



NORWALK-LA MIRADA UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

PRESS RELEASE

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Chavez Elementary Joins the L.A. Opera to Bring Life to the ‘Legends of Cannery Row’

La Mirada – For one day the cafeteria at Chavez Elementary School in Norwalk was transformed into an opera house, with dozens of Chavez fourth- and fifth-grade music students joining professionals from the Los Angeles Opera to tell a story of immigrants struggling to overcome discrimination in a new world, with two performances of “Legends of Cannery Row,” on Monday, Feb. 22.

The 30-minute opera, inspired by Puccini’s “Turandot,” concludes a five-week residency program in which world class L.A. Opera teaching artists instructed Chavez students in the intricacies of performing opera, while Chavez fourth- and fifth-grade teachers Sandra Montoya, Gina Townsend and music coordinator Penelope Barron integrated the opera into studies of history, geography and human rights. Chavez is one of only 13 L.A.-area elementary schools to participate in this year’s residency.

“The opera brilliantly blends creative expression with the actuality of the immigrant experience, which resonates greatly within our community,” Norwalk-La Mirada Unified School District Superintendent Dr. Hasmik Danielian said. “We are extremely grateful to the L.A. Opera for providing our students with the opportunity to participate in such a joyous and significant production. Bravo!”

A packed house of students, parents, faculty and administrators delighted in the humorously thrilling tale of an elementary school class field trip to the famous Cannery Row in Monterey to learn the history of Chinese immigrants, where the sudden appearance of Princess Turandot begins a discussion – in song – bringing to life the plight of those who came from abroad to work in the mid-19th century Bay Area fishing trade.

“This is our fifth year presenting a student opera, which we have found is an excellent way to engage students in a collaborative educational experience, then present what they have learned to their schoolmates, parents and the community,” Chavez principal Gabriela Galvez-Reyna said. “We truly value the tremendous work done by our exceptional teachers in preparing the students, especially our music coordinator Penelope Barron.”

The L.A. Opera provides the “learning-by-doing” in-school opera program as a way to teach music and theater fundamentals to students who, in the process, learn self-discipline and cooperation while

working as an ensemble. In addition, teachers receive an opportunity to support student exposure to the arts and integrate the themes of the opera into a comprehensive lesson plan.

“Norwalk-La Mirada is committed to providing every available academic resource to our students to ensure they grow up to be life-long learners,” NLMUSD Board President Karen Morrison said. “Not all educational opportunities will come in conventional forms. By encouraging our kids to explore their creative sides, they gain confidence in their ability to challenge themselves in new ways.”

Photo captions:

1. L.A. Opera performers with Chavez Elementary 5th graders perform together in "Cannery Row" on Feb. 23.
2. L.A. Opera principal performer and teaching artist Miki Yamashita as legendary character Princess Turandot and Chavez students bask in the limelight between performances.

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