

Gold Coast Chamber Players Mentor in Music

Season wraps with May 4 finale at Lafayette Library

By Diane Claytor



Gold Coast Chamber Players at a recent "Topics in Tempo" session.

Photo provided

"Music gives ... wings to the mind ... and life to everything." –Plato

People who have enjoyed the wonderful music played by the Gold Coast Chamber Players may heartily agree with the Plato quote above. Performing since 1987, the Gold Coast Chamber Players have made their home in Lafayette for the last 15 years, entertaining audiences with their unique, inspiring sounds.

When asked to differentiate chamber players from an orchestra, artistic director, viola player and co-founder of Gold Coast, Pamela Freund-Striplen, said that with chamber music, it's one person playing one part. "Each person is like a soloist,

which makes the collaboration really interesting and really vibrant. Each player contributes and interacts in a deeply personal and artistic fashion. Musicians often feel that's where they do their best work, feel most alive," she explained.

Freund-Striplen is as passionate about education as she is about music and, over the years, has brought concerts to most of the Lamorinda schools. She has also developed two outstanding programs to help bring beautiful music to kids and one program that helps kids bring beautiful music to Gold Coast audiences.

For 14 years, Gold Coast has been mentoring talented, young stu-

dents by giving them the opportunity to perform in a professional concert. In fact, the May 4 season finale, "Virtuosi," at the Lafayette Library will feature this year's student, violinist and Palo Alto High School senior Megan Rohrer. Past performances have featured the Acalanes Chamber singers and musicians from both Campolindo High School and Stanley Middle School.

Freund-Striplen notes that students "soak up the experience of playing with professionals." One former student, Orinda pianist Chloe Pang, said that "having the opportunity to make my formal chamber music debut with ... Gold Coast ... was a great honor and an unforgettable ex-

perience. ... Gold Coast allowed me to voice my ideas and treated me as a colleague, inspiring me to play at my highest level."

Ever since moving to Lafayette, a portion of each Gold Coast concert has been brought into the local schools. The students get a sneak peek of an upcoming show, as well as the chance to speak with the musicians about their music, instruments and profession. "This program is designed to create excitement among the kids and encourage them to come to the performance with their family," Freund-Striplen explained.

The most ambitious and, according to Freund-Striplen "the most difficult to explain," Topics in Tempo is described as "an invigorating instructional program that brings students, teachers and professional musicians together.

"We found that, while Sneak Previews got the students excited, it didn't seem to go beyond the moment," Freund-Striplen said. "It was an enrichment program with not much sticking power." Seven years ago she and her husband, professional clarinetist Tony Striplen, developed Topics in Tempo for grades K-5. The program uses a single movement from a classical piece to teach basic academics over a five-day period.

Beginning with Language Arts, Freund-Striplen said students "listen to a recording of the classical music and create a story inspired by it." For the math section, the kids "study fractions and division by exploring rhythm and beats; we talk about how you feel things differently depending on whether it's a meter of 3 or 4. The kids then become 'maestros,' conducting the piece."

In science "we talk about how sound travels, experimenting with different types of strings and how the pitch changes," Freund-Striplen said. "We often bring in a professional violin maker; the kids love that." The social studies section is, according to Freund-Striplen, "the most fun. We take four very small sound bites from the music and the kids learn how to sing them; they then become composers by ordering the four bites and varying the pitch, tempo or character."

The week concludes with the Topics in Tempo quartet coming into the classroom and playing the piece live. "We tie all the concepts together," Freund-Striplen said. "We've found that year after year, the kids remember what they learned."

Freund-Striplen noted that Gold Coast feels very fortunate to call Lafayette home, stating the audiences are very enthusiastic. "We're always looking for ways to reach more of the community. We want to have a personal relationship with our audience and have them enjoy every piece we perform."

Perhaps Bono said it best: "Music can change the world because it can change people."

Gold Coast will close out this special 15th season at 2 p.m. Sunday, May 4 with a high-energy concert at the Lafayette Library, followed by an anniversary celebration featuring catering from Whole Foods Market. Freund-Striplen said "we're pulling out all the stops" at this final show. "There will be effervescence, jubilation and each piece, on its own, could be a show stopper."

For tickets, visit www.gcplayers.org or call (925) 283-3728.

Taking Charge of College Admission

By Elizabeth LaScala, PhD

Many parents can recall the days when they applied to one, or perhaps two or three colleges, got accepted to their first choice school, and were done. Today, when over 12 million readers across the nation eagerly await the release of the annual August issue of US News and World Report on college rankings, those days seem far behind us and the college admission process is unduly stressful. There are many reasons why this is so. First, high school graduation rates are up in 46 states. According to the June 6, 2013 "Education Week" (<http://www.edweek.org/ew/toc/2013/06/06/index.html?intc=EW-DC13-LNAV>) the nation's high school graduation rate is approaching 75 percent, its highest rate in 40 years. The annual "Diplomas Count" report (<http://www.edweek.org/ew/toc/2013/06/06/index.html>) tracks graduation rates across the country and calculated the national average at 74.7 percent for the class of 2010, the most recent year for which data is available. Projections indicate these numbers will remain high until at least 2022.

In addition to more high school graduates, the demand for higher education has risen steadily, translating into greater numbers of college applicants. For many, a college degree is viewed as the path to economic security, and studies confirm a strong correlation between lifetime earnings and educational attainment.

On their part, colleges (for reasons related to institutional priorities and college rankings) aggressively reach out to prospective applicants, escalating their marketing efforts to attract large and diverse pools of qualified applicants. Broad student recruitment and direct outreach continue to grow in popularity both nationally and abroad. Schools send students emails, attractive guidebooks and invitations to attend regional college conferences and visit campuses for specially arranged tours. College admissions officers visit local high schools and host booths

at college fairs. And, of course, technology makes it easier than ever to access college websites, take virtual tours and prepare college applications. The Common Application, a standardized form that can be completed once and submitted electronically, has also simplified the process; it is currently used by well over 500 member institutions representing 48 states and a handful of European countries, including the United Kingdom.

These trends result in more students applying to more schools than ever before. Yet this is only part of the reason for the increased stress. Digging a bit deeper, we see that the sources of anxiety afflicting many families are fairly limited in scope. Admission stress is most felt by those who are applying to the 50 most prestigious colleges and universities in the country. More students are competing for the same number of freshmen spots at these institutions, so many well qualified applicants are rejected each year. As I frequently and wryly comment, "they [colleges] are pushing for more applications, so they can reject more students."

Unfortunately, heightened media attention on these super selective colleges makes it appear more difficult to gain entry to colleges and universities everywhere. The overall impact on students and parents can be nerve racking. The pressure mounts to take more challenging coursework, register for increasingly earlier test prep, and hire consultants to help students "get into" to the "right" college. College admission has become big business, and students are the consumers. Education begins to be treated as a commodity rather than a public good. The competition creates a game of winners and losers, and the good reasons for getting a college education as well as the quality of that education may become compromised.

There are a few simple guidelines that can help students reclaim the college admission process. First, control what you can control.

With all the hype, it is easy to lose sight of the fact that it is you, the student, who should be highly selective in the college you choose. Students must research and select colleges that meet their interests, needs and academic goals and that their families can afford. Next, plan ahead and start early. Colleges admit students who take grades seriously, challenge themselves and demonstrate consistent involvement in several activities they are truly passionate about. This can include paid employment during summers and breaks or even during the school year if it does not compromise grades or when a family needs the extra cash flow. Taking charge also means taking an honest look at areas for improvement and focusing on these during the high school years. Being a senior is far more fun and rewarding if you prepare the groundwork by doing what needs to be done in the first three years. No matter when you get started, the secret is good organization and planning, taking the right steps at the right time and ultimately applying to colleges that are a good match for you. It is helpful to remember that a good, often a great education can be had at hundreds of schools nationwide, and most of these institutions accept 50 to 80 percent of their applicants.



Elizabeth LaScala, Ph.D. is an independent college advisor who draws upon 25 years of higher education experience to help guide and support the college admissions process for students and their families. Dr. LaScala is a member of NACAC, WACAC and HECA. She can be contacted at (925) 891-4491 or elizabeth@doingcollege.com. Visit www.doingcollege.com for more information about her services.

Celebrations

Lafayette Native Awarded Donald A. Strauss Foundation Scholarship



Anna Peare

Photo provided

Lafayette native and UC Davis student Anna Peare was recently named the UC Davis recipient of the Donald A. Strauss Foundation Scholarship for her project titled the Amigos de las Américas: Backyard Program, which aims to give youth of all backgrounds the opportunity to become catalysts for positive development and change in their own community. The Donald A. Strauss Public Service Scholarship Foundation, established as a memorial to the late Don Strauss of Newport Beach, awards \$10,000 scholarships to as many as 15 California college sophomores or juniors annually. The Strauss scholarships fund public service projects that the students have proposed and will carry out during their junior or senior year. Since its inception, the foundation has awarded more than 240 scholarships, and like their counterparts in the past, all of the new recipients have extensive records of community and public service, as well as a demonstrated desire to "make a difference."