

Starlight Symphony Orchestra Dazzles Blanco with Holiday Concert

By Keith J. McClellan

On Saturday evening, December 3, the Starlight Symphony Orchestra presented its “World of Christmas” Holiday Concert in the Blanco High School Cafetorium. “Brilliant,” said one patron. “Lotsa fun!” said another. “How often do you get to sing Christmas carols with a symphony orchestra to back you up?” asked the conductor.

It was a fun-filled night of Christmas cheer all wrapped up in a warm blanket of humor in a rarified atmosphere of musical refinement. The 51-piece volunteer orchestra, under the baton of Donald K. Miller, presented a delightful program of traditional Christmas music from around the world and invited the audience to sing along when it played some of the well known carols.

Dr. Miller has a wide range of experience conducting wind bands, orchestras, and chamber ensembles and is adept at working with musicians of all ages. In fact, the youngest member of the Starlight Symphony is petite eight year-old violinist, Tiffany Hoxie of Austin. The oldest musician is 83-year old trumpet player, Tom Jenkins of Wimberley.

Since 2007, the affable Dr. Miller has been a member of the UT San Antonio faculty where he conducts the Symphonic Band and Chamber Winds and is coordinator of the athletic bands. He is also the Artistic Director of the critically acclaimed Peaceful Bend Chamber Music Festival in Steelville, Missouri. He is a featured speaker at numerous leadership events.

The Blanco “World of Christmas” concert included the following pieces: “Glorious Sounds of Christmas” arranged by Dwight Gustafson; “German Carol Festival” arranged by James Christensen; “Basque Christmas Suite” by Father Francisco de Medina; “A Charlie Brown Christmas” by V.Guaraldi and L. Mendelson, arranged by D. Pugh; and “Sleigh Ride” by Leroy Anderson.

After a brief intermission, the Orchestra continued with “Holiday Favorites” arranged by Paul Lavender followed by an audience participation Sing-along. An eight-year old pianist from the audience served as guest conductor for a second performance of “Sleigh Ride” while other audience members jingled sleigh bells and “whipped” the horses.

The pinnacle of the night’s concert had to be the masterful rendition of A. Reed’s “Russian Christmas Music” arranged by Clark McAlister. The piece was comprised of Christian music from the Russian Orthodox Church that was preserved from destruction during and after the Russian Revolution. It was sometimes soft and sonorous and sometimes powerful and majestic.

The musicians demonstrated finesse and practiced skill in order to make it a memorable and enjoyable evening of music that paid tribute to the reason for the season. The members of the all-volunteer orchestra, along with their conductor, give of their time and expertise to bring Christmas joy to all who listen to their extensive repertoire. They hail from Austin, San Antonio, Wimberley, New Braunfels, Buda, Dripping Springs, Canyon Lake, San Marcos, Johnson City, Spicewood and all parts in-between.

Starlight Symphony Orchestra will be performing Handel’s “Messiah” and a Community Sing-along at St. Stephen’s Episcopal Church in Wimberley on December 18 at 4:00 p.m. The public is urged to attend the free Christmas concert.