

Blues Legend Toby Walker Inspires Students at Stimson Middle School

Students at Stimson Middle School were treated to musical workshops by legendary blues guitarist Toby Walker, courtesy of the South Huntington PTA Cultural Arts Program. A recipient of the prestigious Memphis International Blues Challenge Award, Walker is an extraordinarily gifted finger-style guitarist, singer, songwriter, and storyteller whose music draws from traditional and contemporary blues, roots music, western swing, and ragtime.

"One of the messages I want to deliver here at Stimson is that one person can come up in front of an audience with one instrument, or two in the case of the number I did, adding my harmonica, and be entertaining," said Mr. Walker. "These days kids hear their music on iTunes and see bands on television, and they're not getting that experience--that one person can be entertaining."

In the course of his performances, Walker painted vivid pictures of his travels to Mississippi, Arkansas, Virginia, and North Carolina, and he told students how he learned the basics of his art at the feet of old-time blues musicians. "Understanding what blues is all about is very important," said Walker. "Blues is all about story telling, which is another way of telling history. 'Hard Times Here and Everywhere I Go,' a story about Blues guitarist Jack Owens, is just that type of song. The kids, seeing and knowing the story, are riveted when it's reintroduced as part of the song. It touches them more; it's something they can relate to."

Mr. Walker began his history of blues by talking about what people did when they were too poor to afford an instrument and had to improvise by making their own. "Early single-string instruments, particularly in the deep South, were created by stretching a piece of wire down the side of the house, and by sliding a piece of steel tubing along the wire, they were able to get more than one note."

Mr. Walker continued to describe the progression of blues as it traveled north to the big cities of New York and Chicago. He ended with a more contemporary song utilizing an electric guitar. "My goal is for the kids to have a really good time and experience something they may never have been exposed to before," said Mr. Walker about his time with the students. He encouraged Stimson students to follow their dreams and bring passion to everything they do.



Students got an up close look at an instrument build in 1926 by the National Steel Guitar Company.



Blues guitarist Toby Walker presented music work shops for two days and captured the heart of Stimson's students.

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