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Taking on music technology without missing a beat

New academy program gets students involved in an evolving industry

by Amber Parcher | Staff Writer

It was only the students' second day in the lab at Wheaton High School, but already junior Rodas Yonas had recorded himself playing on the piano keyboard and was critiquing the playback in an editing program.

"This is pretty nice," he said as he took off the headphones attached to the fancy, 20-inch screen iMac computer and a large piano keyboard in front of him.

Yonas and his classmates are the first students at Wheaton High School to take this music technology class, housed in a brand new music lab that is stocked with Macs, keyboards and complex music-editing software.

The class is a part of the school's Institute to Global and Cultural Studies academy. It catches onto the global trend of making music electronically, said Michael Hunt, the school's academy director.



"We saw the wave of music was going more digital," he said. Another motivator to build the lab and create the class was to continue the music education of incoming students from A. Mario Loiederman Middle School in Silver Spring, which already has a digital music lab. Wheaton's music technology teacher, Dorothy Hollingshead, said the goal is to teach students how to create their own music.

"We told them we get 10 percent of the royalties that you make when you leave this class with the songs you write," she joked.

The students work with a variety of computer programs to record their own music, capture it and match it with thousands of beats and instruments already uploaded on the computer. Soon, they will also be able to make art and edit graphics on the same computers, Hunt said.

The digital music and arts lab is one of several innovative initiatives the high school is taking on, said Principal Kevin Lowndes. By the end of the month, students in the biomedical academy will have their own biomedical lab to perform experiments and use new science technology, he said.

The high school is divided into four academies — biomedical, global and cultural studies, engineering and information technologies. What used to be the exception, with 30 percent of incoming students choosing the academy in 2004, is now the norm, Lowndes said. The school is 100 percent academy, with this year's freshman class required to choose an academy path.

Lowndes said the academy programs put students in more advanced classes and allow them to excel.

Hunt said classes such as the music technology course are providing students with real-world tools, such as making music electronically.

"We saw there was a demand for it in the work force," he said.

Over at his computer, Yodas agreed.

"We're doing what professionals do in their office, but it's in a classroom," he said.

