

Published September 16th, 2009

Local Singers Vie for Winner's Circle at Orinda Idol 2009

By Jennifer Wake



Soul Sisters: from left to right: Neris Newton, Amrita Newton, Jacqueline Garell
Photo Ohlen Alexander

Sequins, taffeta and even feathered boas adorned many of the more than 60 Lamorinda finalists and runners up who took the stage at the Orinda Theatre last Sunday to compete in the finals competition of Orinda Idol 2009. But the true sparkle came from within when these kids (who ranged in age from 5 to 18) belted out songs that put smiles on faces of the thousands who gathered that day to watch them.

Former Miramonte grad, long-time judge, and Spazmatics drummer and vocalist Matthias Montgomery and Bay Area Cabaret founder and judge Marilyn Levinson said the caliber of talent in the annual competition keeps getting better.

"I was surprised just at the way these kids have put together acts and worked so hard to get the harmony right," Montgomery said. "We saw such young people this year who were way ahead of their years."

"You can tell music is a part of their lives," Levinson added. "They don't do this just once a year; they're out there performing and doing this year-round. It's a real commitment."

Finalists have spent the summer performing at local venues including the Orinda Farmer's Market and 4th of July

Parade. "I love that they give you so many performances during the summer and so much opportunity to perform and grow as a performer," said finalist Jacqueline Garell, who has competed in Orinda Idol since its inception in 2006.

It's a commitment for parents as well. Paul Ford, whose children Lindsay and Ryan were finalists, had been at the Theatre nearly 11 hours by the time winners were announced on Sunday. "It's really great," he said. "It gives kids the opportunity to work up their musical chops and work on something formative without the high pressure."

Katie Marino (who won in last year's Orinda Idol middle school category) says the competition has gotten a lot more fun to watch. "The first time, there were no kids, but now it's really growing." Sophomores and runners up Sofie Woodlee and Tara Baghdassarian, who have both been singing since they were little, advise other aspiring singers to try Orinda Idol for the experience, to practice more and get better.

For first-time Orinda Idol finalist Layla Wright, age 7 (almost 8), the experience was a thrill. "I was kind of nervous, but really excited at the same time," she said. "I would say [to kids who might be scared to try this], that if they really didn't want to do it, they didn't have to. But if they kind of want to - even just a little bit - to go for it."

And the Winners Are...

K-2nd Grade:
Niamh Akazawa

3-5th Grade:
Joe Metheny

Middle School:
Maritza Grillo

High School:
Erika Henningsen

Groups K-5th Grade:
Wicked Girls
(Samantha Martin &
Isabel Mueller)

Groups 6-12th Grade:
Soul Sisters
(Jacqueline Garell,
Amrita Newton &
Neris Newton)

Audience Award:
Maritza Grillo



Wicked Girls: Samantha Martin is on the left (white dress) and Isabel Mueller is on the right (black dress). Photo Ohlen Alexander

Reach the reporter at: jennifer@lamorindaweekly.com

Copyright © Lamorinda Weekly, Moraga CA