

# Metrowest Youth Symphony Orchestra grows and improves

By Margaret Brewer/Special to the Crier

Fri May 02, 2008, 01:06 PM EDT

FRAMINGHAM -

MassBay Community College in Framingham is a place of happy sounds on Sunday afternoons as several of the classrooms are filled with music. The Metrowest Youth Symphony Orchestra has expanded dramatically in just a few years from a single orchestra of about 30 members to an organization that offers a full symphony orchestra, a preparatory string orchestra, and several chamber music ensembles. MetYSO is part of MassBay's Cultural Alliance and is the Orchestra in Residence at the Framingham campus.

Unlike most other youth orchestras, which are based in conservatories, MetYSO was formed and is managed by a volunteer board made up, primarily, of the parents of orchestra members. The group grew out of the desire for a high quality youth orchestra experience in MetroWest, rather than one requiring a weekly trip into Boston. The program is also more affordable than other groups, by virtue of the cooperative structure. Parents essentially provide "sweat equity" by serving as board members, officers, rehearsal and concert managers, music librarians, fundraisers, and public relations staff.

"It is truly satisfying to volunteer for MetYSO," says orchestra president Carolyn Barthel, "knowing that the wonderful music education the students are receiving will last all their lives - they will always be able to create beautiful music - and it's an easy drive from our home in Mendon."

MetYSO currently draws membership from 24 area towns from Acton to Foxborough, and from Brighton to Uxbridge. As students from each new town join and experience the orchestra the word spreads. With over 50 families involved the energy and enthusiasm generated grows each semester.

The music director and conductor of MetYSO is Paul Surapine, a virtuoso clarinetist, well known area teacher, and founder of the Claflin Hill Symphony Orchestra in Milford. Surapine has an uncanny ability to choose repertoire that challenges, but ultimately inspires the student musicians. His rehearsals are filled with hard work, but also with historical anecdotes that inform the students and often elicit chuckles from the parent observers.

MetYSO enjoys a close and unique relationship with Surapine's Claflin Hill Symphony Orchestra. The professional musicians of the CHSO serve as coaches for MetYSO chamber music ensembles and as mentors to all members of the orchestra. Several rehearsals each semester are devoted to sectionals, where one or more mentors will work with specific sections of the orchestra to master the music they will be performing. This close work with professionals allows an attention to detail and subtlety of interpretation that is demonstrated with each concert. The level of musicianship keeps improving. Parents of musicians who have been members for several years are thrilled with the progress, as are the students.

"In rehearsal, Mr. Surapine always says that he sets his expectations for the orchestra high, because if you always stick to something you can do, you'll never improve," said Margaret Barthel, a 16 year old violinist from Mendon

The senior group, Metrowest Youth Symphony Orchestra, is a full symphony orchestra of about fifty middle and high school aged players. The orchestra plays repertoire ranging from Beethoven and Schubert symphonies to movie scores and arrangements of Duke Ellington jazz numbers. The May 4th concert will

feature a program of "Pirates and Romans" with two pieces chosen for each theme. They will perform the challenging Beethoven Coriolan Overture, probably his darkest, about the tragic choice facing a Roman general. They will also offer a modern take on a similar story with music from the movie *Gladiator*. The Pirates will be represented by the overture to Gilbert and Sullivan's *Pirates of Penzance* and music from the movie *Pirates of Caribbean*. The entire orchestra is excited about performing these pieces. There are challenges for each section; there is drama, suspense, pathos, and a lot of exciting percussion and brass.

The Preparatory String Orchestra (PSO) is new this year. This orchestra accepts students from about ages 8 – 14 who have at least two years of experience playing their instrument and who are studying with a private teacher. The PSO is directed by Etleva Hima-Buli, a former child-prodigy from Albania. Ms. Hima-Buli takes her charges very seriously and is exacting in her demands on the students. She believes that even very young players can play, "real music, as it was composed," and they can do it beautifully.

Chamber music ensembles are formed for those MetYSO students who are interested and able to commit to extra rehearsal time. There is no additional tuition charged for the chamber music groups. Professional coaches from the Claflin Hill Symphony Orchestra work with each group for at least some of their rehearsals; however, in the true spirit of chamber music, the members also rehearse on their own and learn to work together as an ensemble. In the May concert there will be performances by a string quartet, a clarinet quartet, and a mixed quartet made up of winds and strings (flute, violin, clarinet, and cello).

The mission of MetYSO is to provide a positive and challenging musical education experience for students in the area. Charles Eyerhmann, 13, of Sudbury, describes his experience: "When I applied for MetYSO, I was looking for an orchestra that would challenge me and push me to do better. MetYSO has done just that. I had my violin audition last fall, and was accepted into the Preparatory String Group. After our first concert, I entered the full orchestra. Since I began MetYSO, the aspiration to do better really took over. My playing ability has risen dramatically, and as I can play more complicated pieces, playing the violin has become much more enjoyable. I would recommend MetYSO to anyone looking to improve their musical ability while having fun at the same time."

The next performance of all the MetYSO ensembles will be May 4, at 3 p.m.. The concert will take place at MassBay Community College in Framingham, 19 Flagg Street, in the auditorium. There is ample free parking and the auditorium is wheel-chair accessible. The concert is free and open to the public.

The senior orchestra will have openings in the fall for French horn, bassoon, oboe, and all strings (especially string bass). Students are expected to be proficient on their instrument (district audition level and above) and to be studying with a private teacher. Auditions for membership will be held on May 18. More information about the orchestra, specific audition requirements and audition scheduling is available on the Web site, [www.metysso.org](http://www.metysso.org), or a voice message may be left at (508) 478-5924, extension 6.

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