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STUDENTS EXPERIENCE OPERA IN SCHOOL

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Young Patronesses of the Opera tours local elementary schools to help a new generation learn from watching an actual performance.

Article Text:

BY CHERYL UPSHAW Special To The Miami Herald

Thousands of kids will learn about arias -- by hearing them. A new generation of Miami-Dade children are learning to appreciate opera with an in-house production at their school. In its 32nd season, the non-profit Young Patronesses of the Opera is presenting this year *Papageno*, an adaptation of Mozart's Magic Flute, which will go to Homestead, Perrine, West Kendall, West Miami and Kendall elementaries, among other schools around Dade and Broward counties. Producer Julie Todaro and her nine-member crew and cast performed the first production in January and will finish in May. The schedule includes stops at Bel-Air Elementary, 10205 SW 194th St., April 23; Claude Pepper Elementary, 14550 SW 96th St., April 24; Kendale Elementary, 10693 SW 93rd St., April 29; West Homestead, 1550 SW 6th St., May 8; Pine Lake, 16700 SW 109th Ave, May 6; Redondo Elementary, 18480 SW 340th St., May 9; and Gulfstream Elementary, 20900 SW 97th Ave., May 15.

Papageno is about two bird catchers in love and the troubles they reach from an evil Moor and the help from a magical lady-in-waiting to the Queen to gain their true love. The performances may last for only 30 minutes, but children say they gain so much more. "I really liked the opera, and I really appreciate that they came to show us a real opera in person. I can never do what the singers do. If I did, I would break a glass window," said Maria, a student at Ludlam Elementary, who watched a previous production. "Papageno gave my students a great introduction to opera," said David Burris, a teacher at Ludlam Elementary. "Many of our children would never get to experience opera if this program did not exist," added Nicole Porrello, a teacher from David Fairchild Elementary.

A musical education is not the only advantage gained by the elementary students. Through an opera booklet that accompanies the performance, students learn about the costumes, set and songs in a game-filled way. These books called, *Funtimes*, are even FCAT compliant and can assist in the classroom to make learning fun. "I adored all the costumes and I loved the feathers on the main character, Papageno," said Fairlawn Elementary student Sabrina.

Young Patronesses of the Opera is a group made up of more than 100 women who have been raising money to promote, educate and develop the understanding, taste and love of opera for the past 50 years. This year, the group received grants from the state of Florida, Miami-Dade County, city of Coral Gables, private foundations, Publix charities, Target as well as many individual donations. For more information about the Young Patronesses of the Opera and its program, log on to www.YPO-Miami.org

