we didn't have much room, and Choate offered to have the lessons there since they had so many private rooms for music lessons," Bourgeois said.

Gene Wie, instrumental ensembles director at Choate said the program was brought back in November 2022.

"We brought it back and now students have the opportunity to learn an instrument," he said. "This is important for the student teachers as well because it gives them the skill of teaching an instrument."

“I want my students to understand how difficult it can be to explain different components in music, especially if the student is a beginner,” he added.

Joyce Liu, a sophomore at Choate and student coordinator of the program, said the program has about 15 SCOW students and 10 instructors.

“It varies every week depending on who is available, but one thing that has been an amazing experience is seeing the same students come back every week,” she said.

Jenny Lopez, program assistant at SCOW, enrolled in the program when she was 8 years old. Now, Lopez is 17 and signs the students in for the program.

“I started by playing the violin and it was nice because we would work in groups back then,” she said. “Now, I also take singing lessons.”

Lopez is graduating from Sheehan High School this year and plans to pursue music in college.

“I’m not sure which school I’m going to yet, but I want to stay close so that I can stay at SCOW and continue helping out with the program,” she said.



The program is free, and students don’t need any knowledge about the instrument. In addition, instruments are provided to the students.

According to Bourgeois, the program is open to all students in the Wallingford community.

“We want to have a variety of students join,” she said.

Students just have to sign up through SCOW.

The goal of the program is to help build the mariachi program at SCOW. The Mariachi Academy of Connecticut fell apart and then completely shut down during the pandemic.

According to Bourgeois, the mariachi program had to rebuild itself since most of the students graduated during the pandemic. In 2012, 52 students were part of the mariachi, and now only nine students are in the main group, while four are learning.

“I really encourage students outside of SCOW to join and learn an instrument,” Bourgeois said.

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