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Kacie Mulhern, 17



Want to get involved?

Peninsula Youth Orchestra is looking for children and teens ages 7 through high school that want to learn to play string instruments this fall. Call Karen Pew at 851-2897 for more information.

Making beautiful music together

Weeklong camp teaches kids how to play with others



Children ages 7 through 18 attend the Peninsula Youth Orchestra weeklong string camp.

One of the most important skills a child can learn is how to play well with others. For a musician, this is paramount. Many children in private lessons never have the opportunity to play in a group—especially younger children. That is until they come to the Peninsula Youth Orchestra String Camp.

"We don't have orchestras in all the schools here," said Karen Pew, the camp's executive director. "When we started the program we had 40 kids taking private lessons who'd never played a duet, much less together in a group."

"I think it's great to play not just by yourself but as part of a group," said Kelsey Fahy, 14.

So the first day that the campers arrive they are divided by age into four miniature string orchestras. There they are given music and immediately begin to learn the pieces, playing as a group.

"They all kind of depend on each other," said Pew.

This year, the camp is emphasizing dance music. Students are learning to play the dances of the baroque period, like the Sarabande and Gigue, as well as one their parents may have learned, the "hustle."

"We have the little kids do (the introduction)," Karen demonstrated. "And then the big kids play the main part."

The kids are also learning to do those dances and are taking seminars in percussion.

Anna Mansfield, a dancer who specializes in baroque-period dance, was leading a class of about 20 fifth through 11th graders on Tuesday morning in the art of the "needle and thread." For the dance, the kids must hold hands in a long line while their friends weave under their left arm, then their right. The thread picks up

more and more people and doubles in on itself. When one tall kid ducks under the arm of a small kid, she squeals.

Mansfield, from Seattle but with a pronounced British accent, was brought in with money from a City of Gig Harbor arts grant, said Pew. The grant will also help bring in a dancer to teach the kids how to do the hustle.

Downstairs, the little primary and elementary orchestra kids

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• PHOTOS AND STORY BY CALLIE WHITE •

Camp: String camp gives local youth untraditional experience

from page 1D

are learning how to play percussion.

Barbara J. Burzynski, a local musician, has the kids seated in a circle, holding different instruments. There are congas, maracas, triangles and even more exotic-looking things in every kid's hand.

"Quarter, quarter, eighth-eighth," counts Burzynski. She holds a double-bell shaped instrument and counts off the beats. Then the kids join in.

There is a cacophony of noise — clangings, swishings, bangings and shakings. Not all of it follows the count the teacher has given.

Trying to get them to stop on cue isn't easy.

For the kids, the instruments may seem simple, but the fact is, Pew said, that finding that inner rhythm isn't always easy.

"This is music we're playing," Burzynski tells the class. Then she makes a motion and everyone switches a chair to their right, putting many kids on new instruments. It doesn't happen immediately, but once the kids settle down, they manage to beat out the simple pattern in unison.

This is learning in action, Pew said. By removing the focus from strings, the kids are learning rhythm from within and building new skills to play with their peers.

Little do these kids know that come the end of the week, they will be playing dance music for actual dancers.

Pew said it will be a surprise, but an excellent one in that the kids will get to witness the interplay between the musicians, the conductor and the dancers.

It's a lesson that will make them employable as musicians, said Bonnie Hampton, an organizer.

The music, it seems, has powers to soothe the mercurial child.

"Some of the kids with ADD have especially benefitted," said Debbie Day, promotions assistant. "They can focus on data when it is given to them as a feeling rather than as a calculation."

When it comes to practicing their pieces, and the kids only have a week before they put on a concert for friends and family, the kids almost instantly settle into their chairs and pick up their violins, violas, cellos and basses.

"I really like this orchestra," said Ellen Pew, 15, a camper and the daughter of Karen and Paul

Pew (he directs the youth orchestra). "The experience is good and I like the people."

String camp is the only chance Jonathan Lewis, 14, gets to play with other kids in the summer, he said. Although the pace is different from that of an orchestra, he said he enjoys the intensity.

"At the end of the week you've accomplished something," he said.

The feelings of accomplishment and of the kinship between these artistically-temperamented kids keep them coming back to this camp, now in its fifth year.

Kacie Mulhern, 17, has been attending the camp ever since it began.

"I love the energy," she said. "Lots of orchestras are very good but very, very competitive."

"We have here people with positive energy who really enjoy making music."

Not to mention, said Eric Hampton, 14, who declares that he is "obsessed" with the Renaissance, "the conductors are really awesome."

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