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Side-by-side concert opportunity for Berks teens

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It's a rare case when high school students are seated alongside professional musicians. Julie Drey hopes to bridge that gap with the Fourth Annual Student Side-By-Side Concert with the Reading Pops Orchestra.

"We have anyone who is in a professional orchestra perform with high school students in the county," said Drey, president of Reading Pops Orchestra.

"The students rehearse with the professionals for an hour to an hour-and-a-half, to put together a whole second half of a concert," she said.

The "Side-By-Side" student concert will be held at 7 p.m. on June 13 at Tulpehocken High School. Last year, the concert attracted 53 students. This year, Drey would like to see more. It's free and open to the public.

Students receive music ahead of time, learn on their own and come together for one rehearsal on the day of the concert, Drey said.

"We welcome all high musicians that are up for the challenge," she said. "We just want to be sure that we have a variety of instruments represented throughout the whole orchestra."

This year's show has a patriotic theme in honor of Flag Day on June 14.

"This program is very young, but it has grown tremendously," Drey said.

In the beginning, the high school students would only play one piece.

"Now their part has expanded to play for a whole second half of a concert," she said.

Students agree that this experience is different from school orchestra.

"Being able to play with so many talented and mature musicians is a rare thing, and I think it was really rewarding," said Gov. Mifflin senior Sabrina Popa, who has played the clarinet in the woodwinds section of a side-by-side concert.

"It was great to play with students and professionals all in one orchestra," said Wilson senior Iulia Bancos, who was also in the clarinet section.

"I definitely want to do it again," Iulia said.

The program provides an opportunity to meet other students.

"What I really enjoyed about the program was that I could not only play with other students from Mifflin, but also meet other musicians in the community," said Gov. Mifflin sophomore Matthew Bowers.

Though all musicians are welcome, mastering the music is no simple task.

" 'Stars and Stripes Forever' is a very difficult piece, especially for the woodwinds," Drey said.

Matthew agreed.

"The real difficulty was putting the pieces together in such a short time, which made it harder," he said.

Despite the challenges, Drey wholeheartedly agrees that the program is worth it.

"It is so gratifying to see these students accomplish this (concert)," she said. "It's amazing how they can rise up to the level of concert musicians."

Sabrina agreed, saying, "It was definitely different playing with adults, but they were so respectful and encouraging to us. It was great the way we could come together in the end."

Student musicians may register by contacting Kim Webster at kwoboe@yahoo.com before May 1.

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