

THE ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

MUSIC TO YOUNG EARS

A Student String Music Program is Flourishing in the Anaheim Area
by Celeste Navejas, The Orange County Register (2006)

Julie Metz gracefully waves her baton from side to side, leading students as they play "Countdown to Christmas." The kids follow attentively with their violins, violas and cellos. They are getting ready for an important concert on December 2. "It takes time to get it right," says sixth-grader Gerson Galdamez of Cerritos Elementary. Metz is the teacher of the only Gifted and Talented Education (GATE) string orchestra of the Anaheim Union High School District.



The group practices at Orangeview Junior High. Typically, schools have band or choir, but an all-string orchestra is rare in the public schools. "Some of our children don't have much, they can't afford private lessons," Metz said. "It's wonderful for them to be a part of something larger than themselves." The after-school program - made up of fourth through 12th graders from surrounding schools - is divided into three groups: beginning, intermediate, and advanced.

"It's given me more confidence," says Oxford Academy seventh-grader Mergery Diolazo. The school district provides most of the funding, but the program also receives help from Pacific Symphony's Anaheim-based Harp Guild, which donates money, and Grace Music in Garden Grove, which donates instruments. Metz, who has played with the Pacific Symphony for 19 years, teaches the advanced group. She also teaches Music Masters, a Pacific Symphony elementary school program at the Savanna School District that feeds into the GATE program.

The GATE group performs about five times a year, and has played at the Cerritos Performing Arts Center and the California Reading Association Convention. Nicole Christensen, a senior, her sister Kelly, a freshman, both from Loara High, and their brother Connor, a sixth-grader at Roosevelt Elementary, have been playing the violin since they were toddlers. "It's wonderful to see their joy when they're playing...giving back to the community," said their mom, Maureen Christensen.

For more information on the Music Masters or GATE programs, e-mail 2julie@fea.net