

Mozart Sinfonia Concertante at Campolindo

By Sophie Braccini



Directed by Johnny Johnson, Campolindo High School students rehearse with Pamela Freund-Striplen and Mariya Borozina. Photo Sophie Braccini

“Working with international soloists is a wonderful way for young musicians to grow; they are artists, they absorb a lot from hearing and modeling after professionals,” said Harvey Benstein, retired Campolindo High School orchestra director.

Benstein came to hear the final rehearsal of his former students last week as they prepared to present Mozart’s Sinfonia Concertante with violinist Mariya Borozina (from the San Francisco Opera and Ballet orchestras) and violinist Pamela Freund-Striplen, artistic director of the Gold Coast Chamber Players.

Campolindo’s new director Johnny Johnson wanted to make sure that the young musicians sounded their best before their Feb. 21 performance. It was a great success for the students and their new maestro, as well as a great pleasure for the two soloists who will play the same piece at the Gold Coast Concerts March 1-2 in Orinda and Lafayette with members of the Amati Ensemble from the Netherlands.

“I have known this orchestra for many years,” said Freund-Striplen who used to be a Campolindo parent, “but this is the first time we played together.”

Johnson reached out to Freund-Striplen when he took charge of the orchestra last fall after Benstein’s retirement, in order to continue the school’s tradition of playing with renowned professionals.

“It is amazing to see the students grow as we work together,” Freund-Striplen says. “At first, it can be a little unsettling to work with a young non-professional orchestra, but they learn so fast and literally rise to the occasion to produce an extraordinary result.”

“For us, playing with the soloist is like a dual pleasure,” says Campolindo senior Hae-Lin Kim, principal cellist in the orchestra. “You enjoy listening to the professionals playing and you also play music.” She acknowledges that it was hard at times to adapt to the soloists’ style and requirements, but she felt elated by the result.

Freund-Striplen chose the piece, Mozart’s Sinfonia Concertante, due to the timing of the Gold Coast Chamber concert. “We were going to play that piece with violinist Mariya Borozina very shortly afterward; I thought it would be a great experience for the students to work with two different soloists, and that specific piece by Mozart is one of my favorites,” she adds with a warm smile.

This being his first year at the helm of the Campolindo

orchestra – and with big shoes to fill after the well-loved Benstein had directed the orchestra for so many years – Johnson understood the importance of giving his students a first class experience.

“Johnny (Johnson) is so enthusiastic and has such a warm personality,” says Freund-Striplen. “He is doing a great job with the students.”

The Campolindo symphonic band will be playing Weber’s Concertino for Clarinet with soloist Diane Maltester Feb. 28 and in May the orchestra will present its spring concert.

“Directing these young musicians is a dream job,” says Johnson. “They are very dedicated and talented students, the community support is excellent, and working in this beautiful facility is very rewarding.” He says he found a lot of great programs already in place and plans to continue Campolindo’s tradition of musical excellence.

The Gold Coast Chamber Players concerts are often sold out. For more information, visit www.gcplayers.org.



Johnny Johnson Photo Cathy Dausman

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