

Since the arrival of Janice Hague, the Los Cerritos Middle School choir program concerts have always proved to be worthy of attention, but its recent weekend series of concerts (March 2 to 4 at the Thousand Oaks High School performing arts center) was so good it probably caused some audience members to recheck their programs to make sure that these were indeed middle schoolers onstage.

For their spring concert, Hague's troops presented an impressive retrospective of classic show tunes, not just a pastiche of disconnected songs but entire medleys from 50 years of Broadway musicals.

Hague could have easily devised a program of more kidfriendly shows like "Aladdin" or "Beauty and the Beast," but instead she chose to focus on serious shows written by serious composers, and all the students rose to the challenge.

Musical accompaniment was provided by the always dependable Zach Spencer on piano and Thousand Oaks High School alumnus Joe Martone on drums, who did a superb job interpreting the songs on the fly despite only being provided with charts for two numbers.

The earliest written song on the program was the rarely heard "Life Upon the Wicked Stage" from the 1927 musical "Show Boat." This was followed by a medley from Rodgers and Hammerstein's classic "Oklahoma!" with Hague creating the first of many innovative settings for the numbers.

"Oh, What a Beautiful Mornin'" began with one couple singing the familiar waltz, which soon became three couples, then seven and finally, the entire ensemble, the men's chorus leading the vocals with their female partners looking adoringly at them by their side.

Other "Oklahoma!" numbers included "The Surrey with the Fringe on Top," "I Can't Say No" (featuring a charming performance by Remy Fortney) and the rousing title song. Hague even joined in the fun, playing Aunt Eller in the lively "Kansas City" dance number.

Hayley Hallman staged and choreographed "I'm Gonna Wash That Man Right Outa My Hair" from "South Pacific," fronting a chorus of 11 "nurses." The trio of R&H musicals concluded with Charisse Chua and Daniel Kim singing the romantic ballad "I Have Dreamed" from "The King and I."

Songs from Meredith Willson's "The Music Man" were also performed with flair, precision and great energy. Because of the period cultural references that are scattered throughout the show's lyrics, Hague made sure to explain each of them to the students to ensure they understood the meaning.

Martone's improvised tap on a cymbal to punctuate the "chapel bells' chime" line in "Lida Rose" was especially effective.

Middle school choir members are too young to sing complex harmony parts, but Hague prepares them by teaching musical "rounds" to help them experience harmonic singing.

Complex rhythms are also difficult to learn, but a medley of songs from "West Side Story," performed by the Contempo Choir, showed that the students could handle not only Leonard Bernstein's odd-meter time signatures but also Jerome Robbins' detailed choreography.

The singing and meticulous dancing in the piquant “America,” written in the difficult 5/4 meter, was superbly done, while the waltz “I Feel Pretty” featured lovely vocal harmonies.

Hague and school parent Leasa Shukiar provided the choreography for the splendid “Fiddler on the Roof” medley, featuring Griffin Kessler on violin.

Highlights included Keira Pender’s touching “Far From the Home I Love” and Laine Beaudoin as Tevye in “Tradition.”

Also of note were siblings Hunter and Sydney Uliasz singing the humorously competitive “Anything You Can Do” from “Annie Get Your Gun” and Danielle Sotelo intoning the plaintive “Where Is Love?” from “Oliver!”

### **From the Acorn**