

Autistic children participate in music study

BY MARIAH BOHANON
Staff Reporter

Graduate student Christina Scheperle, like many Truman students during her undergraduate years, switched her major several times because she was interested in more diverse fields.

"When I started at Truman I was a double major in biology and music, which is kind of a weird combination to most people, so the whole time I've been here I've been interested in both the sciences and music, and it's been kind of hard for me to decide between the two," Scheperle said.

Scheperle eventually found a way to fuse together her two interests in music and health science with music therapy. She is responsible for creating a music therapy pilot project at Truman that serves area children who have autism.

"What we're doing here is just a pilot study," Scheperle said. "We're trying to see if a program like this is possible in Kirksville or in Northeast Missouri."

Scheperle graduated with a bachelor's degree of music in violin performance last year. She first started thinking about practicing music therapy as a career after attending an autism conference this past summer, she said.

"It was actually after the conference, when my friend and I were driving in the car, and we just started thinking and brainstorming about how to get more involved, and we thought, well, Kirksville doesn't have any sort of music therapy program," Scheperle said. "They have in the past, but people have either moved away or there just wasn't a lot of interest."

Scheperle gained support for her proposal from the heads of both the music department and the communication disorders department. She also received support from the Missouri Autism Project and the Judevine Center for Autism.

"It was through my friend's connection with the Missouri Autism Project that we were able to get funding for this project," Scheperle said. "We kind of wrote up a brief proposal about it, and they approved it and said they would take care of sending up music therapists to help us get started."

Two music therapists from Southeast Missouri, Kelley Pujol and Jennifer Colley, came to Truman Monday, Feb. 9 to give a presentation on music therapy at the Career Center and to help Scheperle get started with the project.

"They actually ran the first two sessions we had and worked with the kids and sort of assessed them," Scheperle said. "It's me and another graduate student, Sarah Lockenvitz, who's a communication disorders major, who will be running the rest of the sessions. We have to call this Music Group Intervention, the sessions that Sarah and I are doing. Legally we can't call it music therapy because we aren't licensed music therapists yet."

Two sessions will take place Monday nights for the next eight weeks, Scheperle said. The first session works with a 6 and a 7-year-old, and the second session works with three 5-year-olds, she said.



Photos by Mayank Dhungana/Index
Graduate student Christina Scheperle was inspired after attending an autism conference in summer 2008 and with the help of two music therapists, Kelley Pujol and Jennifer Colley, introduced the music therapy program.

"When it comes to working with children who have autism, age is not as important because autism is a spectrum disorder, so you could have a 5-year-old who's very high-functioning and a 10-year-old who's very low-functioning, so it doesn't matter what their ages are — it's more about what their level is," Scheperle said.

Music therapy is used to help autistic children become more socialized and to help them communicate, she said.

"We also know for a fact that

music can change or stimulate different areas of the brain," Scheperle said. "I guess in my opinion, it's a neurological thing. Music is able to reach areas of the brain in children with autism that we can't necessarily reach in other ways."

Scheperle said the music therapy sessions will allow the children to utilize different instruments, such as paddle drums, jingle bells and a keyboard, as well as having a compact disc player and a guitar available to accompany the children. Different instruments and methods can be

used based on a child's individual needs, she said.

"We're working with a child who has proprioceptive needs, so we're going to work on getting them to have some pressure, by clapping or hitting their knees or something," Scheperle said. "And that can kind of re-focus or re-organize their brain stem so that they can focus more."

Children with autism often need set schedules, Scheperle said. The sessions are organized around certain activities and assessing individual needs, she said.

"We start with the hello song, and that teaches them each other's names, and we're working on teaching them to greet each other properly," she said. "Because something as simple as saying hello and looking somebody in the eye doesn't always come naturally to them and the same with goodbye."

Scheperle said she is unsure what will happen to the project after the end of the eight week period. The possibility of continuing music therapy in Kirksville depends on the parents' reactions and whether or not other students are interested in becoming involved, she said.

"It's going to be up to students who want to do something like this and want to pick it up and keep going or if Judevine sends somebody up here," Scheperle said. "I have no idea. And it may not be something that we see immediately. It could be years down the road that something happens."

Parents are able to watch the music therapy sessions from an observation room, Scheperle said. She will be looking for feedback from parents if they notice changes in their children throughout the weeks, she said.

"At each session I'm going to try to let each parent write comments if they notice anything different during the week because we can't always notice in one 45-minute session if there is much of a change," Scheperle said. "But maybe when they go home, their children talk more or do more social activities."

Lockenvitz is running the music therapy sessions with Scheperle. The two have been friends since they were in high school orchestra together, Lockenvitz said.

"For me, this project is mostly experimental," Lockenvitz said. "I don't plan on going into music therapy because I'm doing speech therapy, language therapy. This is definitely something I will want to incorporate with my clients, though, and use my musical background to help them communicate better."

The most rewarding part of the project has been seeing the children have a good time at the sessions, Lockenvitz said.

Scheperle might transfer schools next year to get a degree in music therapy, she said. There is a great need for music therapists, and large areas like Northeast Missouri often are neglected of their services, she said.

"But that's part of the reason we started this — this area shouldn't be ignored," Scheperle said. "There's people who have needs up here also."

Pujol works for the Cape Girardeau branch of the Judevine Center for Autism. She has been a licensed music therapist since 1992 and helped Scheperle and Lockenvitz get their project started.

There is a great need for more music therapists because the job requires both a strong musical background as well as a background in biology and psychology, she said.

"There are definitely long waiting lists for my clients," Pujol said. "It's bothersome, you know, to have a child on a waiting list for two years and know that you can't be helping them."

Holiday's history begins far from its homeland

BY STEPHANIE HALL
Features Editor

Today St. Patrick's Day traditions consist of chugging green beer while pinching your neighbor for his reluctance to wear green and hitting on the barmaid saying 'Kiss me I'm Irish.' While these are great holiday revelries, the actual history and traditions of St. Patrick's Day provide an interesting look at Irish American history.

Saint Patrick

Father Bill Kottenstette Chaplain of the Catholic Newman Center said he thinks historians don't know much about the day's namesake Saint Patrick. What they do know is he was born in present day France and was captured and enslaved at the age of 15.

"He was put to work for some kind of family and worked for seven years," Kottenstette said. "And then he had some kind of vision. They say a voice [told him] he should go to the coast and catch a boat, so he ran away and found some boat that he could get on and came back home, and that's when he entered the priesthood."

After entering the priesthood he returned to Ireland where he became a prominent figure while doing missionary work.

Kottenstette said St. Patrick's reputation grew until he almost became mythological to many people. He said that after St. Patrick's death, the pope and the Catholic

Church reviewed his miracles and canonized him as a saint.

"It's in the United States that the Irish Catholics celebrate St. Patrick's day more than the Irish in Ireland," Kottenstette said. "You know, you want to hold on to something [from] the past when you come to a new world."

Saints' days were much more prevalent in Europe during the Middle Ages and played a major role in everyday life, Kottenstette said. These saints governed Europe and individual towns had days when they would honor saints.

"[People] didn't work that many days because [they] had so many saint's days people were taking off," Kottenstette said. "The whole country would shut down."

The legends

Christine Harker, professor of English and Linguistics, said that St. Patrick's Day is a much bigger deal in America than in Ireland in terms of celebration. The tradition of St. Patrick's Day started when after the Irish first came to America in the after the potato famine of the 1840s.

"Back then they didn't look at Irish as equals," Harker said. "They were considered non-white to people, which didn't qualify as fully equal."

After years of oppression, St. Patrick's Day offered the Irish an opportunity to show pride in their homeland, Harker said. Symbols from Ireland were used in celebra-

tion of the holiday, but many of the traditions are American.

"In the fourth century St. Patrick used the shamrock as a physical symbol for the holy trinity," Harker said.

He used the shamrock to help convert the Irish to Catholicism.

Another tale of St. Patrick is that he exiled the snakes from Ireland, which is a myth, Harker said.

"Many people think that the snakes represent Satan, though when I went to visit Ireland, there were no snakes," Harker said.

Harker said she thinks green has long been associated with Ireland. One instance of this is shown in the flag which is a combination of orange and green.

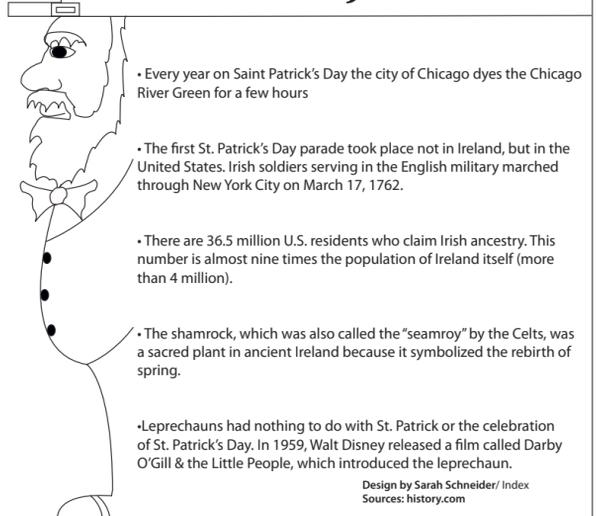
Another St. Patrick's Day staple is the traditional meal of corned beef, which Harker said actually isn't a customary Irish food.

"It's actually the funniest thing, I was dating a guy once who was from Ireland, so I cooked him this traditionally Irish meal of corned beef and he said 'I like this but it's not Irish,'" Harker said.

She said she thinks corned beef was a cheap food that poor Irish immigrants ate when first coming to America, and that could be why it still is served on St. Patrick's Day.

St. Patrick's day in Kirksville
Carol Kellum, president and CEO of KTVO KHQA, is one of the organizers for this year's local St. Patrick's Day activities. She said many Kirksville citizens were

St. Paddy's Facts



upset with the lack of a St. Patrick's Day parade in Kirksville for the past couple of years. She said they decided to host a parade, with a scavenger hunt and contests for children as part of the festivities.

"I love St. Patrick's Day, we just thought [it was a] good time of the year, and downtown could use another event," Kellum said.

As part of the scavenger hunt, children will be given a passport to go around to different businesses in Kirksville to get it stamped. When the kids have fully-stamped passports they can enter to win a pot of

golden chocolate. "Hopefully this will bring people to downtown Kirksville and reintroduce people to business on The Square," Kellum said.

Another event is the Ms. and Mr. Leprechaun contest where children can dress up as leprechauns and possibly be featured in the parade. The parade starts at 5:15 p.m. and will include numerous floats and music, Kellum said.

"St. Patrick's day has had a [drinking] [reputation] but this event [will] focus on kids and family," Kellum said.