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Campo students learn from musical mentors

By Diane Claytor



Campolindo students Brigitte Jia and Tanya Zhong accompany Gold Coast Chamber Players' musicians and violin soloist, Corina Stoian, as they perform Bartok Romanian Dances. Photos Diane Claytor

Fifty students, all string players from Campolindo's orchestra, sat in a semi-circle on the school's Performing Arts Center stage last week. Most looked enthralled and listened intently as four of their classmates, sitting alongside four members of the Gold Coast Chamber Players, accompanied Gold Coast violin soloist, Corina Stoian, as she played Bartok Romanian Dances. The music was uplifting and emotional; the musicians - student and professional - were incredible.

"It's an amazing experience for a high school student to see professional musicians up close like this," exclaimed Johnny Johnson, Campo's orchestra teacher/conductor. Proud of his young musicians (violinists Brigitte Jia and Tanya Zhong, cellist Marc Schultz and violist Michelle Perelmutor) who joined the Gold Coast professionals (Gil Sharon, Dan Flanagan, Pamela Freund-Striplen and Jennifer Kloetzel), Johnson was very excited that four of his students were able to play with their counterparts in a quartet.

"We try to provide different experiences for our kids several times a year," Johnson said. "It's easy to get in your little tunnel and get used to the way you playing sounds. Then you hear an example of professionalism and it really opens your ears and mind, knowing you really can strive for a higher level. This was such a special side-by-side experience."

Based in Lafayette for the last 18 years, the acclaimed Gold Coast Chamber Players are dedicated to education, bringing concerts and mentoring to nearly every Lamorinda public school since they moved to the area. Pamela Freund-Striplen, artistic director and co-founder of Gold Coast, noted that they are always looking for ways to connect with the community, and going into the schools and working with students is one of her favorite ways to accomplish this.

"Students are always being told what to do," she noted. "But to actually have the opportunity to play with a professional, well, that's something you can't get anywhere else. It really distinguishes Gold Coast from other similar organizations. Sharing the feelings and sounds with professional musicians is pretty cool for the kids."

Prior to the actual performance of the students and professionals at Campo, Freund-Striplen and her Gold Coast players worked with the class, "teaching them about flexibility," Freund-Striplen said. "Romanian music is very free.

"One of the most inspiring things I do is being able to play with young people and introduce them to an idea and do it in a really deep way," she continued. "Just coming and playing for them is enriching and educational, but this is very different. They learn so quickly because it's so hands on. And playing alongside a professional can be a truly powerful experience."

The Gold Coast Chamber Players were recognized by Contra Costa County in 2015 with the Arts and Culture Award. They are devoted to the art of chamber music as well as sharing their passion with the community. Their next performance - "Czech Mate" - will be at the Lafayette Library next month and their final concert of the season - "French Connection" - will be a celebration of Lafayette's 50th anniversary. For more information, go to gcplayers.org.



Campolindo violinist Tanya Zhong and cellist Marc Schultz playing side-by-side with their Gold Coast Chamber Players counterparts in a mini-performance of Bartok Romanian Dances.

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