

Thursday
March 17, 2005
More
information:

Concert on campus

The event:
"Celebrate Abilities," the seventh annual MSU music therapy recital, will feature performances by music therapy clients. This event is organized by MSU School of Music and MSU Community Music School, 841 Timberlane St.

The venue:
Auditorium of the Music Building

The extras:
Show begins at 5:30 p.m. Friday. Admission is free.

Source: MSU School of Music and MSU Community Music School

Healing harmony

MSU music therapy performers prepare for Friday recital

By [EMILY BINGHAM](#)

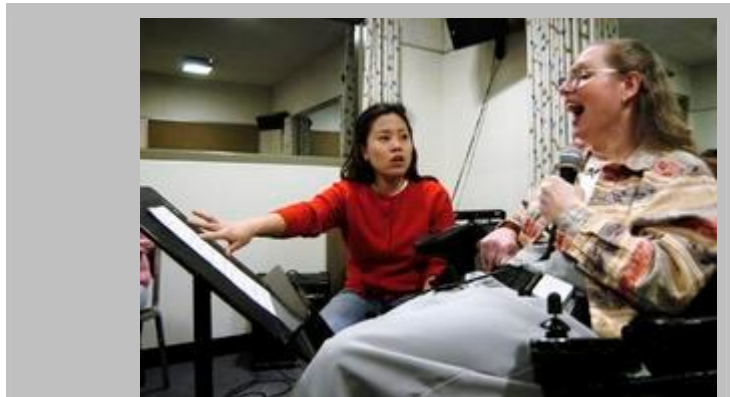
The State News

The blended sounds of flute, bassoon, piano and vocal harmonies filled the basement of the Music Practice Building on Wednesday morning as Michelle Knechtges guided a group of students through a song.

"I wrote it," she said, grinning and pointing at her name on the top of the sheet music.

The 49-year-old Mason resident held a microphone near her mouth and sang alto harmonies to the tune, titled "I Am Happy," for which she penned the lyrics, chord progressions and melodies for all instrument and vocal parts.

Wednesday's practice session was in preparation for Knechtges' upcoming performance in the "Celebrate Abilities" recital this Friday on campus. The recital, in its seventh year, will feature about 30 acts showcasing the talents of individuals and groups who receive musical therapy for social, cognitive, physical or emotional disabilities.



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Music therapy student Emily Yea Ju Rhee, left, works with Michelle Knechtges on a piece of music composed by Knechtges. The piece, entitled "I Am Happy," was composed by Knechtges singing the different parts of the song and having them transposed into notation by those working with her. Thus far, she has composed five pieces of music.

"A lot of people with special needs don't get to celebrate what they can do," said Cindy Edgerton, the primary therapist for Music Therapy Clinical Services at the MSU Community Music School, 841 Timberlane St. "This just puts it all on their abilities."

Knechtges, who sustained a traumatic brain injury after a car crash when she was a student at MSU, has been attending regular music therapy sessions in the area since 1998. With the help of music therapy professionals and students, she has written about five songs and increased her breath strength, word articulation and self-expression.

"When we're through, I am calm, I am peaceful, the music is inside of me/I am fulfilled, I am confident/I am happy," she sings in her most recent work.

Like Knechtges, some of the performers in Friday's show have been music therapy clients for several years, but others have only just started participating in music therapy.

Edgerton said it's difficult to pinpoint an exact definition for music therapy because the term covers a broad field in the world of health care. Among other practices, music therapy is used with cancer patients, people taking pain medication and individuals diagnosed with autism, various impairments, developmental disabilities or mental illnesses. MSU was the first institution in the world to offer a school of music therapy and, later, to have an on-site music therapy clinic.

"We use music to address nonmusical goals and objectives," Edgerton said.

The recital is one of the year's biggest events for those involved with the music therapy programs at the School of Music and the Community Music School. Students, faculty, staff and clients have been practicing for it by integrating performance material in regular music therapy sessions.

Jaime Merritt, a music therapy senior who is helping coordinate the show, has been helping a group of young children.

"We've been working toward it all semester," she said. "It started out just as an activity - they really liked playing the drum kit. So we've been preparing and practicing taking turns.

"It worked out really well that we were able to put the activity we were doing into the recital."

The show, free for the public, will begin at 5:30 p.m. Friday in the auditorium of the Music Building and is expected to last about two hours. Those who have been gearing up for the recital said the performances will be the culmination of a lot of hard work and effort.

"The reward is watching it," Merritt said. "You see how far they've come ... when they succeed, and they're happy with themselves."

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