

A kid-sized taste of Mozart

Local theater troupe gives series of performances for elementary students

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The Summit Elementary gymnasium acoustics weren't really conducive to hearing dialogue during the early stages of Tuesday afternoon's production, but then the music took over.

And the music was Mozart, which meant it was a joyful noise indeed.

Summit was the last of four local elementary schools in the past two weeks to host a Bloomington Early Music Festival-sponsored musical play, "Mozart: A Family Portrait," written and directed by Debbi Ponella of Stages Bloomington, the local community musical theater troupe for young people.

The young people at Summit clearly enjoyed the mix of sight and sound provided by young actors and musicians from local middle and high schools as well as Indiana University's Jacobs School of Music.

The vocal trills in an aria from "The Magic Flute" sung by soprano Sara Fox left many a student mouth agape, with the unspoken question quite obvious, "How does her voice make sounds like that?" One young man in an olive green shirt waved his hand in time with the vocals trills, as if conducting.

And when the string quartet dived into "Serenade No. 13 for Strings in G Major" — better known as "Eine kleine Nachtmusik" or "A Little Night Music" — it clearly struck a chord with the kids. Some of the students recognized it immediately.

Clarinet and trombone were also featured, the latter on a slice of Mozart's "Requiem Mass in D Minor," his final composition. And the show began with Tony Ponella, portraying Mozart, singing "To My Sweetheart I'm Returning," an aria written when the composer was 12.

"We tried to give them a wide range of things, musically, and some elements from Mozart's life they could maybe relate to," Debbi Ponella said after the 45-minute performance concluded. "We tried to give them some things they'd recognize, such as the variations on 'Twinkle Twinkle Little Star.'"

Summit student Megan Vernon said, "It was cool when they played all different versions of 'Twinkle Twinkle,'" and classmate Nicholas Hill agreed. They and colleagues from Sandy Carson's fourth-grade class convened in Jill Courtney's music room after the show to discuss it.

"I liked how it was so classy and educational," Shayla Gale said. "Most plays we see aren't based on a true story, either."

The play reveals details of Mozart's life through the theatrical contrivance of a real-life Bloomington girl — Bloomington High School South student Evie Bauman, playing herself — touring Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's family home in Salzburg, Austria, and finding herself stepping back into the 1700s to meet Mozart and his family. A portrait of Mozart's deceased mother, portrayed by Bloomington North student Caitlin Diekhoff, speaks to Evie, and the fantasy takes flight from there.

The Summit students seemed to appreciate all of it, period costumes included, though they found the powdered wigs worn by the men humorous.

"I didn't want to make fun of the way they were dressed, of the wigs and all, but it was kind of funny," Jordan Breedlove said. "But otherwise, it was all really cool."

Kierstyn Franklin mentioned the wigs, too. Morgan Ciastro and Daniel Caukins liked watching the minuet dance.

Jace Pugh thought "when all the violins played together, the sound was incredible." Destinee Splunge was partial to the trombone. Antonia Kieffaber loved the vocal quartet. Max Lewis and Aero Bosley enjoyed watching a famous painting by dello Croce of the Mozart family "come to life."

Bauman, who attended St. Charles for grade school — which along with Unionville and Fairview elementaries joined Summit in hosting the show — can still see herself in the younger students of the audience.

"I think this has a good variety of music kids can enjoy, and I know I'd have enjoyed seeing something like this at that age," said Bauman, who met Ponella through Stages Bloomington. "And it's been a lot of fun for us to perform for them."

From left, Tony Ponella, Jennifer Brophy, Caitlin Diekhoff and Evie Bauman perform "Mozart: A Family Portrait" Tuesday for children at Summit Elementary School. The musical play, based on the life and music of the 18th-century classical composer, was sponsored by the Bloomington Early Music Festival.
Jeremy Hogan | Herald-Times



From left, Sara Fox, Erin Houghton, Matthew Wells and Cody Medina perform Tuesday at Summit Elementary School in a musical play about Mozart. Jeremy Hogan | Herald-Times



Tony Ponella portrays Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart Tuesday during an educational program for children at Summit Elementary School. Jeremy Hogan | Herald-Times

