Jeffrey Hughes: Not Your Average Violinist

By Mimi McMann

Musician Jeffrey Hughes has come a long way since he first picked up a child-sized violin at age 3. Today he is an accomplished artist who combines classical violin, soul, funk, rock, jazz and hip-hop to create an original sound.

Recently Hughes was acknowledged by his alma mater, Graland Country Day School, with an alumni achievement award named after former Graland teacher Nancy Priest. With the 92-year-old Priest in attendance at the award ceremony, Hughes reflected on his career path: “The violin and Graland, those are really the two best things that happened to me as a kid.”

After being introduced to the instrument as a toddler, he continued his classical training, earning a scholarship to the University of Denver’s Lamont School of Music. Hughes has spent his career exploring the versatility of the violin and expanding its audience. By bridging the gap between classical and modern music like hip-hop, he showcases a traditional instrument in a new way. Among other notable performances, Hughes has played for President and Mrs. Obama, with the Colorado Symphony Orchestra, and at the Grammy Awards.

“Music is a form of self-expression,” he said. “It is a wonderful feeling to express myself in positive ways. I love to perform.”

Graland art teacher Cathy Naughton remembers the year Hughes came to Graland as an eighth-grader in the late ’90s: “He was a great kid who was very charming. He made friends easily and was extraordinarily well-liked.” The classmates are still connected, and many alumni from the class of 1999 were in attendance to see Hughes receive his award.

Hughes attended Graland for two years and graduated after ninth grade. “I only wish I’d come sooner,” he said. “Graland prepared me for the real world. The environment and the school helped to give me the skills and tools that shaped me into the man I am today.

“I’m very honored to receive this award in the company of such accomplished and incredible peers, for it was here where my dreams began and were fostered and cared for. I developed much of my identity at Graland, and began my evolution as a musician.”

The Nancy Nye Priest Alumni Award is presented each year to recognize an outstanding Graland alumnus or alumna who, through their work, demonstrates an outstanding commitment to community and loyalty to the ideals nurtured at Graland.