

VINEYARD GAZETTE

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Twenty Years of Wonder: Artists At Camp Celebrate With Record

By JULIA EGER

This is a place where bare feet and imaginations run free.

On Friday, August 13, Sense of Wonder Creations held a celebration to honor the final day of this year's summer camp and the program's milestone 20th anniversary. Held at the camp, which is also the home of director Pam Benjamin, current and former campers, as well as counselors and parents, congregated to enjoy two hours of organic food and fun. Musical performances by special guest Kate Taylor and by the camp participants themselves, who chanted catchy camp songs such as Delicate World and Make a Difference, kept the animated audience entertained.



Pam Benjamin introduces musical guest Kate Taylor, with Alex Cook and Tobey LaRoche.

Sense of Wonder, located on Grove avenue in Vineyard Haven, offers classes throughout the year and hosts a five-day camp for 7 to 12-year-olds for the summer season. The camp boasts a range of activities, including arts and crafts, pottery, community service, swimming, mask making, sculpture, mural drawing and puppetry.

Making its way into the performance lineup on Friday was a spoken-word piece — known as a slam poem — by Ben Williams, a veteran counselor and sophomore at Reed College.



Benefits global environmental, humanitarian groups.

"A camp amply supplied with energy . . . Say your name, give your cause, let's expand our horizons and include everyone," he recited.

"This place has dramatically affected me," Ben said later, with audible adoration for the camp, the campers, and Mrs. Benjamin, whom he described simply as "the best."

Since its founding in 1991, Sense of Wonder has positively affected many who have attended or been involved. "It is just an amazing and unique place," said Ms. Taylor, the singer who has a long association with the camp.

"I wanted to start this camp because it combines all of my favorite things — children, the arts, social responsibility, environmental awareness, peace, justice," Mrs. Benjamin said in an interview. "What has resulted, what we do at camp today, is a blend of all these things. The camp is all about encouraging kids in their creativity and making them feel great about what they do and the way they do it."



photo by Lynn Christensen

Isabella Morris

The summer camp program, which consists of approximately 30 campers per week, a few counselors-in-training ("They just can't stay away!" Mrs. Benjamin exclaims) and several counselors, has a weekly theme around which daily projects are arranged.

Themes this summer included wilderness awareness, creativity, locally grown produce and farm animals, ocean life, puppetry and music, peace and justice, and building schools in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

And while themes dictate the general outline of the week, Mrs. Benjamin said student interest really shapes the camp.

"We gear projects very much toward the campers, so if they're not engaged in something we're doing, we find something new to do. In the end, it's completely about them," she said.

One week, a few innovative campers decided to fashion musical instruments out of some gourds — sculpting drums, shakers and horns before ultimately forming their own band. Such occasions happen regularly in an environment of creativity, Mrs. Benjamin said.

Each year Sense of Wonder raises money for different causes, including various orphanages around the world. One summer tradition designed to raise money for a conservation group is the papier-mâché creature raffle: campers build and paint a different animal each year. This year, the magnificent five-by-six-foot osprey that campers created wowed spectators on Friday. The winner of the raffle, who happens to be the same camper who painted it, plans to donate the osprey to Felix Neck.



Campers showcase some tunes from new CD.

This year, in celebration of the 20th anniversary, Sense of Wonder released a compact disc with seven self-recorded tracks by campers and counselors geared toward environmental awareness and social responsibility.

All profits from the recording, which costs \$10, will benefit local and global environmental and humanitarian organizations. Mrs. Benjamin hopes to sell the CD in shops across the Vineyard.

Ben Williams's poem describes the camp as "subtly stated and sustainably aimed," a place that allows all participants to "keep sensing new wonders in each new day."

With fantastic ideals and fun in mind, Mrs. Benjamin and her Sense of Wonder community certainly project a sustainable future of 20 more summers to come.

For more information about the Sense of Wonder program, go to senseofwondercreations.org.



Imani Hall and Cesca Robinson have that special sense.