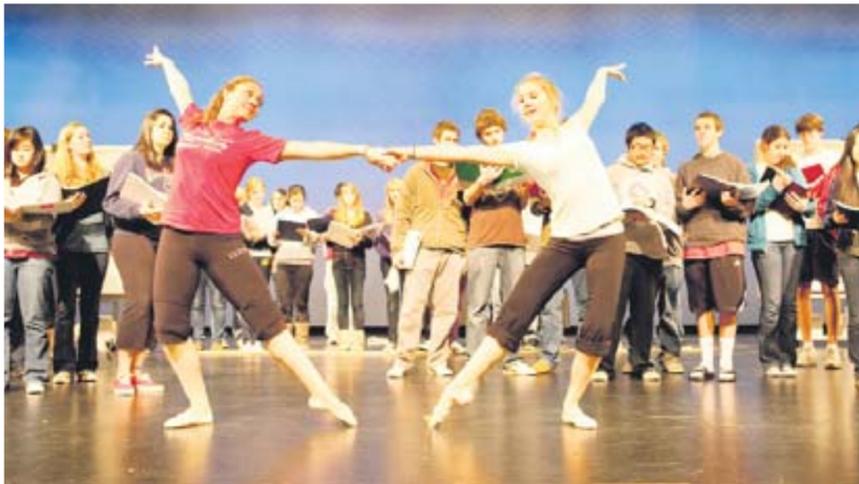


The Music of Spring

By Lou Fancher



Olivia Da Silva and Holly Sass at a rehearsal

Photo Doug Kohen

The annual musicals at Lamorinda's three high schools are as different as the snowflakes that fell in a rare burst of winter on December 7th, 2009. And just like that brief blanketing of snow, (and the related snowball battles at area schools,) the musicals create an unparalleled mixture of suspense, joy, and breathless exhilaration.

David Pinkham is directing his ninth Campolindo High School production this year. At Campo, auditions are open to all grade levels, although students must be enrolled in the choral program to participate. Pinkham and three to four associates select the musical each season. "First, I see what our next crop of singers will be," he says. He then searches for variety: "Last year, we did Beauty and the Beast, with people dressed up as things they aren't, so this year, we wanted to go 180 degrees the other way." With a number of strong male voices and wanting an ensemble show, The Titanic was selected. There are two casts of the 8-10 leading roles and a total of 130 students involved in the production.

Bruce Lengacher is the Producer and Stage Director of Cinderella, the 2010 musical at Acalanes High School. The process is intensely student-driven from start to finish. "I usually pick three shows I think we can do with the talent we have," Lengacher explains. The juniors and seniors in Concert Choir—a prerequisite for participation—study the libretto, then vote. This year, the kids liked all three options, making for a tight race. "I had to recount the ballots three times!" says Lengacher. There are approximately 50 in the cast, plus 35 instrumentalists. For

choir members whose calendars are too jam packed with sports, student council, part-time jobs, not to mention hefty academic loads, Acalanes offers options. "We have student production teams so the kids can be a part of the musical without being at all the rehearsals," Lengacher explains. With a tight, two month production schedule and four rehearsals a week, it's little wonder students refer to the final week before opening night as "hell week."

Miramonte High School assigns the overall director's chair to Sarah Downs, the school's Director of Music. She selects the musical, hires the producers and directors and conducts the auditions, open to all drama and music students. Downs chose Into the Woods, with definite goals in mind. "The music is very challenging. This group of seniors, especially—I have a talented group of kids and this musical will take them to the next performance level." Once the preliminary decisions are completed, the musical becomes a student-based production. "Students learn and run the lighting, students learn and do the marketing, set construction, really, every aspect," Downs says. Miramonte's cast is this year's smallest at 32, but Downs' ultimate goal is as big as the Titanic: "[Participating] teaches them to make a commitment and follow through to achieve the end product."

Successful high school musicals, contrary to the hilarity of television's "Glee," and the Hollywood smash hit "High School Musical," are mostly the result of roll-up-your-sleeves-and-get-dirty work. Expectedly, parents volunteer their time and

skills; whether it's building sets on Saturdays at Campo or tutoring in the homework room next to the theater at Miramonte. The musicals are more than just a song and a lark; they become a community event and a chance for students and their families to create lasting memories.

"I don't remember a lot about high school," Lengacher admits, "but I remember every rehearsal and every show I was in." The impact of his own high school performances keep him motivated during the long hours and late nights. Pinkham, whose two children were in past productions, also got hooked on theater through personal experience. "It's an artistic outlet for me," he says. With a nine year history, he gets an added boost from watching individual students develop: "It's so much fun to see the amazing changes and growth," he says. And, Downs, sounding serious beyond her years, speaks with candor and purpose when she says, "The musicals give the kids a different genre of music to learn. And it gives the kids the experience of working together."

Collaboration and Learning could be the title of the annual productions, if it weren't so dreary, and well, unmusical. The three high schools may fall into different patterns as they bring a musical to the stage, but there are two things they all have in common: kids are the stars, and fun performs nightly.

Lamorinda's 2010 High School Musicals
 Acalanes: Cinderella, March 3-6
 Campolindo: The Titanic, March 11-13, tickets www.campochoir.com
 Miramonte: Into the Woods, March 18-21 and 25-27

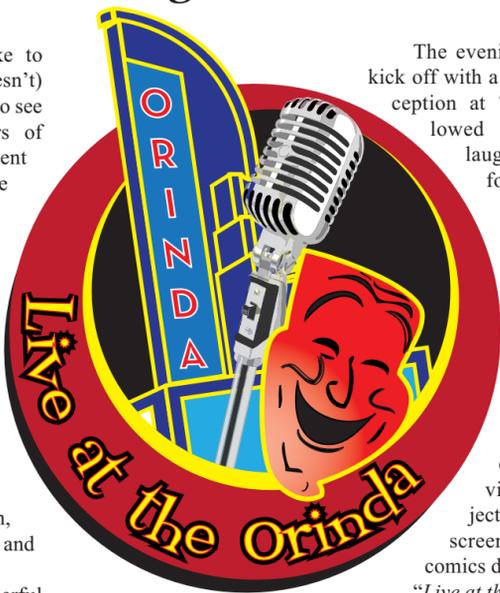
Live at the Orinda—Chamber Brings on the Laughs, March 5th

By Andrea A. Firth

Lamorindans who like to laugh (and who doesn't) will have the opportunity to see five well-known masters of funny at the comedy event *Live at the Orinda* to be held on Friday, March 5th at the Orinda Theater. Sponsored by the Orinda Chamber of Commerce in collaboration with Tommy T's Comedy Clubs and The Lamorinda Film & Entertainment Foundation, the night of laughter will feature comedians Ed Tracey, Larry "Bubbles" Brown, Dan St. Paul, Mark Pitta, and Johnny Steele.

"Comedy is a wonderful thing," says Rick Kattenburg, the owner of an Orinda-based architectural firm and a Chamber member. "We want this fundraiser to be uniquely different," he adds, "A lot of work has gone into the planning to make this a lot of fun." Kattenburg spearheaded the event,

which will raise funds to defray the Chamber's operational costs. Like many of Orinda's non-profit groups, City budget cuts have left the Chamber short on funds to cover events they sponsor such as the Restaurant Tour.



The evening of fun will kick off with a champagne reception at 7:00 p.m. followed by the laugh-packed performances starting at 8:00 p.m. Seating for the show will be open. According to Kattenburg, everyone will have a great view because of a live video feed projected onto the big screen above the comics during the show.

"Live at the Orinda offers fun-loving people of our East Bay communities the opportunity to share an evening of relaxing laughter while discovering all the charms of Orinda," adds Sue Breedlove, Orinda Chamber of Commerce President. "We expect this will become an annual event."

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