

ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

History of Piedmont East Bay Children's Choir Sleepaway camps with a focus on music



Summer choir camps are a balance of intensive instruction and peer interaction.

By Allyson Aleksey

Part 4 in a series

Summer sleepaway camps are an integral part of the Piedmont East Bay Children's Choir program. Summer camps are required for students in the Performing Department, grades 5 through 12, and are highly recommended for students in the Training Department.

During these getaways, choral students develop and sustain relationships with their peers while strengthening their musical talents as a group.

Traditionally, summer sleepaway camps are held at Walker Creek Ranch in Marin County, a 1700-acre site that includes a forest, vast grasslands and a 4-acre swimming hole. The location boasts over 20 miles of hiking

trails, and students even get to try organic cuisine grown from the camp's garden, made possible by restaurateur Alice Waters, known for her Berkeley restaurant Chez Panisse.

"Choir camp is a balance of really intensive music training, a bunch of traditions that we've developed over 35 years, and being in a beautiful and natural environment," explained Founding Artistic Director Robert Geary.

Each camp runs for about one week, and includes rigorous music theory and choral instruction, balanced with socialization and downtime. Singers rehearse for four to five hours each day.

"When young people get together out of their home and school environment, it's a real growing experience," Geary said.

Given the current uncertainty surrounding the health safety of

group singing, Piedmont Children's Choir decided to offer camp as a virtual program this past summer. Artistic Director Eric Tuan confessed that the students were disappointed by the news due to their love of spending time at the camp.

"When the students learned that they couldn't go to Walker Creek this year, they cried. Camp is such an integral part of the experience," Tuan said.

But the choir faculty was able to craft an engaging experience through the digital medium, while providing something that was different from the online rehearsals that they had in the Spring semester. Maintaining engagement and ensuring students were out of their chairs were key factors when developing a digital camp.

"I think it exemplified what the challenge is. We asked ourselves, 'What is the core of our program? What keeps our students engaged with music. How do we transfer that to a completely different medium?'" Tuan said.

Mornings at camp consisted of campfire songs or activities to start the day, followed by a 30-minute music theory class and rehearsal rotations. One advantage of the digital camp was that each student was given individualized choral instruction.

"Which is no mean feat for a group of 46," Tuan added with a smile.

The camp faculty sent students home with "camp kits," which included an electric candle, friendship bracelet material, arts and crafts and other sleepaway camp essentials. In an effort to keep students creatively engaged. As example, this year's camp was based on a theme of Harry Potter. Students were part of a Potter-themed "house," and competed against one another to win a prize at the end of camp.

Working cohesively and building peer relations are pillars of the camp program, explained Tuan. Utilizing small group classes and one-on-one vocal training in combination with adapted camp traditions helped make it a smooth transition.

For more information on choir camps, visit <https://www.piedmontchoirs.org/camps-and-tours>.

Next week: Performing Department

Aurora Theater – live broadcast with actor Michael Asberry

By Allyson Aleksey

"Aurora Connects" is Aurora Theatre Company's weekly live broadcast every Friday at 4 p.m. on the company's YouTube channel.

Last week Aurora directors Josh Costello and Dawn Monique Williams will interview actor Michael Asberry, who appeared on Aurora's stage in *Exit Strategy* and *Satellites*. He recently performed in *When We Were Colored* with the Sacramento Theatre Company; *Sweat* with Capital Stage Company; and a *Midsummer Night's Dream* with the San Francisco Shakespeare Festival. Asberry holds numerous film and television credits as well, including *San Andreas* (Warner Brothers), *Chance* (Hulu), *Trauma* (NBC), *Nash Bridges* (CBS), and voiceover for Pixar Animation in *Pine Sol*.

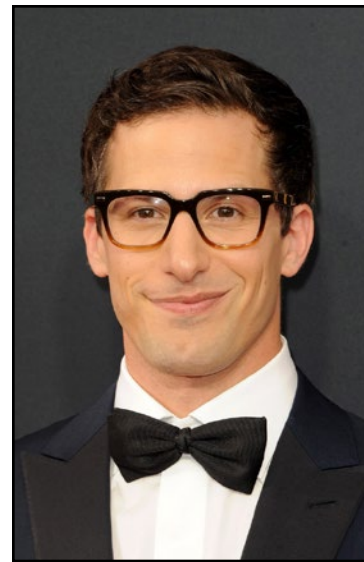


Michael Asberry

The discussion took place on October 2, but it can still be seen on Aurora's Youtube page: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RU-RG-r3Fgqo&feature=youtu.be>.

Berkeley Symphony, Berkeley Public Library collaborate

Andy Samberg reads *Little Fox and the Wild Imagination* on Friday



Comedian Andy Samberg

By Allyson Aleksey

Berkeley Symphony announced the launch of "Reading is Instrumental," a new weekly musical storytime series for children and adults.

The series is hosted by the symphony, in partnership with the Berkeley Public Library. It is co-produced by the symphony and the Berkeley Public Library Foundation. Weekly storytime readings began on Friday, September 25, with multi-award-winning actress Rita Moreno, who read *The Runaway Bunny* by Margaret Wise Brown. The series continued last Friday with author and Professor Emerita at University of California, Berkeley Maxine Hong Kingston and husband Earl Kingston. The couple read *Baby's Got the Blues* by Carol Diggory Shields, a humorous

story about the trials of babyhood that tips its cap to legendary blues artist B.B. King.

The event this Friday, October 9, will feature comedian and actor Andy Samberg, best known as a former *Saturday Night Live* cast member. He will read a new book by his friend Jorma Taccone titled *Little Fox and the Wild Imagination*.

The read will begin at 11 a.m.

"Berkeley Symphony is proud to partner with the Berkeley Public Library Foundation on this exciting new project that combines the art of story-telling with live music performance," Music Director Joseph Young said. "The series encapsulates two of my lifelong passions: bringing music to young people and creating community enrichment through shared stories and experiences. There is no better time for our friends and family to come together virtually and see that arts are alive and well in Berkeley."

Berkeley Public Library Foundation Executive Director Kathy Huff echoed Young's sentiments.

"Music and words together are a magical combination," she said. "We are incredibly grateful for all who have agreed to help make this fun program happen during these exceptional times. We all need stories and music to keep our spirits up, but our kids and families who are at home need them."

Earlier reads are available on the symphony's Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/berkeleypubliclibrary/>.



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