



ELGIN SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

News Release

Tuesday, May 3, 2011

ESO and U-46 complete Carnegie Hall's national Link Up program

After months of practice and preparation, 800 students from 11 elementary schools within School District U-46 (U-46) will experience the thrill of performing and singing with the Elgin Symphony Orchestra (ESO) on Tuesday, May 10 at 10 a.m. Taking place at the Hemmens Theatre in Elgin, the program entitled "The Orchestra Sings" is the culmination of the ESO's and U-46's participation in Communities Link Up, a national music education program organized by world-renowned Carnegie Hall.

ESO Education Conductor Randal Swiggum leads the orchestra on May 10. Evan Bravos, St. Charles native and baritone, serves as the program's host and guest vocalist. Participating U-46 schools include Centennial, Coleman, Creekside, Harriet Gifford, Huff, Liberty, Lowrie, Oakhill, Sheridan, Sunnydale and Sycamore Trails elementary schools.

Early in the 2010-2011 school year, schools and students received recorders, educational materials and program support designed to develop performance and listening skills in young people. U-46 teachers then began working with the students using the specially-designed materials to prepare for the May 10 event.

Now in its 26th year, Link Up promotes the development of musical talent and essential skills for learning by using a student-centered curriculum that aligns with national standards. Initially, Link Up began as a music appreciation program that welcomed elementary students into Carnegie Hall to introduce them to musical instruments and orchestral music. Over the years, the program grew to include students' study and performance of the recorder as well as national expansion that now features regional partners from around the U.S.

Carnegie Hall's Weill Music Institute (WMI) provides curriculum materials and program support for orchestras and educators. Additional support for the Communities Link Up program comes from the U-46 Educational Foundation and the ESO. This is the ESO's first year participating in the program.

In addition to the ESO, other national partners in Communities Link Up are the Albany Symphony Orchestra; Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra; Carnegie Hall of Lewisburg, West Virginia; El Paso Symphony Orchestra; Fort Worth Symphony Orchestra; Gulf Coast Symphony; Meridian Symphony Orchestra; Mississippi Arts Commission; Mississippi Symphony Orchestra; Omaha Symphony; Sacramento Philharmonic Orchestra; St. Louis Symphony; The University of Southern Mississippi Symphony Orchestra; Vocal and Instrumental Teaching Artist Academy (VITA); and the West Michigan Symphony.

The concert is not open to the general public; however, parents of participating students can purchase tickets, subject to limited availability.

Please direct media inquiries to

Tracy Hulett

Director of Marketing & Communications

t.hulett@elginsymphony.org

Heidi Zwart Healy
Marketing & Communications Manager
[*h.healy@elginsymphony.org*](mailto:h.healy@elginsymphony.org)

Elgin Symphony Orchestra
847-888-0404
20 DuPage Court
Elgin, IL 60120-6424

Carnegie Link Up engages students, affirms ESO mission

Post-program review

Wendy Evans, Education and Community Outreach Manager

The Orchestra Sings

On May 10, 2011, the Elgin Symphony Orchestra (ESO), in partnership with the School District U-46, presented “The Orchestra Sings.” Eight hundred students, many of which were Latino--and thereby reflecting Elgin’s diversity--filled the Hemmens Cultural Center that morning. For nearly all the children, this was their first opportunity to see and hear a symphony orchestra in person. The program was the culmination of the yearlong Carnegie Link Up program, implemented by the ESO based on a curriculum and method devised by the Carnegie Weill Institute to engage children in music and the arts. Recently, I attended a workshop in New York where I met with other Link Up participants and attended New York’s Link Up concert at Carnegie Hall.

The entire Link Up program was a tremendous experience that confirmed the value of what we do at the ESO, for both the enrichment of young people and the future of music in our communities. I heartily recommend the program’s continuation and hope that you draw the same conclusion after you read this review.

Weeks of Preparation and Anticipation

For the entire academic year, lucky U-46 fourth graders absorbed the Link Up curriculum. They learned to sing catchy tunes written specifically for this concert, studied note reading and learned to play the recorder, studied the structure of the orchestra and proper concert etiquette, and listened to great works of music from the standard orchestral repertoire.

For many weeks the students anticipated the day they would get on a school bus for a trip to perform with the ESO. In their weekly music classes they expressed nonstop enthusiasm for the outing as they worked on the music. They talked amongst themselves about how “cool” this trip would be. They talked about it at home with their parents, who also felt the pride parents feel when their children are about to do something special. Many families scraped together the \$10 per ticket so that they could witness this wonderful event in their child’s life. Nearly 200 parents attended the concert, a first-ever event for many of them. In my opinion, this program was the single-most important Latino outreach event ever staged by the ESO. How do we attract more of Elgin’s diverse population to our concerts? We have now moved closer to this goal.

Transfixed and Engaged

When finally the day arrived the energy was palpable. As the children waited in their seats for the concert to begin, pre-concert slides with riddles, questions, and puzzles were on the screen above the stage. As the answers were shown, the children cheered with delight, as the excitement built for the concert that was about to begin.

From the downbeat of the first piece, the students were transfixed. They listened attentively, picked up their recorders to play when given the cue, and sang along with enthusiasm. Guided by cues on screen showing familiar pages from their workbooks as well as exciting new graphics, the students participated readily and smoothly. The slides never distracted the listeners from the music. In fact, they were designed to focus listening and add a layer to the learning process.

Months of preparation and painstaking organization for both U-46 and the ESO's staff paid off as the concert unfolded. With just one and one-half hours of rehearsal time for the orchestra to run the music and coordinate with the technical aspects of the show, it felt as if it would be nothing short of a miracle that the concert would occur. Randy Swiggum held the baton and there's no denying that his charisma as an education conductor guarantees that the children will engage and learn while having a wonderful time. Evan Bravos, singer and actor, was a good compliment to Randy. They'd worked together before and their rapport on stage was natural and entertaining. It was especially fulfilling for me to witness hundreds of students make music together and feel their enthusiasm for the day—a welcome feeling after working behind the scenes to bring the event to fruition.

Top-notch Curriculum

Materials provided through Carnegie Link Up included workbooks for teachers and students, recordings, teacher's aids, and the orchestra's parts and scores. These materials are developed by experts in the field and are provided free of charge to the orchestras and schools participating. This service provided by the Carnegie foundation is invaluable; to develop curriculum of this quality on our own would be possible but extremely expensive.

There was also an active online community for the 15 orchestras that participated from across the U.S. The staff at Carnegie was available to answer questions and provide any needed support.

“I was a performer!”

The Carnegie artistic development team says that its goal is to keep the student in the “flow zone,” defined as a state of high engagement halfway between boredom and anxiety. The concert constantly bubbled with surprises, challenging the students and keeping them on the edges of their seats.

Carnegie wants every child to have something to contribute, but they never forget the “fun” of the experience. When I attended a Link Up performance at Carnegie Hall, for example, a salsa rhythm and brass band marched in from the rear of the concert hall to the song “Oye” while animated confetti lined the walls and the entire audience danced and sang along. Music was coming from all directions; it was a stimulating culmination of a year's study.

This program is remarkable in many ways but is particularly unique because the students “own” the event. They not only feel like participants, they feel like **they belong in the concert hall**. When one young girl was asked how she enjoyed the ESO performance, she exclaimed, “I was a performer!” Students and their families deserve to feel like they can come back to hear the symphony and feel welcomed. Many of the parents who attended had never even heard of the ESO. If it once seemed intimidating to go to our concerts, it will no longer be the case. They were “blown away” by the experience.

Carnegie Link Up and the ESO

Carnegie Link Up is a program with tremendous merit. It strengthens our ties to this community and I hope that we will be able to secure funding in order to present it for many years.

In the words of Ruth Cavanaugh, a U-46 teacher, “As a veteran teacher, I can't tell you how delightful it has been to breathe new life into teaching this important core material! I feel this curriculum may encourage more students to continue their active involvement in the arts in choir, band and orchestra.”