

Duo helps Bellevue students feel the music

Students can't help but dance as duo brings lively songs, rhythm to Bellevue Elementary School.



Jessica Reilly

Fifth-grader Wyatt Schechel dances Wednesday while Shawn Wyckoff and Maria Millar, with Sonic Escape, perform at Bellevue Elementary School. The duo is performing at various schools this week through the Artist in Residence program with the Dubuque Arts Council.

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Normally, the members of Sonic Escape perform for adult audiences in elite venues, but during their 10 days as guests of Dubuque Arts Council, they shared their musical skills with young students at 19 area schools.

"It's more schoolchildren than we've performed for total in our entire careers," Maria Millar told an audience of rapt grade-schoolers at Bellevue Elementary School on Wednesday morning.

Millar, a violinist, is half of Sonic Escape. Her husband, flautist Shawn Wyckoff, is the other half. The couple, who often perform with a cellist, live in New York City.

They are dynamic performers and engaged their youthful audience individually and collectively. They encouraged the youngsters to snap their fingers and clap their hands to keep rhythm as they played lively Irish jigs. They brought some students down from the audience to dance while urging the rest of the youngsters to sway or dance in place.

"You look like a big swaying ocean," Millar told the students. "I love that about kids. They have no problem getting up and dancing, unlike adults."

From their repertoire of about 1,000 pieces, the pair played a series of songs from various countries, including Japan, Ireland, Norway, Sweden and Denmark.

"Rather than have kids sit still, I like the idea of having them move to the music so they internalize it," she said. "I feel that the more senses you involve with music, the deeper experience you have of it."

The performance was more than a concert.

The duo explained their instruments -- worth at least \$12,000 each -- and their lives as musicians. Both started playing music as young children, graduated from the Julliard School and have practiced more than 50,000 hours to date, they estimated. Students peppered them with questions about their music and their personal lives. They have been a couple for 14 years and married for three.

Fourth-graders Jacob Waller and Dawson Weber were eager to share their favorite parts of the performance.

"I liked it when she let people go down on the floor and dance," said Jacob, 10.

Dawson, 10, added: "My favorite was when the guy took his flute apart and started to play each part differently."

The two boys play recorders in music class, but no other instruments.

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[Click to view Telegraph Herald's video about Sonic Escape's performance](#)



Jessica Reilly

Fourth-grader Danny Bakey dances while Maria Millar, with Sonic Escape, performs at Bellevue Elementary School Wednesday, April 2, 2014, in Bellevue, Iowa. The group is performing at various schools this week through the Artist in Residence program with the Dubuque Arts Council.



Jessica Reilly

Wyckoff and Millar perform from their repertoire of about 1,000 pieces.