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24 Bonita Unified Students Synchronize Harmonies in Southern California Regional Honor Choirs

SAN DIMAS/LA VERNE – Bonita Unified School District’s choir program has found the secret ingredient to success: cultivating a community of singers from elementary to high school, supported by passionate educators who nurture talent, and preparing students for professional opportunities on elite stages.

This year, a record-breaking 24 choir students from Bonita Unified’s two comprehensive high schools were chosen for the Southern California Vocal Association’s (SCVA) Honor Choirs. Bonita High School choir students made history with 21 individuals named to the prestigious group – the most students selected from a single campus across eight counties.

“We were confident and optimistic in how we prepare our students, but it was a pleasant surprise to see so many students selected. It is a huge affirmation that what we do at Bonita Unified works,” Bonita High Choir Director Ryan Yoder said. “Honors like this don’t happen if you don’t have the amazing elementary and middle school programs that elevate students to take on national stages at the high school level. This speaks to the investment the District has made in music education and its students.”

Around 266 singers are selected every year by SCVA, out of more than 500 high schoolers from across the region. The chosen singers came together on Nov. 7 and 8 for 36 hours of intense rehearsals, before performing a culmination concert of the best high school vocalists in Southern California on Nov. 9.

Bonita Unified’s choir program starts in fourth grade and builds up to senior year of high school, with students having access to nine consecutive years of comprehensive music education. Bonita High senior Ksenia Freeborn has been in choir for seven years, starting at Roynon Elementary School and continuing at Ramona Middle School.

“It’s crazy to go from seven students last year to 21 this year,” said Freeborn, who plans to pursue choir and music therapy in college. “It shows how much talent is in our program and to know I’m part of that is amazing.”

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Bonita High School was represented by senior Parker Birdseye, sophomore Connor Cho, junior Holland Dowdle, junior Ian Egge, sophomore Isabel Flores, senior Maleek Flournoy, senior Ksenia Freeborn, senior Reese Gonzales, sophomore Erik Hernholm, junior Alexander Hill, senior Philip Kennedy, junior Rylee McCartney, junior Zoe Moreno, junior Lizzie Navarro, sophomore Serenity Ng, junior Paul Padilla, sophomore Anthony Rourke, sophomore Ava Sierra, senior Kyra Silacci, sophomore Jaden Silva, and junior Zoe Tucker.

San Dimas High School was represented by senior Soft Washburn and sophomore Evann Araiza. Saints sophomore Leanne Flores was selected for the Vocal Jazz Honor Choir, becoming the first BUSD student accepted in the 12-student ensemble. Washburn is a two-time SCVA Honor Choir selection and a longtime member of Bonita Unified's choir program, beginning at Ekstrand Elementary and continuing at Lone Hill Middle School.

"It was a great time rehearsing. We barely took breaks and really pored over the music," said Washburn, a singer and piano player since childhood, who plans to major in music education. "You become a really tight-knit group because you get to explore the emotions and artistry of the pieces."

Silacci auditioned last year for the SCVA Honor Choir but did not make the cut. After a year of hard work and preparation, she earned a spot in the Honor Choir and a solo performance.

"Auditioning for the Honor Choir and making it is huge for me," Silacci said. "I started from a place of self-doubt, so to see where I'm at now compared to where I started is so uplifting and inspiring."

Back in October, Bonita Unified's choir students completed an exhaustive audition process, including preparing a classical solo and being evaluated on tonal memory, sight reading, music scales, and triads.

"The Honor Choirs bring together top-level students from across the region, and then they return with experiences and knowledge to share with other students at school," San Dimas High Choir Director Jared Pugh said. "These opportunities benefit students musically and professionally, and I am proud of what our Saints have accomplished."

PHOTOS:

BUSD_SCVA_1: Twenty-one Bonita High School singers perform in the Southern California Vocal Association's (SCVA) Honor Choirs, supported and mentored by Bonita High Choir Director Ryan Yoder.

BUSD_SCVA_2: San Dimas High School sophomore Evann Araiza, sophomore Leanne Flores and senior Soft Washburn represent their school and District in the SCVA's Honor Choir and Vocal Jazz Honor Choir.

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