

'Surreal': Calgary students shocked as Arkells steps in during performance of band's hit song

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Canadian rock band Arkells shocked kids at the Calgary Arts Academy on Wednesday.

The academy was the 2018 winner of the MusiCounts Passion Prize for

their cover of Arkells' "People's Champ" for the Canadian Music Class Challenge (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ajr0BYjCgl8>) put on by MusiCounts and CBC Music.

More than 200 academy singers, instrumentalists and dancers gathered in the school's gym, thinking they were being asked to perform the song again because they had won the prize. But partway through their performance for the assembled cameras, Arkells walked in.

"It was shocking," said student Cael Payn. "I was like, who are these people going through our gym? I realized it was them and then I was like, I have to sing really good now."



The Juno award-winning Arkells puts on a surprise performance for students at the Calgary Arts Academy on Wednesday.

Arkells joined them for a second performance of "People's Champ," then performed "Knocking at the Door." Then, after remarks by Calgary Mayor Naheed Nenshi and MusiCounts executive director Kristy Fletcher, the students took selfies with the band and got them to sign their phones.

"That was a very unique and surreal experience for us," said Arkells singer

Max Kerman, who had seen the prize-winning YouTube video after it was released.

“I was pretty blown away by how fearless they were as performers,” Kerman added. “They were really going for it, no one was really timid. And they really enjoyed the performance. I was really impressed.”



Arkells singer Max Kerman takes selfies with students on Wednesday.

MusiCounts is a Canadian music education charity that “ensures that all kids have access to music and music education through the schools and communities,” said Fletcher. The charity is 22 years old and has awarded \$11 million in musical instruments to more than 1,000 schools across Canada.

“On a personal level, I feel like this just isn’t work,” said Fletcher. “This is joyful, it’s so unbelievably rewarding to know that you’re impacting students, impacting children, impacting a community.”



(<https://postmediacalgaryherald2.files.wordpress.com/2019/02/arkells075-copy.jpg?quality=55&strip=all>)

Part of the passion prize award was a \$5,000 grant to purchase musical instruments, which were wheeled in after Arkells' performance. Academy music teacher Garrett Thorson said the new instruments give more opportunities for a diverse musical experience.

"We wanted to get a good mix of practical and fun," he said. The grant went toward method books, a saxophone and "what school doesn't need a keytar? So we made sure one of those was on there as well," Thorson said.



Student Gabrielle Zitale with the band Arkells, surrounded by MusiCounts prizes.

Thorson said they've been participating in the Canadian Music Class Challenge for three years. Each year they try to pick a song that's a bit different, adding they picked "People's Champ" because it's upbeat and "it's got some power behind it."

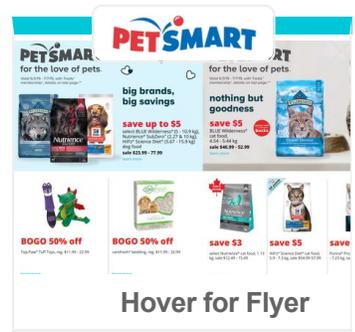
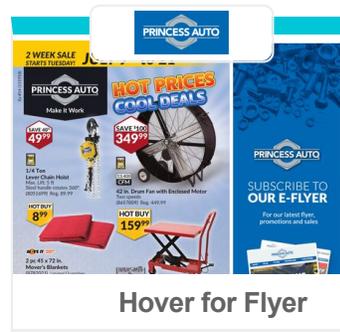
He was excited to see the kids' reaction to Arkells. "It was a really cool experience to see all that energy in the room," Thorson said. "We put hours and hours into that song. I'm glad to see it paid off for everybody."

Arkells, who were recently nominated for Juno Awards for group of the year and rock album of the year, play the Scotiabank Saddledome on Saturday.

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