Like Minds

One jug band, plus four other quirky school clubs

By Candice Dyer • Photographs by Christopher T. Martin

BANG AND STOMP Front row from left, Maddie Fox (guitar), Savanna Lawing (washboard), Leah Zipperman (block) Back row from left, Dr. Allen Barksdale (guitar), Emili Earhart (bones), Matthew Tennant (tambourine), Daichi Tsunafuji (spring board), Michael Groome (tub), Mark McCandless (harmonica), Amy Wakano (jug drums), Sam Cone (washboard tie), Alanna Minor (cymbal)

JUG BAND

GALLOWAY JUG BAND

The Galloway School

A GRAFFITO SCRAWLED on the basin warns: "This Washtub Kills Fascists."

The dented instrument thrums with surprising fury in the hands of Michael Groome, whose slight Adam's apple bobs as he wails in a keening treble "Take This Hammer," an old work song by Lead Belly. He is accompanied heartily by about a dozen other music makers, who play a makeshift springboard, the bones (rib bones of a cow), and a washboard with thimble, among other string and percussive instruments. In a gesture of authenticity, one girl strikes a rusty railroad spike periodically to punctuate the chorus.

"I wouldn't be exposed to these songs if I didn't belong to the band," says Groome, a senior who dreams of playing "noisy, avant-garde rock" professionally.

The Galloway Jug Band grew out of the History of American Music class taught by Allen Barksdale, a hipster teacher in wing tips. He and science instructor Mark McCandless advise the group, which draws its repertoire primarily from folk and other old-timey roots music, including nubby-textured, world-weary numbers by the Carter Family, Jimmie Rodgers, and Blind Lemon Jefferson.

"Music is a good tool because it gives the students context," says Barksdale. "For example, the old fiddle tune 'Eighth of January' is about the War of 1812. A song gives them a fuller, richer sense of the time, so they're more likely to remember the history lesson."

The band rehearses once a week in Barksdale's classroom, which is plastered in sepia-toned placards and posters of vintage Americana, and gigs mainly for parents and younger students—often with spontaneous, unexplained guerrilla performances in hallways.

"Our music is intense, comical, sometimes uncanny, and always awesome," Groome says. "If you can bang on something, you are eagerly accepted." ■

TANGLED WEB From left, Katie Buckis, Joanna Lu, and Candice Lee

MARIST KNITTING CLUB
Marist School

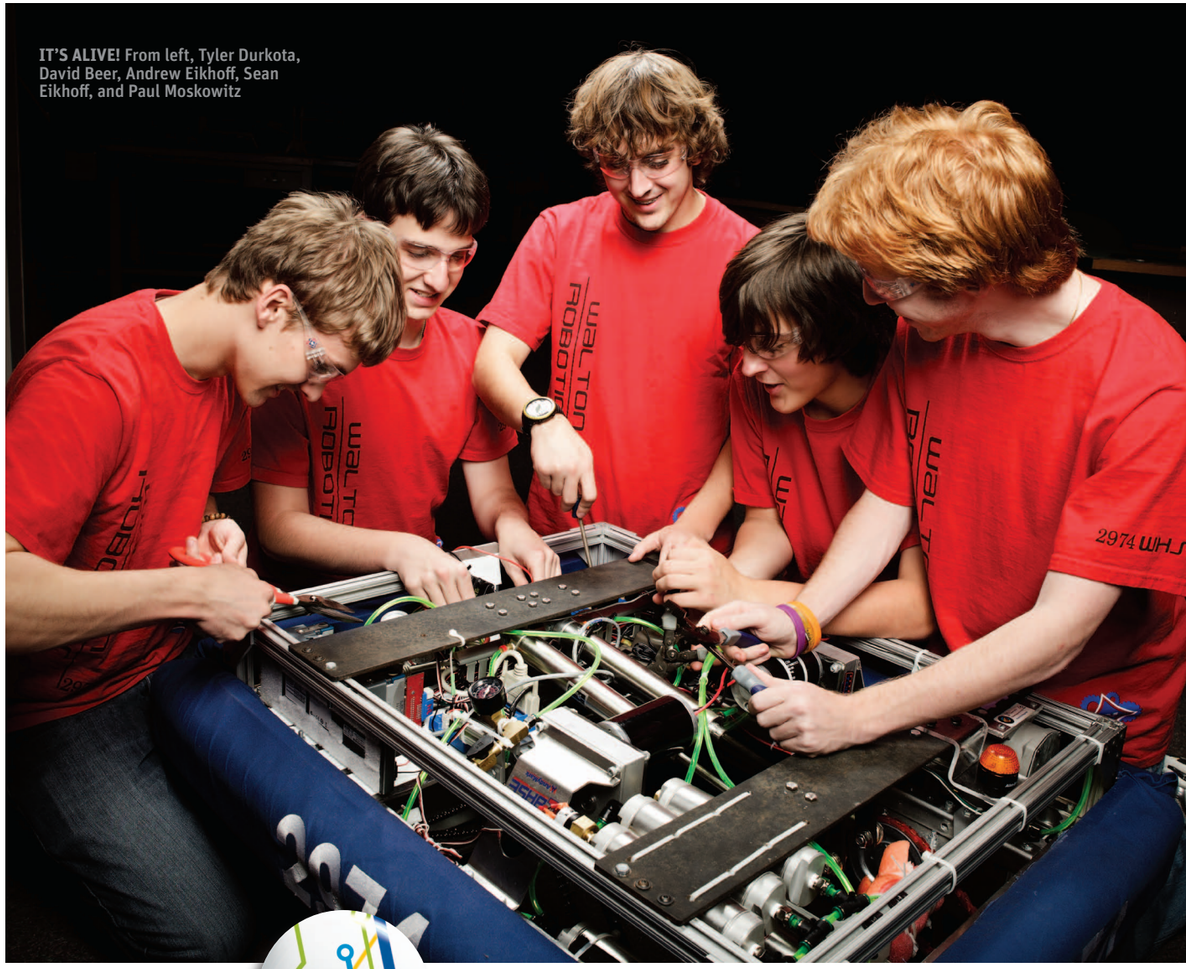
KNITTING BECAME CLOAKED, cozily, in a spirit of girlie rebellion in the early 2000s with subversive primers such as *Stitch 'n Bitch*. The hobby caught on initially with the Goth types, whose first-time projects often languished unfinished because black yarn poses such a visual challenge.

At Marist, though, knitting has returned to its more wholesome warp and woof. "I'm not a really artsy person, but I do this because my grandma does," says Georgia Smith, a thirteen-year-old whose shiny, blond head is frequently bowed, eyes squinted in concentration, over a scarf in progress. She explains, "There are two basic kinds of stitches: knit and purl—um, that's purl with a 'u,' not like the jewelry. It's a great way to do something productive when you're bored. You have something you can hold in your hands at the end of it."

And something comforting to share. One of the club's ongoing projects is crafting squares that are used to make afghans for chemotherapy patients. "We try to knit with a purpose," says teacher-adviser Susanne Greenwood. "And the girls—it's mostly girls, but we've had a few young men who were excellent knitters—usually end up making Christmas gifts, which makes me feel good."

Knitting also develops patience and focus. "They're all so busy," Greenwood says. "This is an outlet. Your hands have to be very relaxed to make these stitches. So it's calming."

For that reason, she does not expect the trend to unravel. "Knitting has been around a long time, and our club has become fairly well established, so I think it's here to stay, whether knitting is considered in vogue or not." And according to fashion prognosticators, "chunky knitwear"—like cardigans made with a big, round needle—will undergo another surge in popularity, so expect even more stitches in time. ■



IT'S ALIVE! From left, Tyler Durkota, David Beer, Andrew Eikhoff, Sean Eikhoff, and Paul Moskowitz

WALTON ROBOTICS TEAM
Walton High School

IF HE WERE THE CLIQUISH TYPE, Walt 2.0 might hang with the jocks. The 120-pound robot can kick a soccer ball fifty feet into a goal, and thanks to his bumpers, he takes a bruising without blinking. Walt 2.0 proved so badass, in fact, his creators placed ninth in two competitions in which radio-controlled robots squared off against each other on the field.

"We spent six intensive weeks designing, building, and programming this robot," says the team's executive director, Tyler Durkota, "so it was gratifying the first time all of its lights came on, everything worked, and we made it do exactly what we wanted."

The school's support for robotics coalesced three years ago into a competitive team that has fared well against the estimated 4,000 teams worldwide. The students, eyes shielded with safety glasses as they cut metal with a saw, do much more than tinker, says adviser Brian Benton.

"It's like an internship at Lockheed Martin," he says, "because it involves pneumatic systems, electronics, computer programming, and assembling the same parts used in underwater rovers at manufacturing facilities. We're talking about high-level engineering, not plastic toys."

Like other real-world endeavors, robots cost money. "What we do is capital-intensive—it may cost $10,000—so we devise a business plan, recruit sponsors, and do community outreach," says Durkota, a junior who plans eventually to work in computer programming.

Of the thirty-six team members, eight are girls. "We're trying to recruit more girls, who are excellent with robotics because—and I'm generalizing here—they tend to be very detail-oriented," he says.

Despite its techie allure, the field of robotics remains underpopulated, Durkota says. "We aim to change the perception. In other words, you don't have to be a nerd to get excited about robots." ■

QUIDDITCH CLUB
Roswell High School

LIKE MOST SPORTS—and life in general—Quidditch involves moving toward a goal to attain a prize despite the opposition in your path. Its rules and terminology, inspired by the Harry Potter book-and-movie phenomenon, are just more fanciful.

Described in the text as an enchanted and aerial version of "basketball on broomsticks with six hoops," matches play out between two teams of seven witches and wizards in roles defined as chasers, beaters, a keeper, and a seeker, with balls in the form of quaffles, bludgers, and the all-important golden snitch, the capture of which determines victory.

"It's just like in the books, except we can't really fly, obviously," says Austin Shaw, who founded the club at the beginning of the school year with his friend, Michelle Cotton. They do, however, sprint and clash astride broomsticks.

"It's a full-contact sport," Cotton says. "The snitch—who is identified by a tennis ball in a yellow tube sock hanging from the back of a player's pants—can tackle the seeker and do anything and everything to get away."

However, strict rules govern the foul equivalents of blagging, cape-tugging, and other unsportsmanlike conduct.

The club, which plays intramural games and hopes eventually to face off with teams from other schools in a "tri-wizard tournament," includes about thirty students, not all of them bespectacled.

"You don't have to be a jock to play this game, but it's not exclusively bookworms," says Heather Rabinowitz, who cosponsors the team with fellow science teacher Beth Ball. "It takes a good-spirited person to run around on a broom."

For Shaw, who relates to Harry Potter's portentous quest "to set the world back to a state of righteousness," the club represents a full-circle moment. "This is the beginning of the end of the series," he says, noting that next year's film release will be the last. "I'll be going away to college then, so my youth is coming to an end." ■

NO BLAGGING, PLEASE From left, Austin Shaw, Jacob Volk, and Michelle Cotton

OTAKU BELLES From left, Senna Hubbs, Alex James, Kiddist Makonnen, and Christi Roth

ANIME CLUB
Brookwood High School

OTAKU, LOOSELY TRANSLATED, means "geek" in Japanese, and it lately has been applied to people with an obsessive interest in anime and manga, or graphic novels. (Whatever you do, don't call them "comic books.")

About forty fans of the highly stylized form of Japanese storytelling have rallied together, over sushi and the cookie sticks called Pocky, in the Anime Club. They screen and discuss films, peruse manga, and tell Japanese ghost stories, all while plotting their own wide-eyed dreams of art and movie-making. As part of the club's whimsical argot, they call each other by Japanese nicknames.

"Most of us grew up with Pokémon and Yu-Gi-Oh," says president Senna Hubbs, "but when we were little, we didn't know what we were watching. As we got older, we realized, 'Oh, this is anime!' It's insane but beautiful."

Anime characters typically are teens in school uniforms with eyes that are exaggerated in size to convey emotion, she says, adding, "I doodle anime eyes at the top of my notes all the time—angry eyes are almost entirely irises."

Narratives veer from shojo, or romances that tend to appeal to girls, to violent, action-oriented shonen.

The club, which claims a few members of Asian descent, had disbanded for a couple of years until Hubbs resurrected it last year "by sheer force of otaku will." Recently it conducted a competition for a logo and settled on a drawing of a mecha, or giant robot, with a Japanese schoolgirl, "which sums up anime really well," Hubbs says.

"Some people regard it as low art, as a genre, when in fact it can be very sophisticated, and it's a format, not a genre," she says. "There are many genres within this format—comedy, horror, sci-fi—with some of them anime- and manga-specific, such as 'Magic Girl,' a superhero in a sparkly pink tutu who fights these monster things with glowing hearts."

Pass the Pocky. ■

ILLUSTRATION BY DANNY CAPOZZI