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Local students perform at Carnegie Hall

By Pippa Fisher



From left, Campolindo High School students Aman Malhotra, Kevin Deng, Brigitte Jia and Andrew Torres find some time for sight-seeing in New York.

Photos provided

Four talented Lamorinda students were among the finalists chosen from all over the world to perform in February on New York's most famous stage. And all four musicians attend Campolindo High School.

This year those selected included CHS students Junior Andrew Torres (clarinet), Junior Aman Malhotra (viola), Senior Brigitte Jia (violin) and Senior Kevin Deng (trumpet).

The High School Honors Performance Series annually invites music directors from high schools to nominate outstanding students, who must then submit an audition tape and resume of their musical achievements, along with an application explaining why they would like to be in the HPS.

The finalists travel to New York to rehearse and perform with other elite musicians under master

conductors at Carnegie Hall. This year there were students from 45 U.S. states as well as from Canada, China, Hong Kong, Australia, New Zealand, Mexico, Guam and Qatar.

Lafayette resident Jorge Torres, who is a parent of one of the finalists, says it is no coincidence that four of those selected are Campolindo High School students, which he says was one of the largest numbers from any one school. He credits the inspirational teaching of CHS music teacher Johnny Johnson.

"Even though the kids weren't officially representing Campolindo, I think their selection reflects the high caliber of musicianship being taught at the school," says Torres. "Johnny Johnson is doing great things with instrumental music at Campo."

Torres points out that Johnson's students are consistently selected

for several extracurricular groups, including the Diablo Wind Symphony. "Given that instrumental music is an elective, it's a testament to Johnny's talent as an instructor that year after year, his students continue to take music."

Torres' son Andrew agrees. "Mr. Johnson has made a huge difference in my love for music. He has a great demeanor and is very positive and encouraging. I have gained great knowledge and skills from Mr. Johnson and from the Diablo Wind Symphony conductors, Diane and John Maltester."

The four CHS finalists all agree that performing at Carnegie Hall was awe-inspiring.

Aman Malhotra said that meeting new musicians from around the world and preparing for a performance a few days later was quite an experience. "Having to learn to understand each other and work together as an ensemble in two days required a lot of rehearsing and focus, but our work paid off."

The students raised the money for the five-day trip themselves through sponsorship and donations from family and friends. Torres said his son financed his trip in part through his wages as a lifeguard.

While the trip was focused on the music, performance and meeting other like-minded students, there was some time set aside for sight-seeing, including a nighttime cruise on the Hudson River, a visit to Central Park and a Broadway show.

All four students say they intend to pursue music in some form after high school.



Elite young musicians are brought together from all over the world to perform at Carnegie Hall with the High School Honors Performance Series.

Teen Opinion

Upon further reflection: Junior year and the path to college

By Alexandra Gold

As the first semester of junior year comes to an end, competitive spirit runs wild through our veins, sparking 2 a.m. cram sessions and strenuous breaks spent refreshing School Loop for the updated grade report.

Despite popular belief, this overwhelming competition is not essential to pushing hard work; what was once a lighthearted journey to societal standards of success has turned into a crippling battle to reach the top of the class, or at minimum the highest of the colleges one is aiming for.

Competition has become the fuel that spurs envy, self-loathing, and a defeated sense of self. Rather than an excerpt from a charming '80s movie filled with laughter and preoccupied teenagers, high school has become

a warzone, with our peers as the enemy and college as the prize.

It feels like we're always telling adults that learning simply is not how it used to be, or tallying the reasons why the pressure of a competitive school district eliminates the effort for genuine progress, (frequently misinterpreted as childish complaining of sleepless nights and pointless exams) but all to no avail. The pressure to be accepted into a name-brand college and head off to a successful, money-generating career overpowers the search for a life suited to the individual, in a location designed for one's own tastes, and a job path that will ensure not only security but joy.

Don't get me wrong, the prospect of a financial safety net and college degree are goals in

my own life, and I work just as hard in school as the next suburban teenager, but it often feels as though even someone else's failures are more impressive than my own successes.

How will I get into college if I'm not nearly as intelligent as them? This is our root issue: if we define ourselves by others triumphs, we will never find pride in our own, because comparison is eternally the thief of joy.

Thus, upon further reflection, we must learn to weed out the envious glares shot at the ideal student, the copious amounts of self hatred, and the desperate glances at one another's exam scores, and do this wearying work for ourselves, because in the end, that's all we have: ourselves.

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