Amazing musical youth of Castro Valley High, Music@Menlo

WHILE traveling to Europe on Luftansa 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 orchestra of 90. I wondered for a few moments if

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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 Luther 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, 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; violinists David Kim and pianist Peter Ashmov.

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