The Quest 2015: Students & Musicians in Northern Michigan

By ELIZA FOSTER on May 13, 2015

During last year’s collaboration between Earthwork Music, Blackbird Arts and SEEDS (otherwise known as “The Quest”), students in K-12 from Northern Michigan had the opportunity to work with local Earthwork musicians to write songs inspired by the 1938 Alan Lomax Michigan archives. The result was “an ecstatic performance at the City Opera House,” Seth Bernard, founder of Earthwork Music says.

“The Quest is a creative adventure for kids to discover the awesomeness of both their place and their path, produced by SEEDS with partners Earthwork Music and Blackbird Arts,” says Seth. “The Quest starts with a creative process surrounding a theme at after school workshops and culminates with an original performance to share with our community.”

After last year’s successful Quest, Earthwork musicians have already started working with students for this year’s performance, set for July 2 at Milliken Auditorium.

The Quest continues this year with the “central inspiration for our creative adventure being food, farming and nutrition,” Seth says. “The final performance will be a combination of original songs and new versions of classic rock songs!”

The Quest is run through SEEDS after school program with students from Rapid City, Mesick, Kalkaska and Brethren. There are more elementary students participating this year, which Jana Lanning, 21st CCLC Program Director and Education Specialist SEEDS After School, says is this year’s “Quest twist, finding that elementary voice and helping them find their own creative process.”

Not only do students get to work with music and art, the program also “helps them find their creative voice” and fosters the ability to “express themselves, find their own voice and learn to respect each other,” she says.

The workshop process is already in full swing for the summer performance. Seth says that the “collective creative process” is “always new and exciting” and that he and the students have already rewritten the song “Smells Like Teen Spirit” to “Smells Like Home Cooking” to coincide with this year’s theme.

“We start with a clean slate and 90 minutes later we have created a song together that everyone in the room helped to shape, that all of the kids feel a sense of investment in,” he says. “To see the creative process become something that is both very personal to each child and also shared by each group is always very exciting!”

Some of the songs they’ve written so far include Lunch on the River which Seth explains is an ode to the Michigan picnic, Gummy Bear Blues a “sugar crash blues jam” and Great Lakes “an ecological anthem about how we need clean water to sustain healthy life forms of all kinds, from our forests to our garden to ourselves!”

“It’s a really creative and interesting process,” Jana says. “It’s definitely a partnership and group process.”