



Virginia Arts Festival

# Rhythm Report

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## Greetings Rhythm Project Supporters—

As the fall season ends and we look ahead to winter and spring, we give thanks for the opportunities we have been able to provide to our community during these trying times. As with all things in today's world, The Rhythm Project has had to make a number of adjustments due to the COVID-19 Pandemic, which has touched all of our lives in many ways. Back in June, we were able to resume regular rehearsals with the All-Stars and were even able to audition new freshman to join the ensemble! Being a percussion instrument, the steel pan lends itself well to the health guidelines we must follow to stay safe. Facial coverings, temperature checks, and social distancing have become just a normal part of our routines as our students come together in gratitude for this unique opportunity to express themselves creatively. We have also worked diligently to bring back our middle school Rising-Star students in a combined ensemble of students from our communities in Norfolk and Portsmouth. This group currently meets in the Robin Hixon Theater Clay and Jay Barr Education Center. Our Fifth Grade Junior-Stars are also currently working virtually with a brand new virtual learning module that the Rhythm Project team has worked tirelessly to put together exclusively for them. We understand the powerful impact our ensembles and learning experiences bring to our students' education. This time has proven the resilience all of our students demonstrate each day, and we look forward to continuing to bring these new opportunities to all of our Rhythm Project students throughout the coming months as we work together through this Pandemic.

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-Interviews with all Seniors as Learn more about how the Rhythm Project has impacted their lives.

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For more information and a schedule of future performances please visit [RhythmProject.org](http://RhythmProject.org)





Mr. Roberts demonstrating how to play "Calypso Blues" alongside an overhead video of Mr. Ferguson playing the steel pan template.

## Rhythm Project Goes Virtual

In spite of the many challenges that the 2020 academic year has presented, the Rhythm Project team has done an incredible job to keep the arts alive in its partnering schools in Virginia. With the limitations of going virtual, the Rhythm Project was able to create an actual-sized steel pan template made from hardboard and vinyl, along with custom made mallets that each student will be able to use with the template.

These templates went through cutting, sanding, printing, and applying of vinyl stickers which allowed three hundred and twenty (320) physical templates with mallets to be distributed to (8) total elementary schools from both Norfolk and Portsmouth Public Schools. These include Larchmont, Tidewater Park, Richard Bowling, and Ingleside Elementary in Norfolk, and Brighton, West Haven, Park View, and Douglass Park Elementary in Portsmouth.

Along with the physical templates that acted as a medium to encourage "hands-on" learning, the Directors of the Rhythm Project also recorded a series of YouTube lessons that chronologically educated the students about the historical and theoretical aspects of the Steel pan, as well as fundamental exercises and the steps to learning their first tune virtually. With nine (9) lessons recorded in the first module, schools are able to use these lessons to fulfill online music education in a unique hands on approach for 9 consecutive weeks or extra-curricular meeting times. With an uncertainty on when students can expect to be back in person, the Rhythm Project team is preparing a second set of 9 lessons that will be available after winter break. These lessons have been created in the hope that students will be able to have a smooth transition from virtual to in person learning when the time comes.

The Virginia Arts Festival, in tandem with the Rhythm Project are thankful that we have continued to provide opportunities for excellence during these trying times. This new virtual experience has allowed for an expanded reach of students serviced by the Rhythm Project's learning experiences. We feel incredibly proud to take what is a challenging situation for our students, and create a space where they can explore music in a safe environment. Our efforts to reach a wider demographic of students has fostered more opportunities for partnerships throughout Hampton Roads for future years to come. As the Rhythm Project team continues to create these learning opportunities, we hope that the impact is one that inspires, motivates and encourages students to dream and be driven to learning no matter the challenges they face.

## Rising-Stars Are Back In Action

Having to stop all in-person operations last March meant big changes for all of our ensembles in the Rhythm Project. As we were forced to say goodbye prematurely, we lost the chance to showcase the hard work put in by all students throughout the school year. We are so excited to have the opportunity to bring back our students this year and focus on bringing a safe and productive steel band experience to them. This year we have taken the opportunity to combine our Norfolk and Portsmouth Rising-Stars to maximize our ability to create a safe learning environment at our home office in Norfolk.

This combined ensemble began meeting with both Mr. Roberts and Mr. Ferguson this past November weekly on Mondays. The combined Rhythm Project Rising-Stars had their debut performance on December 16th, opening for the All-Stars on their "Rhythm of The Holidays" live stream concert. We're excited to provide future performance opportunities for these hard-working students!





## A Farewell to Our Seniors

Due to the COVID-19 Pandemic, The Rhythm Project All-Stars were forced to pause rehearsing between March and June. Thankfully we were able to welcome these students back for rehearsals and a number of socially distanced concerts this past Summer and Fall. Due to this schedule adjustment we had the opportunity to hold onto our Seniors for an extra amount of time as they enjoyed their last few performances and prepared for the next step in their journey as young adults. Mr. Ferguson had a chance to sit down with each graduating Senior and asked them about their experiences with the Rhythm Project from starting as young Rising-Stars, to leading and becoming role-models in the All-Stars!

### What are some of your fondest memories as a student in the Rhythm Project?

**Torrance Massenburg:** My fondest memories would be all the trips to West Virginia for Manette Festival of Steel. Getting to learn from the greatest pan players while also spending time with friends was the best.

**Josh Osbourne:** I would definitely say all of the trips we've taken are my favorite. West Virginia has always been the best since we get to spend all week together learning and bonding.

**Savannah Barsoom:** Definitely the big performances we got to do at Indianapolis and Washington DC. Playing in front of large audiences is such a thrill and I'm so thankful for all the times we got to share the stage together.



Torrance Massenburg, Portsmouth



Josh Osbourne,  
Virginia Beach

**Jessica Tuminelli:** Spending time getting to know everybody in the band especially on all of the trips that we had the opportunity to take.

**Jalen Anderson:** My favorite memory with the Rhythm Project would have to be when we won PANFest in 2019, that was such a great feeling.

### In what way has the Rhythm Project helped you in areas outside of music?

**SB:** Rhythm Project has helped me manage my time and schedule as well as taught me how to be an effective leader when working with others.

**JA:** It helped me find a clearer perspective on culture and learning about how other cultures express themselves through music.

**JO:** My time here has helped with my confidence and being a strong leader no matter where it is that I am needed. I teach martial arts classes and the Rhythm Project has allowed me to work on my ability to have confidence when leading a group of students whether it's for music or martial arts.

**TM:** It has helped with my ability to focus in my courses especially ones that challenge me to think creatively.

**JT:** The Rhythm Project has helped with my confidence and my ability to find my voice when working in a group.

### What advice would you give to someone in their first year with the Rhythm Project?

**JO:** You just need to keep with it. The more time you put in early on with the music, the better time you're going to have making music with your friends.

**TM:** Be open and friendly to everyone, we are all super fun to be around and will be helpful so don't be afraid of anyone.

**JA:** I'd say to be sure to practice, even if you don't necessarily want to sometimes. You can't give up when things are hard, focusing on giving all you have to each practice will allow you to have a great experience playing great music with your friends.

**SB:** I would tell them to show up to as many practices as possible. It will seem difficult at first but staying on top of your music will benefit everybody in the group.

**JT:** Listen to the music! It makes it so much easier to learn our music when you have taken the time to listen to the recordings and understand how the song is supposed to sound before you play any notes. A lot of people are aural learners so this can give new students a chance to get ahead and not feel behind.



Savannah Barsoom,  
Virginia Beach

(Seniors cont.)

**If you could visit one place in the world where would that be?**

**JT:** I would love to visit Italy. It is such a beautiful country with a rich cultural history that I would love to explore.

**SB:** I would visit Japan, my first dream was to visit Trinidad but since we were able to do that this year I'd love to then experience the culture of Japan.

**JA:** Definitely Trinidad, although I've already been there once. The beauty of the island and it's music and food makes me want to go back right away.



Jessica Tuminelli,  
Virginia Beach

**JO:** I'd honestly love to go back to Trinidad and spend more time playing pan with the bands there.

**TM:** I would love to go back to Trinidad, it was a life changing experience for me and I'd love to have the chance to compete in Panorama again alongside the friends I made while there.

**Finally, what are your plans for after high school?**

**SB:** I plan on attending George Mason to major in Arts and Visual Technology.

**TM:** I will be attending Old Dominion University to major in Cyber-Security before finishing my schooling at George Mason.

**JA:** I am attending Johnson and Wales University to study Culinary Arts and eventually



Jalen Anderson, Portsmouth

**JO:** I am taking a gap year to focus on leadership skills teaching at my martial arts academy and will be studying music education in the fall of 2021.

**JT:** I will be attending University of Virginia in Charlottesville to major in Biology as I pursue my dream to become a Doctor.

## Sponsors

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The Rhythm Project is a world percussion ensemble dedicated to the nurturing of self-esteem through individual and cooperative achievement. Founded in 1996, the program was started in Portsmouth, VA by the Virginia Arts Festival. There are four elementary and three middle school Rhythm Project programs that feed the program's premiere performing ensemble, the All-Stars. The All-Stars is a year-round program for high school students that focuses on instilling discipline and dedication in students through performance and touring opportunities. Additionally, two high school programs complete the family of eleven Rhythm Project ensembles that serve the cities of Norfolk, Virginia Beach and Portsmouth.

The All-Stars, 2009, 2010, and 2019 Virginia International PANFest Grand Champions, have earned international acclaim and collaborated with many prominent artists. They have opened for Gladys Knight, shared the stage with pan artist Victor Provost and the Metropolitan Jazz Orchestra, and performed at the Royal Nova Scotia and Virginia International Tattoos. In May 2014, the group was featured on NPR's "From the Top" program showcasing outstanding talent in high school students.

