

2013 Harmonikids Hohner-sponsored Session #1: Kingsbury Middle School in Memphis, TN

On February 1, 2013 I returned to provide another special Blues Harmonikids session to children at Kingsbury Middle School in Memphis. Several years ago I had visited the school to teach at the request of the Blues Foundation for their Blues in the Schools program. At that time I was impressed by the commitment that teacher Ms. Kathleen Riser had made to nurturing the children she taught. She explained to me that she liked to intersperse those children with learning challenges among the other children so that there was positive interaction between the children. Indeed, what I saw there again was students helping students, enriching each other's experience. Those with special challenges were not singled out, therefore protecting and boosting their self esteem, while providing them assistance gave a purpose that elevated the aiding student's esteem as well. I was very pleased with the success of my return visit this year. The wonderful session is described in words and photos provided by Ms. Riser below.

~ Gary Allegretto, founding director of Harmonikids, www.harmonikids.org

The Blues Hits Kingsbury Middle School

Gary Allegretto played his way into the hearts of 58 sixth grade band students and special needs students. The sixth grade band students are just beginning to understand and experience the gift of music. The special needs students (SPED) have many different needs ranging from behavioral disorders to several learning disorders. But, all enjoyed and experienced the blues on Feb. 1, 2013.



The K.M.S. beginner band now has harmonica Fridays! We are continuing to learn the songs that Gary taught the students. Hunter said, "We can take what we've learned in our band class and put it on the harmonica. Things like our embouchures. Gary told us to make a "fish mouth with bottoms up!" I think I'll always remember how to form my harmonica embouchure!" George, one of the SPED students told me, "I can be on stage like Gary 'cause I can play the harmonica too." What a joy to see a student who normally would not show excitement glow with pride!



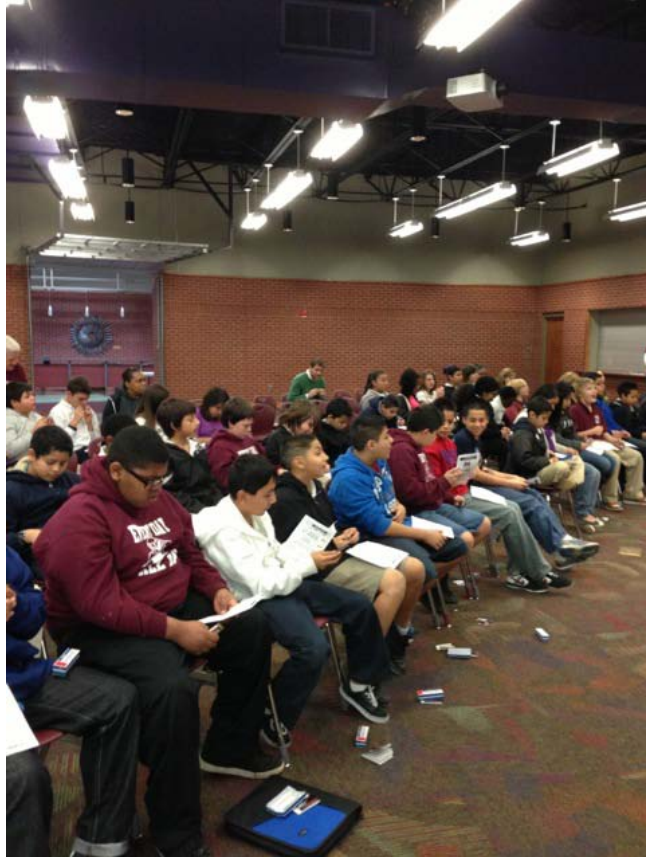




The time that Gary spends with the students at Kingsbury MS is a very special event for them. Kingsbury MS is considered a lower income area with 97% of our students on free or reduced lunches. When someone takes the time to make them feel they deserve the best it not only encourages them, but also allows them to believe they are worth it! I was brought to tears when I overheard Kayla saying "I can't believe Gary flew all the way from California to spend time with us. What did we do to deserve this?" The answer to her sweet question is "you show a love for music!" The students of K.M.S. cannot afford to rent or purchase band instruments, so they are only able to play during the school year. Angel said, "Wow! Now I can play music whenever I want to!" The gift of the free harmonica allows them the freedom to continue their musical journey whenever the mood hits! The hour that Gary spent with these students will last a lifetime!

Gary opened their minds and hearts to learning more and more about music and the possibilities it opens up in their lives. He encouraged them to practice and spend time with their music. I would personally like to thank Gary for this awesome gift he provides for children. My students will always remember this day.

~ Kathleen Riser, Kingsbury Middle School band teacher







THANK YOU HOHNER AND GARY ALLEGRETTO!!!!

KINGSBURY MIDDLE SCHOOL LOVES YOU!