

PERFORMING ARTS

Piedmont Choirs in performance at Davies Hall



Piedmont Choirs Founding Artistic Director Robert Geary conducts *Carmina Burana* at Louise M. Davies Symphony Hall on Saturday night.

Music review by Anastasia Edel

This weekend at San Francisco's Davies Symphony Hall, singers from Piedmont East Bay Children's Choir (PEBCC) performed Carl Orff's monumental choral work, *Carmina Burana*, with the San Francisco Choral Society conducted by Piedmont Choirs founding director Robert Geary.

He retired earlier this year as Artistic Director of Piedmont Choirs but continues to lead the adult voices of SF Choral Society. Eric Tuan, who has assumed the role of the PEBCC's artistic director, assisted with Piedmont Choirs' Ensemble and Concert Choir performance.

The engagement with the Choral Society was a special occasion, as it gave the younger singers an opportunity to sing with a full orchestra and a gathering of internationally acclaimed singers in a premier musical venue. For many in the Choir, the engagement coincided with the start of school, which meant they had to catapult from vacation mode and into 14-hour-long days filled with classes and rehearsals.

And then there was the usual rush-hour commute to San Francisco Wednesday through Saturday for rehearsals.

As evidenced by the standing ovation at the end of both the Friday and Saturday performances, they managed well – and had a great time.

"It was amazing to sing with an older choir and be complimented for our work," said Larissa Edel, a member of the Concert Choir directed by Andrew Brown.

In the first part of the program, listeners were treated to a new choral poem in the world premiere of *Teach Your Children* by David Lang, one of America's most performed composers. Structured as a conversation between adults and children, the music was urgent and hypnotic – a meditation on the American nation and what it aspires to be.

The complexity of contemporary issues highlighted in Lang's piece served as perfect framing for

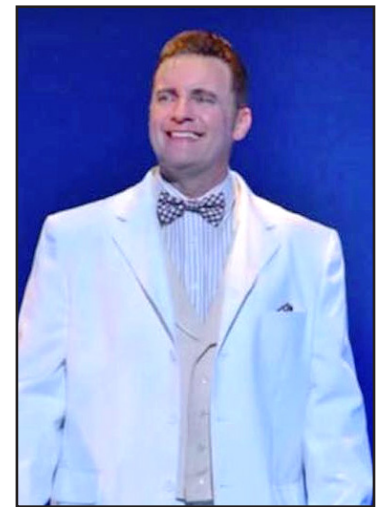


Members of Piedmont East Bay Children's Choir arrive at Davies Symphony Hall in San Francisco for a performance with the SF Choral Society.

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The role of Cinderella will be played by Amanda Sylvia, seen here earlier in the season as Katherine in *Newsies*.



Noel Anthony in the role of the prince.

Sondheim's *Into the Woods* opens at Woodminster Aug. 30

Woodminster Summer Musicals finish the current season with a flourish with Stephen Sondheim's *Into the Woods*, based upon an epic fairytale by the Brothers Grimm. James Lapine and Stephen Sondheim take everyone's favorite storybook characters and bring them together for a timeless modern classic.

Both the book and musical score won Tony Awards in 1986 when the show opened in New York.

The story follows a baker and his wife who wish to have a child; Cinderella, who wishes to attend the King's Festival; and Jack, who wishes his cow would give milk. When the baker and his wife learn that they cannot have a child because of a witch's curse, the two set off on a journey to break the curse.

Eventually, everyone's wish is granted, but the consequences of their actions return to haunt them later with disastrous results.

The role of Cinderella will be played by Amanda Sylvia, seen earlier in the season as Katherine in *Newsies*. The prince will be played by Noel Anthony* and Gary Stanford Jr.

Tickets are available by phone at 510-531-9597, online at www.woodminster.com, or in person at Woodminster's box office Monday-Sunday, or at the box office 2 hours before the performance. *Into the Woods* opens on Friday, August 30, with shows on weekends through Sunday, September 8. Thursday and Sunday performances are at 7 p.m., and Fridays and Saturdays are at 8 p.m.

With its setting in a beautiful redwood grove in the Oakland hills, patrons are invited to come early with a picnic dinner and enjoy eating outside before the show begins.

The production is directed by Joel Schlader, with music direction by Mark Dietrich, and choreography by Harriet Mason. All Woodminster shows are performed with live orchestras with musicians who are members of Musicians Local No. 6.

Woodminster history

Over the last 53 years, Producers Associates has presented more than 150 productions, entertaining over a million Woodminster Summer Musicals ticket holders. The shows have been

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PBECC

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the second act, *Carmina Burana*, a musical *tour de force* through antiquity and Middle Ages. Written by the German composer Carl Orff in Nazi Germany in 1937, the choral symphony encompasses ancient love poems, medieval drinking songs, and texts from ancient mythology. Most were created around 13th century by a group known as Vagantes – unfrocked priests, runaway monks, and intellectuals. They traveled through France, England and Germany, earning their way with satirical songs.

Several hundreds of these songs surfaced in 1803 in a Benedictine abbey in southern Germany.

Twenty-five of the songs were selected for *Carmina*. The cantata opens with dramatic “O Fortuna,” an impassionate evocation to Fate that rules over god and men. Performed by the combined adult and children choirs, it is perhaps the most famous chorus ever written, opening at a slow pace with thumping drums and choir that drops quickly into a whisper, building in a steady crescendo of drums and short strings that peak

on one final long note. The rest of the composition falls into three parts: “Prima Vera” (Spring), “In Taberna” (In the Tavern”) and “Cour d’Amour” (Court of Love), a journey from beautiful pastoral scenes to ecstatic spiritualism. All songs are sung in Latin.

Soprano Marnie Breckenridge, tenor Ramond Meyers, and bass-baritone Eugene Brancoveanu – a veritable all-star lineup – sang the lead roles.

Orff envisioned the work to be performed in a theatrical setting, and the local performance featured a group of young female dancers. With tickets free for middle and high school students, there were plenty of young people in the audience.

“The San Francisco Choral Society and I are very grateful to have had the opportunity to work with Piedmont East Bay Children’s Choir in both the world premiere of *Teach Your Children* and the iconic and dramatic *Carmina Burana*,” said Geary. “Ensemble performed beautifully. Congratulations to them Ensemble and their remarkable director Eric Tuan.”

For his part, Tuan also expressed his gratitude.

“It was a special pleasure to perform with Maestro Geary and the San Francisco Choral Society in the prestigious setting of Davies Symphony Hall. It was particularly powerful to be part of the premiere of *Teach Your Children* by David Lang, a composer whose work I have admired for many years.”

About Piedmont Choirs

Founded as Piedmont Boys Choir in 1982 by Suzie Rahl, the Choir has estab-

lished itself as a leading force in international choral activities and the commissioning and performance of new music. The Choir’s annual concert schedule regularly features over 50 performances, divided among the 15 various choirs that comprise the organization. The Choir’s flagship performance group, Ensemble, tours internationally and competes in festivals and competitions throughout the world, frequently winning top honors and awards at competi-

tions and music festivals in Europe, Asia, and North America. Its prestigious awards include a first prize for Contemporary Music and second prize for children’s choir at the 2010 Kathaumixw Choral Festival in British Columbia; the distinction of being the only choir to win three gold medals at Grand Prix St. Petersburg (Russia) Choral Festival in 2008; and two gold medals at the 2006 Hong Kong International Children’s Choral Festival.

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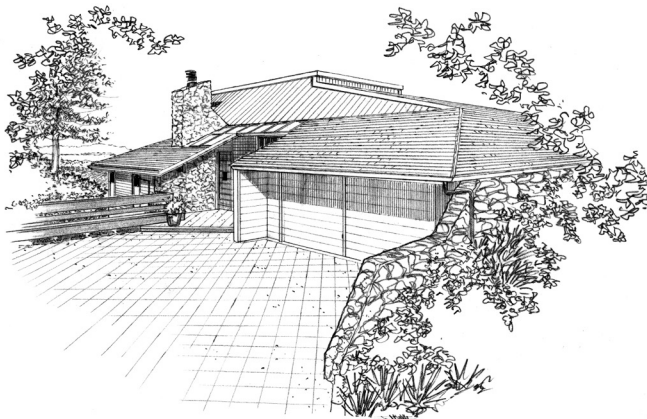
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