

Lake Braddock's Orchestrating Talent

Four Graduates of Burke School Continue Musical Aspirations at Juilliard

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The Juilliard School in New York has about 800 undergraduate and graduate students and the lowest acceptance rate in the country, making the performing arts conservatory one tough nut to crack.

Perhaps Lake Braddock Secondary School officials are handing out nutcrackers with diplomas. The Burke school boasts four alumni as current music students at Juilliard.

Two of them, senior Alexander White and freshman Stuart Stephenson, are trumpet players. Also at the conservatory are Kathryn Farenish, a sophomore flutist, and Eric Roberts, a graduate student in the percussion program.

All played in the Lake Braddock band and were members of the Annandale-based American Youth Philharmonic Orchestras.

White said that when other Juilliard students learn about the four musicians from Lake Braddock, "They are like, 'Really?' Because most people come from all over the place. Maybe people played in the same youth orchestra in the same area, but not normally from the same public high school. It's one thing if it was an arts high school. But a public high school in Burke, Virginia? It's a little bit weird to get four students."

Stephenson and White were back in Burke this month for spring break. They also participated in the National Trumpet Competition at George Mason University the weekend of March 15.

White finished second among college students, bettering his 2007 third-place finish. In his first year in the collegiate division, Stephenson did not make the finals; he was second among high school trumpeters last year.

Raymond Mase, one of the trumpeters' Juilliard instructors and chairman of the brass department, joked during a call from



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Juilliard School senior Alexander White, left, practices with Juilliard freshman Stuart Stephenson. Both played in the Lake Braddock band and the American Youth Philharmonic Orchestras.

New York about what might be in the water at Lake Braddock. He said of the four Virginians, "It's a funny sort of coincidence."

Reflecting on the situation of White and Stephenson, he said that about 80 trumpet players audition annually for Juilliard's freshman class, and the school accepts two undergrads in trumpet each year.

"They must be getting really fine instruction," at Lake Braddock, Mase said. "Both are wonderful players."

Although they did not know each other until high school, White and Stephenson shared a succession of private instructors when they were growing up, including former members of the U.S. Army and Air Force bands. The most recent was Adel Sanchez of the National Symphony Orchestra.

"They are both absolutely tremendous

talents and very hardworking guys, two of the best students I ever had," Sanchez said last week.

He credited some of the students' success to their time in the American Youth Philharmonic under the direction of Luis Haza. There, Sanchez said, "they got a real taste for orchestral music."

Flutist Farenish confirmed that Haza was a muse, as was Lake Braddock band director Roy Holder.

"We became more passionate about music because of them," she said.

The three undergraduates agreed that Holder and Louis Bean, the middle school band director at Lake Braddock, were top-notch.

Farenish said Juilliard classmates tell her "you guys must have had a really good band



COURTESY OF PRESTIGE PORTRAITS

Kathryn Farenish, a sophomore flutist at the Juilliard School in New York, is a graduate of Lake Braddock Secondary School in Burke.

program." She said they truly did.

"We are really fortunate," Farenish said. "I personally believe that Mr. Holder . . . had a huge influence on my decision making, and he was such an inspirational person."

Farenish said Holder emphasized the rigors of performing classical music even in the marching band, a high-school experience that few others at Juilliard tell her they shared. Holder "won't take any credit, of course," Farenish said, "but he should take all of it, in my opinion."

Holder laughed when told what Farenish had said. As she predicted, he downplayed his role in the students' ongoing success.

"They are just special kids to start with," Holder said.

At Lake Braddock, he said, he tries to identify each student's strengths and challenge them appropriately.

Roberts, White, Farenish and Stephenson "were very bright kids and obviously talented," Holder said. "And they also worked very, very hard."