




Arts & Culture Seen

Thought Leadership on SaportaReport

Music: A Common Language For Refugee Girls

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Contributed by the Global Village Project Arts Program

What letter comes after “q” in the English alphabet? Did you sing the *ABC Song* to remember? Singing is one of the most efficient and fun ways to learn language, and that is precisely what happens in Music Classes at the Global Village Project, a school for refugee girls in Decatur, Georgia. Since the school’s founding, arts education has been a cornerstone of the unique curriculum that enables students new to America to rapidly gain the skills necessary for high school in the United States.

Visual arts, theatre, and music provide communication paths that cross language barriers – and global village project students speak more than fifteen languages, as they come from troubled home countries like Myanmar, Syria, Iraq, Somalia, Congo, and too many others. The school has partnered with programs like Playmaking for Girls and ArtAccess at the High Museum of Art to give their girls the extra preparation and understanding they'll need to succeed and, in many cases, to cope with the emotional challenges resulting from their families' plights.

For music, the school has benefited from Decatur-based teacher Elise Witt, a renowned composer, performer, and educator. Her fluency in five languages and understanding of music education techniques helps these middle-school students in some cases leap from pre-K English levels to 8th Grade levels in just two to three years. Students write original songs about their academic studies; fractions, suffixes, and the water cycle all become stickier when put to song.

Unique songs created by GVP students with Elise include her special polyrhythmic multi-lingual musical collages. These collages take a word or phrase, translate it into multiple languages, and create a musical phrase for each language. Students stack these phrases polyrhythmically into a harmonic whole. The performed collages demonstrate the idea of harmony, both in music and in the world – the world these young women envision together.

Students recently wrote a musical collage using the word “thank you,” which represents “Appreciation,” one of the Global Village Project’s core values. *The Thank You Song* is now sung for guests and for the volunteers and teaching artists who work with GVP.

GVP students will perform several of these polyrhythmic multi-lingual musical collages on November 23 at 7PM at the Chosewood Arts Complex in Southeast Atlanta during the release celebration of *All Singing: The Elise Witt Songbook*. GVP students will sing alongside renowned singers like Caroline Aiken, John McCutcheon, DeDe Vogt, the Mosiers, Joyce & Jacque, the Rosin Sisters, and CubanaSong.

For more information on the Global Village Project, visit www.globalvillageproject.org.

REFERENCE:

<https://leadership.saportareport.com/artsandculture/2019/10/14/music-a-common-language-for-refugee-girls/>