

THE SHEPHERD SCHOOL OF MUSIC



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Musicians of the Caribbean

Shepherd School musicians took to the tropics this winter to provide a unique brand of outreach. Under the direction of Marie Speziale (third from left), a quintet featuring Rice alumni and graduate students made its way to the U.S. Virgin Islands to perform during the 350th anniversary of the St. Thomas Reformed Church.

"The organist/choirmaster had heard of our successful brass and wind chamber music program at the Shepherd School from industry professionals," Speziale said. "So as the committee planned this special celebration, they reached out to me to arrange for one of our groups to perform." The chosen quintet, [WindSync](#), performed the anniversary celebration's finale concert Dec. 11, with their arrangement of "West Side Story." Known for combining old and new repertoire, WindSync performed in an interactive fashion that aimed to expand the woodwind quintet repertoire and unveil a musical art form to stimulate public engagement.

"WindSync always tries to channel new levels of artistic output and innovative presentation when putting on a concert production, but they outdid themselves with this performance, acting, dancing and singing so enthusiastically," Speziale said. "Even though I've had opportunities to perform all over the world, this experience will stand as one of the most remarkable for me.



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"It was an enormously gratifying experience and one that was accompanied by great pride to see them challenge themselves and enjoy such enormous success."

The ensemble features Shepherd School graduate students Garrett Hudson on flute and Kevin Pearl on oboe and alumni James Johnson '09 on clarinet and Tracy Jacobson '10 on bassoon. Rounding out the quintet is Anni Hochhalter on French horn.

"Rice is such a powerful launching tool for its students," Speziale said. "WindSync members are full-time musicians throughout the city of Houston, maintaining teaching studios and performing professionally in the area."

But Speziale's biggest point of pride in the quintet is their outreach efforts. The group performs weekly outreach seminars in Houston public schools through the Young Audiences of Houston program. Those efforts were on the musicians' minds during their trip this winter as they worked at the Montessori School and a Sunday morning church service.

"The community had an incredibly supportive response to the concert and the outreach efforts and that made every moment of the process worth it," Speziale said. "We loved having an opportunity to share something that means so much to us, and then to know that the audience was so appreciative of WindSync's efforts."