



Symphony Musicians Help Empower Girls Through Music

By Rachel Gossen

When Cindy Ellis and a woodwind quintet of Pacific Symphony musicians began playing “Let It Go” during a recent visit to Girls, Inc. of Orange County, they had no idea a sing-along would erupt. The girls were overjoyed to hear the popular Disney tune and began singing with strong voices, getting energy flowing through the room that lasted for the rest of the performance. “I got a bit misty eyed,” Ellis said. “It’s refreshing to hear kids just being in the moment and being kids—singing and laughing.”

Girls, Inc. strives to teach young girls to be strong, smart and bold—traits Ellis thinks girls can see and connect to in the character of Elsa. “In *Frozen*, Elsa was discovering and accepting her unique powers and growing more independent through the storyline in the movie. Even though none of us can turn any object into ice and snow, we are all on the journey to discover our unique ‘superpowers’ as human beings.”

Ellis programmed the music for the informance (informational performance) to be familiar to the girls and their families, but also to showcase a few classical pieces they might have never heard before. She fluctuated between popular and classical music, while sharing life lessons the girls could find in each piece.

Selections included the *Pirates of the Caribbean* theme to encourage girls that it’s okay to be different like Captain Jack Sparrow, “Take Me Out to the Ballgame” to empower girls to be athletic and healthy, and “Can You Feel the Love Tonight” from *The Lion King* to express the group’s love of sharing music. The selection of classical music included “The Story of the Woodwind Family” to teach the girls about the instruments being played, “Spring” from Vivaldi’s *Four Seasons* to explain that many of Vivaldi’s pieces were written for an all-female orchestra and choir, and the Overture from Mozart’s *Marriage of Figaro* to teach girls about Mozart’s life as a young composer.

“Personally, I loved how the musicians introduced each instrument to the girls,” said Kelli McIntosh, elementary programs coordinator for Girls, Inc. of Orange County. “They created a whole story, a world where the instruments had different personalities and characteristics you could hear in their sounds. It was such a creative way to help the girls learn about each instrument’s unique qualities and remember them.”

After the performance, the girls were able to participate in an “instrument petting zoo,” where they could ask the musicians questions and try out instruments like the flute and clarinet. For

Ellis, it was the highlight of her time spent at Girls, Inc. “Hands on experience is the best! I loved it when the girls were able to make a sound on an instrument for the first time. To see them explore their own boundaries and try something new was heartwarming,” she said. Ellis hopes that the performance encouraged enthusiasm for the arts, and maybe even inspired some girls to pursue music.

“As fun as it is to watch the girls in their wide-eyed amazement, it’s just as fun to watch the parents enjoy their daughters’ joy,” adds McIntosh. “A few years ago, one mother was so impacted watching her daughter with a violin, being taught by a professional musician, that she signed her up for violin lessons the next afternoon!”

“Our Heartstrings partnership with the Symphony is amazing,” she continues. “We are able to offer exposure to symphonic music and experiences to girls and families who may have never been able to enjoy this before. This program has taken special interest in supporting our mission—‘Inspiring all girls to be strong, smart and bold’—by sending female musicians to play in front of our girls and families. Heartstrings has provided a foundation and illustration that girls and women can be performers, composers, etc. It has educated our girls about the world of music, as well as inspired them to grow up to be involved in music if it’s their passion.”

“This partnership with Girls, Inc. exemplifies what Pacific Symphony’s Heartstrings program is all about—utilizing music to help community partners fulfill their important missions and spread the joy and power of music to all Orange County residents, regardless of their age, background, socio-economic conditions or other circumstances”, adds Mary Hawkes, director of community engagement at Pacific Symphony. “Through Heartstrings, the Symphony is working hand-in-hand with our partners to increase the quality of life in the county.”



For more information on Girls, Inc. of Orange County, please visit their table in the lobby on March 18-19 or visit www.girlsinc-oc.org.

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