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Odyssey of the Mind World Finals

By Lou Fancher



Photo provided

Take some of the most creative young minds from across the globe, bring them all at once onto a blistering, hot campus in the midwest in late May, and what happens? Answer: Six eighth-grade students from Joaquin Moraga place 7th in the world in Odyssey of the Mind's World Finals.

The Moraga Rotary Club Team A, already sporting first-place blue ribbons after the State level of competition, went to East Lansing, Michigan, expecting the best. Megan Adachi speaks for the group, saying, "Just getting to World is winning!" The attitude is not a slogan; it's what makes this team special.

They are special and "weird," which in Odyssey is good, according to team members Samantha Garcia, Samantha Bartak, Omid Boozarpour, Kyle Dana, Jarrett Tom, Jack Price and Adachi. The kids feed off each other's enthusiasm as they shout out definitions.

Weird—the good kind—is energetic, unique, spontaneous, awkwardly social, out-there, narwhal, (Google it,) and "us!" Reaching group consensus, Tom explains why mutual weirdness is important: "The best thing about Odyssey is you can do everything you ever wanted to," he says, smiling, "and you can't look at other people as strange when you're about to go up on stage as half-man/half-woman!"

At World, the Moraga team competed against 62 equally "out-there" middle school groups. Teams from China, Hong Kong, South Korea, Japan, Singapore, Belgium, Poland, Mexico and other countries spent the four-day event rehearsing, competing, socializing and repairing props.

"Right before we were ready to compete, all the props were falling apart," says Boozarpour, rolling his eyes at the memory. Months of use and transportation by truck from California to Michigan caused everyone to wonder if the

materials would last. Repairs were done under adverse conditions. "It was so hot, we were sweating," says Garcia. "It was terrible, terrible...terrible!"

The team's spontaneous portion of the competition occurred two days into the event. Because a language-based problem might have given the American team an advantage over international teams, their problem was hands-on. They were given one piece of string, a variety of irregular objects and six minutes to come up with a creative way of suspending all the items from a hook. "The hardest object was a ball with a neck that was wavy," says Boozarpour, carving his hands through the air to demonstrate. The team came up with a physical solution, a theme song and a story. Dana begins to retell the story saying, "I can't remember," then, "it kind of evolved," and finally, "It was something about a baby being thrown out of a plane." Somehow, it clicked with the

judges: the team's "spont" scores were some of the highest in their age group.

On Saturday, at their long-term presentation, the team had a large audience of supporters. "It was nice to have the support of the other regional teams," says Janice Adachi, co-team leader along with Linda Wong. "Everyone started cheering for us; it was great," says Price. "We'd made a lot of friends by then," says Garrett, "because of pin trading, mostly."

The pins, designed by each country, are traded voraciously during World competitions. Pin parties are not unlike the floor of the New York Stock Exchange when the Dow plummets or soars: bargaining is fast, bartering is key and victory is in knowing the angles. "The meanest thing anyone could do to you is rip you off in pin trading," says Boozarpour. Amidst the back-and-forth action, friendships are formed and respect for good-sportsmanship through honest competition increases.

The team admits to being in awe of the kids from other countries. "I was dreaming when I thought we might get in the single digits," says Dana, "and we did!" If placing seventh was the best part of this year's competition, the second best part was being with kids from all over the world. The team has fond memories of playing basket-

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ball, pin trading with sign language to bridge communication gaps and sharing meals. "It shows you how everyone's the same," says Garcia, "it was entirely fun."

Prop destruction follows the announcement of the final scores. Five months of work vanishes from the face of the earth in 5 minutes. "It took a little longer this time," says Price, "because we all wanted a swing at it." Bartak, who has been quiet through most of the interview, suddenly speaks up: "It wasn't very efficient, but it was so satisfying!"

In the end, the Moraga team won prizes that surpass any award. They won a broader perspective on the world, they solidified a six-member friendship, and they came

home proud, confident and immensely happy.

Lamorinda Goes to Odyssey World Finals

In addition to the Moraga team that reporter Lou Fancher has been following this past year, three other Lamorinda teams advanced to the Odyssey of the Mind World Championships garnering outstanding results in their divisions.

Congratulations to:
Happy Valley School Team A, 10th place
Orinda Masonic Lodge Team, 12th place
Glorietta Elementary School Green Team, 21st place

Orinda Idol Finalists

Submitted by Britta Glade



(L-R) Ashley Abramson, Savannah Sherwood, Natalie Childers, and Eloise Eng look forward to the K-5 group try-outs. Photo Julie Abramson

Six community judges were entertained by almost 200 K-12

contestants at this year's Orinda Idol tryouts held May 12-15. The stu-

dents came from 23 different schools in the Lamorinda area and exhibited a very high level of talent, enthusiasm and creativity. In the end, 35 soloists and 10 groups from 15 different schools were selected to advance to the finals, which will take place on Sept. 12 at the Orinda Theatre.

The finalists will perform in various locations over the summer, including:

- Orinda July 4th celebration
- Orinda Community Park concert on July 20
- Orinda Farmers Market on August 14

The 2010 finalists have also been invited to perform at the Lafayette Wine and Art Festival on September 19 and the Education Foundation of Orinda/Chamber of Commerce Dine About Town evening on September 28.

Talented Musicians Take the Stage at Jazz Café

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All of their practice hours came together at last Friday's Jazz Café.

A total of eight bands entertained a packed multi-purpose room/jazz lounge at Stanley Middle School - four from Stanley and four from Acalanes. Representing Stanley was the 39-member strong Stanley Jazz Orchestra, Jazz Surge, the Jazzkateers and The Wednesday Morning Combo; representing Acalanes was the 24-member Acalanes Jazz Ensemble, the Gypsy Chicks, Flying Solo and On In Five.

All of the Stanley students had an opportunity to improvise, pals Emma Maiden and Lauren Chuck confessed to being "a little nervous" before their performances. "Playing music expresses my creativity at a whole new level," said Maiden. She's been playing at Stanley for three years and plans to continue at Acalanes. Fellow eighth grader Chuck will be attend-

ing Campo, plays the flute and saxophone, and she also feels music helps her articulate her individuality.

"I like students to take chances and improvise," said Stanley Director of Music Education Bob Athayde. It's clear he has found his passion at Stanley. "No one gets cut - we find a place for everyone - there are no substitutions." His philosophy is embodied in the music department's motto, "We all play together." They play together a lot - students arrive early before school to practice and get no credit. "Doing something well takes time," notes Athayde - an important life lesson for these 12-, 13- and 14-year olds.

The Jazz Café crowd enjoyed a unique arrangement by Kyle Athayde of "Old Devil Moon;" the younger Athayde, a professional musician, comes by way of the Juliard School of Music. "He used to

be my student, now he's my teacher," said proud papa Bob.

A concerted effort from parent volunteers transformed the Multi-purpose room - candles, special lighting and decorations - into Yoshi's East. Unlike the celebrated jazz club's sushi and sashimi plates, there were tri-tip sandwiches and Caesar salad provided by Chef's Touch.

Athayde credits many talented volunteers who generously give their time to support these students. Tommy Davidson, John Aczon, Chris Mani and David Portnoff help on a daily basis with music and direction. A special shout out went to 87-years-young bass clarinet player Nick Longo who comes every day, with his "New York attitude," and Ginni Reynolds, who keeps the Music Office running smoothly along with LASF, the PTA and the Generations in Jazz Foundation.

ORINDA IDOL FINALISTS 2010

GRADES K-2:

Hannah Biles
Malin Glade
Kiera Glenn
Alex Meckes
Lillian Storrs
Grace Baer
Emily Barlow
Ryan Ford
Arriana Glenn
Samantha Martin
Kate Marvin
Casey McGonigle
Jackie Patton
Lara Waibel
Leah Woodcox

MIDDLE SCHOOL:

Michelle Anjani
Aaron Baum
Sophie Belinn
Lucy Clearwater
Isabelle Johannessen
Tosca Maltzman
Julia Meckes
Amrita Newton
Emma Patton
Madison Wheeler
HIGH SCHOOL:
Kate Avery
Lindsay Ford
Jacqueline Garell

Parker Hasler

Rochelle Kwan
Katie Marino
Neris Newton
Steven Patton
Francesca Reutzell
Sofie Woodlee
GROUP CATEGORY K-5*:
Celtic Summer: Fiona Akazawa, Malia Akazawa & Niamh Akazawa
Crazy Girls: Emery Anderson, Malin Glade, Shelby Tse
The Odd Couple: Samantha Martin, Jackie Patton
The Chordettes: Lauren Bond, Beth Huelsenbeck, Maia Shwartz & Amanda Yuen
The New Yorkers: Ellie Glade & Jocelyn Purcell

GROUP CATEGORY 6-12*:

Lucy and Liam!: Lucy Clearwater & Liam Williams
J*Rock: Liza Horn, Aislinn McNiece, Cessie Nishimi, Kelsey Raftis, Reed Rembac, Grace Strausser, Iris Wagner, Caroline Whelehan
Three-O Members: Natalie Clendenning, Allison Nichols & Audrey O'Donnell

SPJANKI:

Jacqueline Garell, Amrita Newton, Neris Newton, Katie Marino, Paige Powell, Sofie Woodlee
Julia & Katie: Julia Elliott & Kate McGlothlen
The Wonder Twins: Lindsay Ford, Francesca Reutzell
JUDGES NAMED RUNNER-UPS** AS FOLLOWS:
GRADES K-2: 1st Grace Barmmer, 2nd Ashley Abramson
GRADES 3-5: 1st Amanda Bovoso, 2nd Layla Wright
MIDDLE SCHOOL: 1st Paige Powell, 2nd Liam Williams
HIGH SCHOOL: 1st Annalise Baer, 2nd Connor Holton
GROUP CATEGORY K-5:
1st Amoré: Katharine Larson, Ophelia Luchin & Grace Baer, 2nd Friends: Kate Marvin & Lucy Stenovoc
GROUP CATEGORY 6-12:
1st Blondies: Sierra Ryder & Regan Fitch, 2nd Kelly and Beverly: Beverly Worth & Kelly Higgins, 3rd Beltway: Maritza Grillo & Tosca Maltzman



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** Runner-Ups serve as alternates in their category for finalists who choose not to compete September 12, 2010