

New Roxbury Music Clubhouse in sync with local youths

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(Courtesy Calin Peters)

Damiere Jackson, 15, and three of his friends now have the space and tools they need to continue making music as a band.

By Matt Rocheleau, Town Correspondent

Eighteen-year-old Brian Means has been going to his local Yawkey Boys and Girls Club since he was five.

“This is my place,” he said. “It’s like a second home for me.”

But when he and three friends recently formed a rock band, the teenagers did not have adequate space or instruments through the Roxbury youth club’s small music program, or elsewhere, to carry out their melodious ambitions – until now.

[The Yawkey Club](#) unveiled a 1,500-square-foot, state-of-the-art music clubhouse Wednesday evening that club and partnering officials expect will serve 100 youth

weekly – an enormous upgrade from the youth club’s former music offering housed in a space described as a “large closet.”

“Now that we have this, it tops it all off,” Means said. “I’m definitely excited.”

“We can make our first album here now,” added 13-year-old Ifunamya ‘Maia’ Obi, a fellow singer with Means in the band, Jinx, that also includes guitarist Damiere Jackson and drummer James Green, both 15.

The sound-proof facility that comprises its own staff, new instruments, computers, a recording studio, Rock Band video game and practice rooms, is the eighth and largest member of “a family of music clubhouses” that has opened in underserved Boston and surrounding communities over the past seven years.

The [Music and Youth Initiative](#) founded by Gary and Joan Eichhorn has been spearheading the [clubhouse-building effort](#).

“It’s becoming increasingly difficult for schools to provide music programming ... particularly for middle and high schools,” Gary Eichhorn said prior to Wednesday’s ribbon-cutting and music performances “Our mission is to try and bring music to any kids we can, especially for kids who could not have access otherwise.”



Marylin, 14, sings "Don't Know Why" by Norah Jones.

(Courtesy [Calin Peters](#))

Like each of the seven existing music facilities, the Roxbury Music Clubhouse and its \$75,000-a-year budget became a reality because of numerous corporate sponsors and two main partnering institutions – one with musical expertise, in this case [Berklee College of Music](#), and the other is a youth organization, in this case [Boys and Girls Clubs of Boston](#).

Berklee has now partnered with all six of the clubhouses in the city – the Yawkey Club, two in Dorchester, and one in Jamaica Plain, in Mission Hill and in Allston. The two clubhouses outside of Boston are in Lawrence and Everett.

Jeremy Butler, who graduated from the college in 2009, will be the facility's music director and Berklee students will work as the program's faculty members teaching ensembles along with private and group lessons. Alumni, faculty, and staff volunteers from the school will also present workshops.

The college also gave access to its real-time, web-based [PULSE](#) music curriculum, and youth club members can choose to join [Berklee City Music](#), which offers after-school instruction, mentoring, and scholarship opportunities to underserved youth at no cost.

"Dudley Square is rich in history, talent, and culture, yet it has lacked accessible music education programming for local youth," said Jim McCoy, the college's director of community affairs and campus engagement. "Berklee wants to offer neighborhood-based music education programs free of charge—not just music lessons, but a course to take music as far as the students want."

And much of the instruction will be done through curriculum authored by Berklee alum David Bickel, a former music director at the first music clubhouse in Lawrence who is now the Music and Youth Initiative's program manager.

Bickel equated the program to community youth soccer leagues in that "everyone gets to play," it is designed for musicians of all talent levels and "it's not just practice, you also get to play in the game as a team," he said.

The ability for students to quickly learn the skills necessary to play alongside other musicians is the program's most unique aspect – the curriculum is synced so that all of the students in the program learn the same concepts, lessons, songs, etc. even if they are learning different instruments.

That team-based model has had youth playing together in a band in as little as four weeks after the program began, Bickel said.

"This is not something you have to sell to kids," said Eichhorn, a high-tech industry veteran and amateur jazz guitarist. "The kids are learning the songs they want to learn really fast and in bands, and that's the best way to keep kids interested."

He said in the process of finding a new hobby, passion or potential future career, the music clubhouses are a place for students to build important life skills – such as good study habits, teamwork, and creativity, which help build confidence.

The other music clubhouses average about 200 visits each week, including 70 to 80 students enrolled in formal lessons, Eichhorn said. Two alumni of the music clubhouses have gone on to Berklee on full scholarships.

“Our goal is for every child to go to college and now they have a path through to Berklee,” said Yawkey Club Executive Director Andrea Swain.

The second-floor clubhouse space at the Roxbury youth club was formerly planned as a fitness center; the fitness room instead replaced a conference room. But, Swain said the club was unable to afford to contract out the necessary work to rebuild that space for its new musical purpose.

It would not have happened if it weren't for the club's maintenance worker, Anderson Mottley, who put in extra hours since July to complete the job.

“It shows the tenacity of our staff,” she said.

“This is one of the gems from our 100th anniversary year that will leave our legacy,” Swain added.

She said she hopes the new room will attract teens who do not go to the youth club because they feel it's too young for them, and not cool.

“The music clubhouse is the ultimate cool for older youth members and teens,” she said.

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(Courtesy Calin Peters)

From left to right: Roxbury Music Clubhouse Director Jeremy Butler, Yawkey Club Executive Director Andrea Swain, Joan and Gary Eichhorn of Music and Youth Initiative and Berklee College Director of Community Affairs and Campus Engagement Jim McCoy.