

## A Festive Evening to Support Junction Mariachi Club

By Patricia Koning

Last Friday evening, nearly 200 community members came together for an evening of great food, mariachi music, and dancing – all to support the Mariachi Club at Junction Avenue K-8 School. Belia Martinez, the event's organizer, estimates that the event raised about \$5,000, which will be used to purchase instruments, costumes, and other supplies.

The Livermore-Pleasanton Elks Lodge donated use of their facility on Larkspur Drive for the fundraiser. "We are very active in the community with our Hoop Shoot for Basketball, scholarships, and veteran's programs," explains Cynthia Kennedy, president of the Elks Board. "This event was an easy sell to our board – we all want to support music programs and our schools."

Wente Vineyards, Tamas Estates, Murrietta's Well, and ABC Music all donated items for the silent auction. Casa Orozco catered the event at a discount.

In attendance were Junction families, Junction staff, community members, and mariachi fans, as well as School Board Member Anne White and Superintendent Kelly Bowers. "I'm thrilled to support Junction and the performing arts," said Bowers, who attended

with her husband. "The Mariachi Club is a really great program."

Mariachi is a genre of music that originated in small villages across Mexico. Mariachi ensembles typically consist of violins, trumpets, classical guitar, a high-pitched, five-string guitar called a vihuela, a large acoustic bass called a guitarrón, and a harp. The sharply contrasting sounds of the instruments create a unique, lively sound.

The Mariachi Club, which began last May, is one of several programs intended to complement Junction's Dual Immersion program. The Futsal Club, Hispanic Culture Club, and Ballet Folklórico all provide meaningful afterschool activities that connect students to Hispanic culture and their school.

Jonathan Clark, Raymundo Coronado, Juan Reyes, and Gustavo Sanchez, the Mariachi Club instructors, performed at the fundraiser along with several other mariachi colleagues. There are 36 students in the Mariachi Club, but Martinez hopes to grow the program. The Mariachi Club will perform at the Livermore Valley Education Foundation's Reach for the Stars benefit in April.

Martinez is the parent center coordinator at Junction and newest member of the Livermore Board of



Belia Martinez and Elks Board president Cynthia Kennedy take a break with the mariachi performers.

(Photo by Paul Martinez)

Education. She was appointed last month to serve out the remainder of Stu Gary's term, through November of this year. Gary left the Board when he was elected to City

Council.

The Junction Mariachi Club meets every Thursday evening from 6:30 to 8:30 pm. For more information, contact Alicia Calo-

nico, (925) 960-0654, [acalónico@yahoo.com](mailto:acalónico@yahoo.com) or Belia Martinez, (925) 606-4720 x6392, (925) 528-7500, [bmartinez@lvjusd.k12.ca.us](mailto:bmartinez@lvjusd.k12.ca.us).

## Review: SJO's Terrific "Traviata"

By Susan Steinberg

Verdi's "La Traviata", the world's second most popularly-performed opera, is being given a dazzling new production at Opera San Jose's opulent California Theatre.

Staged and directed by internationally-acclaimed Jose Maria Conde, the uniset concept is brilliantly versatile, and strikingly accurate for the period setting of 1889. As an example, the half-finished Eiffel Tower is visible from the window in Act I, and completed by Act III, just one of many impressive details by set-designer Erik Flatmo.

Costuming by Elizabeth Poindecker is gorgeously realized in shades of purple, violet, mauve, and maroon in Act I, with heroine Violetta outstanding in a pale yellow gown, like the fragile butterfly she truly is. In the final scene, the sparkling gown stands displayed on a dress form center-stage, amidst the shabby remains

of former splendor, shrouded furnishings, and Violetta's rumpled little death-bed. The contrast and symbolism are heartbreakingly obvious.

Best of all, the singing and acting are equally first class, on a par with any major opera house (and better than many bored and boring performances this reviewer remembers from SFO and even the Met). Rebecca Davis, an Opera San Jose alumna, returns from Chicago to glorify the tragic role of the courtesan who discovers true love too late. Winner of the Western Opera Auditions, she has gone on to star appearances at a variety of famous venues, including her triumphant bravura turn in last fall's "Idomeneo." Her shimmering pianissimo is magical, as is her nuanced physical acting.

Playing her dashing lover Alfredo Germont, tenor Michael Dailey brings a fresh ardent vocal portrayal to the stage, renewing memories of his many OSJ suc-

cesses, from "L'Elisir d'Amore" to "La Rondine." Especially effective in his confrontational scenes when he believes Violetta has betrayed him, he is meltingly sympathetic returning to beg forgiveness at her deathbed.

Young newcomer Evan Brummel, as Alfredo's stern father, conveyed an impressive gravitas as the strictly moralistic provincial who softens and becomes a compassionate remorseful figure by the finale. Second-place winner of the Irene Dalis Vocal Competition with a strong voice and stage presence, he is a singer to be watched in future productions.

The supporting cast includes many fine OSJ repertory ensemble members, familiar from previous performances. Veteran Isaiah Musik-Ayala is a menacing bass-baritone Baron Douphol, Violetta's jealous "protector", and Silas Elash a consoling Dr.Grenvil.

OSJ is so rich in excellent singers that it can boast an equally stun-

ning double cast, with Jouvanca Jean-Baptiste, recent Irene Dalis Competitions finalist and Wagner Society Award winner, as Violetta. Alternate performances feature SFO Merola Program graduate Alexander Boyer as Alfredo, and popular baritone Torlef Borsting as his father.

Lively Spanish dancing enhances Act III, choreographed by Lisa La Cour. An added asset is the fine-tuned chorus, with impeccably sharp entrances and precise finishes. Their beautifully blended voices and uniform volume control in the crescendo-diminuendo passages of Act III provided an outstanding emotional setting, as did their individualized stage business. Kudos to Chorus Master Andrew Whitfield.

Highest praise must go to Conductor David Rohrbach, professor emeritus of voice and opera, and a veteran coach of many productions, including 60 with OSJ. His sensitive orchestral interpretation

was heartbreaking without being over-wrought, especially in the overture, where a slow deliberate tempo conveyed the music's full emotional impact.

Future performances will include 8 p.m. Thursday February 16, Saturday February 18, Tuesday February 21, and Friday February 24, with 3 p.m. matinees on Sundays, February 19 and February 26. Tickets are available at 408-437-4450 or [www.operasj.org](http://www.operasj.org).

The historic, lavishly restored California Theatre is located at 345 South First Street between San Carlos and San Salvador Streets in downtown San Jose, with a huge parking lot across the street. Be sure to arrive 90 minutes before curtain time to hear the Bay Area's best pre-opera talk by immensely knowledgeable and entertaining General Manager Larry Hancock. After the talk, enjoy the old favorites played on the lobby's magnificent "Mighty Wurlitzer" pipe organ.