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Amazing musical youth of Castro Valley High, Music@Menlo

WHILE traveling to Europe on Lufthansa earlier this week, I picked up the February issue of the airline's magazine to read an interview with the great conductor Daniel Barenboim. Standing out among his many thoughtful comments was, "Children don't learn about music through life, they learn about life through music."

Sounded right on the mark to me! It also made me remember some rare moments during the Jan. 29 Nathan Rubin Memorial Concert at California State University East Bay in Hayward. During the course of the concert honoring the late superstar violinist, there were excellent performances by notable local professional musicians, many of whom had close associations with the CSUEB Music Department. But there was an absolutely astonishing performance by the orchestra of Castro Valley High School.

Most in the audience were stunned to see the stage fill up with 60 formally dressed high-school students, all playing their hearts out in J.S. Bach's Double Violin Concerto. The ensemble of teenagers played at a level rivaling what many regional adult orchestras can do.

It turns out that their director, Heidi Dahms, was one of Rubin's former students. She has achieved something quite remarkable with her young orchestra.

Dahms explained that the musicians onstage represented only two-thirds of her school symphony orchestra of 90. I wondered for a few moments if



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I were in Germany, Austria or perhaps the Czech Republic, instead of the state of California. High-school orchestras playing at this level are rare indeed in the United States at this time of budget cuts to education.

According to Castro Valley Superintendent of Schools James L. Fitzpatrick, Castro Valley is fortunate to have many groups that provide funding and service to its schools; the Music Parents' Society is among them. Exceptional support also comes from the Castro Valley Education Foundation, the Castro Valley Sports Foundation and the Castro Valley Arts Foundation.

Since high academic achievement and active involvement in music seem go together, I was interested to read that the 2005 Castro Valley High School teens all met the new state Algebra I graduation requirement. They also had an impressive passage rate on the California High School Exit Examination of 97 percent on English/Language Arts and 98 percent on math — compared with statewide reports indicating that about 12 percent of the state's seniors still need to pass the exam.

At the completion of the concert, I began to believe in miracles again.

Young talent

Five talented young alumni of Music@Menlo's acclaimed summer Chamber Music Institute have returned to the Bay Area to perform in a benefit concert at 5:30 p.m. Sunday in the Martin Lecure Hall of the Menlo School, 50 Valparaiso Ave., Atherton.

The concert represents the culmination of the pilot 2006 Chamber Music Institute Residency. According to Wu Han, one of the founders of Music@Menlo, the pilot program is a collaboration with high-school faculty and staff at the Menlo School to find creative ways to incorporate music directly into teachers' regular classroom curriculum.

The weeklong program involved placing five especially accomplished Music@Menlo alumni inside English, literature, history, studio art and music-theory classes, thus enabling the musicians, teachers and students to explore classical music in the context of other academic subjects.

Concert pianist Wu Han and violinist David Finckel, the program directors, say that the program will not only help the performers, but also will introduce a whole generation of new listeners to the joys of great music — and, I might add, also help them get better grades in their academic subjects.

Music@Menlo alumni playing in the concert include violinists Korbinian Altenberger and Joanna Kaczorowska; cellist David Requiro; violist David Kim and pianist Peter Asimov.

For tickets, which are \$45, call (650) 725-2787 or visit www.musicatmenlo.org. Proceeds will fund scholarships for

Music@Menlo's Summer Chamber Music Institute.

The San Francisco Chamber Orchestra, under the direction of Benjamin Simon, is doing its bit to promote youth music with its family concert for kids of all ages titled "2 Bs or Not 2 Bs" at 1 p.m. Sunday at Koret Auditorium, 100 Larkin St., San Francisco, and 4 p.m. the same day at St. John's Presbyterian Church, 2727 College Ave., Berkeley.

The concerts will feature three accomplished young violinists from the Palo Alto Chamber Orchestra: Evie Chen, 14, Evan Jeng, 15, and Theodore Chao, 15, in performance with the San Francisco Chamber Orchestra musicians. Admission is free.

Matt Haimovitz, who has been described as "one of the most exciting cellists of our generation," joins the SFCO in works concert promoters say is "both tried and true, and completely new." The program includes J.S. Bach's Suite No. 5 for Unaccompanied Cello; Arnold Schoenberg's early Romantic Opus 9 Chamber Symphony for 15 Solo Instruments, and the world premiere of Bay Area composer Richard Aldag's "Elegy for Cello and Chamber Orchestra."

Performances are at 8 p.m. Feb. 17 in Herbst Theatre, 401 Van Ness Ave., San Francisco, at 8 p.m. Feb. 18 at Mount Tamalpais Methodist Church in Mill Valley, and at 3 p.m. Feb. 19 at the First Congregational Church, Dana Street and Durant Avenue, Berkeley. Admission is free. Call (415) 248-1640 or visit www.sfchamber-orchestra.org.