

SIUE East St. Louis Center For Performing Arts Closes Its Summer Session To Thunderous Applause

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EDWARDSVILLE - In tribute to such legends as Katherine Dunham and Miles Davis, and in honor of such celebrities as Darius Miles and Eugene B. Redmond, the East St. Louis Senior High School auditorium stage became the platform on which “The City of Champions” was celebrated and revered through song, dance and musical instrumentation.

The Southern Illinois University Edwardsville East St. Louis Center (ESLC) for the Performing Arts brought its summer session to a close Friday, July 30 with a performance given by students, ages 6-17.

Those thanking the audience and bragging on the students included SIUE Chancellor Randy Pembroke, SIUE ESLC Executive Director Tim Staples, EdD, and ESLC for the Performing Arts Director Homer Simmons.

“This is an exciting night. We are celebrating champions right here in this great city,” said Simmons. “We celebrate their careers in sports, medicine, education, social services, entertainment and the list goes on and on. Some of our youth performing tonight, you never know, could end up having their names listed among some of East St. Louis’ champions.”



“We are pleased and proud to bring to everyone another fantastic performance, directed by our amazing and hard-working staff and performed by our wonderful and talented students,” said Staples. “We are grateful for the collaboration with East St. Louis School District #189, the East St. Louis Senior High School and East St. Louis Senior High School Principal Valencia Martin. We are also happy to have joining us tonight, SIUE Chancellor Randy Pembroke and College of Arts and Sciences Dean Kevin Leonard.”

“There are many traditions at SIUE, but I think the SIUE East St. Louis Center for the Performing Arts summer programming is one of the best traditions of this University,” Pembroke said to roaring applause. “There is so much talent that comes on the stage each summer. ... Also, I’m married to one of the teachers, Mary Jo Pembroke. Let’s give a round of applause to all the teachers, Homer Simmons and Jack Williams for all they do. Thank you, to all of you for sharing your children with us this summer. The study of the arts, whether it’s music or dance, helps with discipline, focus and creativity, and that serves people throughout their lives.”



The show's numbers consisted of students performing beginning piano, guitar, violin, drums, bass guitar, West African drumming, keyboards, hip-hop, ballet, Dunham Technique, West African, jazz and chorus.

Some highlights from the evening included:

- "E String Concerto," music accompanied and arranged by Anna Cecelia Villegas and performed by William Hill, Donteaus Lee and Marshall Thornton
- "Ode to Joy," music written by Ludwig Van Beethoven and performed by William Hill and Donteaus Lee
- "We are the Champions," music written by Freddie Mercury and performed by Gabby Mitchell and Dr. Mary Jo Pembroke
- "Pretty Hurts" dance number, choreographed by Jay'Kayla Winford
- "Reflection" (from *Mulan*), music written by Matthew Wilder and David Zippel and performed by age 13-17 chimes choir and assisted by SIUE Chancellor Randy Pembroke and Ana Cecelia Villegas
- "Stronger Together," dance number choreographed by Ta'Shayla Montgomery
- "Work it Out" band selection, music arranged by Esau Toombs



Students performing included (ages 6-8): Kristen Edwards, Aubree Jackson, Joseph King Jr., Karsyn Lee, Harper Mitchell, Amilya Morning, William Ratliff, Ella Richmond and Mackenzie Willis; (ages 9-12): Imani Barnes, Lauren Bell, Jalyann Clayton, Pillar Coates, Karenza Cox, Joslyn Howell, Aun'ya Lee, Donteaus Lee Jr., Madisyn Lee, Semaj Lee, Gavin Mitchell, Mark Ratliff, Marshall Thornton and Layla Wilson; and (ages 13-17): TyAnna Andrews, Nia Barnes, Olivia Bell, Kayona Brown, Jason Coates, Khylon Edwards, Jamaya Johnson, Jo'Ell King, Gabrielle Mitchell, Hailey Tucker and Willis Wright Jr.

Performing arts instructors included: Ta'Shayla Montgomery, ballet/contemporary/jazz dance; McKinley Smith, hip-hop dance; Jay'Kayla Winford, lyrical jazz dance; Dr. Mary Jo Pembroke, piano/chimes; Ana Cecilia Villegas, violin; Phil Ring, guitar, Esau Toombs, band, Gerald Babatunde Williams, West African drumming; and Andra Lang Jr., art instructor/artistic scene design.

The SIUE East St. Louis Center for the Performing Arts program continues with its free After-School Program from 4-7 p.m. Monday-Thursday, Tuesday, Sept.7-Thursday, May 12, 2022. For more information and details on fall registration, contact Simmons at hosimmo@siue.edu.

The [SIUE East St. Louis Center for the Performing Arts](#) has a long, rich history. The legendary dancer, anthropologist, and social activist Katherine Dunham founded the Center for Performing Arts at the SIUE East St. Louis Center in 1964. At its peak in the 1990s, the East St. Louis Center for the Performing Arts provided year-round instruction to more than 1,000 youth and became a training ground for professional artists of all disciplines. For decades, the East St. Louis Center for the Performing Arts provided performing arts classes to students and community members to develop local talent and to cultivate a love of the arts. Classes often culminated in musical and theatrical productions.

Photos:

Students from the SIUE East St. Louis Center for the Performing Arts showcased their talents during the end of summer session performance.