



These singers will perform in San Diego Opera's upcoming production of "Tosca":
Back row: Daniela Camilleri, Hannah Prater, Sophia Linkletter;
Front row: Jerrin Padre, Kayla Stults. Photo/Jon Clark

Local teen singers featured in San Diego Opera's production of Tosca

By Matt Liebowitz

The San Diego Opera's upcoming production of "Tosca" will have help from a group of talented North County teens.

Daniela Camilleri is one of five North County students making up the 16-member San Diego Opera Children's Chorus. Beginning Jan. 24 at the Civic Theatre, they will back the French soprano Sylvie Valayre and American tenor Marcus Haddock in the San Diego Opera's production of "Tosca," Giacomo Puccini's dramatic thriller about a beautiful woman who risks everything to save her lover in an oppressive police state.

A 13-year-old Carmel Valley resident, this is Camilleri's second opera; last spring she performed in the San Diego Opera's double-bill of Cavalleria Rusticana/Pagliacci.

Joining Camilleri in Tosca are: Jerrin Padre, a 12-year-old Carmel Valley resident performing in her fourth opera; Kayla Stults, an 11-year-old Solana Beach resident performing in her third opera; 13-year-old Carmel Valley resident Hannah Prater, performing in her second opera; and 13-year-old Sophie Linkletter, an experienced actor with Christian Youth Theater, who was recently involved in The Power of Youth Celebrity Charity Event to benefit St. Jude's Hospital at the Nokia Theater in Los Angeles. This is Linkletter's first opera.

In "Tosca," the children's chorus appears as an all male group of townsfolk, about which Camilleri said she and the other girls aren't bothered.

"We always seem to be kids who are obnoxious, causing trouble," she said. "That's just theater."

Although appearing on stage as kids, practicing and performing is anything but child's play.

"It's kind of scary the first time [in rehearsals]," said Camilleri about joining the adult chorus, led by Chorus Master Timothy Todd Simmons. "We're so used to singing with our little group of kids our age, and then we come into this room, and the sound is so loud. The adults are so powerful, it's intimidating."

Added Camilleri, "We talk to all the adults. They are all really nice, and help us through the whole

experience."

Added Daniela's mother, Simone, "They learn so much from the adults, not just about voice, but about being professional."

It's not just their nerves during the on stage performance Camilleri and her cohorts have to balance.

For the five weeks prior to opening night, the children's chorus adheres to a rigorous practice schedule, often practicing as many as four hours a night.

"It's overwhelming," said Camilleri. "but the teachers help, and I still stay on top of my work."

"School has been very supportive helping her manage her schedule," added Simone.

As exciting as appearing on stage is for Camilleri and her friends, Simone said the parents gain pride, and a whole new perspective, watching their kids prepare and perform.

"As a parent, it's amazing just watching her go through the process, watching it unfold and develop into a full-blown production, and then seeing them perform in front of 1,200 people," said Simone.

Citing the diligence of the directors and producers, Simone added, "We've always been opera goers, but never appreciated how much hard work goes into it."

Performing has awoken Camilleri's love for the art of opera as well.

"I always slept through operas," she admitted, "but now I have a greater appreciation." She recently saw "La Boheme" in San Francisco, and said, "I really enjoyed it."

With opening night just a few weeks away, Camilleri said she and her fellow chorus members are thrilled to finally showcase all their hard work.

"I always get excited about opening night," she said. "It's so good having it come together and actually being able to perform. It all pays off."

"Tosca" opens Jan. 24 at the Civic Theatre (3rd Avenue and B Street in downtown San Diego), with shows Jan. 27, 30, Feb. 1 and Feb. 4. For more information, visit www.sdopera.com.