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Pro bono vocal coach Rena Wilson helps Lamorinda Idol competitors

By Sora O'Doherty



Photo provided

Since 2011, actor and vocal coach Rena Wilson has been offering free coaching to young voices hoping to win the Lamorinda Idol contest, and she loves it. She considers it a gift to be able to help the young singers, and program chair Steve Harwood calls her "an absolute angel."

Wilson, with her best friend and business partner, ran Performing Academy and had been coaching private students for the Lamorinda Idol competition. She contacted Harwood and offered to do pro bono training open to all the contestants and Harwood jumped at the offer. He was very supportive of Performing Academy, Wilson says. Her partner Rene Dewese Moran took over when Wilson moved to Los Angeles, but she continues to offer Idol coaching over Zoom.

Wilson teaches vocal technique and performance coaching. At first, she did the coaching in person, but since the pandemic, she has found that the Zoom conference platform works very well for this purpose.

Her goal is to help the students be more confident on stage, to deliver a more passionate performance, and to engage with the words and storytelling of the song. "Every year," she says, "it never ceases to amaze me; sometimes a kid will come in quiet and timid, but they grow their performance and by the end of the session they are singing from bottom of their feet to top of their head." Competitors have to be good singers and strong performers, Wilson explained, but coaching can take their performance to the next level.

Over the past dozen years, Wilson has had the privilege of working with many families, and many students she coached have become her private students. Those who follow the contest will know that there are contestants from the same family who appear in different years. "It is such a gift to see a younger brother or sister," Wilson says. In addition, she coaches those students who come back year after year.

Wilson describes her coaching style as "really direct but very positive, creating a warm environment where kids feel supported."

"What Steve and the Lamorinda Arts Council have created gives the kids this beautiful level of confidence in themselves, confidence to create a video and post it on YouTube," Wilson adds. "Kids feel really good about themselves, really positive."

Wilson emphasizes breathing technique, vowel placement, diction, and performance coaching. She wants the students to focus on what the words really mean and how can they can convey the story to their audience. This year, coaching sessions will be offered by Wilson in June and July.

In her experience, Wilson says that parents can be very hands-on, or not. Until the kids hit middle school it can go one way or the other, she noted. Some parents are not involved, but parents do tend to be much more involved with elementary students. Once they hit middle school, the kids try to take control. Getting accepted into the finals includes all of the performances and coaching during the summer.

This year the Lamorinda community will have an opportunity to hear the finalists perform at three local concerts: Lafayette Plaza (June 23); Orinda Community Park (July 13); and Moraga Commons (Aug. 2). The final performances and announcement of winners will take place on Aug. 20 at the Orinda Theatre. Finalists were notified on June 1, and the complete list of finalists and runners-up can be found on the Lamorinda Arts Council website, at lamorindaarts.org.

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