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Arts

Crybaby Concerts

Fontana presents musical performances with kids in mind

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Performances for Crybaby Concerts vary in venue and music genre.



When most people think of classical concerts, they envision audiences dressed in their Sunday best, listening intently and quietly as musicians perform.

At Kalamazoo's Crybaby Concerts, though, members of the audience might cry, dance or talk, and that's OK. It's expected even.

"The performers know what they're getting into," says David Baldwin, executive and artistic director of Fontana Chamber Arts, which hosts the monthly concerts at venues throughout the area.

The free 45-minute concerts are held at 11 a.m. on one Saturday each month and are targeted specifically at young children. Baldwin says the young audience members range from 2 months to 6 years old — and their parents attend too, of course. Children are welcome to listen, sleep or dance during the concerts, and snacks are provided afterward.

Crybaby Concerts started in 2012 at the Epic Center and now move throughout the Kalamazoo area. Recent concerts have been held at the Kalamazoo Public Library and Bronson Methodist Hospital. Baldwin says about 200 people attend every performance.

"It gives kids exposure to live music at an early age, and parents get to hear it too," he says.

Although Fontana Chamber Arts is known for presenting classical music, Crybaby Concerts have also featured bluegrass, jazz and folk music and a capella singers.

The Ann Arbor-based duo Gemini has performed at Crybaby Concerts several times, most recently in April. Gemini's Lazlo Slomovits says he and his brother Sandor have been playing for children and families for 35 years.

"Kids are lively and energetic," Slomovits says. "It makes the whole thing a lot of fun. There's hand motions, movement — they're hardly

ever just sitting there.”

The Slomovits brothers play guitars and pipes and sing songs with topics that run the gamut from pizza to a Hungarian folk tale. During one of their songs a toy figurine dances on a board.

“You combine audience participation and something kids can relate to,” he says.

Carolyn Koebel, a member of the Grand Rapids band An Dro and a Crybaby Concert performer, says the concerts appeal to the “wiggly” nature of kids and help children make the connection between music and musicians.

“We invite kids to come up and touch the instruments, to try and make a sound,” Koebel says. “Most music they’re hearing is in context of a television screen. We want to make the association that a person is making those sounds: ‘If that person can do it, maybe I can too.’”

Baldwin says Crybaby Concerts performers include both regional artists and groups that might be playing at Western Michigan University on the same weekend. Those artists who don’t usually perform for children adjust to their audience, he says. Recently a group of musicians performed at a sit-down dinner for adults on a Friday night and played a Crybaby Concert across from the Bronson maternity ward the next morning.

Performers, especially those who are used to playing for children, say they try to strike a balance between what’s enjoyable for adults to listen to and what will keep kids’ attention. That effort is helpful, given the active nature of children. And even though the children at Crybaby Concerts are young, performers say few wander on stage when they aren’t invited.

“We rely on parents to keep an eye on their kids, but they (the kids) usually just want to get a better look,” Slomovits says.

Tags:

- Crybaby Concerts
- David Baldwin
- Fontana Chamber Arts
- children-friendly concerts
- Gemini
- Lazlo Slomovits
- Sandor Slomovits
- Carolyn Koebel
- An Dro

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