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## The talented singers of Acalanes choral program excel all year

By John T. Miller



The women of Acalanes' Bella Voce along with director Bruce Lengacher. Photo John T. Miller

Listening to the Bella Voce women's chamber choir practice in their rehearsal space at Acalanes High, it is easy to hear why they would win Unanimous Superior ratings at their festivals throughout the year.

With no one in the audience other than this reporter, they sang with unbridled joy and euphonic precision a contemporary Spanish language song "Martes," by Joseph Gregorio, under the direction of Bruce Lengacher, their musical instructor.

I applauded when they finished, but Lengacher nodded and mentioned casually, "You were just a little sharp on those last high notes there."

The chorus agrees, and I can sense the sopranos vowing to nail those notes the next time around.

Superior Ratings

All four of the Acalanes ensembles scored high in their festival outings this year, while also participating in a whirlwind of activities that helped continue their tradition of being one of the best performing arts programs in the area.

At the California Musical Educators Association (CMEA) Choral East A festival hosted by Acalanes in March, both the Chorale and Women's Ensembles achieved Superior ratings, while the Concert Choir scored a Unanimous Superior rating. The Bella Voce and Concert Choir went on to garner Unanimous Superior ratings at the Napa Valley Choral Classic Invitational.

Year in Review

The Concert Choir attended the Choral Institute in Occidental with Head Royce Academy, Ruth Asawa School of the Arts and ECCO, the high school ensemble of the Piedmont East Bay Children's choirs. Together they worked with L.J. White to present the world premier of "I/WE" at the First Unitarian Church of San Francisco.

All four ensembles participated in the Mixed and Women's Fall Choral Classic festivals with the other district coral programs, and they performed a pair of winter concerts in December: "Winter Wind, Winter Moon."

In January, Bella Voce and the Women's Ensemble worked with Volti, a professional chamber choir, on a Renaissance piece and a modern composition.

Later that month the combined fine arts departments began their nine-week production schedule of "Bye Bye Birdie," which ran for three performances in March.

Bella Voce also competed at the Northern California Women's Choir Golden State Competition at the Lafayette-Orinda Presbyterian Church, placing fourth out of ten schools, thereby earning a spot in next year's competition. "We probably could have done better," said Lengacher, "but the competition coincided with closing night for our musical, and a majority of the cast was also in Bella Voce."

Later in March, Bella Voce and Concert Choir toured Los Angeles, where they participated in a workshop with Dr. Chris Peterson at CSU-Fullerton, and an advanced vocal workshop with Disney composer and arranger Bret Simmons. They also attended an Anaheim Ducks vs. Buffalo Sabres hockey game. "We didn't get to be on the ice for the National Anthem, but we sang our own arrangement loudly from the stands," said Lengacher.

The choirs finished the season with their Spring Choral Concert "He Said, She Said," in April and the Pops Concert "Broadway and Beyond" in May.

Notable Performers

Lengacher, in his 18th year as choral director at Acalanes, made special mention of three students who brought talent and energy to the program: Sarah Manning, who will attend University of Colorado at Boulder

next year, did original graphic designs for the musical, Spring and Pop concerts; Conrad Rocha, a junior,

Rocha choreographed the musical and co-choreographed the mass choir numbers for the Pops as well as for Concert Choir's song; and Emma Broback, who will attend UCLA, received the Arion Award, recognizing her as the outstanding choral musician.

The choir is generously funded by LIPE and the Acalanes Performing Arts Boosters.

Reach the reporter at: [john@lamorindaweekly.com](mailto:john@lamorindaweekly.com)

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