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URI TODAY

From the Department of External Relations and Communications

From Kingston to Kingston: Jamaican students visit URI in program that promotes music education

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KINGSTON, R.I. – March 5, 2020 – The University of Rhode Island will welcome music students and a teacher from the renowned Alpha Boys Institute in Kingston, Jamaica, on Friday, March 6, as part of an exchange program that supports music education. The program is supported by March for Music Education, which encourages youth music education and social development through creativity.

The Alpha Boys Institute is a 140-year-old vocational school committed to helping young men with jobs and life-skills training. Globally known for its music program, the school has produced jazz and reggae musicians and boasts Grammy-nominated alumni. Through the March for Music Education exchange program, two students and their bandmaster from the Alpha Institute will visit the Berklee College of Music in Boston, Canton High School in Canton, Massachusetts, and URI from March 4 to 7.

Mark Berney, a lecturer in jazz trumpet in URI's Department of Music, is one of the key contributors to the program. Berney, who visited the institute in Jamaica recently, has played Jamaican music since he was in college, including performing with one of Bob Marley's backup bands, The Skatalites. Berney found a way to inspire and encourage students of the Alpha Institute through cultural exchange.

"Several original members of The Skatalites got their musical training at the Alpha Boys School," said Berney. "I play in a band called King's Highway. We



<<https://today.uri.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Berney.jpg>>

URI jazz trumpet instructor Mark Berney, center, works with an Alpha Boys Institute student during a recent workshop in Kingston, Jamaica. (Photo courtesy of Mark Berney

play early Jamaican music, Rastafari, Nyabingi, early ska, and other types before reggae. With the help of my band mates, Alex Beram and Nathan Sabanayagam, along with Josh Chamberlain, we started this partnership between the U.S and the Alpha Boys school, and donated proceeds from the band to raise money for scholarships for the students.”

On Friday, March 6, the Alpha Institute visitors will attend Berney’s classes at the Fine Arts Center, meet with URI students and faculty, take part in a master class taught by Grammy-winning jazz trumpeter Brian Lynch, and

https://events.uri.edu/event/university_artist_series_presents_uri_jazz_faculty_in_concert_with_guest_trumpeter_brian_lynch#.Xl1vopNKi3c attend a performance by Lynch and URI jazz faculty

https://events.uri.edu/event/university_artist_series_presents_uri_jazz_faculty_in_concert_with_guest_trumpeter_brian_lynch#.Xl6wpZNKiCc at 8 p.m. at the Concert Hall in the Fine Arts Center.

On Wednesday, March 4, the students attended songwriting classes and listened to an ensemble at Berklee. Later that evening, the students performed with King’s Highway at La Fabrica Central in Cambridge, Massachusetts. On Thursday, March 5, they will participate in music technology classes and an ensemble at Canton High School.

March for Music Education has raised \$50,000 in support of student scholarships at the Alpha Institute, covering such areas as academic and vocational training, social welfare, and medical assistance for students and their families. The exchange program is also supported by King’s Highway, Jamaica Nice and private donors. All students at the Alpha Institute attend on scholarship.

Berney said he believes the exchange program will facilitate musical and cultural education across borders.

“There is a need for more music education in Jamaica,” he said. “Musicians can get gigs or go out with a touring band and make a living. So, we have people like Clayon Samuels, the senior instructor at the Alpha school, come here to promote that music education and provide inspiration to his students.”

Berney emphasized that there are many similarities between American and Jamaican music, but how Jamaican and U.S. students approach music is different.

“The Jamaican students are really in touch with their heritage and with their music more than what you might find in band classes in the U.S,” said Berney. “For young musicians in the States, the music they listen to is not connected to the music they learn in band class. But in Jamaica they seem to be more connected to their musical roots.”

For more information on March for Music Education’s U.S tour, [visit here.](#)

<https://march4music.org/the-march-for-music-education-exchange-activities-march-4-7-usa/>

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