Children's Chorus Makes Beautiful Music

By Diane Clayton

On a Monday evening, the small church chapel is filled with children dressed in their best. They haven't seen each other in a week and the post-holiday chatter has died down. Suddenly, Andrew Brown claps his hands, eyes look forward and the singing starts. Relaxation and vocal exercises follow before the room fills with voices coming together, making music that could be described as angelic.

This is a rehearsal of the Contra Costa Children's Chorus Level 4 choir group.


The nationally recognized CCC has been providing high quality choral music education to local children since 1984 when it was founded by its current artistic director, Sandy Warner. The Lafayette-based program is one of only a few in the nation to offer a comprehensive program of music education for children of all ages from preschool to high school.

Brown claps his hands; all eyes relax and the talking stops. "Look forward and the talking stops."

"We give them a beautiful repertory, music that is beautifully written for vocal demands of Level 4. Vocalizing, phrasing, two-part singing, discipline and respect for one another," says Ms. Brown.

"We try to have even the most timid singers, those who begin learning to read music, build their musical vocabulary and technique and understand music theory. They also move from singing in unison to singing in parts. We've advanced from Level 2 (7-10 year olds), voices are more developed and students are learning to train their bodies through posture and breathing."

Level 4, generally to advanced pre-teen singers, focuses on preparation for the musical and vocal demands of Level 4. Vocalizing in foreign languages begins here.

The Advanced Performing Group (Level 5) represents the culmination of the CCC training. Challenges pieces from a variety of styles, music theory knowledge is advanced and sight-reading demands are increased. Participation is by application and the opportunity to showcase their talents is provided at both national and international festivals and tours. Over the years, they have performed in China, Australia, Argentina, Germany, Belgium, and the Netherlands. The Honors Ensemble is described as the most elite group and demands the highest level of commitment.

For all the honors and awards the CCC has received, the outstanding choral education and performances, the Children's Choir represents as much. Board member Lblda Berta believes tie most important lessons taught are the hard work, dedication, and discipline and respect for one another. "When you sing in a chorus, you have to rely on each other for vocal activity. We're heard time and again from former members that the training received at CCC was among the defining moments of their education," she says.

Ms. Brown, who sang with CCC 30 years ago and now has two daughters in the Chorus, echoes those sentiments. "It was exciting to do something with so many and Belgia. The Honors Chorus. And now they've been totally committed to something."

"Getting serious about her dreams of being a professional singer." Maura, a former singer, says that the training received at CCC introduced her to music that is beautifully written for vocal demands of Level 4. Vocalizing, phrasing, two-part singing, discipline and respect for one another. "When you sing in a chorus, you have to rely on each other for vocal activity. We're heard time and again from former members that the training received at CCC was among the defining moments of their education," she says.

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