

Opera singer gives middle school students a preview performance

By JILL FANKHAUSER
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The opera came to Mirror Lake Middle School Oct. 22. It wasn't a full-scale production, but an introduction for middle school students to the art.

Anchorage Opera General Manager Torrie Allen brought a couple of opera singers, one who is performing in the opera "Carmen," which opens in November, to the school.

Mirror Lake keyboarding teacher Emily Blahous invited Allen to talk to her class, and brought in the Spanish class as well. "Carmen" is set in Madrid, Spain, during the 1930s and the Spanish Civil War, but sung in French.

Allen treated the students to a few oper-

atic notes – demonstrating just how loud he can get. He is an opera singer on top of managing the Anchorage Opera.

His singing served as a preview of the type of music the students will hear when they go to the free dress rehearsal performance of "Carmen" in a couple of weeks.

Allen and his staff answered every question asked about opera, including production costs (\$220,000); how long it takes to create a production like this (a year); where do the singers come from (all over, auditions were held in New York City); and do they ever make a mistake on stage (performers sometimes forget the words and make them up, but no one usually notices.)

Allen emphasized there is something for everybody in "Carmen." There is a love story, dancing, tragedy and a bullfight; plus much of the music is recognizable.

"Opera can be tough to get into," Allen said. "It takes a little pre-exposure to prep them."

Allen also wanted to excite the kids about coming to the show and talk about how the arts add to people's lives.

Allen explained three reasons why he thinks community performances are important: There are the economics – a performance brings business to restaurants, hotels, bars and parking lots. There is the social aspect – it is a way to reach out and touch others' lives. And the performances may inspire a person to think and do things more creatively.

Blahous wanted students to learn that there is life beyond their school and home, and expose them to something that could enrich their lives.



STAR PHOTO BY JILL FANKHAUSER

Torrie Allen (left), general manager for the Anchorage Opera, spoke to Emily Blahous' (right) Mirror Lake Middle School class hoping to excite students about the opera "Carmen" that students will attend in November.

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"They need to see what music will do for them," Blahous said. "It's important for the kids to hear languages and music."

Going to the opera is Blahous' tradition. She has taken school children to see about 12 operas over the past six years. She puts her ticket stubs and programs on the wall for students to see and ask questions about.

"Going to the opera makes them feel like they are a little cut above," Blahous said.

Allen has been reaching out to kids in classrooms all over Anchorage and even up in Talkeetna to help bring new fans to the show.

"It makes me feel great when the kids go 'wow,'" Allen said.

"Carmen" will be on stage Nov. 8, 12, 14 and 16 at the Alaska Center for the Performing Arts.

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