



Whittier Union HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICT

To Achieve and Maintain Excellence...

NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: March 21, 2024 **CONTACT:** Andrea Garcia **PHONE:** 909-447-2403

Whittier Union Chamber Singers Find Their Voice as Honor Choir Performers

WHITTIER – California High School’s acclaimed Chamber Choir offers a safe space for its singers, with the inclusive environment in Cal High Choir Director Dan Hawkins’ classroom encouraging students to showcase their talents without prejudice and find their voice as performers who are prepared to take their vocal gifts to the next level.

This year, four Cal High Chamber Choir members have been recognized for their excellence by being named to prestigious regional honor choirs. Seniors Roxie Navarro and Larissa Ortega and junior Allison Orellana-Mejia were selected to the Western American Choral Directors Association’s (WACDA) High School Honor Choir. The three singers performed together at the 2024 WACDA Pasadena Conference Honor Choir concert, held March 9.

Ortega was also selected, along with sophomore David Gutierrez, for the Southern California Vocal Association (SCVA) Honor Choir, with both students performing at the SCVA Honor Choir concert at Redlands University in November 2023.

“I’m so proud of these students who courageously auditioned for these choirs,” Hawkins said. “It takes a tremendous amount of preparation and bravery to put oneself out there, but they were rewarded with unforgettable experiences of working alongside some of the best conductors and singers in the country. The experience they have gained will improve their performance.”

Hawkins’ steady guidance and belief that anyone can train themselves to become a better singer is personified by Orellana-Mejia’s rapid ascent. As a freshman and novice singer, Orellana-Mejia struggled to establish herself. Taking Orellana-Mejia under his wing, Hawkins encouraged her to keep trying, assuring her that one day her true singing voice would emerge.

Orellana-Mejia is now considered one of the top sopranos in the WACDA region, hitting notes so high that she has been designated as a Soprano 1, the highest vocal range for women.

“Mr. Hawkins is super dedicated to his students,” Orellana-Mejia said. “He will do whatever it takes to help you find your voice, giving voice lessons and even staying after school. This is my first time selected to be in Honor Choir, and I can’t thank him enough for what he has done for me.”

– MORE –

Ortega, who is diagnosed as dyslexic, requires extra time to learn her parts and said she is grateful to Hawkins for his patience. As the Chamber Choir’s only member to make both the SCVA and WACDA Honor Choirs, Ortega loves the opportunity to network with her peers.

“I love going to conferences and making new friends,” Ortega said. “It’s wonderful to see so many others who have the same passion for music as I do.”

Navarro, who serves as the Chamber Choir president and was named to the WACDA Honor Choir for the second time, loves the unspoken connection between performer and audience, which can sometimes be a shared emotional bond.

“At last year’s WACDA concert, we sang a song celebrating Black Lives Matter, and the composer was in the audience watching us perform,” Navarro said. “It was a very touching moment. A lot of the audience was in tears by the end of the song, and so was I.”

Gutierrez was a freshman when he was cast in Cal High’s musical presentation of “The Lightning Thief: The Percy Jackson Musical,” taking a solo turn on the song “Another Terrible Day,” and beginning his musical journey. Gutierrez said this helped him find the determination to further develop his talent.

“I started singing in my freshman year, and I found a home in our choir room,” Gutierrez said. “It’s an outlet for creative expression, a place where you can express yourself any way you want to, and no one judges you. I can’t say enough about Mr. Hawkins and what he means to the choir.”

Hawkins is now in his 23rd year at Cal High and currently serves as the school’s Visual and Performing Arts department chair. Hawkins teaches three levels of choir: Chamber Choir, Vocal Ensemble and Cal High Chorus, as well as piano classes and a guitar class.

“Thanks to the leadership of Dan Hawkins, our Cal High Chamber Choir singers are succeeding at the highest levels,” Cal High Principal Bill Schloss said. “Dan’s belief that any person can learn the skills to be an excellent singer benefits more than our regional Honor Choir recipients, it allows so many students the opportunity to discover their talents and has brought so many students together.”

PHOTO CAPTIONS

WUHSD_CHOIR1: From left to right: California High School Choir Director Dan Hawkins, junior Allison Orellana-Mejia, senior Roxie Navarro, senior Larissa Ortega, and sophomore David Gutierrez.

WUHSD_CHOIR2: From left to right: California High School senior Roxie Navarro, Choir Director Dan Hawkins, junior Allison Orellana-Mejia and senior Larissa Ortega celebrate their performance at the Western American Choral Directors Association’s (WACDA) High School Pasadena Honor Choir concert on March 9.

OUR MISSION:

The Whittier Union High School District provides all students with an engaging, quality standards-based instructional program delivered by a well-trained staff resulting in improved student achievement. Whittier Union High School District works to achieve and maintain excellence in providing a comprehensive education for all students.

BOARD OF TRUSTEES:

Gary Mendez
President

Irma Rodríguez Moisa
Clerk

Jaime López
Member

Josefina E. Canchola
Vice President

Dr. Russell Castañeda-Calleros
Member

Dr. Monica Oviedo
Superintendent