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News



The Starmus stage featured Syzygy's Kat Stockton singing the closing tune, "Giant."



Kat Stockton performs at Starmus festival's closing concert at Armenian National Opera and Ballet Theater in Yerevan.

Local Teen Makes International Debut

Kat Stockton performs at Starmus, a global festival honoring science communication through art and music.

BY CHRISTINA TYLER WENKS THE CONNECTION

nstead of hitting the books, she hit the

Kat Stockton spent her 19th birthday and first days of college in life's classroom on the other side of the world — observing architecture, culture and history of Armenia, conversing with some of the world's greatest science minds and musicians, and performing for 20,000 people.

"Artists, musicians and scientists are bound together by human passion and creativity," said Stockton.

Classically trained, Stockton traded her upright bass for a microphone during her rock-n-roll debut at Starmus, a global festival that engages some of the planet's top minds in the spirit of discovery, fusing art, music and science to enhance science com-

Starmus was co-founded in 2011 by astrophysicist Brian May, who is also known as the lead guitarist of the band, Queen. The festival has attracted the world's greatest thinkers like Stephen Hawking, Nobel laureates, astrophysicists like Neil DeGrasse Tyson, Apollo-era astronauts Buzz Aldrin and Charlie Duke, and many rock stars.

"It was humbling and uplifting to be around so many people who are super accomplished. Meeting famous people was casual," Stockton said, elated to meet one of her music heroes, Armenian-American artist Serj Tankian. "I got some tips from those I look up to in the music world. Keep your www.ConnectionNewspapers.com

eyes open and your priorities straight."

Stockton hails from Great Falls, Virginia. She attended the Potomac School in McLean and performed with the Capitol Symphonic Youth Orchestras at Carnegie Hall before scholarship and opportunity led to study with industry professionals at Michigan's Interlochen School of the Arts where she graduated in May. Performing in the rising tech hub of Yerevan, the oldest consistently inhabited city on Earth, provided a different learning experience than Indiana University's Jacobs School of Music, where Stockton majors in audio engineering and production.

Stockton performed with a band that called itself Syzygy, consisting of students still attending Interlochen. The band's name, Syzygy, is an astronomical term for celestial objects, such as planets or the sun, earth and moon, forming a straight line.

"We were teenagers who had not worked together as a band and we learned what to do and what not to do and I am grateful for the opportunity," said Stockton.

"This trip gave the kids an idea of how varied a performance could be, in terms of scope, preparation and professionalism," said Marc Lacuestra, Interlochen's director of music production and engineering. "They have learned how to be flexible and how to roll with the punches and make a performance happen under less-than-ideal circumstances, but they also know how smooth a performance runs when everything is done right and everyone is professional.'

Five of the band's performed songs were penned or cowritten by Stockton. After per-



Before the Starmus festival performance in Armenia's capital of Yerevan, Kat Stockton sang at a tech center in Gyumri near the Turkish border.

forming 10 tunes at a tech center in Gyumri near Armenia's Turkish border, Syzygy closed this year's Starmus festival in the capital city of Yerevan with a nine-song set. The last number was Stockton's "Giant," which is about powering through pain and finding one's voice and purpose.

"It was powerful to end on this song because it was about my personal journey," said Stockton.

As 27 hours of travel home got underway, conflict erupted on Armenia's border. "People my age were so determined to fight,"



Starmus founder and astrophysicist Garik Israelian talks with Kat Stockton after the Starmus closing concert.

she said. "Even with a tumultuous history, (Armenian) people preserve their culture. The youth are forward thinking and united. Great to get another view and talk to people my age and see how they are handling.'

As much as the music, memories of young adults met in Armenia struck a chord. "I am really inspired to be myself. I experienced that I could be that someone who gives hope through music."

That's a feeling Stockton will continue to chase as she completes missed college assignments and continues to broaden her musical spectrum in an upcoming college performances of "L'Étoile."

"I have found a light to follow. I've made the first steps," she said.

Challenges for County's Special Education Students

Special Education PTA president and FCPS respond.

BY MERCIA HOBSON THE CONNECTION

isparities for special education students in Fairfax County Public Schools, cited in the 210-page FCPS Special Education Comprehensive Program Review: Year 2 Final Report by American Institutes for Research, did not surprise Amanda Campbell. She is the president of the Fairfax County Special Education Parent Teacher Association (SEPTA).

Campbell highlighted that the final review mirrored SEPTA's findings to the division. "It was very validating to see it backed by data," Campbell said.

The report was the second of two annual deliverables by American Institutes for Research, which the division contracted in October 2020 to conduct an independent, third-party review of its special education

American Institutes for Research presented its Year 1 interim report and presentation document at a session in September 2021, followed by its 2022 Final Report https:// bit.ly/3m3JQpv The report's scope did not include special education programs during COVID-19.

The division's four original goals for its special education program to AIR's twoyear comprehensive review were: one, design, structure, and processes; two, human capital; three, evidence-based practices; and four, communication. "Restraint and seclusion would be specifically OUTSIDE OF SCOPE for the purposes of this review," according to the division's RFP 2000003084 Special Education Comprehensive Review.

"We are very appreciative of the work that has been done in compiling this report," said Dr. Michelle Boyd, assistant superintendent of Special Services at FCPS. "Our staff has worked closely with students and families, which is reflected in the report's mention of positive feedback from parents on the quality of FCPS instructional staff."

Campbell addressed what she considered the top four important findings of the lengthy review.

❖ First, "Fidelity of implementation is a point that we (SEPTA) have been raising since being chartered in April 2017," Campbell said. She referenced a research question in the final report, "To what extent do schools implement special education services with fidelity?"

Fidelity of the implementation of special education intervention programs is minimal and inconsistent across programs, according to the independent report. And special education services are implemented inconsistently across the district.

Campbell said that programs and best

4 Great Falls Connection October 12-18, 2022



Amanda Campbell, president of the SEPTA



Dr. Michell Boyd, assistant superintendent of Special Services FCPS



Occupational therapists work to address a student's ability to access and participate in school activities.

practices for students with disabilities had been identified. However, teachers and support staff who interact with students face difficulty implementing programs effectively. A poorly implemented program can fail students just as easily as a poorly designed one. AIR's finding was important to Campbell. "If the programs are not implemented with the same evidence-based science, then the outcomes are not going to be the same,"

"That time aspect is a critical part of fidelity," said Campbell. The time the program requires is not always what the students receive, according to Campbell. She described scheduling around multiple services as a giant jigsaw puzzle. "It is critical that we get kids the time they need in these programs for them to succeed," Campbell said. To implement a practice or program "with fidelity," teachers should understand how to implement evidence-based practices centered on five elements: adherence, exposure/ duration (time), delivery quality, program specificity, and student engagement.

Second was Campbell's concern was that the division's special education services are inconsistently implemented across its five regions and schools (1k.2.). It is "very individualized and dependent on where you live in the county and what school," Campbell said — leading to a question of equity.

The Fairfax County Public Schools division is the eleventh largest in the United States. It serves a diverse population of about 178,635 students from Pre-K through 12. In all, 14.9 percent of the total student population are students with disabilities; 31.7 percent are economically disadvantaged; and 19 percent are English language learners. Approximately 198 schools and centers are dispersed across five distinct regions within the district, covering 391 square miles.

- Campbell's third concern: Students with disabilities disproportionally receive in- and out-of-school suspensions compared with peers without disabilities (1a.3.). SEP-TA and the division have discussed this since 2019. The differences are dramatic.
- Campbell's fourth concern was how little parent input was evident in IEPs. "Results from the IEP sample review show minimal documentation of parent input on IEP documents. Nearly 38 percent of the IEPs in our sample did not include any written evidence of parent input within the IEP itself," cited the review (1f.4). AIR reviewed a randomly selected, representative sample of 300 IEPs.

According to the U.S. Department of Education, "Each public school child who receives special education and related services must have an Individualized Education Program (IEP). Each IEP must be designed for one student and must be a truly individualized document. The IEP creates an opportunity for teachers, parents, school administrators, related services personnel, and students (when appropriate) to work together to improve educational results for children with disabilities. The IEP is the cornerstone of a quality education for each child with a disability."

According to Campbell, parents should be equal partners in the IEP process. "When you have a statistic showing so little parent input, it encapsulates the concerns that families have noted. Their input is not included. That is one of the incredibly validating findings of this report," Campbell said.

Boyd, the assistant superintendent of Special Services, said the division knows "there is work to be done to improve outcomes for students with disabilities." Boyd named areas such as "multi-tiered systems of support, inclusive practices, transitions, communication with stakeholders, and exploring ways to address special education teacher workload."

Among other findings related to students with disabilities, as reported by AIR, FCPS does not meet Virginia state targets for the percentage of time students with disabilities are included in the general education setting (1.e.1.). Access to evidence-based practices for students with disabilities varies. Special education students in some racial-ethnic groups are at a higher risk of being suspended or expelled for greater than ten days than their special education peers in all other racial groups (1a.3.).

The final review of AIR included 54 findings and 19 recommendations for changes to the division's policies, processes, and practices. AIR will engage in three months of pro bono strategic planning with the division's Department of Special Services to support them in the next steps. "We look forward to working collaboratively with stakeholders to develop a comprehensive special education enhancement plan," said Boyd.

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Great Falls Youth Rugby July 2022

Photo via Great Falls Youth Rugb

Youth Rugby Registration Opens

PreK-12- grade students welcomed.

By Mercia Hobson The Connection

egistration is underway for fall rugby by Great Falls Youth Rugby and McLean Youth Athletics Inc. The two nonprofit amateur sports clubs are working together to give students in Northern Virginia the chance to play rugby.

Rugby is a crossover sport, with many of the same skills that can be found in other sports like basketball, football, soccer, according to Gary Coetzee, president of Great Falls Youth Rugby. During off seasons, players in other sports can stay fit, build endurance, and enhance skills through rugby, as verified by one of the best offensive linemen in Texas, Ian Reed, as spotlighted on the Great Falls Youth Rugby Facebook page. The agility and nature of rugby as a close-contact sport gave Reed and his teammates the edge on the gridiron, according to the recent Oct. 1 story in the Austin American Statesman by Rick Cantu. Reed is headed to Clemson to play on its football team.

Rugby also fosters virtues like humility, respect, dedication, confidence, and teamwork in its players. "All the required qualities that young people need while they stumble through life," said Coetzee.

Fall practices are held at Grange Field, 9818 Georgetown Pike, Great Falls, on Tuesdays from 5:30 to 7:00 p.m. and at Leo Field, 9830 Georgetown Pike, Great Falls, on Saturdays from 2–3:30 p.m. For more information, go to http://www.greatfallsrugby.com/.

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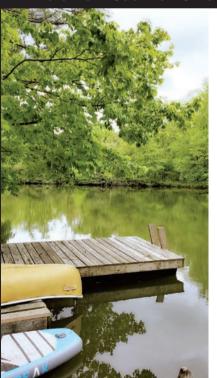
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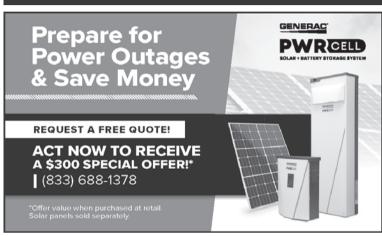
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Calendar

SEPT. 24-OCT. 30

Fall Festival. At Reston Farm Garden Market, 10800 Baron Cameron Ave., Reston. The festival will run Friday, Saturday and Sundays September 24 to October 30 with five 90 minute online ticketed sessions. Fall Festival hours are Friday through Sunday 10:00 a.m. to 11:30 a.m to 12:00 p.m. to 1:30 p.m., 2:00 p.m. to 3:30 p.m., and 4:00 p.m. to 5:30 p.m. to 6:30 p.m. \$28 per child and \$7 per parent, children 2 and under free. For times and tickets visit https://www.restonfarm.com/fall-fest.

OCT. 1-30

"Modern Illuminations – Knowledge and Power" by Rosemarie Forsythe. Presented at Reston Art Gallery and Studios. Rosemarie Forsythe's intricately detailed paintings depicting symbols of knowledge, strength, hope and resilience will be presented in a featured exhibit, "Modern Illuminations – Knowledge and Power," at Reston Art Gallery and Studios (RAGS) from October 1 until October 30. Everyone is invited to meet Forsythe when she is at the gallery for the show's opening weekend, October 1 and 2.

OCT. 6-27

Sights and Sounds of Early Herndon. At Arts Herndon, 750 Center Street, Herndon. The Herndon Historical Society, in collaboration with Arts Herndon, is pleased to announce a unique exhibition that will include many never seen before unique photos of the town of Herndon from the 1880-1930 time period. The exhibit will also include artifacts from Herndon's past. Exhibition visitors will experience a special view of early Herndon life, how our forefathers and families lived and worked. Visitors are invited to attend a free reception at Arts Herndon on October 14 at 6:30 p.m.

WEDNESDAY/OCT. 12

Fall Harvest Festival. 8 a.m. to noon.
At Oak Marr Farmers Market, Oak
Marr Rec Center, 3200 Jermantown Road, Oakton. Will feature
live music, free samples of warm
apple cider, a free pumpkin
painting activity, and activities for
children and families. Visit www.
fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/farmersmarkets

THURSDAY/OCT. 13

Oakton Vs. Madison Fundraiser. At
Oakton High School. Dig Pink is
a volleyball event for athletes,
coaches, parents, and communities
to unite in a collective effort to
raise awareness and fundraise to
support metastatic breast cancer
research through the Side-Out
Foundation. Link to the story
about the Side-Out Foundation:
https://side-out.org/about-us/

FRIDAY/OCT. 14

Fall Harvest Festival. 8 a.m. to noon.
At McLean Farmers Market, Lewinsville Park, 1659 Chain Bridge Road, McLean. Will feature live music, free samples of warm applecider, a free pumpkin painting activity, and activities for children and families. Visit www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/farmersmarkets

FRIDAY/OCT. 14

The Boy Band Project. 7 p.m. At McLean Community Center, 1234

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The McLean Pet Fest takes place Sunday, Oct. 16, 2022 at McLean Central Park.

Ingleside Ave., McLean. The Boy Band Project transports you back to a time when the boy band phenom dominated pop culture and TRL was appointment television. Delivered with their own special mix of handsomeness, tongue-in-cheek humor and talent from Broadway's "Wicked," "Hairspray" and "Mamma Mia" (and more), these boys recreate the sounds and choreography of your favorite boy bands, from NKOTB to One Direction.

OCT. 14-16

Farm Harvest Days at Frying Pan Farm. 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. At Frying Pan Farm Park in Herndon. Watch the cider press in action, milk a goat, shell corn, peel apples, meet the farm animals and see traditional farm demonstrations. Take a wagon ride around the park or take a spin on the carousel. Have you ever wondered what it was like to operate large equipment? Come see these up close and speak with those that operate them at Big Truck Night, which takes place on Friday, Oct. 14, 2022 from 5 to 6:30 p.m. For even more family fun at Frying Pan, visit the Fall Carnival that runs concurrently. There will be games and rides and tasty food and beverages for sale. Carnival tickets may be purchased online, and an unlimited carnival ride pass is available for use on Friday and Sunday afternoons.

OCT. 14-16

Capital Art & Craft Festival. At Dulles Expo Center in Chantilly. The Fall Capital Art & Craft Festival will feature art in more than a dozen mediums including glass, jewelry, leather, paintings, prints, photography, pottery, wearable art and wood. Friday, Oct 14: 10 a.m. – 5 p.m.; Saturday Oct 15: 10 a.m. – 5 p.m.; Sunday Oct 16: 10 a.m. -4 p.m. Tickets: \$10 in advance; \$12 at the door. Visit www. CapitalArtAndCraftFestivals.com

SATURDAY/OCT. 15

NVMR Train Station Open House. 1-5 p.m. At Vienna Train Station, 231 Dominion Road, NE, Vienna. Stop by the Historic Vienna Train Station where you can see and hear HO scale model trolleys and trains including Thomas and some of his friends on display and in operation. Great family fun and activity for the young and young-at-heart. Hosted by the Northern Virginia Model Railroaders. See www.nvmr.org.

SATURDAY/OCT. 15

Free Black History Concert. 3 p.m. At 8641
Lewinsville Road, McLean. Historic Pleasant
Grove is hosting the acclaimed Washington
Revels Jubilee Voices ensemble for a free
Black History Celebration featuring tradition
al African American song, poetry, and dance.
This event will take place in a quaint 1895
church setting, now an historic site. Visit
www.HistoricPleasantGrove.org.

OCT. 15-16

Pumpkin Pop-Up and Halloween Experience. 10:00 a.m. – 6:00 p.m. At Tysons Corner Cenwww.ConnectionNewspapers.com ter, The Plaza, McLean. What better to bring in the fall season and get into the Halloween spirit than at Tysons Corner Center's Fall Festival? The Pumpkin Pop-Up and Halloween Experience invites everyone to engage with the community with a farmer's market, wine tasting, live pumpkin carving demos, food sales, music, and a costume contest.

SATURDAY/OCT. 15

Fall Book Sale. 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. At Centreville Regional Library, 14200 Saint Germain Drive, Centreville. Bag Sale on Sunday from 2 - 5 p.m. Fiction for all ages; extensive variety of nonfiction, audiobooks, DVDs and audio CDs.

SATURDAY/OCT. 15

Fire Prevention Week. 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. at Vienna Volunteer Fire Department, 400 Center Street, S., Vienna. The Vienna Volunteer Fire Department is teaming up with the National Fire Protection Association to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the Fire Prevention Week. This year's campaign, "Fire won't wait. Plan your escape", works to educate everyone about simple but important actions they can take to keep themselves and those around them safe from home fires. Visit www.vvfd. org.

SUNDAY/OCT. 16

LINK Celebrates 50 Years. 2-4 p.m. At Herndon United Methodist Church, 701 Bennett Street, Herndon. LINK, an all-volunteer food pantry providing emergency support to neighbors in Herndon, Sterling, and Ashburn, is celebrating 50 years of service to the Northern Virginia community. LINK, a partnership of 15 Christian churches from multiple denominations, provides emergency food and financial assistance to neighbors facing economic challenges. Visit the website http://www.linkagainsthunger.org

SUNDAY/OCT. 16

McLean Pet Fest. 11 a.m.-4 p.m. At McLean Central Park, 1468 Dolley Madison Blvd., McLean. Have fun at the park, see great pet tricks and demonstrations, find valuable pet-related information and get tips on products and services that can enhance the life of your pet and improve your experiences as a pet owner. A variety of exhibitors will be participating. Bring your leashed pets to show off their best costumes and join the fun for the Pet Parade at 3 p.m. Take a picture of your pet and the whole family in the photo booth.

OCT. 21-23

Great Falls Studios Art Tour. 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.
Great Falls Studios represents independent
artists in Great Falls; including the 14 artists
who rent studio space at The Arts of Great
Falls two shared art studios: (1) The Artists'
Atelier with 9 artists and (2) The Artists' Loft
with 5 artists. This year marks the 19th Annual Great Falls Studios Art Tour from Friday
October 21- Sunday October 23, 10 a.m.-5
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Time is Telling



By KENNETH B. LOURIE

After nearly three months of 24-7 focus on my brother's struggle to survive the effects of sepsis (and septic shock), the immediate, imminent danger seems to have passed. Passed into a daily grind of occupational, physical and speech therapies, all of which are monitored six to eight hours a day by a care giver who lends her assistance as well to assisting my brother with his activities of daily living. All of which are improving due to his commitment to get better. No doubt my brother has come a long way since his admission to SICU in mid-July and has progressed further and faster than those original doctors anticipated. Nonetheless, the path ahead is fraught with obstacles (not literally, although there are three sets of stairs inside his house and even two smaller ones outside just to get in).

My challenges are all too familiar to you regular readers: 13 years-plus living with non-small cell lung cancer, stage IV. Originally characterized as "terminal," changed approximately three years ago to simply "incurable" after my diagnosis changed to papillary thyroid cancer, supposedly the "friendly cancer" because of its curability. For my situation, not so much, however. I'll spare you the details, most of which I've relayed in previous columns anyway. Not that I ever expected a health guarantee but given my parent's long lives (both lived into their mid to late 80s), I kind of figured that I'd live into my 80s as well. That being presumed; it turns out the facts are somewhat different. Initially, in Feb. '09, I was "prognosed" for "13 months to two years." After my re-diagnosis three years ago, I was given a new lease on life, sort of, until a procedure to rid the thyroid cancer from my body was unsuccessful and so I received an amended timeline/ prognosis: the prescription medication that I have been taking daily since Sept. '19 is effective for three years-ish. I'm now into the "ish" time.

But this is my obstacle, as it has been going on nearly 14 years. Nothing new, but it sure gets old, slowly. A cancer diagnosis upsets every thought/ plan you had concerning your "road to find out," to quote Cat Stevens, concerning your future (heck, your present, too). And not that I didn't share this feeling with my brother, quite the opposite in fact. Other than my wife, Dina, he was my go-to resource. But now, given his own health challenges and his own cancer diagnosis to boot, we've sort of become equal partners. Not in crime, but in the methodology of surviving. Now, we're on the same team, if you get my meaning: both having been diagnosed with cancer. And it's this shared burden that binds us together more than we ever imagined. (When you've had two healthy parents who lived well into their 80s, you don't anticipate having your own health problems at younger ages than ever afflicted them. It's a presumption, sure, but doctors will often learn a great deal about your prospects by asking about your immediate family history: mother, father, siblings.)

Even though my brother is five years older than me, I never imagined him dying before me. As an older, big brother, I looked up to him. He took care of me. He couldn't possibly die before I do. This feeling became even more prevalent after I was diagnosed with lung cancer. Now I had a perfectly good explanation/understanding of why I was going to predecease him. Not that I was happy about it. Hardly. It just seemed the normal order of things, in my chronological life, anyway. Yet, after his recent health struggles and near-death experience (sepsis is very often a killer and extremely difficult to overcome), I'm forced to consider that my brother might die before my time, despite my issues. And this awareness/revelation has weakened me. Seeing him fight for his life every day in SICU as I did for nearly six weeks was a life-changing experience, especially as a younger brother who looked up to and was somewhat dependent on that older brother.

Now that he's home recuperating and rehabilitating as vigorously as he can, he is – to me, anyway, establishing his bona fides. He is not letting his recent health struggles/challenges negatively affect him at all. He has accepted his deficits and is working every day to overcome them. And even though he can't walk without the assistance of a walker, his goal is to do so. Though he may not be able "to leap tall buildings in a single bound" (or even walk up a few steps) he is my superman and I'm proud to share all our burdens together. And due to his tireless efforts to get better, once again, I don't feel as if he's going to predecease me; and in an odd way, that's extremely comforting to me.

Kenny Lourie is an Advertising Representative for The Potomac Almanac & The Connection Newspapers.



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Dianne Van Volkenburg donates a portion of each sale to the Embry Rucker Community Shelter



