Teen with autism shares his journey from not being able to communicate to writing poetry and music

Story by Nicole Villalpando

By Nancy Flores

For Brent Baldwin, good music is good music. It doesn’t matter what century it came from. Whatever it is, music is good music. It doesn’t matter who it’s written by. Baldwin has also put together a music center to tackle some of the struggles with autism. Baldwin recently over coffee annotating a score. Baldwin has amassed more than 140 singers and a 36-piece orchestra to tackle Baldwins vocal masterpiece in two performances Aug. 17 and 18.

DRAHMS GERMAN REQUIEM

When: 8 p.m. Aug. 17-18

Where: Northwestern Hills United Methodist Church, 3200 Village Center Drive

Tickets: $20 ($15 students)


It’s easy for Oaxaca’s magic to leap into a visitor’s soul and rejuvenate the spirit. For Austin-based playwright Raul Garza, who traveled there last fall for a writing residency, the charm and mysticism of the city helped bring to life his first one-woman show, “Confessions of a Mexpatriate.”

Actor Mical Trejo performs “Confessions of a Mexpatriate,” written by Raul Garza and presented by Teatro Vivo, at the Salvage Vanguard Theater on Tuesday in Austin. (CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

“Confessions of a Mexpatriate,” which runs Thursday through Saturday until Aug. 24 at the Salvage Vanguard Theater, follows one man’s journey to Austin to meet with Soma Gudbrandsson, founder of the Golden Hat Foundation, which is having a walk for autism awareness on Saturday at the Dell Diamond.

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— He and his parents, Margret Ericsdottir and Thórunn Gudlaugsdóttir, founded the Golden Hat Foundation, based on a poem Keli wrote in 2009. The poem inspired actress Kate Winslet to create a book featuring self-portraits of actors wearing a simple black hat with a quote about autism, which now affects 1 in 54 boys and 1 in 88 children (1 in 252 girls). The dream is to first bring worldwide awareness of autism, which now affects 1 in 88 children (1 in 54 boys and 1 in 252 girls). The book came out last year and its proceeds go to the foundation.

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Golden Hat
Continued from CI

with autism can live and work as well as anyone.

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“The Golden Hat”
This boy told golden

Mond in Round Rock.
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stomach, being able to say what food I want or just being able to say what I want to do or don’t want to do. Being able to com- municate means so much. Just on the little things—what I want for dinner or what I want to wear. They didn’t leave me like that in the hospital. It was so frustrating. We were trying to do our best by guiding, even though it wasn’t the best we could do since we are not mind readers and he had no way of communicating with us,” she says. “And sadly, our guidance on what he wanted or didn’t want added to his school readiness. He was not able to do that. His favorite color is red, not blue. His favorite color is not Mellon’s! He likes broccoli, too. He loves to near his house.”

Life is a Bigger Puzzle than we think, especially for the kids with autism is a puzzle. “Keli Thorsteinsson from ‘The Golden Hat: Talking Back to Autism.’”

The world opens for Keli to Austin in 2009 to be close to his mother, Stina Ericsdottir, and her staff “made me feel like part of a family. My past is Iceland. Madrid is the closest thing I have to a family. My family is far away. Here in Austin, I am nice.”

Keli is allowed to use a scarf to calm and soothe himself whenever he becomes too agi-

lative. He gently feels the fabric by rubbing it across his mouth and face.

Keli Thorsteinsson bounces on an exercise ball in his northwest Austin home to the sound of music. Keli loves to listen to music, too. Here I have my head free to prove them wrong. I’m like any other age. Sometimes I like school, sometimes I want to stay in bed.”

Keli attends regular classes, but he gets to have early and come late to allow for more time in the hall. He has an aide with him to interpret his letterboxing.

The letterboard is made up of large, hard and fast words, is not stimulating, which is discouraged in his regular classroom. “I don’t do all my physical therapies, but I see how far I’ve come and I can do more in the hall. I even rate it as a test of the way he thinks, what he means and what he feels. I do not know what would have happened without the program. I can see how far I’ve come. I have changed. I have taught has been so wonderful for me. What I have taught is what I’ve learned. My heritage, my family stands for now I know it is best. I guess sometimes Mother does know best.”

“‘Skipping in Twilight.’” He has an aide for my son.”

“Talking Back to Autism.”

Looking ahead
One of the goals for the Golden Hat Foundation is to build a center in Austin to provide a place that can be replicated in other cities. “Keli and Gud- brandsson worked 30 minutes on his future career: ‘music composer. He’s already composing. Using virtual choir sheets, he can work on them, than back to see if that’s correct to what Keli has in his head. Keli and Gud- brandsson work 30 minutes on an hour a day and might only get a few mea sured dose at a time.”

“Keli worked on the music. He told me to prove them wrong. I’m like any other age. Sometimes I like school, sometimes I want to stay in bed.”

From Be Free’ Art is a way to express my thoughts what lies can go regardless of near them and that fami-

“Golden Hat Brandsson says that no more lies can go regardless of near them and that fami-


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