



TAKE IT BEYOND THE CONCERT HALL

with From the Top Alum
Eric Segerstrom



Eric Segerstrom is a 17-year-old percussionist/composer from Delmar, New York. He performed on *From the Top* on show [237](#) and is a [Jack Kent Cooke Young Artist](#).

“I was working with underprivileged kids who had been through a lot of tough life experiences, and who may not have cared for classical music... this was pretty eye-opening for me, as I really had to rethink how I would share my music.”

BRINGING SMILES TO ALBANY'S YOUTH RECEIVING FAMILY THERAPY AND SUPPORT

Percussionist Eric Segerstrom wanted to connect with children from his hometown who hadn't had the same musical opportunities that he had growing up, so he reached out to the Parsons Child & Family Center: a residential facility for families and children coping with domestic hardship. Working with three separate groups of kids at the center, Eric performed a combination of classical and hip-hop works on marimba, and then helped the kids build their own instruments using paper plates and plastic cups. At the end of the event was a full-group performance using the newly made instruments. The experience provided Eric with a whole new perspective on the ways he can share classical music with younger audiences.

GOALS: “Because these presentations took place in early January (right after the holidays), I wanted to bring some happiness to these kids who have been through so much hardship. Furthermore, I wanted to introduce them to music that they normally would not be so exposed to.”

PROCESS: Before this experience, Eric had worked with younger music students, teaching composition and theory. However, he hoped to share his knowledge with kids who were less privileged, and found a connection with the Department of Therapeutic Recreation at the Parson's Child & Family Center. Eric worked with one of the department's directors to help determine content and material that would be suitable and exciting for the kids.

ON WHAT IT MEANS TO BE AN ARTS LEADER:

“To me, being an arts leader is about giving back and passing on what you know. As a first year college student, I'm in a rather unique position: I have knowledge that I can pass on to kids, peers, or even adults about music and composition, yet I am young enough that my peers and younger kids can relate to me more so than they would to an adult. I got to this point because of other people who took the time to teach me and pass on what they knew. I believe that being an arts leader is really about using what you know to benefit others, whether it is by teaching, performing, writing, or speaking.”

Q&A WITH ERIC

From the Top (FTT): How did these presentations differ from your previous work with kids?

Eric: Before this, whenever I worked with kids, they were privileged and fortunate New York City kids who wanted to learn a little more about composition. Yet talking about classical music with kids who have no background in it, while also trying to make it fun and exciting, is a lot harder than it sounds. For the first time, I really felt like I had to step up to show these kids what I knew and how music can be new and fun.

FTT: What were some of the challenges you encountered?

Eric: The most challenging moment for me was the first presentation: I had almost no idea what to expect going into it. I had been prepped a little beforehand by one of the Directors of Therapeutic Recreation, who suggested just working with the kids and going with the things they wanted to do. However, this is really tough advice to follow when you aren't getting any visible feedback from your audience!

Before I knew it, I had gone through all of the pieces I had prepared with 45 minutes left in the presentation! I was a little embarrassed, and felt badly that I hadn't done what I had hoped to do. I went home and came up with a few more ideas for the next presentation, including combining their interest in hip-hop with classical music. I felt much more prepared the next day.

FTT: What were some memorable moments?

Eric: The most memorable moments were definitely those in which I realized that I had left some sort of impact on the kids. On my last day at the Parsons Center, there was a particularly rambunctious kid who spent much of his time

with me running around the room and flailing his newly made shaker in the air. When everyone had left and I was packing up, one of the Directors told me that she had never seen that kid so happy for so long.

Another memorable moment was my second day: this was the smallest group I played for with only three or four kids. However, they were so genuinely interested in the marimba and the music I was playing that their questions filled up a majority of the presentation!

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FTT: What did you take away from this experience?

Eric: I think my time at the Parson's Center showed that music can help people, even if it's in a small way. The kids that I worked with all seemed pretty happy when they left, and I think it piqued an interest in some, or at least a curiosity, to the idea of classical music and the marimba. This is why I strongly believe that funding for the arts cannot be cut out of school or federal budgets...the impact of a creative and emotional outlet can be vastly underestimated, especially when it comes to kids.

[CLICK HERE TO LEARN MORE ABOUT ERIC!](#)