

'POLICE ACADEMY' STAR WOWS STUDENTS AT STS. PETER AND PAUL

St. Thomas Source

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ST. THOMAS - Dramatic sound effects, theatrical routines, and some classic beat-boxing from comedian Michael Winslow tickled the funny bones of students, teachers and parents at Sts. Peter and Paul Catholic School Tuesday.

Winslow, best known for his role as the human beat-box in the "Police Academy" movies, also had audience members cheering and clapping with various impersonations and a comical reading of a book called "The Magically Mysterious Adventures of Noelle the Bulldog," which was written by his "good friend," singer Gloria Estefan.

During the reading, Winslow had a new sound effect for every sentence and entertained younger students with the different voices he used for the book's characters, along with his ability to produce multiple noises during busier scenes. In these instances, Winslow was able to imitate the sounds of many animals, cars and even more than one musical instrument in just one breath, transporting the audience from ordinary reality into the pages of the book.

As a special treat for the older students -- who filed into the school's cafeteria after strains of laughter wafted across the courtyard into various classrooms -- Winslow set up a small television set and provided the sound effects for a clip from "Star Wars -- Episode VI, Return of the Jedi" and seemingly battled enemy forces in space alongside Luke Skywalker, Han Solo and Princess Leia.

In a brief question-and-answer round, students also challenged Winslow to perform some celebrity impersonations, which ranged from a pudding-eating Bill Cosby to "Family Matters" character Steve Urkel and funnyman Chris Tucker. Winslow also did a brief acoustic rendition of a Stevie Wonder song, using his vocal chords to simultaneously produce the sounds of both the piano and the saxophone.

When asked about his abilities, Winslow explained that he grew up listening and imitating the sounds of animals in his neighborhood and practiced everyday to build his talent. "It grows on you after awhile," he added later. "And then one day, I realized that I can't help but make noises. I also realized that I can take them with me anywhere—that I can just pack them up when I go traveling, so that when I visit different countries and don't know the language, I can use my sounds. I consider this my main philosophy, because sounds are universal and transcend any language barrier."

After the reading, students anxiously lined up to get Winslow's autograph, talking excitedly about their favorite parts of the performance, while some teachers stayed close by to take quick snapshots. "It was really something different," Laquann Roberts, a seventh-grader at Sts. Peter and Paul said. "And I thought it was really fascinating that he could make all those noises at once. I especially liked the effects he did for the 'Star Wars' movie—it was fun watching the screen and hearing the noises all around us."

"It really was amazing," added 12-year-old Joshua Quetel, who was waiting to take a picture with Winslow. "There were times when you didn't even know where the noises were coming from—

sometimes they seemed like they were coming from the outside or in other parts of the room instead of just coming from him."

Many adults in the audience were also impressed by Winslow's performance. "I actually sat down with him before today's event," Rev. George Franklin, the school's principal said. "And I was really intrigued by the way he could just manipulate his voice like that and how spontaneous his sounds were. I thought that he would have to think about something before he did it, but no—it was really improvisational. And we're really glad that he could be here to share this with us."

Winslow explained that he came to St. Thomas as part of the Resort to Reading program sponsored by the Mahogany Run Golf Course and Ginn Clubs and Resorts for National Library Week. "I got a call one day, and someone asked me if I was interested in coming to St. Thomas, and I thought, 'Why not?' I've never been here, and I thought it would be a great opportunity to get kids excited about learning how to read."

Winslow also said he saw the reading as an opportunity to further a new phase in his career: becoming a part of educational and kid-friendly programming. "I used to be involved in the 'Reading Rainbow' series on television, and I wanted to kind of go back to that," he said. "So, I just did a new movie called 'Lenny the Wonder Dog,' which kids can sit down and watch without parents having to worry about what they're going to see."

Winslow added that he's trying to send a positive message about the importance of education to youngsters through his participation in various reading activities. "It's really important that our students learn that it's one thing to come to school every day, but it's quite another to actually finish," he said. "And I think that idea—that they should finish what they start—should really be emphasized."