

Young Musicians Thrive in L.A. Youth Orchestra

By LAURA ABRUSCATO
Contributing Writer

While some of the young musicians in the Los Angeles Youth Orchestra (LAYO) will pursue professional music careers, many others go on to careers in other fields. Either way, the goal for artistic director Russell Steinberg is to build a passion for music for life.

Twenty Palisadians are among the 120 youth in the orchestra, which is divided into two sections—an intermediate group and a pre-professional group. Students are required to study two years with a private teacher before they can audition for the orchestra.

The youth meet on Sundays at the Encino Community Center, where they spend half the time playing with their entire orchestra and half working either with a woodwinds, strings or percussion coach.

Palisades High freshman Charlotte Costain has been playing violin since age 4, and as a member of LAYO toured Vienna and Prague in 2015 and Italy in 2017. “It’s a really good experience meeting kids who come from different schools and different parts of Los Angeles,” says Costain.

For PaliHi freshman Aidan Lee, a member of LAYO for two years, cello is a more recent endeavor—he began playing as a sixth grader at Paul Revere Middle School.

“Russell [Steinberg] really knows what he’s doing and he chooses excellent music,” says Lee. “I like the people in the orchestra and the coaches are really good.”

Steinberg treats the students like adults. “It goes way beyond the notes,” says the composer and conductor. “I talk to them about how the music is put together, bigger ideas behind the themes.”

The orchestra started almost 29 years ago as a Jewish symphony through Milken Community High School, where Steinberg was the music director.

It expanded over the years, and came to include Jewish and non-Jewish students, ages 8-18, from all over L.A. The orchestra achieved nonprofit status in 2008 and relies on foundations, corporations and private donations to help run its programs.

Palisadian Fati Adeli was so impressed



Some of the Palisades students who play with the L.A. Youth Orchestra are (left to right) Vera Fang, Himalya Joshi, Layla Adeli, Leena Adeli, Riley Scaff (in back), Ryan Zaid, Kiran Slomka, artistic director Russell Steinberg (in back), Kimberly Affeld, Aidan Lee (in back), Alice Hanscom, Haroun Daoud and McCartney Hutchinson.

Photo: Matt Mindlin

with the orchestra after her older daughter joined in January 2017 that she joined its governing board a year later.

Her daughters, Leena and Layla, both began violin in first grade with Children’s Music Workshop, an after-school program offered at Palisades Elementary.

Leena, a fifth grader, joined LAYO in August. “I love the challenging pieces and I see how much I have improved as a violin player since joining LAYO,” she says.

Layla, a seventh grader at Paul Revere, says, “The pieces Russell chooses are challenging but fun, and with hard work we are able to sound like a professional orchestra.”

Although Steinberg was initially hesitant to travel internationally with the group because of the expense, he has found that his students gain valuable performance experience beyond their local fall and spring concerts.

He recalls seeing pictures of Mozart and Haydn on Vienna city buses and notes, “The students get to be in other cultures where classical music is revered.” Argentina is next for summer 2019.

Steinberg believes music benefits young people in many ways. “It’s character building,

it literally rewires the brain, and it takes years to develop. It’s technology that’s thousands of years old and nothing about it is easy.”

The director often speaks before concerts at the L.A. Philharmonic and hears from elderly music lovers who tell him, “I’m so angry with my parents; they let me quit [my instrument].”

Steinberg refers to LAYO, which he describes as “diverse, all cultures, all socioeconomic backgrounds,” as “the future of culture in L.A.”

The orchestra will play Tchaikovsky’s *Capriccio Italien* and *Symphony No. 5 in E minor*, Offenbach’s *Ballet Parisien*, Rachmaninoff’s “Vocalise” and selections from Grieg’s *Peer Gynt*, as well as Steinberg’s “Carnegie Overture” (which he wrote for LAYO when they played Carnegie Hall) at UCLA’s Schoenberg Hall at 4 p.m. on Sunday, April 15, and at 7:30 p.m. at Pasadena’s Ambassador Auditorium on April 16.

For tickets, email: laticketinfo@mail.com or visit: losangelesyouthorchestra.org.

Play On! to Open April 6

Theatre Palisades’ second show of the season is *Play On!* by Rick Abbot, which opens Friday, April 6. The farce centers around an opening night of *Murder Most Foul*, but the cast has yet to make it through one rehearsal, and the playwright keeps rewriting the script. This is a fast and funny backstage comedy appropriate for the entire family.

Directed by Sherry Coon, the cast features Michael Bernstein (Henry), Lauren Chapman (Violet), Richard Conolly (Saul),

Bella Dixon, (Smitty), Ria Parody Erlich (Aggie), Sue Hardie (Louise), Keely O’Sullivan (Smitty), Cindy Pearl (Phyllis), Catherine “Cat” Rahm (Gerry), Marina Tidwell (Polly) and Robert Watson (Billy).

The show runs through Sunday, May 13. Performances are Fridays and Saturdays at 8 p.m. and on Sunday at 2 p.m. at the Pierson Playhouse, 941 Temescal Canyon Rd. Tickets are \$20 for adults and \$18 for seniors and students. There is free parking. Call (310) 454-1970 or visit theatrepalisades.org.



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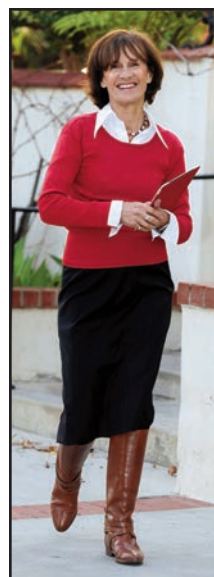
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