

Inspired Learning Inspired Teaching

by Karen Kneten

Ten years ago, the Pearl Hall Elementary music staff returned home from the TMEA Clinic/Convention committed to making meaningful connections for their students with their community around Pearl Hall. While it certainly doesn't hurt that NASA's Johnson Space Center and several Houston professional arts groups are located conveniently in their backyard, the extraordinary success that followed was rooted in these educators' passion and persistence for delivering the best possible education for all of their students. Pearl Hall music educators are quick to point out, however, that connecting students to the world around them is possible in any school of any size in any location.

Over the past eight years, there have been incredible connections made possible through the Pearl Hall elementary music program through their extraordinary Building Cultural Bridges program (featured in the February 2007 *SOUTHWESTERN MUSICIAN*). Through BCB, these music educators have opened up the world to thousands of students in this Title 1 school. Given their consistent success with hosting international guests to further their music education curriculum (most recently, The King's Singers), we asked Pearl Hall music educators and BCB directors Jami Lupold, Pat Surface, and Seth Fewell to share their thoughts on the success of this program and to offer advice on how to effectively incorporate guests in a music education program.

How do the ideas you initially had for this program ten years ago compare to today's reality?

Our initial goals were to help our students connect with their community, to create a real-life learning environment that includes international music in the curriculum, and to make it relevant by having people from around the world interact directly with students to share their careers, cultures, folk music, and favorite children's literature. We aimed to accomplish this by

hosting guests from the 16 countries that are members of the International Space Station. These guests came to Houston as participants with the Houston Symphony, NASA, Houston Grand Opera, Society for the Performing Arts, and other organizations with an international presence.

Having hosted guests from all 16 ISS countries, we began expanding to other countries around the globe. Hosting arts organizations have even begun contacting us to bring international visitors to the school. We have now had 57 individuals from 23 countries share the excitement of connecting with the world with students at Pearl Hall Elementary.

What do you believe most significantly contributed to the program's ongoing and consistent success?

The simplicity of the concept is important. Natives of countries from around the world share information about their culture, music, careers, and literature with students to make learning more relevant while building relationships with others and developing cross-curricular connections. While the concept is simple, the details of any one event can be quite intricate depending on the guest and what they are involved in at the time.

In a practical sense, it is a perfect set up to bring music to life through interaction with international guests. We share each BCB guest experience with the entire school (K-4). Interviews are student driven. Two fourth graders conduct the interview from memory, with one of them controlling the digital recording studio equipment. The collected folk songs are taught to the students in the native languages and the collection of children's literature suggested by guests is available in our library. Students learn the music and background information as part of our curriculum. Each event's video and audio recordings are used to teach the information to our classes. Select individuals record the songs for our BCB website, and we share MP3 files of the students' recording with contributing guests.

The King's Singers Join the Ranks of BCB Participants



visits with our astronaut friends at NASA and preparing the students who would interview them.

After an exciting tour of the International Space Station Mission Control Center, The King's Singers offered the best version of "Happy Birthday" that I've ever heard to astronaut Cady Coleman the day before she launched on a Russian Soyuz to fly to the

space station for a five-month stay.

Back at Pearl Hall, our selected set of fourth graders interviewed the six singers to learn about their favorite folk songs and books from their childhoods. The King's Singers ended the interview with their rendition of "Danny Boy."



At the 2007 TMEA convention, our three music educators attended a clinic presented by The King's Singers where the singers shared how they prepare themselves for long weeks of tour, deal with the stress, and keep their voices in top shape and their minds sharp and fresh. A couple of the members spoke about their use of Brain Gym activities and of how exercise keeps their minds clear and stress to a minimum. Since our school uses Brain Gym activities daily for focus and calming, this offered a unique connection. After the session, I asked them to share further how and why as vocalists they applied the Brain Gym activities.

Our conversation eventually led to our Building Cultural Bridges program and, of course, I invited them to be a part of it. Knowing they perform in Houston every two or three years, they agreed that the next time they were in Houston they would come to the school for the BCB program. From that point on, I maintained communication with them, updating them about every three months on the progress of the BCB program so they would remember us. Two years after that initial conversation, they were confirmed to perform in Houston and our work began—from proposing a schedule with their agent to coordinating

We moved to the gym and they shared their amazing talent in concert for the entire school and special guests. After receiving our thanks in song with 400 elementary students singing "Joy to the World," The King's Singers entertained us with British folk songs and Christmas songs old and new for half an hour.

While half of our school was present in the gym, the other half enjoyed the concert simultaneously in their classrooms on their large interactive white boards via the campus-wide broadcast system. This was an entire day of pure bliss to remember forever.

— Jami Lupold

What do you know now that would have been valuable to know in the beginning of this project?

It is important to have not only audio/visual documentation of each event but also a written record of each contributor's information, song and book titles, languages spoken, etc.

If you are not media-technology savvy, ask for help from district personnel. You don't have to have a videographer and a professional photographer. You can simply start recording with a video camera on wide angle before the event begins and record throughout. Just make sure you have plenty of power and digital space for the entire program.

The following questions are intended to help teachers of any school consider how to start a program featuring outside guests.

How can I fit anything more into the already limited time with my students?

We suggest starting small. Plan a single event in one year targeting one or two grade levels. The educational outreach event or guest artist appearance becomes the focus for your lesson content or curriculum. Immerse your classes in the guest's musical style, their songs, dance, etc. Make connections from this real-life experience to the TEKS to show how rigorous this kind of lesson is for student learning.

How do I approach my administrators to gain their support?

Sell the idea of one presentation (neither mentioning nor closing the door on future visitors). Make a strong case for why this visitor fits, what you will do to pre-teach, what will happen for students while the guest is there, and what will happen as follow-up after the visitor is gone.

Our school is within driving distance of arts organizations. How should I first reach out to them?

It depends on what your focus is (e.g., a specific continent or country) and what artists are available. You may find that some of the most endearing guests are regular members of the symphony or opera who are originally from other countries. They may be American citizens now but will have experiences from their culture of origin to share.

Once you have your campus administration and fine arts administrator's support, contact the education director of the local arts organization to see what they already provide. If they don't have an outreach program, ask if they would consider doing so for your program as a trial. If you want to invite a specific guest who will be appearing with a performing group, know that six months to a year will be needed to allow for interaction with agents and recording companies.

Houston Symphony Education Director Roger Daily offers this advice: "It is important when asking an arts organization to participate to remember that it needs to be mutually beneficial to achieve traction for the project. Find out the goals and objectives of the institution and be prepared to illustrate how your proposal will help them meet their mission."

I teach in a rural school. How can I effectively incorporate guests in my music classroom?

Take a look around your school and district. Chances are you have employees or parents from other countries right under your nose, and you'll likely find that highly successful individuals have experienced fine arts education in their young lives. Learning from other Americans is also quite interesting as students connect with something with which they are familiar to transfer to the unfamiliar. The experience is even more rigorous and relevant when the guest is from a country other than your own.

While not everyone has a NASA or Houston Symphony in their backyard, there are a variety of professional, college, and community ensembles almost everywhere. Although not everyone in those groups may have been an international traveler or have been born in another country, their heritage can still be a focal point. Each of us has traditions that can be traced to other places our ancestors once called home. A college faculty, local sports team, or the business community can be used to make multicultural connections.

—Roger Daily, Houston Symphony Education Director

What should I convey to guests when inviting them?

Make sure they know they will be addressing children. Not all adults outside the education arena are comfortable presenting to children. Be sure they understand their participation (and travel) is on a volunteer basis. Explain why you're inviting them, your expectations for the information you want shared, and how you will pre-teach and extend the lessons after they leave. The information we provide in advance includes the following:

- a copy of the interview questions so they can prepare their responses to the fullest;
- a schedule of events and description of their audiences, guests, and/or media personnel who will attend; and
- information on how audio/video recordings and photos will be used. (Obtain appropriate permission/clearance to use media for educational endeavors in the classroom, on your school's website, and for educator presentations. Ask if you may share the digital information with other teachers.)

What I should communicate with parents about guests?

We do not typically invite parents, simply because we are already at a maximum attendance level with students and staff. If appropriate, we invite parents of the children who form the interview team. When needed we send home a short note explaining the upcoming event and studies in class and encourage them to research more on the Internet with their children. When parents become involved with their child's learning, the child's experience at school is more likely to be expanded beyond standard expectations.

Should I invite others to my classroom when we have guests?

For the most part, we like to get the maximum impact with the maximum number of students in every event. As many grade levels as are appropriate for the event's content are invited. When appropriate, we invite superintendents and administrators, local political figures who may support our efforts, secondary and university music educators, directors from art centers/science centers, other astronaut friends, former students,

Among the many education and outreach activities in which The King's Singers have participated throughout the world, BCB stands alone as a model program for others to follow. I am proud to have been associated with the program, and am already looking forward to a future visit.

—Paul Phoenix, The King's Singers tenor

and any others who should be aware of the opportunities being provided at the school.

How do you prepare your students before each guest's arrival?

We pre-teach by introducing students to BCB guests with videos; students study guests' biographies; we research guests on the Internet; students are encouraged to read books related to guests (e.g., about their country, instrument, career); and we encourage students to submit questions for guests prior to an event. Students who submit the most meaningful questions get front-row seats, additional time with the guests, and photo and/or autograph opportunities.

When preparing students for a visit, you should thoroughly cover procedures. We review listening and concert etiquette; remind them that body language matters (the guests will notice); cover what excel-

lence looks *and* sounds like; remind them how to stay attentive and engaged and how to be silent during interviews, presentations, and concerts; and we practice Brain Gym concepts.

Canadian astronaut Colonel Chris Hadfield has visited the students several times and has commented, "It's delightful to see such a spark of interest that has been created by the teachers and that is being absorbed by the students. What makes a big difference in this program is that it is included in the curriculum. The kids are prepared. They're interested, and so it's not just the entertainment of the day."

What would you advise those who don't live in or near major cities?

We are truly blessed to be in our location. This does not mean, however, that schools in other locations can't host astronauts and international musicians for educational endeavors. In fact,

sometimes, being isolated is a benefit in being selected for special visits. Start in the local community. Draw from students' imaginations. *Today we're singing "I Love the Mountains." Wouldn't it be great to meet a mountaineer?* Give them no limits, and find relevant connections with people you know.

When making a request, demonstrate the educational relevance of it. Be ready to provide documentation on how you already teach the content; how the person's appearance will enhance your event; how many students, teachers, parents, political representatives, and related guests will attend; and how you plan to implement the information shared into your curriculum and to extend lessons beyond the guest's appearance.

How have you used the Internet to interact with guests who can't come to Pearl Hall?

We have made video calls over the Internet with the program Skype. It can be a wonderful tool, and the best part is, it's easy to use! Skyping between classrooms can be as simple as sharing a song between children (think musical pen-pals). If you want to bring in outside knowledge of a subject, a short Skype session can take your lesson to a higher level. Skype with another classroom of a teacher you met at a TMEA convention! Share songs, variations, languages, etc. We use Skype, and it's free anywhere in the world when used with a guest who is also a Skype user. Locations on the planet that don't have Internet connections available must use satellite-based programs that will include an extra cost.

We have used Skype for shared learning experiences with students in northern Canada, South Africa, explorers on Mount Everest, astronauts in Russia, and teachers and students in the United Kingdom.

Was acquiring recording studio equipment part of this project?

We acquired our digital recording studio equipment prior to the first BCB event. Now, much smaller and easier-to-use recorders are available, such as the Edirol, which is about the size of two decks of cards. It records in various formats and provides wonderful quality sound at a lower cost than what we initially purchased. You can connect directly

Making Connections

BCB has brought real life, cross-curricular experiences in math, geography, literature, and social studies to Pearl Hall students. One incredible cross-curricular example was a virtual climb to the summit of Mount Everest with BCB participant Dr. Christian Otto (via Skype). Many lessons beyond music were offered through his participation:

- Lessons were taught about the different altitudes of the Himalayan mountains and the animals who live there.
- Science studies became more meaningful to students.
- Geography lessons included information about mountains all over the world and how their growth changes our planet.
- Special art projects connected to Mount Everest were produced school-wide.
- Google Earth was used and map reading highlighted throughout the school.

What the Students Say

It's no surprise that Pearl Hall Elementary students are inspired by their music education experiences. Here's what some have said about BCB:

- *It's fantastic learning about new instruments from people who play them all over the world.*
- *It's fun to learn new things about stories, music, and cultures from different people who come from new places.*
- *It feels so amazing to have someone like The King's Singers come to our school. It is so much better to have this real-life experience than learn from a video.*
- *When I experienced the music of The King's Singers it was like nothing I had ever heard. When you meet them and hear from them in person, it makes you believe that you can be successful too.*

Learn more from the BCB website: www.buildingculturalbridges.net

Read more about The King's Singers visit: www.tmea.org/smlink/KS


Watch a video of The King's Singers event: www.tmea.org/smlink/KSvideo

to your computer to download the files, import to any other media, and burn a CD. Having and knowing how to use a digital recording studio, however, is not a deal-breaker. If you can't purchase more equipment, use what you have available. Convert your recordings to as many accessible formats as possible and back up the recordings on external media.

Students need to feel at ease with the equipment and can develop confidence in handling this type of technology through multiple hands-on sessions.

How has this program affected your everyday elementary music education experience?

Our level of expectation for our student's participation and achievement is very high. We no longer teach music as we

were taught. We believe the BCB program has caused our music education approach to evolve, helping us meet the needs of 21st-century learners. Our expectations of ourselves and our team members are much greater. The challenges of preparing an entire Title I school to host world-class musicians, scientists, and astronauts from all corners of the planet inspire and motivate us to keep raising the bar with each additional guest. It is *inspired learning*, and it is *inspired teaching*. 

Pearl Hall Elementary music educators and BCB directors are Jami Lupold, Pat Surface, and Seth Fewell.

For extended content and to comment on this article:
tmea.org/features



More on Inspired Learning • Inspired Teaching

Because of size limitations, the following content couldn't be included in the February 2011 article "Inspired Learning. Inspired Teaching." Gain additional insight into the success Pearl Hall Elementary music educators have had with international guests and read a special report from The King's Singers on their participation.

Did you have to find funding to support this project?

We have never had dedicated funding for this project. In the start-up, we asked our principal and fine arts department to assist with funds to purchase Boss/Roland digital recording studios, microphones, cords, CDs, a good video camera, and teacher computers in our classes that could handle photo and video processing.

BCB guests volunteer their time through educational outreach events or the school participates in educational challenges or activities provided by NASA, the Houston Symphony, or others. We purchase commemorative lapel pins to present each guest. Our principal and fine arts director assist with some funds if an event merits a trip to the symphony hall or a small group going to NASA in a van. So the costs of a basic event are minimal, including the pin and a few photos printed for autograph exchanges.

Has the consistent approach to this project been a reason for its success?

Yes. Formatting is the key. The students understand their responsibilities and the guests know what to expect. Guests appreciate having an outline of the process so they can prepare to best convey their information. While we may adjust interview questions minimally for a specific guest, the approach and process has not changed in the eight years of this program and several of our guests have commented that they believe the consistency of the program is a contributing factor to its success.

What and how should I promote visits by guest performers/speakers to our school district and community?

Inform your district's communications department and encourage them to include a short description of the upcoming event followed by an article and photo post-event in their publications. Our district sends press releases and we also make direct, personal contacts with newspapers and TV/radio personalities. When an arts organization makes arrangements for guest visits, they also make their regular media contacts.

Have you found guests to be willing to meet with multiple classes, or is it most effective to set up a group assembly of all music classes?

When planning an event, you must look at this closely as it will greatly affect the impact of your event on the students. The driving force is always when and for how long is the guest available. Most of our guests have wanted to meet with as many students as possible. Many times we ask to schedule an interview session

(25 minutes) and one large group event (maximum of 45 minutes + Q&A). Decide if your goal is to include as many students as possible or to provide an intimate event for a limited number of students who are working on a specific project or performance preparation. What space is available during that time for your program? Is lunch still being served making the stage unavailable? Work with coaches to coordinate the event when hosted in the gym if a large group presentation is best.

How do you extend the learning experience after a guest appearance and make the next guest appearance more effective?

We take comments from the students about their impressions of the event, content learned, overall experience, and often share these personal comments with the guest. Each group composes a thank you email message and we often create hand written messages with appropriate art. Photos and videos are shared with the entire school and often posted on the website and on bulletin boards throughout the school. The librarian pulls books that tie in to our events and highlight them in a special area of the library.

We review the experience, sing the songs, tell the stories, and we continue to draw from the experience even years down the road.

We also have debriefings after each event to discuss the best of an event and anything that needed addressing before the next event. Fortunately, we have now hosted a large number of events and have things very streamlined so everything flows exceptionally well. Often the only thing that is desired is: more time with our guests!

If you taught in a school that didn't have the local resources you enjoy, how would you see accomplishing some of the same results as you have with BCB?

We truly are blessed to be in our location. This does not mean that other schools in other locations aren't able to host astronauts and international musicians for educational endeavors. In fact, sometimes being isolated is a benefit in being selected for special visits. Start in the local community. Draw from the student's imaginations (Today we're singing "I Love the Mountains." Wouldn't it be great to meet a mountaineer?). Give them no limits, and find relevant connections with people you know.

The astronaut appearance office at Johnson Space Center services many of the southwestern United States. There is an application online at this website:

<http://www.nasa.gov/about/speakers/astroautappearances.html>

They are civil servants and do not accept a fee for traveling to

Comments from the Houston Symphony's Education Director, Roger Daily:

The Houston Symphony recognized the uniqueness of the project from the beginning. For us, it provided a wonderful entry point for these students into the very diverse world of orchestral music. Composers from all over the planet have made important contributions to the body of music. They bring their influences, customs and expertise into their work. With the International Space Station, knowledge and understanding from all over has created a unique synergy for collaborative discoveries. By recognizing internationally what others bring, space science and music are richer – and the world is a better place. The Pearl Hall students get this relationship because it happens in front of their eyes, rather than something they might read about.

The unexpected result coming from this project is how NASA and the Symphony, sharing the common goals of this project, have grown closer. Dialogue has happened. Ideas shared. The result has been a new high definition DVD of Holst the Planets, a resulting US and UK tour and an interdisciplinary educational CD that supports the project. In the Spring of 2011, the Orchestra will be joined by students of Pearl Hall Elementary and astronaut Chris Hadfield to perform on a space inspired family concert.

a location. You must, provide funding for their travel expenses if over 50 miles. This is exactly how we got started with our astronaut appearances.

The Smithsonian Institute provides guests to visit cities for the cost of travel expenses. Look to see if they are hosting events near you so that your expenses are kept to a minimum. Partner with other schools or towns to divide the cost of bringing in a special guest. Ask hotel managers if they would comp a room for a couple of nights for the school event.

Make sure to show relevance for your request, whether it is science-based or musical. Be ready to provide documentation of how you are already teaching the content; how the person's appearance will enhance your event; how many students, teachers, parents, political representatives, related guests will attend; and how you plan to implement the information shared into your curriculum and extend lessons beyond the guest's appearance.

Describe how you have used Skype to interact with guests who can't come to Pearl Hall.

Skype can be a wonderful tool, and the best part is, it's easy to use! Skyping between classrooms can be as simple as sharing a song between children (think musical pen-pals). If you'd like to bring in outside knowledge of a subject, a short Skype session can take your lesson to a higher level. Skype with another classroom of a teacher you met at the TMEA convention! Share songs, variations, languages, etc. We use Skype, and it's free anywhere in the world when used with a guest who is also a Skype user. Locations on the planet that don't have Internet connections available must use satellite-based programs and will be an extra cost.

We have used Skype to have shared learning experiences with students in northern Canada, South Africa, explorers on Mount Everest, astronauts in Russia, and teachers and students in the United Kingdom. While on a tour in the UK with the Houston Symphony as an Educator Ambassador, I was able to show students in my Texas classroom concert venues ranging from 350 years old, to new state-of-the-art performance halls.

En route from Scotland to England, Houston Symphony principal trombonist Allen Barnhill, participated in a Skype session

with our kindergarteners in Houston. They discussed their favorite instruments and favorite music. During the session, Allen turned his computer around to show our students the English countryside rolling by. "Here is what England looks like," he said. "You are traveling with us right now—in real time—seeing what we are seeing, knowing what we know. Look at the sheep, the cows, and the rock walls in the meadows. Look at the castle!" The kindergarteners' ooos and aahhs were heard from our Texas laptop to the UK. Our students decided this was the best way to learn and look forward to more Skype sessions in the future.

How does having so many guests and programs affect your everyday elementary music education experience with your students?

There are some days we never know what's coming our way next. As an astronaut friend said, "If you stay ready, you don't have to spend time getting ready!" We sometimes have 'regular teaching days' where we teach traditional music education activities and lessons from the start of day to the end, but not many! When the phone rings, the students wait with telephone manners to see if it's the symphony, astronauts, the Houston Astros, or what! It's most disappointing when it's the office calling.

Our level of expectation for our student's participation and achievement is at a very high level. We no longer teach music as we were taught. We believe the BCB program has caused our music education approach to evolve, helping us meet the needs of a 21st-century learner. Our expectations of ourselves and our team members are much greater as the challenges of preparing an entire Title I school to host world-class musicians, scientists, and astronauts from all corners of the planet inspire and motivate us to keep raising the bar with each additional guest.

Has this program enhanced your ability to deliver TEKS-based music education and if so, in what ways?

The scope of the lessons created from the BCB events have a greater depth of relevance and we find that we are covering multiple TEKS points with just one lesson. The connections across the curriculum are more vast and organic. A natural progression of connections develops and multiplies in many ways, sometimes in most unexpected ways, bringing a sense of awe and wonder to all of us. It is 'inspired learning' and it's 'inspired teaching'.

How has this program promoted work with teachers in other disciplines in your school?

We have always taught lessons that link to the content students study in their classrooms. Music education naturally supports almost any other curriculum and is user friendly for students of all ages. Our administrators certainly are thrilled when great cross-curricular lessons are brilliantly presented by space station commanders, symphony conductors, and famous artists who have done their homework to link directly to the Texas education requirements. They also realize the benefits the fine arts bring

As we look at the planet we look at all the different hands that are stretched across the planet which belong to different people of different color, different religion, different shape and size. We're all different. Nobody is the same in this world—and it doesn't matter whether it's somebody living in the poorest village with not very much to eat in a third world country like, say, Bangladesh or Africa or Afghanistan or Pakistan or wherever, to people like ourselves who are really lucky to have all the things that we have: to have enough to eat and clean water to drink. It doesn't matter because we're all the same. We all have blood flowing through our bodies and we all share in pretty similar dreams and the most important thing is that we not only look after ourselves but also we look after the people who are our friends, people sitting next to us—that we look after one another. Because we only get one chance to be here and to do something really good with our lives. So, for all of us, let's not waste that opportunity to do something good and to be kind and to say nice things to each other. Sometimes the really difficult thing to do is to be nice to somebody – but it's the right thing to do. — Paul Phoenix, The King's Singers



to students and are extremely supportive of our music education program at Pearl Hall: they are our #1 fans!

How did you get The Kings Singers to visit your school?

I simply asked them if they ever participated in educational outreach projects, explained in a nutshell, our

Building Cultural Bridges program, the relationship we have with NASA and other international space agencies and our Houston Symphony and extended an invitation for them to contribute to the program.

What did it entail?

All three of the music educators on our team were in a session The King's Singers presented at TMEA 2007 on how they prepare themselves for long weeks of tour, deal with the stress and keep their voices in top shape and their minds sharp and fresh. A couple of the members spoke on their use of Brain Gym activities and some on how exercise keeps their mind clear and the stress to a minimum. Since our entire school uses Brain Gym activities every day for focus and calming, this was a unique connection and after a session they presented I asked them to share further how and why they, as vocalists, applied the Brain Gym activities. Our conversation blended with other attendees and we eventually discussed our Building Cultural Bridges program. The opportunity to invite them to the school for a contribution session for the BCB program opened up and they agreed it was something they would like to support. I gave them a copy of the extracted BCB article which TMEA produced in 2007 for the Texas congress, a bag of "astronaut ice cream" and a "Texas Handshake". From that moment forward I never doubted they would not come to the school.

Knowing that they perform in Houston every two or three years they agreed that the next time they were in Houston for a concert they would arrange to come to the school for the BCB program!

- Updates on our BCB program sent every 3 months keeping our program in the forefront of their minds.
- Two years after our initial conversation, confirmed scheduled to perform in to Houston
- Time to detail out the plan for their visit to our school.
- Proposed schedule that was sent to their agent
- They agreed to the sequence of events
- Some astronaut friends heard of the KS up coming visit and offered to host them at NASA for a VIP tour ("We are SO there!" was the response.)

- Auditions for students interested in interviewing "some very special guests" were begun.
- I was the point-of-contact with their agent/manager and concert manager for the school events over a period of 6 months.
- Conversation took place via emails, a couple of phone conversations and a Skype session.
- Once they were on U.S. soil, the contact for me shifted to a KS representative in New York.

We provided transportation through our school district for the day which began in the International Space Station Mission Control Center where NASA/JSC Assistant Director, Astronaut Dr. Ellen Ochoa welcomed the men to Houston and to JSC and Astronauts Dottie Metcalf-Lindenburger and Don Pettit briefed the KS on their space flight experience and what is happening now. We moved to the Lunar Operations center where they recorded music to wish astronaut, Cady Coleman, Happy Birthday the day before she launched on a Russian Soyuz to fly to the space station for a five-month stay. That song never sounded so good! It was on to the ISS mock ups and shuttle trainer. Everyone wanted to be the "flight director" or the shuttle pilot! It was time to bid farewell to our hosts ,American Astronaut, Dottie Metcalf-Lindenburger and Public Affairs Officer, Andrew Knott...both who were King's Singers fans! At the end of the



Pearl Hall Elementary students interview The King's Singers.

The King's Singers on the Building Cultural Bridges Program



JOHNNY: "This is a fantastic project. I admire this project with people being proactive to create new relationships. It's an absolutely brilliant thing that is going on here. It's my first time to Texas and this is building bridges for me."



PAUL: "We are really privileged, we're really lucky to do what we do and as young people you will have lots and lots of things that you're interested in and what I want you to do is...just to look up at the picture which is on the wall. I know you know it's there.. It's a very strong picture because whilst it says 'Building Cultural Bridges,' I think the picture actually shouts much louder."



CHRIS: "I am married to an American from Kentucky and I have learned about your country from her. Our daughter is a citizen of both countries and will build bridges between America and the UK, England. People are people where ever we go. They have the same loves and fears and the same hopes and dreams. We all want to be friends and enjoy sharing music. If we can spread the same message by singing music like we will for you today as we would in China or Japan or in Germany or France then it helps the world to feel like a smaller place."



TIM: "I think it's worth adding: Always remember how important this project is. Listen to your teachers – that's an important thing. This is a global project which all The King's Singers are very, very proud to be a part of. So keep up the good work. And, if you do sing – KEEP singing. And if you don't sing – START singing."



PHIL: "I've been coming to this country for almost 18 years, three or four times a year and it's fantastic to know that you touch people's lives. People come to us and say after concerts that their life had been changed by what we do and that is an incredibly humbling feeling for us – and it's nothing to do with us – but it is to do with the music; and particularly to do with choral music because of the words that are attached to it. So, it is a wonderful program and we are very proud to be associated with it....and....keep singing you guys!"



DAVID: "A lot of great things have been said – I think, Paul said, is a great picture. It's about friendship. It's about working together. We, in The King's Singers, have been friends and we have to cooperate to do the things we do. We've just been to NASA and you look at the amazing stuff that goes on there and it's about people cooperating together. On the International Space Station you have Americans and Russians living together – 25 years ago that would have felt impossible. But because of the way life is now, that is a reality and the world is better because of it. So friendship is what it all comes to, in my opinion. And that's a great picture to show that."



"The King's Singers have recently had the pleasure of taking part in the 'Building Cultural Bridges' program at Pearl Hall Elementary School. Amongst the many education and 'outreach' activities in which The King's Singers have participated throughout the world, BCB stands alone as a 'model program' for others to follow. I am proud to have been associated with the program, and am already looking forward to a future visit."

Paul Phoenix—Tenor for The King's Singers

Read more about The King's Singers visit: www.tmea.org/smlink/KS

Watch a video of The King's Singers event: www.tmea.org/smlink/KSvideo

tour, they asked Andrew what his favorite KS Christmas song was; "Greensleeves!" So standing with the Space Shuttle trainer and mock-up as their backdrop, they performed an impromptu "thank you" concert for our JSC hosts....absolutely beautiful! A magical morning!

A 20 minute drive to the school for a catered lunch, music by Scott Holshouser, the Houston Symphony's keyboardist and his son, Shaun.

Given your experience with Skype, how would you advise teachers who might not have local access to guests to use it?

You can always connect with video conference events as well. Skype can be a wonderful tool, and the best part is, it's easy to use! Skyping between classrooms can be as simple as sharing a song between children (think musical pen-pals). If you'd like to bring in outside knowledge of a subject, a short Skype session could take your lesson to a higher level. Skype with a classroom of a teacher that you met at TMEA... why not? Share songs, variations, languages, etc. We use Skype and it's free anywhere in the world when used with a guest who is also a Skype user. Locations on the planet which do not have internet connections available must use satellite based programs and will be an extra cost. Mount Everest is one of those locations.

We have used Skype to have shared learning experiences with students in northern Canada, South Africa, explorers on Mount Everest, astronauts in Russia and teachers and students in

the United Kingdom. While Jami was on the UK tour with the Houston Symphony as an Educator Ambassador, she was able to show students in her Texas classroom the concert venues ranging from 350 years old, to new state-of-the-art performance halls. Students in three cities were able to chat with each other on their experience of the symphony's European premier of "The Planets: An HD Odyssey" sharing art and music created by the classes. Pearl Hall students had performed pre-concert ceremonial music at all three of the world premier concerts in Houston and attend the symphony's "Planets" performance.

En route from Scotland to England, the principal trombonist of the Houston Symphony, Allen Barnhill, participated in a Skype session with kindergarteners back in Houston. They discussed their favorite instruments and favorite music with Allen promising to come to the school to play his trombone for them. He asked if they knew where we were and they all shouted "The UK!" "Let me show you something," as he turned the laptop to face the English countryside rolling by... "Here is what England looks like. You are traveling with us right now - in real time - seeing what we are seeing - knowing what we know. Look at the sheep, the cows and the rock walls in the meadows. Look at the castle!" The kindergarteners' "ooos and aahhs" came through the speakers of the laptop from Texas to the UK. They decided this was THE best way to learn and look forward to more Skype sessions in the future. But they still are awaiting Allen's visit with his trombone!



Learn More about the Building Cultural Bridges Program:

www.BuildingCulturalBridges.net

Inspired by Dr. Jeffrey Kimpton's words asserting that "for music education to survive, music educators need to tap into community resources to establish a connection between education and the students' place in the community", music educators Jami Lupold and Pat Surface, and later, Seth Fewell, collaborated with education directors and leaders from some of Houston's foremost organizations.

Lupold and Surface created the Building Cultural Bridges program (BCB), an extraordinary program linking Pearl Hall Elementary with NASA, Johnson Space Center, the Houston Symphony, consuls general's offices, the Society for the Performing Arts, the Houston Grand Opera, the Norwegian Seaman's Church, and Bay Area Photography Club providing opportunities for students to discover that they are an integral part of society at the local, state, national, and International levels.

The program has evolved to create cultural inclusion and provide students unique and innovative learning opportunities to develop and use communication skills and technology to explore relevant studies in international music, culture, and literature.

Pearl Hall students have heard the Houston Symphony perform, performed pre-concert music in Jones Hall, performed concerts with astronauts from Max-Q at the International Space Station Educators Conference and the Texas Arts Alliance Center at Clear Lake, toured Johnson Space Center, sung for over 100 international delegates at the World Space Congress, interviewed leading international scientists and musicians, been the featured school on live web casts in the NASA electronic classroom, and sent their voices into space to international space explorers on the ISS.