SHELTON STATE FEATURES “BACH TO ROCK” ENSEMBLE FOR TERRIFIC TUESDAY

The Shelton State Community College “Bach to Rock” ensemble will perform as part of the Terrific Tuesday Fine Arts Spring Event schedule, Tuesday, April 27, at 1:15 p.m., in the Alabama Power Recital Hall on the College’s Martin Campus at 9500 Old Greensboro Road.

Each year, “Bach to Rock” fulfills its mission to take the unique educational program to area schools, usually performing before nearly 4,000 young children. However, the ensemble is not a show choir. Its purpose is to introduce elementary school students to various styles of music not normally part of their experience and to do so with energetic and attractive college students who, perhaps, have a better chance than parents and teachers of convincing youngsters that knowing good music is a “cool thing” to do. The ensemble a break from its mission of taking the unique educational program to area schools. “’Bach to Rock’ demonstrates a variety of musical styles along with an educational commentary that exposes its audience to wonderful and captivating music from diverse periods and cultures,” says Glinda Blackshear, director of the innovative program.

Although “Bach to Rock” is made up of students from the College, it functions in collaboration and partnership with the community Arts Council that schedules its performances in local elementary schools as a part of the Arts Council efforts to provide and enhance art education.

In its 20 years, the unique and groundbreaking program has also grown in popularity among Shelton State students. Comprised of a group of 14 along with a director, accompanist and sound technician, this year the group is larger than past years because more than two dozen turned out to audition, more than ever before. This ensemble and its innovative activities and approach to music education was created by a member of the College music faculty and is distinctive, the only one of its kind.

A typical “Bach to Rock” program includes classical, sacred, and American popular music and contains examples ranging from Old English, German, French, and Italian arts songs opera, chants and hymns, spirituals, and contemporary gospel. Selections from American popular music include barbershop, big band jazz, classic rock, folk songs, country, Bluegrass, and musical theatre. The group performs with live accompaniment, and the director defines musical terms for the young audience and provides an historical perspective on what they are hearing.

The program is also a College class for which students receive credit; however, they must audition for the privilege of membership. The audition process, itself, is an innovation. Under the supervision of Blackshear, former members of “Bach to Rock” choose those who may join the
current version, based on musical talent, performing ability, and having the “personality” skills for group cohesion and for communication with young children.

Continuous review and evaluation facilitates the program’s improvement. Videos are made of each performance and the “film is graded” to determine “what works”—how does the audience respond, which numbers seem too slow or too long, etc. The Arts Council reports that each year “Bach to Rock” is its most requested educational program.

Although elementary school children are the primary audience for “Bach to Rock,” the group performs at numerous other venues throughout the year, including high schools, senior citizens groups, churches, and civic clubs. The group is in its second decade of performances and providing compelling music education and has never depended upon grant funds. It clearly is an initiative that can be adapted and adopted by other colleges and be sustained within an institution’s normal operating budget.

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