

OPERA

Inspiring Youth

The San Diego Opera takes **ARTS EDUCATION** to a new level

If you thought opera was only one-dimensional, think again. The San Diego Opera is working diligently to not only promote opera in our city, but educate our youth about this wonderful art form. According to Dr. Nicolas Reveles, the Geisel director of education and outreach, education goes long, broad and deep in their company. "It's always been an important element in what we do," he said. "It's key in gaining new audiences; it's an investment, a way to get kids to be audience members, singers or associated in any way with opera."

San Diego Opera's educational offerings include the San Diego Opera Ensemble with productions of Rumpelstiltskin, Così fan tutte and Opera Unplugged; the Opera For Kids...By Kids residency; Student Night at the Opera; docent presentations; teaching artist visits and other special programs.

The San Diego Opera Ensemble brings you the excitement of opera close up! Six outstanding professional young singers combine music, comedy and drama to present two fabulous productions, complete with costumes and sets! "The SD Opera Ensemble is a group I'm very proud of," Dr. Reveles said. "They're terrific young singers from all over the country who auditioned to spend 23 weeks with us and take anywhere from two to three fully produced operas out to the schools. The only thing they're missing is an orchestra. We travel with a pianist, but not an orchestra. It's a real compact version of any of the standard repertoire so the kids can experience opera in the classroom before they come to the Civic Theatre and see the real thing."

In the Opera For Kids...By Kids residency, students take the stage producing their own opera under the guidance of three opera professionals. The operas are especially adapted for children and allow the students to work in all aspects of production — from sets and costumes to stage management and lighting. And, of course the students star in the productions, acting, dancing and singing. Over the course of the six-week program, students are given individual confidence-building responsibilities and learn the value of teamwork. "Opera For...Kids By Kids takes existing productions and they go out and do everything from makeup and props to publicity," Dr. Reveles said. "Sometimes the kids working to get articles in neighborhood papers and other publicity do better than we do!"

Student Night at the Opera provides students and their chaperones access to a portion of the final dress rehearsal of San Diego Opera's main stage productions. "Student Night at the Opera is where kids watch up to the first intermission of whatever it is we're reproducing," Dr. Reveles commented. "Beforehand, we have adult volunteer docents go into the schools and describe opera and teach the kids about opera before they come to the dress rehearsals, so they're well prepared."

"We also have a program called Next Steps, which provides teaching artists or a docent after they've seen the student dress rehearsal so they have an opportunity to reflect on what they saw, learned, experienced and heard. We're good not just at experience and exposure, but we like to follow that up so there's a thorough, systematic educational approach to everything we produce."

Docents use a variety of techniques to bring the opera to life for students. Opera docents present two different programs: the ABCs of Opera, which is a great preparation for elementary, middle and high school students before attending Student Night at the Opera for the first time; and See You At The Opera!, where students can discover more about each of the 2009 International Season productions during presentations.

"The Words in Music program is a six-week residency program in a school," Dr. Reveles added. "At the end of the six weeks, we hire professional singers to come in and do a readers theater performance. It's exciting because the kids get involved directing it, and it gets them involved in the creative process from day one; they essentially create their own opera." **SDP**



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