

Campo students learn from musical mentors

By Diane Claytor



Campolindo students Brigitte Jia and Tanya Zhong accompany Gold Coast Chamber Players' musicians and violin soloist, Corina Stoian, as they perform Bartok Romanian Dances.

Photos Diane Claytor

Fifty students, all string players from Campolindo's orchestra, sat in a semi-circle on the school's Performing Arts Center stage last week. Most looked enthralled and listened intently as four of their classmates, sitting alongside four members of the Gold Coast Chamber Players, accompanied Gold Coast violin soloist, Corina Stoian, as she played Bartok Romanian Dances. The music was uplifting and emotional; the musicians — student and professional — were incredible.

"It's an amazing experience for a high school student to see professional musicians up close like this," exclaimed Johnny Johnson, Campo's orchestra teacher/conductor. Proud of his young musicians (violinists Brigitte Jia and Tanya Zhong, cellist Marc Schultz and violist Michelle Perelmutor) who joined the Gold Coast

professionals (Gil Sharon, Dan Flanagan, Pamela Freund-Striplen and Jennifer Klotzel), Johnson was very excited that four of his students were able to play with their counterparts in a quartet.

"We try to provide different experiences for our kids several times a year," Johnson said. "It's easy to get in your little tunnel and get used to the way your playing sounds. Then you hear an example of professionalism and it really opens your ears and mind, knowing you really can strive for a higher level. This was such a special side-by-side experience."

Based in Lafayette for the last 18 years, the acclaimed Gold Coast Chamber Players are dedicated to education, bringing concerts and mentoring to nearly every Lamorinda public school since they moved to the area. Pamela Freund-Striplen, artistic director and co-founder



Campolindo violinist Tanya Zhong and cellist Marc Schultz playing side-by-side with their Gold Coast Chamber Players counterparts in a mini-performance of Bartok Romanian Dances.

of Gold Coast, noted that they are always looking for ways to connect with the community, and going into the schools and working with students is one of her favorite ways to accomplish this.

"Students are always being told what to do," she noted. "But to actually have the opportunity to play with a professional, well, that's something you can't get anywhere else. It really distinguishes Gold Coast from other similar organizations. Sharing the feelings and sounds with professional musicians is pretty cool for the kids."

Prior to the actual performance of the students and professionals at Campo, Freund-Striplen and her Gold Coast players worked with the class, "teaching them about flexibility," Freund-Striplen said. "Romanian music is very free.

"One of the most inspiring things I do

is being able to play with young people and introduce them to an idea and do it in a really deep way," she continued. "Just coming and playing for them is enriching and educational, but this is very different. They learn so quickly because it's so hands on. And playing alongside a professional can be a truly powerful experience."

The Gold Coast Chamber Players were recognized by Contra Costa County in 2015 with the Arts and Culture Award. They are devoted to the art of chamber music as well as sharing their passion with the community. Their next performance — "Czech Mate" — will be at the Lafayette Library next month and their final concert of the season — "French Connection" — will be a celebration of Lafayette's 50th anniversary. For more information, go to gcplayers.org.

Nothin' says lovin' like chocolate cake in the oven

By Susie Iventosch



Polka Dot Valentine's Cake

Photo Susie Iventosch

What can say "I love you" more than a beautiful homemade cake? This cake is especially fun because the loves in your life won't know there's a delicious dark chocolate cake inside until you cut into it. This cake recipe is one of my favorites because it's so moist and the chocolate chips make it even more so. I have been infatuated with the idea of making chocolate cake with white frosting ever since our friends' wedding in

1989, although it's taken me all these years to actually do it! They had a gorgeous tiered wedding cake, and I just loved the fact the cake inside was chocolate instead of the usual vanilla. It was the first time I'd ever seen that in a wedding cake and it was fabulous. Since they are still blissfully married, I thought it would be the perfect recipe for Valentine's Day in honor of them.

Cooking Term of the Week

Xanthan Gum

Xanthan gum is used as a stabilizer, emulsifier and thickener in food products. It is made from the fermentation of corn sugar. Xanthan gum has the special ability of holding particles of food together, thereby making it a good stabilizer and yielding smooth, creamy textures in the products it's used in such as salad dressings, yogurts, sauces, and even ice creams. It is sometimes used as a substitute for gluten in baked goods.

INGREDIENTS

- 3 cups all-purpose flour
- 2 cups granulated sugar
- ¾ cup unsweetened cocoa powder, sifted
- 2 tsp. baking soda
- 1 tsp. salt
- 1 cup boiling hot water
- 1 cup cold water
- 1 cup canola oil
- 2 tsp. vanilla extract
- ½ cup dark chocolate chips
- ½ cup white chocolate chips or bar broken into small bits
- 1 recipe vanilla buttercream frosting (see below)

DIRECTIONS

Line the bottom of two 9-inch cake pans with parchment paper. Spray paper and sides of pan with cooking spray. Preheat oven to 350 F.

In a large measuring cup or small bowl, mix 1 cup of boiling water with cocoa powder and whisk until cocoa is dissolved. Add vanilla, and set aside. Cool to room temperature.

In a large bowl mix flour, baking soda, salt and sugar. Stir in cocoa powder mixture, additional cup of cold water and oil. Mix well. Add dark and white chocolate chips and stir to incorporate.

Divide batter evenly between the two prepared cake pans and bake for approximately 25 minutes, or until a toothpick inserted in center of cake comes out clean.

Remove from oven, cool and turn layers out onto cooling racks. Frost with vanilla buttercream frosting and decorate with dark chocolate dots!

Vanilla Buttercream Frosting

INGREDIENTS

- 3 sticks (1 ½ cups) unsalted butter, softened to room temperature
- 6 (or so) cups powdered sugar, sifted
- 2 tsp. vanilla extract
- 3 Tbsp. half & half or milk
- ½ tsp. salt

DIRECTIONS

Place butter in a large mixing bowl or the bowl of your mixer. Beat on high speed until very fluffy and very pale yellow, approximately 5 minutes, scraping down sides as you go.

Slowly add the powdered sugar, about ¼ cup at a time, and beating after each addition until well incorporated. (You may need slightly more or less of the powder sugar than instructed, depending upon the moisture content of your butter, so have a half cup or so extra powdered sugar on hand in case.)

Beat in vanilla and half & half. Adjust to desired spreading consistency with remaining powdered sugar.

Set about ½ cup of the frosting aside for decorating the cake. Place one layer on the cake plate and frost the top of that layer. Now, place the second layer on top and completely frost top and sides of cake.

Add cocoa powder and/or brown food coloring to remaining half cup of frosting and using an icing bag and cake decorating tip, decorate top and sides of cake with dots or whatever pattern you like!



Susie can be reached at suziventosch@gmail.com. This recipe can be found on our website: www.lamorindaweekly.com. If you would like to share your favorite recipe with Susie please contact her by email or call our office at (925) 377-0977.

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