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Small white label with text below the portrait of the man with the red bow tie.



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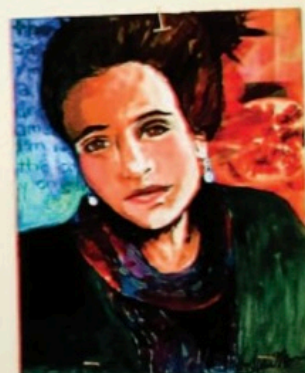


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OUTREACH



Young Artists en Flor

STORY BY PATTY SPEAKMAN HAMSHER / PHOTOGRAPHY BY CHRIS IATESTA

We hadn't had the piano for a full day before my daughters quickly logged a few hours on its bench, happily plunking notes and singing painfully, but happily, off key. Piano lessons seemed an obvious phone call away, and yet we hesitated. Artists are often born from their own self-discovery, finding their way to whatever medium helps them

share their light with their world; exposure sets them on the path to self-expression.

Laura Brino is a shining example of this. The Annapolis-born artist reacted to piano lessons the way my own daughters have so far—with distaste for the formal practice. Yet today, Laura is a working musician who has produced four albums and performs live shows. She plays guitar and sings with a familiar, confident voice. But this is only one dimension of her artistic life.

By day, Laura is an arts integration specialist at Bates Middle School, where a school-wide focus on the arts strengthens curricular connections, increases student engagement, and enhances student learning. Laura works with teachers in every content area to develop plans and teach lessons that connect visual arts, music, dance, and theater. Getting her teaching certificate was just part of growing into a self-sustaining artist, but teaching has also changed her life.

Inspired by a documentary, *Inocenté*, about a homeless teenager in San Diego, Laura began an after school program at Bates two years ago. Inocenté grew up an at-risk student—that is, academically challenged by virtue of her circumstances—like many of the students at Bates but found success, confidence, and mentors in an after school arts program.

“These are just kids that need a place and need support and need to learn better ways to express themselves,” says Laura. Watching *Inocenté*’s story reminded Laura of her own positive experience in the art room as a struggling teen, and she knew that many of the students she encountered at Bates would benefit from a similar safe haven.

Maryland Hall stepped up to help, and the new after school program, Jóvenes Artistas, was born. Teachers, administrators, and counselors are now able to identify kids who will benefit from the once-weekly after school mentoring. Laura has been successfully working to create a safe and trustworthy environment as well as art experiences and exhibitions all in the name of keeping students in school.

The documentary about Inocenté won an Academy Award about a month after Laura started Jóvenes Artistas. The once homeless and struggling teen now tours the country, attending screenings about her

documentary and engaging with people wanting to make a difference for young people. This winter, she spent an afternoon painting with Laura’s after school program at Bates, a surreal experience for Laura and her students. Matt D’Arrigo, the teacher who discovered Inocenté’s talent and promise at his San Diego nonprofit program ARTS (A Reason To Survive), has since taken to mentoring Laura.

“When you find these people whose only interest is helping and wanting to make a difference, things just work out,” says Laura. The same can

be said for her own altruism. Laura does not just teach brush strokes after school; she listens intently to what her students need to share and helps them get a leg up on learning about the world. And she does all this after her day job delivering relevant arts-related lessons to middle schoolers.

When she’s not teaching or mentoring, Laura is in the recording studio. She is now licensed and was signed by the Indie record label Deep Elm, and has plans to tour and release another album by the end of this year. Her music has recently been played in TV shows and movies, and she’s anxious to start a Masters of Fine Arts program in the fall with the goal of bringing together her passion for visual arts and music, a balance she has yet to gain.

Jóvenes Artistas is in bloom and through the mentorship of Matt D’Arrigo and partnerships with other artists and community groups, such as the Annapolis

Police Department, Laura hopes it will continue to grow.

Laura has wisdom to impart to her students, not only by telling the stories of her own teen years but also by demonstrating how taking a nontraditional path in life can lead a person to exactly where they belong. For her, it’s as an artist, sharing her work, and connecting with others.

