





wrote: "I literally jumped up, spun in circles and then cried because I was so excited."

More than half the participating students return for two or more seasons. Many start in seventh grade and stay through the end of their senior year in high school. Some even return as counselors and later as instructors. "It is very rewarding to see them grow from awkward middle school students into sophisticated young adult artists ready to begin their college careers," said Smith.

Although there were fewer students on campus than in previous years, Smith and his colleagues saw this as both a challenge and an opportunity. "The orchestra only had 30 members this year instead of the usual 60, so we couldn't do some of the full orchestral arrangements we had done in previous years," explained Smith. "On the other hand, the smaller number of students meant that each participant received more individual attention from the instructors. Also, the smaller ensemble enabled us to do some more chamber orchestra arrangements, only with a much fuller sound. We were able to do some really creative, challenging things with the orchestra students."

One of the unique aspects of the MSCA is the close friendships the students forge during the intense two-week session. "They

form very strong bonds with each other," said Smith. "They are together for only two weeks, but many remain friends for years," he added. One group of participants has even created a Summer Center Facebook page to help alumni stay in touch.

The Summer Center program offers participants numerous opportunities to perform publicly and showcase their work for each other and the community. This year, the program partnered with Barnes and Noble Booksellers in Salisbury. Students of acting, music theatre and orchestra had the chance to give live, in-store performances during the course of the two-week session's Outreach Initiative. The orchestra students also performed at the Baltimore Museum of Art Sculpture Garden and the Inner Harbor.

Smith commented that the experience is transforming for just about all who participate. For many middle school students, this is their first experience away from home. In addition to developing their skills as artists, they must also learn how to cope on their own and get along in a community living environment. They also develop practical living skills such as doing their own laundry and making healthy eating choices. "For some, this is also the first time they are with so many other students who

share their passions. In their home town or school, they may be considered unique or odd, but here, they are part of a supportive community of fellow artists," said Smith.

"The program is about the journey – the process of learning, not so much an end result," said Smith. The students don't work toward one final production at the end. Rather, they have the opportunity to learn new skills and methodologies, practice what they learn, take risks, and try out new ideas. "It's a safe yet challenging environment where we encourage them to take risks and even if they fail, it's okay because they have grown and learned so much in the process," said Smith. He added: "Having worked with this program for so long, I've seen how transforming the experience is for kids. That is what keeps me coming back year after year."



Robert Smith