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The Peter Pan Foundation brings musical theatre to special audiences

Submitted by Gina Campo



A fan gets a hug from Moana, played by Nadya Jatoft. Photo provided

Bay Area, is especially thankful for the partnership with the Peter Pan Foundation. "In addition to this (performance) and last year's fantastic Wish Upon a Star performances, the PPF has sent characters to five Parents Night Out events to play and sing with our clients and their siblings. I have been consistently impressed with the kindness and enthusiasm that each and every PPF character shows our children, and watching the children's happy excitement and interaction with the PPF characters is one of my favorite parts of my role at ESBA."

Sheila Martinez, from Union City who brought her 5-year-old son, Nathan, to the show, was emotional about the experience. "When Leslie announced before the show the only rule 'was to be anything you need and want to be,' that the kids didn't have to sit still or quietly, and this show was for them, it brought tears to my eyes," she said.

While the event was a special occasion for the audience of special needs children and their families, the experience was equally rewarding for the performers. "Having the opportunity to provide a safe and loving environment for the children of Easterseals Bay Area to experience the magic of the PPF live for themselves was absolutely incredible," explained Nadya Jatoft, president of the PPF teen council, Bay Area Magic Makers. "Seeing the smiling faces of the kids laughing, dancing, and being able to meet all of the princesses and characters was such an unforgettable and inspiring experience that I will carry with me forever."

As magical as the first performance was, the second show of the afternoon was equally inspiring. Founder Leslie Noel explains how the performance for Children's Hospital Oakland started more than 10 years ago.

"Our very first CHO show was in 2006, with our original Peter Pan, Steffen Ryge. We lost him to a tragic car accident just months later. Visiting the hospital that year ended up serving as the inspiration behind The PPF's philanthropic endeavors. Since then, we have kept up the beloved annual tradition, with the PPF BMM Squad (Bay Area Magic Makers) performing for all of the patients at CHO ... it is one of our absolute favorite days of the whole year! I am so delighted to know that our show will once again be bringing magic to the lives of so many patients, while bringing a little piece of Steffen back to life, too."

You can experience some of the PPF magic for yourself at their upcoming holiday show, "'Twas the Opening Night Before Christmas" Dec. 8-10 at Northgate High School in Walnut Creek. The original musical is a story about the magic of putting on a pageant during the holiday season. It follows a high school in the midst of

The Peter Pan Foundation brought their music and magic to the Orinda Community Center Nov. 11, giving two special performances for audiences who would not normally be able to enjoy live theatre. The shows, a modified version of the foundation's annual Memorial Day spectacular, "Wish Upon a Star," was specifically produced for the special needs children from Easterseals Bay Area and the children at UCSF Benioff Children's Hospital, Oakland.

While the first performance for ESBA was performed to a packed live audience, the second performance was filmed and will be given to the hospital to be broadcast to patients' rooms via their closed circuit TVs.

Why provide these specialty performances? PPF founder Leslie Noel explained. "It is so important to provide live theatre opportunities to everyone, including our friends with special needs. What is especially wonderful about the specialty matinees that we are now providing, is that the onstage performances are designed specifically for our audience members with special needs; with lighting, sound, snacks, and interactions adjusted accordingly. Additionally, we are providing a safe, nonjudgmental environment for our guests watching the show. In the PPF, we embrace everyone's beautiful differences, and are working to help make everyone feel included. There is always a strong sense of real magic at the specialty matinees; the magic of loving others."

Stacey Murphy, senior programs manager for Easterseals

auditions, callbacks, opening night, and all the comedy and drama that comes with it.

The show features favorite holiday classics and is a heartwarming story of love, hope and holiday cheer the whole family will enjoy. Showtimes and ticket information can be found at www.peterpanfoundation.org.

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