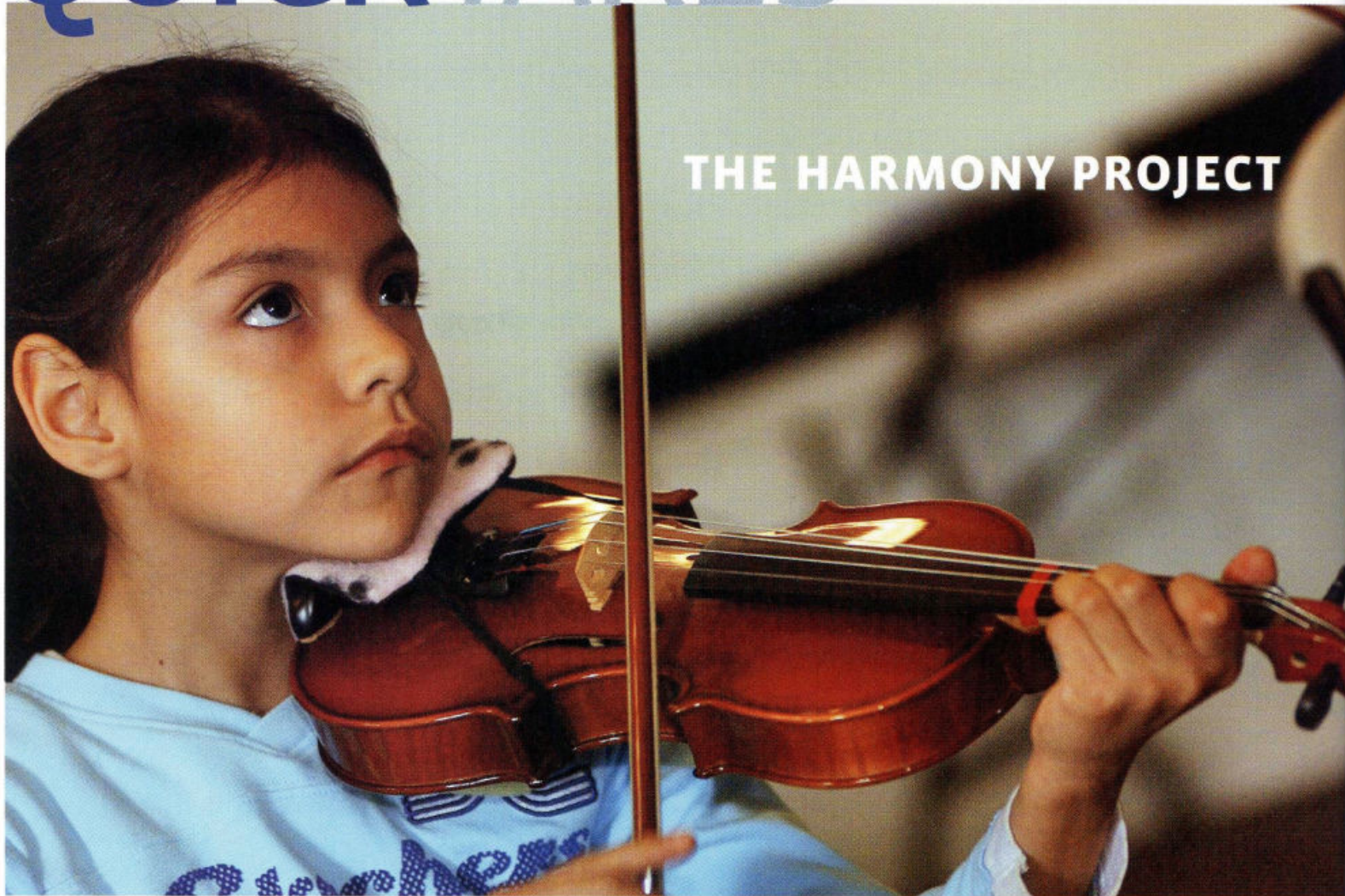


QUICKTAKES



THE HARMONY PROJECT

GANG MEMBERS WITH SHAVED HEADS and tear-shaped tattoos on their faces aren't exactly a welcome sight, especially if they're identically dressed and moving around in a "pod." And it's bad news indeed if they should happen to stop right in front of you, hands deep in the pockets of their extra-baggy blue trousers.

Margaret Martin M.P.H. '93, Dr.P.H. '98 was aghast when she and her 5-year-old son Max ran into just such a group in the Hollywood Farmers' Market eight years ago. It didn't help that Max, a musical prodigy, had attracted quite a crowd playing Bach minuets on an expensive violin. A pile of money lay in his violin case. "The hair went up on the back of my neck," Martin recalls.

As Max's music swelled, the half-dozen gangsters slowly pulled out all the money they had in their pockets — and gently put it into his violin case. "I started to cry," Martin says. "Clearly, they were honoring what this little white kid was doing. I wish I could have hugged each one of them and given them a better opportunity in their lives."

If it weren't for that remarkable encounter, Martin might never have dreamed of helping underprivileged children, who all too often become gangsters like those who heard Max play. In 2001, 18 months after the

Farmers' Market incident, Martin launched the Harmony Project, a nonprofit organization that has been providing year-round music scholarships to underprivileged students in the Los Angeles area.

Over the years, the Harmony Project (www.harmony-project.org) has grown from 35 students and an \$80,000 annual budget to 300 kids and a budget of nearly \$500,000. More than 100 young musical hopefuls are on the program's waiting list. (With donations from individuals and organizations, the program targets students early in elementary school and sticks with them until they graduate from high school.) The Los Angeles Philharmonic provides free concert tickets to Harmony students and recently partnered with the nonprofit to help with its outreach efforts.

There's another key reason behind the creation of the Harmony Project: Martin's passion for public health. A public health professional is trained to look at unhealthy communities and ask, "What can we do to make them healthy?" says Martin. For the most part, this requires developing and implementing public health interventions in everything from drugs, alcohol and teenage pregnancy to gang involvement, homicide and domestic violence.