

Orinda Student Earns Language Scholarship

Submitted by Emily Marley



Chiara Marley Photo provided

Chiara Marley, a rising senior at Miramonte High School in Orinda, has been awarded a

National Security Language Initiative for Youth (NSLI-Y) scholarship for 2015-16. Marley will study Chinese in Suzhou, China, for the summer.

Marley is one of only 620 competitively selected students from across the United States who will receive a scholarship to study Arabic, Chinese, Hindi, Korean, Persian, Russian, or Turkish overseas this year. While in China, Marley will receive formal instruction and informal language practice in an immersion environment.

Marley has studied three years of Mandarin at Miramonte High School and credits her love for languages and culture to her parents, who enjoy family trips abroad and together speak seven languages in all. She is excited to live with a host family in Suzhou, as well as attend a Chinese high school there. Marley looks for-

ward to eating new foods, becoming a more proficient speaker and engaging with other students who share her passion for Chinese language.

The NSLI-Y program seeks to increase the number of Americans who can engage with native speakers of critical languages. NSLI-Y is administered by American Councils for International Education in cooperation with AFS-USA, American Cultural Exchange Service, AMIDEAST, Chinese Language and Culture Center of Maine, iEarn- USA, Legacy International, and Russian American Foundation. Applications for 2016-17 NSLI-Y programs are expected to be available at www.nsliforyouth.org in the early fall. For information about U.S. Department of State sponsored exchange programs visit <http://exchanges.state.gov>.

The Halls are Alive with the Sounds of Music

By Cathy Dausman



Ron Pickett Photo Daniel Jordan

When it comes to performing arts, Ron Pickett is a triple threat. The Orinda Unified School District music teacher earned his degree in music, dance and theater from Brigham Young University with a teaching credential from Chapman University. His mother, who started him on piano lessons in the second grade, instilled in him his love of theater.

"I've always been a performer," Pickett says. "There are eight millimeter films of me dancing when I was 2 years old." During school hours, Pickett works as the vocal music teacher at Glorietta and Wagner Ranch elementary schools, with Recorder instructions for third-graders thrown in.

Pickett teaches "up to 10 half-hour classes a day," with 20 to 30 students per class. He also directs the Ensemble Singers, comprised of Glorietta and Wagner Ranch fourth- and fifth-grade students who rehearse once a week during recess. These groups perform at

special events throughout the year. When he's not teaching, Pickett still performs – acting, singing as a high tenor, and dancing in live theater – although "the dancing becomes a little more limited the older I get," he confesses.

"I am most often in a musical because of my vocal skills, but I just recently was in a French farce with no music, and I enjoyed just the acting and comedic timing," he says.

But it's not all fun and games for Pickett or his students, in spite of the subject matter. Sounding every bit like the nearly 30-year teacher he is, Pickett says he likes to involve as many music-related subjects as possible.

"We learn history, social studies, language arts and, oh, the math involved in music is amazing! What I hope to teach children about music is that it affects all aspects of our lives," he says.

Pickett's paycheck often comes in the form of visits from former students. "Many return to see musicals at their elementary schools," he notes. "Some even come back to help with make-up, sound or other technical aspects. Many continue with their singing and become involved in their high school or college choirs and musical performances. Some have graduated from prestigious universities like NYU and others have gone on to perform on Broadway or in community theaters."

He explains how rewarding it is as a teacher to hear his students "continue to make music something that is important, something that they treasure and love."

"Music," he says, "should be continually important to all our successes."

Pickett is currently playing Uncle Max in the Contra Costa Civic Theater production of "The Sound of Music" through July 19 in El Cerrito. For ticket info, go to <http://www.ccct.org/shows-sound-of-music.html>.



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Illustrator Rafael López

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The quartet is all-female, just like the band of sisters featured in Drum Dream Girl.

The true storyline of the book is one of the things that initially drew López to the project. "It was sort of related to my own mom's struggle as an architect from a traditional family in the '30s and '40s," he says. "Once I connected it to my mom's story everything started to evolve."

One of López's favorite scenes in the book comes just after a moment of conflict. "The girl's father asks, 'What are you doing? I told you no.' Then she's invited by her sisters to join them. In the next scene she's back in the jungle dreaming and drumming along – that's my favorite scene because she isn't being prevented from becoming what she really wants to be. It's a story about women who are very determined to make their dreams come true."

As a part of his presentation, López plans to talk about women who


have faced challenges – mountain climbers, race car drivers, a female president in Argentina, etc. "There are some traditions that are meant to be broken," he says.

López will also ask his audience to think about creation and collaboration and the ways that they can build something together. He ends his presentation with an interactive demonstration, working with the audience to connect emotions, people and illustrations.

López says he had no idea what he was getting into when he first started illustrating children's books. "Ignorance was bliss," he recalls. His efforts in the field now make up half of his work and add to depth and perspective to his perceptions of his own illustrations. "Getting involved with kids allowed me to get more creative with explaining what I do and why I do it. I just jumped in headfirst, bringing something very personal to the style and the story."

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