Dear Friends,

As we prepare to spring into a new season, it is necessary to take the time to thank and acknowledge those of you who have selflessly contributed and participated in the Rhythm Project during our winter season. After a busy month performing for end-of-year concerts, the Rhythm Project All Stars embarked on a project that had a significant impact on students involved, as well as many other young people in the area. Rhythm Live, a fully staged production outlining the history of steelpan and calypso in Trinidad and Tobago, was presented in collaboration with the Governor’s School for the Arts dance department. Students in kindergarten through 12th grade filled the seats of the historic Attucks Theater in Norfolk for two matinees on Friday, February 27 for this visually and aurally engaging performance. There was nothing but great praise from audience members on Friday, as well as on Saturday, February 28, after the evening performance.

Five Rhythm Project ensembles are now preparing for the 7th Annual PANorama Caribbean Music Festival on Saturday, May 9th. Approximately 20 steelbands from as far as Ohio will compete at the 24th street stage at the Virginia Beach Oceanfront. We look forward to seeing you at this event and at other Rhythm Project performances this Spring!

Sincerely,

Sophia Subero  Dave Longfellow  
R. P. Director  R.P. Associate Director  
(757) 282-2823  (757) 282-2815  
Robert Cross  J. Scott Jackson  
VAF Executive Director  VAF General Manager  

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Winter 2008/2009 Performance Review

The Rhythm Project Salem High School Steelband performed at the school’s annual showcase concert on Wednesday, December 10, 2008. This was the first of a series of performances in the community during the winter season for this vibrant ensemble. Those in attendance offered high praise to the students who started playing the instrument for the first time only three months prior to this performance. The Rhythm Project is pleased to offer a program to this talented group of Virginia Beach students.

The Virginia Beach Rising Stars had the opportunity to perform for their peers on Thursday, January 14, 2009 during the Salem Middle School Winter Concert. Their confident and rhythmic performance awed their audience which included Virginia Beach students, parents and teachers. The ensemble’s next performance will be at the 7th Annual PANorama Caribbean Music Festival; four other Rhythm Project ensembles will also participate in this event.

Portsmouth Museums hosted an African American Heritage Celebration on Saturday, January 17, 2009 at the Children’s Museum of Virginia. This event featured the Rhythm Project’s very own Governor’s School for the Arts World Music Ensemble. Students involved in this African Drumming Ensemble had the opportunity to interact with young children fascinated with the drums, in addition to performing prepared selections.

The Hampton Rising Stars program hosted by Syms Middle School was wrapped up with a performance at the closing reception for the Gifted Art Program to which it is attached. The reception was held at the Hampton City Schools administrative building on Wednesday, April 1, 2009. Two weeks prior to this event, on Tuesday, March 17, the ensemble, comprised of 7th and 8th grade students, performed at an orchestra concert at Jones Middle School. The audience at both venues enjoyed listening to the students as they played styles of music ranging from Dvorak to Stevie Wonder, as well as Caribbean genres.

The Rhythm Project’s Phoebus High School Steelband made their debut performance on Thursday, December 11, 2008 at the school’s winter concert. The group’s performance included a rendition of Bach’s *Air On The G String* and arrangements of modern pop music. On Friday, March 27, 2009, educators attending the VA School Counselors Association’s annual conference at the Marriott in City Center, Newport News were thrilled by the performance of six exceptional students playing a unique 20th century instrument. The dedication and musicality demonstrated by this group of Hampton students has been outstanding.

Fairlawn Elementary School, the home to the Norfolk Rising Stars, pride themselves in providing a well rounded education to their students. Because of this, the youngest group of students served by the Rhythm Project has made tremendous progress over the past two semesters! They performed for the school’s winter program on Tuesday, December 16, 2008 and will participate in the school’s spring program later this month. The ensemble’s biggest performance of the year will be for Norfolk Public Schools’ All City Festival at the Ted Constant Convocation Center on Saturday, May 16.
Rhythm Live was a blast!

On February 27 & 28, 2009 the Rhythm Project put on their first fully staged performance at the historic Attucks Theatre in Norfolk. The production featured the Rhythm Project All-Stars, Governor’s School for the Arts Dance Department, and the Governor’s School for the Arts World Music Ensemble. The cast presented two matinees (both sold out) on Friday, February 27, in addition to an evening concert on Saturday, February 28.

The Production traced the history of the steelpan. With the help of the GSA dancers and drummers, Rhythm Live! traced the evolution of steelpan on the Caribbean island of Trinidad, from African drumming through bamboo and metal containers, and finally the development of the steelpan!

The Program
It all began with slaves in Trinidad - African Dancing

The beginning of calypso - Len “Boogsie” Sharpe, Musical Wine

The banning of Skin Drums - Ella Andal, Festival Song

Initial public recognition of the steelpan - Schubert, Ave Maria

Steelpan in early Carnival celebrations - Lord Invader, Rum and Coca Cola; Len “Boogsie” Sharpe, Pan Rising

Panorama and the rise of the steelpan - Ray Holman, Plenty Lovin’; Destra Garcia, Colours Again

The day after Carnival (Ash Wednesday) - Liam Teague, Chant

The American influence - Glenn Miller, In the Mood

The annual Carnival celebration - Mighty Sparrow, Soca Pressure; Destra Garcia, Max it up

The Buzz
“*This was the best show I have ever seen the group perform!*”
- Alvin Schweizer Site Manager, Children’s Museum of Virginia

“This was one of the best events I have attended”
- Kenneth Vaughn 4th Grade Teacher, James Monroe Elem. School

“It was the best performance that I have attended in the school environment.”
- Ashley Livermore 5th Grade Teacher, Willard Model School

Congrats!
To all of the All-Stars and to the other outstanding youth in the area that made this show possible. You have made your parents, teachers and peers proud!
The Rhythm Project is a community engagement program of the Virginia Arts Festival involving elementary, middle and high school students from Hampton, Norfolk, Portsmouth and Virginia Beach Public Schools.

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Visit www.vafest.org for more information on the Rhythm Project!