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Lafayette's Gold Coast Chamber Players Celebrate 15th Anniversary

By Sophie Braccini



Gold Coast Chamber Players explore the relationship between Antonin Dvorak and African American Spirituals with (from left) Dr. Alvin McLean, piano; Lawrence Beamen, vocals; Robert Howard, cello; Hrabba Atladottir, violin; Pamela Freund-Striplen, viola; and Laura Albers, violin (assistant concertmaster SF Opera).
Photo provided

When Pamela Freund-Striplen moved to Lafayette with her husband 15 years ago, the Gold Coast Chamber Players found their new home. "I want to thank many people who have been there with us all these years," she says, "and this year, at each performance we will individually thank some of our supporters." To celebrate the anniversary, Freund-Striplen has invited performers of the highest caliber to present a classical music program for seasoned and novice music lovers alike.

The concert that will launch this year of celebration features Hungarian strings music with Bartok and Kodaly, "a set of pieces that is very engaging, fiery, and passionate. This one is a good one for those who know (classical music) and those who don't," says the director.

Freund-Striplen moved from Alameda to Lafayette for the schools, and the family arrived in a community that had already developed very strong musical education programs. "In fact just as we arrived Steve Falk, the city manager, said to one of his neighbors that all that was missing in Lafayette was a chamber orchestra," says Freund-Striplen, adding that Falk

has been one of their strongest supporters. Gold Coast Chamber Players performed at Town Hall Theatre for seven years, then moved to various churches until the Lafayette Library and Learning Center came into view. "We were asked some advice when the concept of the community hall was defined," says Freund-Striplen. "The result is a place that has perfect acoustics and that has become our home since its opening."

The concept of this ensemble is different from many. Freund-Striplen invites different musicians for each concert; some come back year after year, some don't. "The corner stone of the orchestra is its flexible core," she says. "When I create the cohesive programming each year, I think at the same time about the right people to work together on each piece." The benefit, she says, is that they are always in a 'honeymoon period.'

"Sometimes I meet musicians who are very special, like Amati Ensemble," she adds. "I end up becoming involved in their series and they also come to us. I think that it is great for the community to be exposed to a wide range of musicians and talents from different places."

Also special to the Gold Coast Chamber Players are the discussions prior to the concert, and the post-concert receptions with the musicians. "About 75 percent of the people come to the optional talk," she says. "People find that understanding more about a piece, even if they are already quite knowledgeable, increases their appreciation and pleasure. And the discussion afterward shows that classical music is not a stuffy-powdered-wig experience, but something very accessible and pleasurable for all ages." This congenial approach without ever compromising on the quality of the entertainment can explain the growing popularity of the orchestra.

"Last year we tripled the sales of our season tickets," she says. "It is a big help to know how many people will come." Some people had to be turned down at the door for last year's concert with Lafayette's own Juliana Athayde.

"She is a wonderful musician," says Freund-Striplen of the young Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra concertmaster. She has invited Athayde to be part of the Hungarian Strings concert this year, along with Freund-Striplen, San Francisco Symphony's cellist Amos Yang, violinist Candace Guirao of the New Century Chamber Orchestra, and Russian piano soloist Yana Reznik, who performed on the Horowitz Steinway last season.

There will be two performances of the Hungarian Strings concert: Friday, Sept. 13 at 7:30 p.m. and Sunday, Sept. 15 at 2 p.m. at the Lafayette Library Community Hall. Freund-Striplen hopes that everyone who wishes to be there will get a seat. "The audience is what makes it all worthwhile for me," she says. "To see people I know and I don't know, see them engaged and happy, that's my reward." For more information and tickets, visit www.gplayers.org.

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"Kauwboy" (Little Bird) at the Orinda Theatre

By Sophie Braccini



"Kauwboy"

Image provided

In the film "Kauwboy," 10-year-old Jojo is often left to his own devices. His mother is no more than a smiling image on the wall and a distant voice on the phone; his father is locked up, a bit too rough, and out of his depth.

Jojo finds secret comfort in taking care of a baby Jackdaw that has fallen from its nest. The bird is more touching than pretty: it is sparsely feathered, a little thing chirping and frail that Jojo immediately takes charge of. Yet, in spite of its weakness, the tiny Jackdaw gives Jojo the necessary strength to confront reality.

Jojo is endearing; he is a dreamer hoping for a better life. Netherlands director Boudewijn

Koole found in Rick Lens an excellent child actor to portray the abandoned boy full of hopes and desires, trying to escape his difficult present. He is a boy in need of being loved and the spectator wants to protect and take care of him.

Koole has a way of depicting the magic that can come from some children and their imaginations. There is something of Peter Pan in Jojo; his whimsical side that tends to ignore reality is engaging. He tries to live by creating his own world, to grow without the support of his mother's love. Beyond his 10 years of age, he possesses a great strength.

The director tactfully shows

the oblique way children can 'make do' with their distress, showing the pain but also the liveliness of the child and his resilience. The topic could have been approached with a gooey Disney-like sentimentality, but in "Kauwboy" the bird is not a magical friend fallen from the sky with human-like feelings, but, more modestly, the precious conduit that will permit fragile Jojo to grow.

Jojo's gradual discovery and understanding of the bird is his gate to adulthood. He learns what it is to be responsible for another being.

In an interview for Online-film.org, Koole said that the story of "Kauwboy" was closely tied to his own. "When I was 12, a Jackdaw landed on my bedroom's windowsill ... little by little, we became friends. It came back every day and was becoming bolder, coming into my bedroom and perching on my shoulder," he remembered. He also said that it took him a long time to find the right child to play Jojo. "We saw at least 300 boys before meeting with Rick Lens," he said. "We looked in the streets, in musicals, in bird refuges, and called casting agents." Koole said that the first time he saw Lens he intuitively knew it would be a perfect cast. The young actor is indeed remarkable.

"Kauwboy" is a delightful and poetic family movie for viewers of all ages: children will appreciate the respect given to their peers without too much corniness or simplification; adults will feel their hearts open and be reminded of the pains and the joys of childhood.

The movie will be presented at the Orinda Theatre for one week, beginning Sept. 13. For more information, visit www.lamorindatheatres.com.