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ASCAP presents Barry Eastmond and Gordon Chambers at MVHS Assembly

By Deena Parham

The dream of most aspiring singers, songwriters, and musicians is to meet someone who might give them their “big break.” Performing arts students from Mount Vernon High School recently had that rare opportunity.

The American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers (ASCAP), brought two of its most influential artists to visit the school. The special program was part of the Triple Hill Music Festival, a project of the Westchester Arts Council.

Students met prolific songwriter-producer, Barry Eastmond, who has to his credit over 60 Gold, Platinum, and Multi-platinum albums by a host of legendary singers, including Whitney Houston, Al Jarreau, Barry White and George Benson. He is the composer for many hits, including the Grammy winning “I Apologize” by Anita Baker.

Gordon Chambers, an eight-time ASCAP Pop-Award winner, joined Eastmond. Chambers is a singer-songwriter, who just released his sophomore album, “Love Stories.” Chambers is signed with Hitco Music, where he has published songs for more than 60 artists, including Queen Latifah, Patti LaBelle, the Isley Brothers, and Marc Anthony.

Donna Jackson, Triple Hill’s Creative Director, had the privilege of introducing both of these extraordinarily gifted and talented ASCAP artists in an assembly at MVHS. Eastmond, whose love of music began at the tender age of four, said, “The piano teacher felt I had an aptitude for playing classical piano. I ended up going to the Julliard School of Music when I was six years old.”

When Eastmond was 23, he wrote and produced his first big hit song called, “You are My Lady” for singer Freddie Jackson. In a true testament to the 22-year-old song’s longevity, the entire audience sang the song without missing the lyrics.

Chambers also broke into the music industry at the age of 23, while working as an entertainment editor at *Essence* magazine. He said, “I was a huge Anita Baker fan and a good imitator of voices.” His first hit for Baker was, “I Apologize” in 1994. Chambers noted, “That song changed my life because it was my first Grammy Award winning song.”

Prior to the ASCAP performance, Guitar Center Larchmont and Abelon Software donated a copy of the Live 6 Recording Software to MVHS. Dominic DiMartini and Damon Jackson of the Guitar Center, provided training to learn how to put together various elements of a song, from live instruments, to looping, to special effects. Ross May, Jr., provided sound technician services at the event.

The students then had a once-in-a-lifetime chance to test out their newfound songwriting talents before the renowned ASCAP artists. The MVHS students composed a song called “Music.” Joshua Freeman, an aspiring music producer, quickly volunteered to perform the song,

providing spirited vocals while playing the keyboard. Eastmond was very impressed, and quickly exchanged his contact information with the young musician, who also plays the drums.

Inspired by Freeman's eagerness to perform, Chambers quickly reminded the students, "You always want to leave the audience inspired. You never know when your moment will come." MVHS seniors, Jody Ann Green, Chris Foster, and Andre Dodson, later performed their vocal rendition of "Music."

Lisa Ganzenmuller, of ASCAP, said that Donna Jackson had approached the organization to participate in the music festival's programming. Jackson noted, "We definitely needed a songwriter portion for the program. The students had the chance to see how music is created."

Jackson was equally enthused by Freeman's willingness to showcase his talent, "This is a life changing experience, just by having one connection. Joshua was just so bold in his spirit, to play this song."

For Freeman, a MVHS junior, he was thrilled that the event had come to fruition. He stated, "I'm always practicing music and constantly trying to improve my craft." Mira Porter was excited that her son had a chance to participate. "This program gave many kids an incentive, because they really needed it. I've always told Joshua that when opportunity and preparedness meet, great things happen."



(l to r) Chris Foster and Andre Dodson sing, and are accompanied by Gordon Chambers



(l to r) Barry Eastmond, Gordon Chambers, Lisa Ganzenmuller, Donna Jackson, and Kelly Jackson.



(l to r) Gordon Chambers, Joshua Freeman, and Barry Eastmond