



Zoellner artist-in-residence Bakithi Kumalo mentored 18 young musicians in Lehigh's Music Master Mentor Program.

Zoellner Art Center's Artist-in-Residence Bakithi Kumalo Gets the Show to Go On

Participants in the inaugural Music Master Mentor Program open for the famed bassist in SteelStacks performance.

More than a year after the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted the inaugural Music Master Mentor Program with the Zoellner Arts Center at Lehigh University, seven student participants were able to open for famed bassist Bakithi Kumalo on Sept. 12 at Levitt Pavilion SteelStacks.

Kumalo, who was the artist-in-residence at [Zoellner Arts Center](#) at Lehigh University in early 2020, had been in the midst of mentoring the young musicians and 11 others from Lehigh Valley schools when the pandemic forced the Music Master Mentor Program online and led to the cancellation of the culminating concert at Baker Hall. The students got to join Kumalo 17 months later on stage as they opened for the [Graceland Experience](#).

"Both Lenore Pitsolis, Zoellner Arts Center's education and community engagement coordinator, and I couldn't have been more pleased to witness these seven young artists give it their all, bringing a smile to one another's faces as they shared the stage and supported one another in their first public performance," said Tahya, director of the Music Master Mentor Program.

“It was heart-warming to witness their growth as musicians as well the friendships formed among these young people from schools throughout the Lehigh Valley who previously had been unacquainted, and the crowd gathered at Levitt Pavillion offered a resounding round of applause and standing ovation at the conclusion of the set presented by these young musicians showcasing their talent and enthusiasm.”

Kumalo, renowned for his bass playing on artist Paul Simon’s 1986 *Graceland* album and his subsequent touring with Simon, and keyboardist and composer Will Smith, had begun working with the middle- and high-school students selected for the program in February 2020—teaching them technique, rehearsal and performance skills, composition and songwriting. Also, Dan Andree, a Lehigh Valley drum instructor and music education consultant, had lent his expertise.



Seven students who participated in the Music Master Mentor Program at the Zoellner Arts Center were able to open for famed bassist Bakithi Kumalo on Sept. 12 at Levitt Pavilion SteelStacks.

The young musicians had participated in four of the six three-hour Saturday sessions when the statewide shutdown occurred.

Prior to the SteelStacks performance, the young musicians in the inaugural program who were available for the concert reconvened for an in-person rehearsal at Zoellner Arts Center, Tahya said. Pieces had to be reconfigured, as some of the young musicians who had been part of the program had scheduling conflicts or had graduated from high school and were away at college. Those who performed included two drummers, a flutist, vocalist, saxophonist, keyboard player and a bassist.

Three songs from the original set list—a mashup of *7 Nation Army* and *Revenge, Georgia* and *What’d I Say*—were chosen for the SteelStacks performance. The music was rearranged according to the new configuration of musicians. For example, *Georgia* was originally slated to feature a female vocalist; the music was rearranged to accommodate a flutist to take the lead playing melody, Tahya said. Another arrangement, the mashup, which originally featured all the participants was recomposed by one of the program’s young talents.

“Zoellner Arts Center considers this an important program, and we look forward to continuing to have an impact in our community bringing together diverse students from across the Valley,” said Zoellner’s Executive Director Mark Wilson. “Arts experiences, arts creation and arts learning are an integral part of

what we do.”

For more information, visit [Zoellner Arts Center Music Master Mentor Program](#)

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