

# SUNDAY

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# This is no ivory tower

Some artists are 'expressing themselves' in the classroom

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An Entertainment & TV Magazine

## COVER STORY

# This is how you keep the beat

Artists turn  
classrooms into  
studios of fun

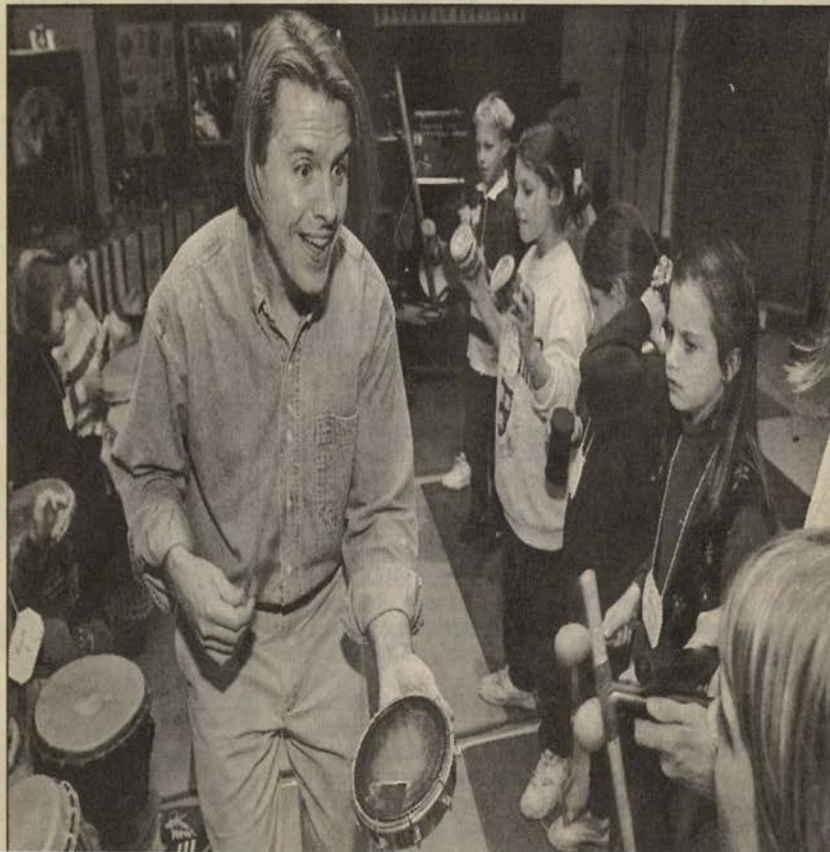
By CHRISTINE HAMM  
For the Monitor

**W**hen the 554 students at Bow Elementary School raise their index and middle fingers, they're delivering a message . . . and they can do it in 39 different languages.

Whether it is run-ya-ra-ro, le-ma-na or pax, that message is peace, a lesson the kindergarten through fourth-graders learned last week from Randy Armstrong, guitarist and co-founder of Doah World Music Ensemble and Unu Mondo.

Armstrong spent the week in the gold and orange, ranch-style school off Logging Hill Road as an artist-in-residence, a program co-funded by the school's PTO and the Arts in Education Program of the N.H. State Council on the Arts.

"Discussion with staff has generated



world community," school counselor Glenn Berger said in his application for the grant. "We believe Mr. Armstrong is capable of sharing with our students a musical journey of world proportions."

In anticipation of that ambitious prospect, students at the school dressed the multi-purpose room with maps, flags, continent cutouts, outer space photographs of earth and pictorial borders of multi-national children hand in hand.

When Armstrong arrived with his collection of several dozen instruments from around the globe, the stage was set for an exploration of world cultures through the common element of music.

As Armstrong began one of the two-dozen sessions he shared with kids, parents and staff throughout the week, he asked for a show of hands from those in the room who liked music. No one held back. Every hand was raised.

"I look at the world as one country," Armstrong said. "We have different national backgrounds, but we share one thing in common - the earth - and we all enjoy music."

Through more than 20 years of performing that has taken him across several continents, the 42-year-old Armstrong has collected ample evidence to believe in that statement. In classrooms from Alaska to India to Bow, New Hampshire, Armstrong has found similar responses to the message and music he shares.

Armstrong, who lives in Dover, began his week-long residency at Bow with an introduction to his instruments: the xylophone he called a West African balofon and that looks like the bridge over the river Kwai, the mesh- and seed-covered shekere gourds from Ghana

Professional musician Randy Armstrong inspires kids at Bow Elementary School with his creative energy.

KEN WILLIAMS / Monitor staff

**"Music is a lot like the wind. It can touch your cheek softly or be as powerful as Hurricane Bob."**

— Randy Armstrong

and Nigeria, the Lakota Sioux courting flute embellished with a three-dimensional eagle head, the Brazilian berimbau which resembles a horned bow and arrow, the handcarved mahogany djembe drums from Gambia . . . All of these united with his own guitar and new-age electronic synthesizer in an other-worldly panoply of sounds.

As he told the story of a young Zimbabwe boy and girl who wandered into the forest surrounding their tribal home, he used the instruments to imitate the sounds of thunder, birds, snakes and lions. Soon, the students were joining him, hooting like crows and bellowing like monkeys, all caught up in the possibilities of sound.

"Music is a lot like the wind," Armstrong said. "It can touch your cheek softly or be as powerful as Hurricane Bob. You can feel it but you can't touch it. That's really the amazing power of music."

The same could be said of the power of the artist-in-residence program. In an

evaluation conducted in 1992 by Dr. Bernadette Colley for the N.H. State Council on the Arts, one teacher wrote: "We open doors for children and they can enter one of those doors. . . . It broadens the horizons of children. . . . I think there is a part of the human spirit that really needs the enrichment that the arts appeal to, the aesthetic part of you."

The approximately 60 writers, actors, musicians, mimes, dancers, puppeteers, storytellers, craftsmen, architects, and folk, media and visual artists included on the Arts Council roster have been judged for their artistic excellence as well as their classroom abilities.

Schools either pay the entire cost of the residency program or raise part of it and apply for a matching grant from the Arts Council. Varying in length from three to 60 days, residencies are tailored to the needs of the site and coordinated with the classroom teachers.

Usually, they include all-school assemblies and workshops as well as an opportunity for the artist to work more intensely with a smaller group of children. Kids are selected for the smaller groups based on interest, ability, or - as in Bow's case - through a lottery.

"Sometimes you'll see energetic teachers write in three-year arts plans to tie in with a specific curriculum," said Catherine O'Brien, a coordinator with the Arts Council.

That's what Hopkinton's Harold Martin and Maple Street schools did to

enhance their local history curriculum. Two years ago, Newport weaver Patryc Wiggins worked with the schools to weave stories of the town into tapestries displayed at the town's Antiquarian Society museum. Last year, the schools hosted oral historian and folklorist Cynthia Cohen. On Tuesday at 6:30 p.m., musicians David Colburn and Deborah Stuart will kick off the third year of the project with a free community concert at Harold Martin School.

In Peterborough, an artist-in-residence program evolved into a town-wide children's art festival, O'Brien said. Donations from the business community helped finance two stage productions and visits from a storyteller and a marionette theater during the day-long event. A downtown theater showed a film the students had made with film animator June Casey, and storefronts featured displays of children's artwork. A barbecue, balloons, face painting, a parade and a creative costume contest were also part of the celebration.

"The artist-in-residence is not designed to replace a school's art

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### On the cover

Randy Armstrong with Bow Elementary School kids. Photo by Ken Williams.