

INSPIRING YOUNG MUSICIANS

Gold Coast Youth Orchestra

By Julia Kasper



The Gold Coast Youth Orchestra formed out of a need for students in the public schools to have an additional place to learn how to play string instruments. Donna Richards and Timothy Byrns founded the non-profit organization almost three years ago to provide students who were interested in playing a string instrument more advanced training.

"Learning how to play a string instrument should be taught by a string teacher. Once a student learns how to play and enjoy the strings, they may not have the chance to continue with advanced training by a professional," Richards said. "Not every school in the county has a string program. We can help in that area."

The need for students to learn not only how to play their instrument, but learn music specifically for a string orchestra has the organization offering music performance opportunities. "This summer students can participate in our 8 week summer program. We even have an 'End of the Summer Program Concert', which gives our students service hours for high school," Richards said.

The program is for intermediate and advanced string players. Placement auditions will be held June 1, and the program begins June 11. The rehearsals will be held Tuesday and Thursday evenings from 6:15 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. and Saturdays from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. The times were set up in the evenings so students who live all over the county can have the opportunity to participate.

"GCYO has helped me learn how to become a musician. Mr. Byrns helps to build our confidence by giving us solo opportunities and pushing us beyond our comfort zone. GCYO gives me the opportunity to excel in an orchestral group, since my school doesn't have one," said Rachele, a cellist for six years, who has decided to major in Music Therapy/Music Education.

Timothy Byrns, the string teacher, takes his performance knowledge, and breaks it down on a level for all students. He works with the entire group, and then spends time with each player for individual help as well.

"Mr. Byrns is an excellent conductor and I have learned so much from him. The musical selections are challenging and enjoyable all at the same time," violinist Christina said. "I would highly recommend GCYO for middle and high school students

of intermediate and advanced levels. It helps prepare them for college music ensembles." Christina has played for six years and wants to pursue a Vocal Performance Major in college.

The students in the program even nominated Mr. Byrns for the GRAMMY's Music Educator Award. Statistically, students who are involved in music outscore non-music students in standardized tests including the SAT and ACT. Music students excel in Math and Science, but Music Education divulges into History and Language as well.

"We teach music theory, ear training, bowing fundamentals, shifting, posture, and concert etiquette. We hope by adding an intermediate ensemble this summer we can reach more students earlier in their musical education so that they will have a solid foundation to achieve their desired goals," Byrns said.

This string orchestra chamber group is offered to students from middle schools to undergrad. Several of the former students come back to play while home from college and even after graduation.

"GCYO puts me in a better position to enhance and improve my playing skills above and beyond what my school program gives me. I recommend that every string student should try out GCYO for at least one day, and I guarantee they will love it and want to become a permanent member of the orchestra," said Brenda, who has played the viola for four years.

Once students begin performing they said they couldn't stop. Music is already a part of their lives and playing an instrument as a part of the orchestra has become another social group of friends they hope to keep in touch with even after college.

"I love to come back to a rehearsal and work with the intermediate students, after focusing in my classes at college. It is fun to play and rehearse with them," said Collin Richards a graduate from Pompano Beach High school, who was awarded a Cello performance scholarship at the University of Florida, after being taught by Mr. Byrns.

To be a part of the program you can email your request to: info@gcyo-fl.org or contact GCYO at 954-501-0401. To request a performance from the group or to offer financial support to the orchestra please call 954-501-0401.