

## Out of this World...The roots and goals of the Stanley Music Program

By Anna Eames

Anyone with any connection at all to the living, thriving operation that is the Stanley Middle School Music Program is well aware of its unfailing ability to astonish and amaze.

After nearly twenty years with Stanley Music, renowned music educator Bob Athayde is now in charge of a program that has mushroomed throughout the local community, inspiring thousands of young musicians over its many years of existence.

With Athayde teaching six bands ranging from Beginning Instruments to his advanced Symphonic Band, as well as four jazz bands who rehearse in the mornings before school, Loretta McNulty running the strings program with two large classes, and Rachael Kleir in charge of two sizeable chorus classes, it's hard to believe what the program was like twenty years ago.

At that time, it consisted of a single collective strings class, one chorus group, and a lone band class. The program expanded gradually as Athayde teamed up with Acalanes music instructor Rick Meyer, LASF, and many other forces who worked towards keeping up with the program's rising participation.

Eventually the middle school saw the addition of one more band, then another, until Athayde, who at the time covered the orchestral and choral programs as well as band, was relieved of his chorus position by a specialist teacher. This provided the chorus with more specific and expert vocal education, and permitted Athayde to focus on the rest of the program.

Ten years ago, a strings specialist, Loretta McNulty, was brought in to take over the orchestra. After only a year under her direction, the program added a second class, which teaches the fundamentals to prepare students for the orchestra. "By the end of that year, those students really know their theory, and they've explored their instrument in ways that are harder to do in a rehearsal," said McNulty, "It's been a wonderful way for the whole thing to grow and get stronger."

The chorus program has done a great deal of its progressing just this year. Under new choral teacher, Rachael Kleir, a second chorus class was added, and chorus students will join their fellow musicians at the CMEA Music Festival in May.

The chorus was recently presented with the incredible experience of watching and performing the Barber of Seville with the San Francisco Opera Guild. Kleir hopes to make this a tradition, as well as a trip to a different elementary school each year. "The future goal would be to...start traditions...but when you do a new thing, it takes some time to adjust to it," said Klier.

The program as a whole has been a magnet for the limelight, creating an increasing momentum stimulated by enthusiastic support from every possible sphere.

"The parent support here has always been very strong and very consistent. People take the initiative. If they see a need, they'll take care of it," said McNulty.

"[To] build something, you share your enthusiasm with people. If someone ever goes 'Boy, if you ever need anything let me know', say, 'Thank you, yes I do', and just share with people what they do," said Athayde of how the program transformed from a single music class into the large band program it is today.

The community participation comes from people seeing a good thing and wanting to be a part of it. "The doors are wide open...and people talk enthusiastically about what's going on here," said Athayde.

That kind of reaction from so many people is, of course, triggered by the reverberating enthusiasm and talent among the students of the Stanley Music Program, as well as the cup of coffee and front row seat that Athayde will offer to anyone who ventures to peak their head in the band room during the school day.

On any given day that one might have done so this year, he or she easily could have found themselves as an audience of a professional jazz quartet or an African drummer playing for the chorus. On another day, you might have found vocal instructors teaching such vocal jazz techniques as "scatting", or a composer and retired professor from Cal, Michael Senturia, teaching his own composition.

"Instead of having to take you out of school all day to go to the symphony, we bring the symphony to you," said Athayde. "I have a lot of famous



The Stanley Band Room

and not-so-famous people – all great musicians – who come in... You never know what's going to happen."

Weekly, this statement comes to life inside the Stanley band room. Students from different sections meet with professionals on their instruments and ultimately receive private lessons that are genuinely invaluable. "They give us advice and help us to play better. They know our instruments better, and it's much more individual. Mr. Athayde has to help with the whole band, and with sections, it's just a group of seven (students)," said eighth grade Symphonic Band saxophone player, Ben Marshall.

The effects of the program are proven by the many students who go on to play in high school.

"Without the foundation that it provided, I would not be where I am today," said Katherine Freidman, former violin student whose experiences with the Stanley Music Program helped her develop a love for music that led her into the Acalanes High School orchestra. "The specialized help made a huge difference and made the experience that much more geared toward my goals and personal learning experience."

The range of new and stimulating information students are presented with reaches farther than human help. Each year's classes are pioneers for a different teaching tool introduced by Athayde to keep his young musicians interested in their music.

Music theory computer games, video breathing exercises, and computer-generated accompaniments and "practice partners" combine in each successful attempt to catch and hold the attention of students in the program. Kept guessing and learning, Stanley musicians maintain an eager curiosity about and interest in the infinite world of music.

Still growing, with awards and recognition pouring in, the orchestral and choral teachers look to expanding their programs within the next few years. "For at least another year or so, it would be good to just continue that momentum and keep it growing before making any other changes," said Kleir.

"I want my students to grow musically, and I want to kindle their love for music...I want them to grow in as many ways as I can help," said McNulty.

This captures the philosophy of every parent, professional volunteer, administrator, and educator involved in the evolution of Stanley Music.

"Great quality kids come in, so it's a matter of building on what walks through the door," said McNulty.

Anna Eames is a feature writer and Stanley Music graduate who now attends Acalanes.



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