

# Harmony Project helps young musicians blossom

Anne Kallas  
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## VENTURA COUNTY STAR





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KRISTIE AKIN/SPECIAL TO THE STAR Students perform “Twinkle Twinkle Little Star” during Friday’s spring recital at Sheridan Way Elementary in Ventura.

VENTURA, Calif. - The notes weren’t always played perfectly, and sometimes the rhythm was a little off, but the beginning instrumental music students at Sheridan Way Elementary School in west Ventura still brought the audience to its feet during the spring recital.

The New West Symphony Harmony Project of Ventura County has been working for the past four years to give children in the low-income neighborhood a chance to play instruments and become musicians.

“We started with Sheridan Way, but now thanks to the collaboration with the Randy California Project, we are also inviting students from E.P Foster and Will Rogers schools to participate,” said Andria Landin, Harmony Project manager.

The Randy California Project was named for Randy C. Wolfe, who played in the rock band Spirit, which was formed in 1967. Wolfe used Randy California as his stage name. He drowned in 1997, and his family set up a trust that has been used to fund the teaching effort.

Landin said the Harmony Project program in was founded in 2011 by Jordan and Sandra Laby as a project of the New West Symphony.

“This is a community investment project that focuses on youth development,” Landin said. “It’s an incredible resource that provides a transition for communities.”

Sheridan Way Principal Maria Elizarraras said the students “have definitely responded to the music. Most have found a different interest they feel confident about, which helps them achieve academic confidence.”

Landin said the young musicians who have been with the program since its inception are making great strides.

“They really grow with the program. Many started in the third grade and by the time they are in middle school, they’ve really matured as musicians,” she said. “This program is about building leaders.”

Fifth-grader Jairo Gallegos, 11, said he has already moved past the level of the beginning students playing in Friday’s concert. He will be playing in the more advanced Harmony Project

Orchestra B concert at 6 p.m. May 30 at the Bell Arts Factory at 432 N. Ventura Ave. in Ventura.

The young musician said he loves playing the saxophone.

“I can be with my friends and get lost in the music. And it’s fun,” he said. “I’ve learned a lot of different types of music, and I really like the rhythms we play on the sax, especially the blues.”

Daniela Guerra, of Ventura, said her daughter Naomi Flores, 10, a fifth-grader, has blossomed as she has been introduced to the cello.

“It helps her get in a group and gives her a sense of belonging,” Guerra said. “She really looks forward to her cello lessons.”

Aliesha Valdivia, 11, also a fifth-grader, said she plays the cello “because it’s awesome.”

“I really like the sound,” she said “And it’s big.”

Harmony Project saxophone teacher Andrew Conrad said he has been driving to Ventura for two years from Los Angeles, where he is a professional musician, to teach the children.

“I learn a lot about my own music when I teach these kids. I really like teaching these guys,” said Conrad, who said the dozen or so music teachers who offer instruction on different instruments offer a wide range of musical ideas.

“For the most part, all of the teachers throw a lot of music and ideas at the kids. There’s always a little resistance, but once they learn how to do it, they enjoy it.”

Visit <https://www.newwestsymphony.org/education/harmony-project.php> for information about the Harmony Project.

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