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Entertainment

D.C. Youth Orchestra teams with Marvin Hamlisch at Kennedy Center

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By: Marie Gullard
Special to The Washington Examiner
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What greater thrill can there be for a young student of orchestral music than to perform in front of a live audience at the Kennedy Center?

For alumni of the D.C. Youth Orchestra Program, the dream is reality this Saturday evening on the Kennedy Center's Millennium Stage. In celebration of the D.C. Youth Orchestra's 50th anniversary, Marvin Hamlisch, principal pops conductor of the National Symphony Orchestra, presides over a program featuring some of the Youth Orchestra's 50,000 alumni from across the country.

As emcee and guest host of the evening's performance, Hamlisch will lead the students in George Gershwin's "Summertime" from "Porgy and Bess" while Jesus Manuel Berard, the Youth Program's conductor and music director will lead other great works that include the "Prelude to Die Meistersinger von Nuernberg, WWV96" by Richard Wagner and Sir Edward Elgar's "Nimrod from Enigma Variations, Op. 36."

Since 1960, the D.C. Youth Orchestra Program has served the District's community by providing music education and performance opportunities to young people regardless of previous skill and experience or their ability to pay the tuition.

"Every child needs some place where they feel important," Ava Spece, executive director of the Youth Orchestra, said. "Sometimes it's on the athletic field [but] for a lot of kids, it's music. If you can't afford it, we will do everything to help you get here so you can get a quality music education experience and figure out whether [or not] that's the thing for you."

With financial subsidy from the D.C. Public Schools System, the D.C. government, individual donors, contributors and foundations, students pay about 45 percent of the program's cost and, most importantly, the program accepts all students who are willing to learn.

"Last year we gave out almost \$90,000 in scholarships," Spece continued. "And we have 12 curriculum

If you go

**D.C. Youth Orchestra
 50th Anniversary
 Celebration Concert
 with Marvin Hamlisch**

When » 6 p.m. Saturday

Where » Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, 2700 F St. NW

Info » Free, no tickets required; 202-467-4600; dcyop.org

levels, so the skill level is the same for each class.”

The 50th anniversary performance is timed with the program’s new move to the recently restored Eastern High School where on the weekends 40 Youth Orchestra faculty members take over 35 to 40 classrooms filled with students.

Tonight’s concert features 110 alumni orchestra members.

Elizabeth O’Neil, an alumni oboist who will continue her education at the New England Conservatory of Music this fall, has thoroughly enjoyed her years since elementary school with the D.C. Youth Orchestra.

“This was my foundation in orchestral music,” she said. “It prepared me for a career.”

Topics

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