



Power of music

The Santa Rosa Symphony's Education Program was one of only two in the U.S. chosen this year for a week-long residency program with international concert and recording artist Midori Goto.

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By the time she turned 21 years old, former child prodigy Midori Goto already had started a foundation to bring music education to the inner-city children of New York City.

Over the last 21 years, the classical violinist has deepened her connection to the community, creating four organizations aimed at bringing the joy of music to children across the globe.

“A nurturing teacher or music program can open one's eyes to the power of music and set you along a path that includes a lifetime of music making,” said the violinist, referred to simply as Midori. “There is such an opportunity for young people to find and share their unique voice through music.”

As the culmination of a week-long Orchestra Residencies Program here, the Japanese-American violinist will perform with two of the Santa Rosa Symphony's youth orchestras at 3 p.m. Sunday in the Green Music Center's Weill Hall.

During the first half of the concert, Midori will perform Bach's Concerto in D minor for Two Violins side by side with three young soloists from the Young People's Chamber Orchestra (YPCO) directed by Aaron Westman.

During the second half of the concert, Midori will play Mendelssohn's Concerto for Violin in E minor with the Youth Orchestra conducted by Richard Loheyde.

During the concert, 26 professional musicians from the Santa Rosa Symphony will be sprinkled throughout both youth orchestras, providing additional mentorship.

The Santa Rosa Symphony's Education Program was one of only two in the U.S. chosen this year for the week-long residency program. The other already took place in Kalamazoo, Mich., and Midori will be heading to Bahia, Brazil, and Capetown, South Africa, later this spring for the international version of the program.

“Working with students serves as a constant inspiration and reminder of why I do what I do as a performer and teacher,” said Midori, who holds the Jascha Heifetz Chair in Music at USC's Thornton School of Music.

Ben Taylor, director of education at the Santa Rosa Symphony, said the program won the residency after filling out an application that outlined some of the goals they hoped to achieve and potential event concepts.

“We wanted to have an opportunity for our professional orchestra musicians to really work in mentorship with our youth orchestra musicians, and tighten the bond between them,” Taylor said. “We also wanted to have Midori be a catalyst to bring other young musician programs from around the county together.”

For the selection process, Midori asked a few of her colleagues to read the applications.

“One of the most important criteria is the creativity of the activities proposed, and the impact the residency could have on the community,” she said.

Earlier this week, Midori made presentations at Cali Calmecac Language Academy in Windsor and Sheppard Accelerated Elementary School in Santa Rosa, both of which take part in the symphony's “It's Elementary” immersion program.

“It takes a class of 20 students each year, at second-grade level,” Taylor said. “They learn a string instrument and basic music skills for five years ...” All are from English-language-learner homes and are considered socio-economically underserved.

The violinist also gave master classes at Sonoma State University and Santa Rosa High School.

“All the different events ... are in service of one goal: to provide new opportunities for the young people involved,” she said. “I hope that they will come to see music in new ways.”

At 3 p.m. Saturday, the students from the symphony's ensembles will join with peers from across Sonoma County for a free public performance — Super Strings Day Concert — alongside Midori at Weill Hall. No reservations are needed.

At noon Sunday in Weill Hall, Midori will lead a free moderated discussion on what it's like to be a professional musician. Then she'll give a short master class.

But the highlight of the weekend promises to be the Sunday afternoon concert, which also includes works by Brahms, Tchaikovsky and Verdi, and a world premiere composed by Taylor.

“This is a truly exciting opportunity,” Taylor said. “I hope it inspires the students and shows them not only what a professional musician acts like in rehearsal and performance, but also gives them a sense that superstars are real people ... just like them.”

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