

Talent Sparkles During The SIUE East St. Louis Center For The Performing Arts Holiday Celebration

by Megan Wieser

December 25 2021 7:15 AM



EAST ST. LOUIS - With the melodies of the season like “Deck the Halls,” “This Christmas” and “Sleigh Bells,” Southern Illinois University Edwardsville Center for the Performing Arts students gave a festive and multi-talented performance during their Holiday Celebration on Thursday, Dec. 16 in the Multipurpose Room in Building D at the East St. Louis Higher Education Campus.

Performances included musical numbers on the piano, chimes and drums, and dance numbers that were comprised of jazz, ballet, hip-hop and Dunham Technique. Audiences were also treated to a “Jingle Bells” piano duet by SIUE Chancellor Randy Pembrook and his wife, Mary Jo Pembrook, PhD, piano and chimes instructor. The audience gave a rousing standing ovation at the conclusion of the concert when Katherine Dunham Technique movements were performed to “A Christmas Dream,” choreographed by Performing Arts dance instructor Jay’Kayla Winford.

The night ended with more applause for Pembrook who received an award to celebrate his [retirement](#) and commemorate his years of service to the Performing Arts program at the SIUE East St. Louis Center (ESLC).

“Our students, ages 7-17, delighted the audience with a marvelous show that was unmatched by any other,” said Performing Arts Program Director Homer Simmons. “Our students are always excited to perform before an audience. Their commitment is a testament to their passion and to the future of the Performing Arts program.”



“Performances in the arts and arts education are two important foundations to a vibrant community,” said Pembrook. “Our area has a rich history, including Scott Joplin and Miles Davis. Arts education allows students to reach their potential as artists. Without arts education, society misses out on the beauty that budding artists can offer. In addition, it stirs creative thinking, develops skills relating to working within ensembles and allows for aesthetic satisfaction that is a key element in life.”

The Performing Arts program is also vital to SIUE’s purpose, according to the chancellor.

“It helps us fulfill our mission of community service and community education,” explained Pembroke. “We have an institutional responsibility and commitment to provide quality instruction to those in the Metro East and beyond. As a music educator by training, with three degrees from SIUE, I feel a particular commitment (as does Mary Jo) to ensure that all who seek to learn more about the arts (music, dance, visual art and theatre) have a place to accomplish that, particularly young people.”



“We are grateful and offer our sincerest thanks to Chancellor Pembroke for his constant support of our program and to the arts,” said Simmons. “He understands the importance that the arts play in children’s development and learning.”

Holiday concert performers included: Imani Barnes, Nia Barnes, Lauren Bell, Olivia Bell, Kaylana Brown, Greyson Coates, Meadow Coates, Karenza Cox, Kacien Fields, Donteaus (D.J.) Lee, Aunya (Tink) Lee, Danae Tyus, Josiah Tyus, Gabby Mitchell and Khalifa Sylla.

Performing Arts staff and teachers include: Jack Williams, coordinator; Gerald Babatunde Williams, African drum and dance choreographer; Winford, Dunham Technique, hip-hop and modern dance choreographer; and Mary Jo Pembroke.

Performing Arts will continue its After School program with a spring session beginning Monday, Jan. 10, 2022. For more information and to register, visit [East St. Louis Center for the Performing Arts](#).

[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.

With a focus on empowering people and strengthening communities, the [SIUE East St. Louis Center](#) is dedicated to improving the lives of families and individuals - from pre-school through adult - in the Metro East. Head Start/Early Head Start and a charter high school are among the programs that offer the community renewed hope and an opportunity to reach educational, career and life goals. The Center also assigns first priority to encouraging, supporting and improving the educational success of the residents of East St. Louis and surrounding urban communities. The Center provides comprehensive programs, services and training in the areas of education, health, social services and the arts.