

CVHS music students to showcase skills in Kalamazoo

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CLINTON TOWNSHIP — Music students from Chippewa Valley High School are taking over Kalamazoo.

From May 9 to 11, the students will be part of the 57th annual Michigan Youth Arts Festival at Western Michigan University. About 1,000 high school students, chosen from a pool of more than 250,000 total students across Michigan, were invited to this year's festival.

Michigan Youth Arts is an alliance of 11 statewide education associations that collaborate to develop high-quality arts education programming. Students, selected through what is described as a "rigorous adjudication process," will participate in workshops and master classes and will be able to attend open performances and exhibitions.

Travis Darghali, Daniella Grainger, Pamela Jones, Brooke Majewski and Johnny Serra will represent CVHS students of vocal music; and Natalie Adams, Sebastian Cole, Nathan Johnson, Patrick Mackezyk, Elena Miller, Alexis Phinney and Alex Sherman will represent CVHS students of instrumental music.

CVHS choir director James Pecar said the school applied for MYAF in 2016 — the first year the event did not conflict with prom scheduling. CVHS students have participated in the all-state honors choir portion of MYAF the past five years.

The festival itself is described as "a showcase of student accomplishments," rather than a true competition or evaluation.

"This is so exciting for me," Pecar said. "All academic artistic disciplines are represented at this festival. For our students to be among the top students in the state for their category is truly an honor.

"We are so proud of their diligence and work ethic throughout the process. While the event showcases 1,000 of the 250,000 eligible students, that [sic] 1,000 students breaks down into a number of small, particular categories, of which these students represent the top talent."

CVHS band director Tim Hoey said this is the first year CVHS has had a small ensemble, composed of a brass quintet, selected. Band students are selected based on past solo and ensemble performances.

Eight ensembles were selected "from literally thousands that performed" statewide, he added.

"It's very rewarding to see our students excel and receive recognition for all their hard work, and it is hard work," Hoey said. "We constantly preach that if you work hard and if you work smart, you will succeed. These students are living proof."

One of those students who has exhibited hard work is CVHS senior Pamela Jones, who is part of the SATB and quartets selected to perform at MYAF. She is also in the all-state honors choir at MYAF.

“Going to MYAF is such an honor and privilege,” Jones said. “It’s the culmination of all of our hard work. To be acknowledged by Michigan School Vocal Music Association and by peers that share the same passion for art is a remarkable feeling.”

Hoey said a lot of emphasis in schools today is based on the core curriculum, but events like MYAF keep arts from going by the wayside because it reminds people “how vital the arts are and what an important place they take in our lives.”

Pecar said festivals encourage students and educators “to pursue the highest level of artistry in their field.” Events like MYAF, he said, invokes a sense of teamwork and integrity in a field that is meant to keep individuals honest.

As he described, a person cannot just copy-paste an alto line or a sculpture from Wikipedia.

“Art is one of the most human and necessary activities our students can pursue. ... These students encourage one another, and the culture established at this event is nothing but positive,” Pecar noted. “These students are the future, and when they learn to take pride in their work — something this festival facilitates — we believe they carry the same drive and work ethic on to the rest of their lives and future projects.”

For more information about MYAF, visit www.msvma.org/myaf.