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Benefit concert honored musician, teacher Jimmy Cutrell

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Area musicians paid tribute Sunday afternoon to one of their own, a beloved instructor afflicted with a disabling spinal condition.

"We are here ... to give back to an individual who has given so much to this community," said Vanessa Hyatt-Fugate of Brenau University's WBCX-FM and emcee for the Jimmy Cutrell Benefit Concert at Brenau's Pearce Auditorium.

Cutrell suffers from spinal stenosis, or narrowing of the spine, a condition that was diagnosed after he fell last year, resulting in paralysis from just below the neck down.

He watched from his wheelchair as performers, many of whom were his students, took the stage.

Maggie Auffarth, an eighth-grader at North Georgia Christian School in Gainesville, sang "For Good" from the Broadway musical "Wicked." Auffarth was encouraged by Cutrell's "gentle and kind spirit," Hyatt-Fugate said.

Anna Stewart, 13, a seventh-grader at Davis Middle School in Flowery Branch, blew Cutrell a kiss after she had danced an Irish reel.

And Michelle Roueche, conductor of the Lanier Chamber Singers, pointed to him and then gave him a thumbs-up after the ensemble completed its set.

Cutrell "has inspired, has motivated, educated and certainly aided in ... many lives of people in this community, especially the young people," Hyatt-Fugate said.

"Jimmy, your influence is far-reaching and so ... this afternoon, we celebrate you."

Other performances included a piano duet by Keith and Priscilla Jefcoat, piano pieces by You Ju Lee and combined singing by the youth choirs of Gainesville First United Methodist and Gainesville First Presbyterian churches.

The concert had no admission fee, but organizers accepted donations. People could drop money into a large box, which also served as a notepad for well-wishers to leave written messages.

Organizers also passed a plate during intermission.

"We decided not to charge because a lot of the students come from large families and a lot of the people in the community that I know would love to come have large families," said Elena Trear, who helped coordinate the event.

Trear's daughter was one of Cutrell's students at Preparatory Music Inc. at Brenau.

"We all love him and he has been very kind and generous to many of his students, giving them scholarships throughout the years and making it possible for them to do wonderful things," she said in an interview last week.

Marolyn Cutrell said she and her husband were grateful for the concert and didn't care if they received any donations.

For them, the excitement was about seeing students and fellow musicians again, "and for Jimmy to get back in the public," she said.

<http://www.gainesvilletimes.com/archives/15160/>



The Lanier Chamber Singers opened the program Sunday afternoon at the Jimmy Cutrell Benefit Concert at Pearce Auditorium.

By TOM REED (The Times) | UPLOADED: Feb. 22, 2009

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