

Flute choir puts on winning performance for seniors

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By Bobbi Seidel - Staff Writer



The Junior Flute Choir, a program of teacher and flutist Marjorie Koharski (left) of Neptune, plays recently at Wayside Retirement Center in Ocean Township. The four members are (second from left to right) Stephanie Sun, Holmdel; Theresa Shafto, Neptune; Alison Fierst, Point Pleasant; and Gwendolyn Morris, Howell.
(STAFF PHOTO: BOBBI SEIDEL)

The sound of flutes — clear and singular or joined in pleasing harmony — fills the small living room at Wayside Retirement Center in Ocean Township, inspiring enthusiastic applause from a half-dozen or so senior citizens.

The four girls comprising the Junior Flute Choir play classical, opera and folk tunes during the half-hour performance, one of 10 free concerts the group gives each May and June at nursing homes in Monmouth County.

Playing with them is their private music instructor, Marjorie Koharski of Neptune, who created the choir. The group's program includes "Minuet in G" by Johann Sebastian Bach, the gospel hymn "When the Saints Go Marching In" and the 1930s song "Jeepers Creepers."

"They come here every year," says center aide Nancy Riquetti of Neptune City. "The residents love them."

"I teach by playing with them, not by standing in front of them," says Koharski, a longtime member of the Monmouth Symphony Orchestra and a member of the newer Manalapan Symphony Orchestra. "I usually play the alto flute, which is a little deeper sound. They play C flutes — the regular flutes.

"Performing in the flute choir gives them an opportunity to further their skills, to play together and to be responsible for their own part. If they play in a school band, they may be one of many people playing the same part," adds Koharski, who plays professionally in a duo with a violinist and in a duo with a classical guitarist.

Playing for the elderly means even more than that for the four girls.

"It's nice that we do this," says Stephanie Sun, 12, a sixth-grader from Holmdel. "They enjoy the music we play. I know my grandfather enjoys listening to classical music. I like doing it because I can make people happy."

"It makes me feel good to see them smile," says Alison Fierst, 12, a seventh-grader from Point Pleasant, adding her older cousin, Laura, who plays the flute, inspired her to learn.

"I like to make people feel good," said Theresa Shafto, 13, a seventh-grader from Neptune who has been playing since a music teacher introduced her to the flute in the fourth grade. "I saw the flute, all tall and mighty, so beautiful. I just had to try it."

Two solo performances in fifth grade convinced her she enjoyed playing for the public.

"I saw the way people smiled. I figured they liked it, I liked it, then I met Mrs. Koharski and said, "Why not join the flute choir?" " she says.

"I have a passion for playing the flute," says Gwendolyn Morris, 14, an eighth-grader from Howell. "I want to play for others because it makes them happy. I like to go home knowing I've added a little happiness to someone's life."

These performances give her pleasure too, Koharski says. "I like working with kids," says the retired elementary school teacher, who has been teaching music privately since 1960. "I feel like I can pass on what I've learned to them."

The Junior Flute Choir and a second group, The Festive Flutes, play in Monmouth County. The Junior Flute Choir rehearses from the end of March through April, then plays in May and June.

The Festive Flutes includes high school students with advanced music skills and some adults and plays at libraries, fundraisers, weddings, parks and senior residences. Auditions take place in July, rehearsals in August, and the group plays from September through June, including a holiday program in December.

