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MUSIC

**Bach influenced by Mesoamerica**

by *Anthony Broadman*

Johann Sebastian Bach probably never wore a mariachi uniform. But the German baroque-era composer did draw on music from what is now Mexico when he wrote his dance suites.

Violinist Daniel Stepner gave a presentation Tuesday on Bach's use of Mesoamerican dance to Sunnyside High School music students. He said the cultural "street" between Latin America and Europe runs both ways.

"Some cultures don't get the credit they deserve," Stepner said after his presentation.

"What's important, for any student, is to see how important any individual culture fits into (world culture), how they added richness to American and European cultures."

Stepner, who teaches at Harvard and Brandeis universities, played a concert on Monday with his Lydian String Quartet, presented by the Tucson chapter of Friends of Brandeis University. Tuesday morning he discussed the elements of Bach's dance suites derived from Mesoamerican dance music with a few hundred students from Sunnyside and Desert View high schools and Sierra Middle School.

Besides the exercise in musicological genealogy, the event validated the music and culture of Sunnyside's students, Principal Raúl Nido said.

At a school where 89 percent of the students are Hispanic, Stepner's message of musical acculturation struck 17-year-old Sydnee Rivera, a member of Sunnyside's mariachi ensemble, Mariachi los Diablitos, as appropriate.

"Classical and mariachi - they sound so different," Rivera said. "Then to hear something like that, they sound so much alike."

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