

# “Charlotte needs this; Charlotte needs artists, and it needs a place where little artists can grow.”

— Lindsey Horne, a piano teacher at CSA

The Community School of the Arts offers a range of visual arts and music classes, with both group and private lessons available for young children to young adults. In addition to traditional classes, the School sponsors camps and an extensive community outreach program, which includes violin instruction at three Charlotte-Mecklenburg elementary schools, after-school classes, and other enrichment endeavors throughout the area.

While CSA has been growing for the past 40 years, it is still largely considered a fairly well-kept secret. This past summer, the School was featured on NBC’s *TODAY*, when Al Roker donated instruments, art supplies, and other materials to CSA for classes and outreach efforts. The publicity, plus a handful of new programs, is helping to raise the profile of this prodigious nonprofit arts school.

“Part of our mission is to transform lives through arts education,” says CSA executive director Andrea Stevenson. “So we

CSA’s Andrea Stevenson believes students need programming that touches their heart strings.



have a very personal goal, which is to build the confidence of all the individual students who come to us, expand their love of the arts, allow them to discover their creativity, and encourage their self-expression — to help them become well-rounded adults.”

## The Power Of Art

According to Stevenson, CSA’s place in the community goes beyond its mission to inspire the individual. The School, she insists, is also creating the next generation of arts patrons, noting that 95 percent of CSA students are under the age of 18.

“We are purely an arts education organization; that’s all we do,” she says. “And we are raising everyone else’s future audiences. We feel that if we can reach as many students as possible, and give them that hands-on introduction to the arts, they’ll grow up to understand and appreciate the symphony, the opera, and the art museum, and be better patrons of the Charlotte arts community for years to come.”

One of those future patrons is Emily Tran, a 16-year-old rising senior at Myers Park High School. Tran plays the piano and violin, and has been taking lessons for the past five years at CSA, where she has won merit scholarships two years in a row, based solely on her musical proficiency. “Everyone’s so friendly here and it’s kind of like a home; it’s welcoming,” she says. “I love my teacher.”

Like most high school seniors, Tran has been considering her options after graduation and beyond. She says she’s not sure if music will be her major or a minor concentration in college. But, her plans *will* involve her passion. “I hope to play forever,” she says with a laugh.

“Charlotte needs this,” says Lindsey Horne, a piano teacher at CSA. “Charlotte needs artists, and it needs a place where little artists can grow.”

## Finding A Place

“Little artists” have increasingly fewer places to grow, as budget cuts continue to >

diminish arts programs in schools. CSA is all too aware of this fact.

“Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools has mostly taken the arts and instrument education out of elementary school completely,” Stevenson says. She points out that CMS is not unique and that across the country, arts programs are among the first things to go when there are budget constraints.

Stevenson grew up in Texas, where she was an active percussionist throughout high school. She is saddened to see the programs that were so meaningful to her being slashed from schools. “Students have to have something they love at school,” she says. “They need something there that motivates them; that keeps them committed and engaged in school and in learning. We’ve done this very illogical thing where we’ve cut back things that make students want to get up and go to school in the morning.”

Horne, who attended Northwest School of the Arts in Charlotte, and echoes Stevenson’s sadness about the state of music education in so many of our schools, says, “It’s heartbreaking, because that was my favorite part of my public school education. I think it’s so important, for various reasons, that children are exposed to music. It’s something that they can be passionate about and responsible for.”

## A Joyful Noise

The Community School of the Arts has an Orchestra in Schools program at First Ward, University Park, and Dilworth Elementary schools. Stevenson explains that 20 students from each school get to take group violin classes through CSA twice a week before the regular school day begins. “We give them

each a free loaner violin for the whole year, so they all have their own violins,” she says.

“At a time when instrumental music is being removed from schools and other educational programs, CSA plays a special role in keeping music alive for children in our community,” says Laurel Talley, Suzuki violin coordinator at CSA.

“For a lot of students, we are the only place they can take lessons, especially students who want to take *affordable* lessons close to home,” Stevenson adds.

Stevenson explains that the core values of CSA are excellence, accessibility, diversity, a nurturing environment, joy, and sustainability. She clarifies that, yes, joy is a core value and



CSA works to give children exposure to both the ability and the joy of participating in the arts.

one for which she argued passionately. “If we ever become just transactional; if we ever become the kind of organization where we say, ‘You pay us, we’ll get you some lessons,’ we’ve missed it completely,” she says. “If it’s not joyful, then we’re not doing what we’re supposed to be doing.”

And, despite budget cuts and reduced arts funding in the public schools, Stevenson asserts that there is still

plenty about which to be joyful. “To see a student stand up on stage with confidence and play a saxophone solo at a jazz concert is a joy,” she says. “It is a privilege just to have been there for that.”

Stevenson remembers attending the Orchestra in Schools concert last spring and seeing and hearing 60 elementary school students play their violins. “Afterward,” she recalls, “I said to one young lady, ‘Way to go! You sounded great!’ And she looked at me and said, ‘Yes, I did.’ *That makes my whole year*, I thought to myself. *That’s all I wanted — for you to be able to say, ‘Yes, I did.’*” **TCW**

## To Learn More

The Community School of the Arts is located in Spirit Square at 345 N. College St., and maintains a number of satellite studios throughout the Charlotte area. Visit [csarts.org](http://csarts.org), or call 704/377-4187 for locations and additional information.