

# Washington Jewish Week

At Kol Ami Northern Virginia, a junior music group is formed

By Jacqueline Hyman  
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The Junior Kol Amites at their first rehearsal on Sunday, Jan. 12. Photo provided.

players to just come and play [with the adult band],” said Wright, who acts as the junior group’s conductor. “But I had more and more parents coming up to me wanting their kids to participate, and I got the idea to start a second group.”

There are seven kids, grades four through eight, in the Junior Kol Amites. They’re preparing to perform at the congregation’s Tu B’Shevat seder on Feb. 9.

The range of instruments in the children’s band is unusual, Wright said. They have a violin, two clarinets, a saxophone, a cello and two euphoniums, a tenor brass instrument. The mix of strings, woodwinds and brass instruments isn’t something most elementary and middle school-aged children are used to, because orchestra and band are taught separately.

“With only seven kids and an unusual mix of instruments ... it pulls them a little out of their comfort zone,” he said.

Wright said that before the first rehearsal, he had each child play for him so he could assess what they knew. Some are taking private lessons or classes in school, and Wright said he doesn’t want to interfere with what they’re learning.

“I tried to write the arrangements in a way so that I’m not teaching them their instruments,” he said. “Keep working on musical skills? Absolutely. But I try to stay away from the technical side of things.”

Rabbi Gilah Langner said music has “lifted up our community,” calling Kol Ami — the only Reconstructionist community in Virginia — “small but mighty in music.”

“It’s really made a big difference in the way [things have] been handled or processed by the community, so it’s been times of sorrow and times of joy,” said Langner.

Three of the Junior Kol Amites are middle schoolers who have played with the senior Kol Amites.

“They’re strong players for their age. They kind of act as leaders in [the junior] group,” Wright said.

For the Tu B’Shevat seder, the Junior Kol Amites are rehearsing two songs, “Garden Song” by David Mallet and made popular by John Denver and “Adamah V’shamayim.” They will be the main source of music, Wright said, though there might be some guitar or piano, too.

“Every kid has had a great attitude. They’re extremely patient and kind to each other,” Wright said. “I can work with the kids individually, either to have them demonstrate for the other students or to help them to work on their part, and they seem completely fine with it.”

The goal is for the Junior Kol Amites to focus on holiday music, so they can also play at Purim and Chanukah celebrations.

Langner’s role in the junior band is limited to helping select its music, but she said she wants to stay involved.

“I do hope to pop in and give encouragement and just to let them know how much this is important to us as a community and that their having a role in the community is really valued greatly.”

Elementary and middle schoolers met on Sunday for their second rehearsal for a new band at Kol Ami Northern Virginia Reconstructionist Community in Arlington.

Kol Ami, which has 65 member units, has a band called the Kol Amites (rhymes with dolomites) that performs on the High Holidays and at b’nai mitzvah. The band includes a few kids playing next to their professional musician parents, who could rehearse together at home.

Other kids wanted to join too. So Jason Wright, a professional French horn player who creates the Kol Amites’ arrangements, started the Junior Kol Amites.

“It was really impossible for most elementary and middle school