

## CHAPTER 21

### ARTS ON FIRE

By the new year, the arts programming was really taking shape. The Arts were ‘on fire’ and Mr. Harris was front and center in supporting them at WEDJ! Under the leadership of Ms. Palmer, the PK Nation hosted a sell-out crowd for their fashion show extravaganza on January 30th in the multipurpose room. In addition to ballet and modern dance, Suzuki violin and a visual arts class demonstration was featured in the front foyer during the parent-teacher conference day in February. Students in grades 3–8 were also treated to an assembly from the *Afghan Youth Ensemble* and master classes after school led by members of the National Philharmonic. Probably one of the most memorable experiences, for me, was the production of ‘*On this Island*’, an inspiring salute to Black History Month coordinated by Mr. Harris, Mr. McKeiver and Ms. Nugent on February 28th. In the February PrincipalPoint I shared the following:

*I’ve watched with our friends at the Washington Post, how the seeds of hope are planted and nourished to produce what I know is a wonderful salute to Black History Month... To recap some highlights of March, all students were treated to the dance and visual arts production of “On this Island” – on Friday, March 1st. The performances were breathtaking. Mr. McKeiver and the student’s passionate portrayal of inspirational quotes made for a wonderful display of artistic talent! (<http://www.wedjschool.us/dr-smith/principal-point-february-message-from-dr-smith>)*

Each performer wore their t-shirts proudly. On the back, it read: “*To watch us dance is to hear our hearts speak, because we are Irie!*” According to Wikipedia: *Irie* (I-rie | ‘-ree) is a word in Jamaican Patois that can mean:

1. powerful and pleasing
2. excellent, highest
3. the state of feeling great.

Ms. Nugent was born in Jamaica and clearly was able to share her spirit and love for dance. The sold-out performance and depth of story woven with movement felt like I was viewing a production of ‘*So You Think You Can Dance*.’ I often spoke with Mr. Harris about perfection as an unrealistic expectation, and by removing the pressure for all to be on the same page at the same time, the students were able to present a very real and joyful integration of dance and story.

The energy of the arts continued to expand throughout the year. The guest arts teachers from the National Philharmonic (NP) organized a spring concert as an

afternoon assembly that was attended by family members and a few NP Board members. It was impressive to view the growth of the violin students over the course of the year. The classic tone of this presentation was well received and the behind the scenes support from Dr. Zirkle, Ms. Teachout and Mr. Harris helped make this event a success.

April featured the *Walls Arts Performance Group* at a special National Philharmonic sponsored assembly. Students were welcomed back after their week break with a wonderfully playful way of sharing dramatic story, music and dance. At the conclusion of *Family Week*, the PK Nation hosted a special dress-up ‘Black Tie’ event on the Friday evening. The food, dancing and décor was top notch. Ms. Palmer and her terrific team of supporters left everyone with truly positive memories!

In the spring, the music teachers hosted a music ‘*Infor-mance*’, an open house to view music classes. Mr. Ginsburg also took grade 6,7 and 8 student art pieces to the *Frieze Art Week Exhibition* in New York City. And in May, Mr. McKeiver and Mr. Harris combined their forces once again to create a stunning WEDJ rendition of *The Wiz* for dance students in grades 1 and 2. The productions of the WEDJ WIZ and *Kindergarten Goes to Broadway* were standing room only. The costumes, make-up and integrated stories were incredible. In my monthly newsletter I noted,

*On Friday, May 24th, the grade 6–8 theater majors performed Macbeth to families and staff members. The students worked hard to memorize their lines and get into character. It was wonderful to see how far this group had progressed in a year.*

At the beginning of the school year, we had some serious reservations about how the guest teachers would influence the quality of arts performances at WEDJ. Through collaboration, the school was able to satisfy most families by showcasing a combination of mini-productions and recitals that placed more students of all ages ‘performing’ in the limelight.

The heart of the arts continued to shine during the 2013–2014 school year, as well. The talented fine arts team coordinated *Kindergarten Goes to Hollywood*, an *Arts Alive* lecture demonstration for Grades 1 and 2 and a *Winter Solstice* production at CAPS (Community Academy Public School), featuring the grades 3–8 arts majors. Mr. Harris worked overtime to find a larger space to host this event. Ms. Elcock’s art students also shared and presented their impressive artwork that evening, in addition to musical pieces from Mr. Bell and Dr. Zirkle’s classes.

Mr. Harris also made some wonderful connections with the National Gallery of Art. In December 2013, Mr. Jon Frederick donated a 3D piece of art to the school and in February came to WEDJ to share a PowerPoint presentation and dialogue with parents about visual arts. Mr. Harris also coordinated a *Salute to the Arts Week*, that featured an adopted script written by Ms. Palmer from Debbie Allen’s ‘*Brothers and Sisters of the Knight*.’ I was so impressed with Ms. Palmer’s work leading up to the production and extremely proud of the young people who had transformed into actors under her tutelage!