Welcome to the arts at Harvard

There’s so much to see and do!

Known around the world for academic excellence, Harvard is also a vibrant center of artistic expression throughout the year. From student performances, special art exhibitions, museum collections, and lectures to programs with local children, there are thousands of ways for the community to enjoy the arts and culture at Harvard.

Harvard University is a preserver and nurturer of world art, an incubator of new talent and new artistic expression, and a magnet attracting famous artists and performers.

This Harvard Arts and Culture Connections offers a glimpse at the spectrum of activities that help to define Harvard arts and culture. We also hope it guides you to a Harvard arts connection that interests you.

Incubating emerging artists

Students are the heart of Harvard’s arts and cultural identity. Whether it is theater, dance, visual arts or music ensembles, students bring a rich array of ethnic and cultural expression that reflects today’s world.

“As Harvard has become more culturally and ethnically diverse, so has the art that can be experienced here,” says Jack Megan, director of the Office for the Arts, which is a hub for student arts and cultural programs.

“Whether you are Hispanic, Asian-American, African-American, Irish-American, Hindu, American Indian, or a part of any other group, you will find distinct elements of your cultural heritage reflected in the arts scene at Harvard today.”

In any given year, as many as 700 student performances are presented and most are open to the public. This means nearly 30 new student productions, shows or exhibits premiere weekly during peak seasons in the fall and spring. From the Harvard Radcliffe Orchestra, the Gilbert and Sullivan Players, the Lowell House Opera, and the Kuumba Singers, to hip hop, jazz, electronic music, Harvard students stage more than 700 performances every year, working artists are in residence on campus, and many more are drawn to perform at campus events, most of which are open to the public. For more information, see http://www.harvard.edu/arts.
Boston girls mold clay; shape strong lives

It is the beginning of class and it is Nia’s turn to say what clay means to her. She glances around the ceramics studio at the circle of teenage girls. They’re standing shoulder to shoulder in front of a table covered with pristine clay tablets just waiting for hands to mold them. “What I like about clay is you can always start over when you mess up, and it can be anything you want it to be,” she says.

Nia, a 15-year-old from the Boston neighborhood of Mattapan, has nicely captured the power of working with clay, which has drawn nearly a dozen undeserved teenage girls across Boston to Harvard’s Ceramics Studio in Allston this day. The girls, ages 9 to 18, are participating in the spring session of a 20-week arts therapy collaboration aimed at providing them — all of whom have been either witnesses to violence or victims of it themselves — a chance at a better future.

Class begins. Amid escalating chatter, Nia is entranced, silently rolling out clay tubes with her fingers, then coiling and smoothing the sides of her emerging pot. Teacher Kati Blair, a graduate student with the Harvard Graduate School of Education’s (HGSE) Arts in Education program, and recent HGSE student volunteer and intern, circulate among the girls. She suggests ideas for projects, demonstrate sculptural strategies, and offer various tactics to solve the problem at hand. Arts Incentives Program coordinators provide feedback and encouragement.

An unusual group of people and organizations have come together to help these girls find an artistic outlet. The Arts Incentives Program at the United South End Settlements coordinates the program and provides ongoing counseling for the girls. The Naratoue Security Corporation, which patrols MassHousing developments, helps — through the efforts of Deputy Chief Matt Brevelli — to identify girls for the program, and provides transportation. Harvard brings the magic of the arts by offering the studio space, ceramics teachers, and experts — and the clay. Last fall, Cambodian artist Yary Livan, a survivor of the Khmer Rouge’s reign of terror and the only remaining master of traditional Cambodian ceramics and kiln building, was guest instructor. Drawing from his own experiences and love of art, Livan brought a special intuition for teaching that helped break down barriers and build the girls’ confidence.

Program coordinators say the program not only gives them a space to develop pottery skills, but also helps the girls gain a sense of competence and self-worth.

Harvard University arts: So much to see and do!

blues and rock and roll ensembles, arts exhibitions and plays, the Harvard student arts world is as energetic as Greenwood Village or Paris’ Left Bank.

The whole student arts scene is unveiled during a single weekend in early May. This moveable feast called FOG/Harvard is free and open to the public; it draws thousands of nearby residents and their families to experience the depth and breadth of Harvard student talent.

Every corner of campus becomes a stage for more than 200 acts, including a Saturday performance fair, plays, and outdoor activities like pot-making and face painting.

“Working with clay not only feels good and is fun to do, but it gives these girls a sense of pride in their own work,” says Blair, who has been working with girls in the Arts Incentives Program since last fall. “Turning a lump of mud into a project is something physical; they can see what they’ve done.”

Lisa Flegel, founder and director of the Arts Incentives Program, is convinced that art contributes to mental health and social change. “We are working together to chase down the problems until they are solved.”

Class is almost over. Jessie, a resident of the Academy Projects in South Roxbury, picks up her pot, presses it against her cheek and breathes in the smell of the clay. “I like the patience and the creativity,” she says. “You get to do new things that you’ve never done before … It’s like giving it all the love you never had.”

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Many famous artists began their careers at Harvard, such as cellist Yo Yo Ma, singers Pete Seeger and Bonnie Raitt, filmmaker Mira Nair, and playwright Christopher Durang, and actors Tommy Lee Jones and Jack Lemmon. Today, students like Stefan Jackwai, concert violinist, are the ones to watch.

I’m convinced that we are dealing with people here who will be heard from five, 10 to 15 years out,” says Megan. “Harvard is a place to come hear some of these people talk about their work for five years.

And as tomorrow’s artists are formed on campus, today’s leading artists are drawn to the academic intensity of Harvard’s learning and teaching environment. Faculty, artists in residence and visiting experts regularly showcase their work across campus.

There is a steady stream of public performances at Sanders Theatre and other venues (tickets available at Harvard’s Box Office in Holyoke Center), free exhibitions in places such as the Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts, in the American Repertory Theatre (A.R.T.), Harvard’s professional theater in residence.

The Learning from Performers program of the Office for the Arts has linked professional artists such as violist Itzhak Perlman and singer Bobbie McFerrin with students and the broader community for more than 30 years. These conversations and workshops with visiting artists occur year-round and are free and open to the public.

In addition to their exhibitions, teaching, and research, the Harvard University Art Museums offer concerts, special events, and family programs that reflect the diversity of their collections and of the community. This performance of Kathak dancing at the Sackler Museum is just one of many special events and activities that draw children and families to the museums year-round. All Harvard’s museums are open to the public. For more information, visit www.harvard.edu/museums. The Fogg Art Museum is home to Rembrandts, Picassos, and Van Goghss. Some of the world’s finest ancient Chinese jades are on view at the Arthur M. Sackler Museum. The Busch-Reisinger has modern and ancient Germanic art. The art museums also host a range of special events for children and families, such as drawing workshops and storytelling.

It’s essential to our mission that we contribute to the cultural vitality of the Cambridge and Boston communities where we live,” said Thomas W. Lente, Elizabeth and John Morse Cabot Director of the Harvard University Art Museums. “Our study centers, which are open to the public, offer a unique opportunity for the community to study and interact with works of art in a very personal way and in an intimate setting. Our collections are renowned for their range and depth, but they have also been developed with emphasis on their value for teaching and research for everyone.”

Harvard’s other museums also house wondrous treasures. The Harvard Museum of Natural History has the Glass Flowers and the 120-million-year-old relics of ancient creatures. The Peabody Museum has items from the Lewis and Clark Expedition. And the Semitic Museum presents artifacts from the Near East.

Each of Harvard’s six museums is open to the public and regularly offers classes and activities for families and children in Cambridge and Boston public schools.

Elsewhere on campus, activities abound, such as the Harvard Ceramics Studio at 219 Western Ave. in Allston, which offers classes and sponsors community outreach programs, plus two shows and sales each year.

Harvard arts and culture envelops Harvard students, famous artists, families, and children in a robust creative environment.

We hope you enjoy the show!
In step with CityStep


Now in its 34th year, the Harvard Summer Pops Band, Harvard’s community band led by Tom Everett, continues to challenge, inspire, and entertain the staff, students, and members of the greater community who participate in the weekly summer practices at Lowell Hall, and then the general public who enjoy two annual August performances in Harvard Yard and the Hatch Shell.

The band’s 100 or so members often range in age from 12-year-olds to retirees. Every year there are additions and subtractions, but there are always plenty of band veterans who make newcomers feel welcome and act as mentors. “For a lot of people it becomes a home,” says Everett, director of the Harvard University Band and associate of the Music Department. “They have an identity here. They have a support system.”

Everett founded the Harvard Summer Pops Band in the summer of 1972 to fill what he says was a void in the summer music scene for non-professional musicians. The band offered an opportunity to play for those who didn’t normally have a chance to join ensembles. And Everett also saw the program as a way to engage the community.

Susan Foster, a local resident, joined the band seven years ago when she was in high school. She played the flute in her school’s band and orchestra and was looking for a place to make music during the summer. Now the Summer Pops Band is one of the rare times during the year that she gets to play, especially with other musicians. “I am always impressed because it is a community band, a summer thing, and people take it so seriously. They work hard,” Foster says. “And Tom [Everett] really takes the time to teach us music. We don’t just play, we learn ... you get a mixture of people who are really serious about music and those who are having fun and it’s a nice combination.”

Everett adds, “It’s extremely rewarding to have all these people come together, most of them not knowing each other and who have not shared a similar experience, most of them playing music that they are not familiar with beforehand, and have the music come together.”

Many band members have come to Everett at the last performance to say, “I never thought I’d play at the Hatch Shell.” For Foster, that performance is the best part. “It’s always really fun to think that you’re playing on the stage where the [Boston] Pops play.”

Harvard Summer Pops Band in tune with community