

AVERY ARTS COUNCIL HOSTS BANJO CONCERT



The Avery Arts Council sponsored a banjo concert on Thursday, March 25 at Avery County High School. Students were treated to a concert that was both highly entertaining and educational.

Appalachian State University hosted a concert from March 24 to 27 called “Black Banjo Gathering/Then & Now” at Farthing Auditorium. Three of the eleven musicians performing in that concert agreed to bring their special banjo sounds to the students at Avery High in an effort to promote the art and diversity of that instrument’s music in different cultures.

Also on hand to help host and entertain was the area’s banjo-playing folklorist Steve Kruger.

Dom Flemons, a member of the musical group Carolina Chocolate Drops, which was one of the groups performing at ASU, brought his multi-instrumental talent to Avery High. Dom has performed at such venues as the National Folk Festival, the Newport Folk Festival, The Grand Ole Opry, Prairie Home Companion, Merlefest, New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival, Spoleto Music Festival, Rockygrass, and Symphony Space in New York, to name a few. He plays guitar, banjo (four, five & six), jug, harmonica, kazoo, quills (panpipes), bones, snare drum and bass drum. Dom told the students that although banjos and black string musicians first got here on slave ships, this is everyone’s music now.



Cheick Hamala Diabate, a Grammy-nominated musician from Mali, West Africa, also performed. He entertained the students with his diversity in playing several instruments, including a stringed gourd, guitar, banjo and ngoni, an African plucked-lute instrument. Using Adelphi, Maryland as his home, Cheick travels all over the United States, Canada, Europe and Asia. He has performed at the Kennedy Center, the United States Senate, and the Smithsonian Institution.

New Orleans native Don Vappie played tenor banjo in traditional jazz styles that were first made popular in the early 1900s. His band, the Creole Jazz Serenaders, New Orleans' premier classic jazz orchestra, helps to represent and perpetuate the rich banjo traditions of New Orleans.

The musicians spoke to the students on the history and significance of the distinctive string and percussion instruments that they played.

The event was produced by the Avery County Arts Council and funded in part by Grassroots Grant funds from the North Carolina Arts Council to further promote the appreciation and enjoyment of diversified music from around the world.