

# Opera company offers students crash course

BY COURTNEY GAILLARD  
THE CHRONICLE

Students from Diggs Visual and Performing Arts Elementary School are spending this week with performers from Piedmont Opera in the Diggs Summer Family Arts Camp. Furniture Brands International and Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Schools are sponsoring the weeklong arts camp.

Professional artists and musicians are spending the week working with nearly 30 children in grades K-5 in a multidisciplinary arts camp that allows them to take part in creating, directing, designing and performing an opera. The camp will conclude with a scaled-down performance of Gilbert and Sullivan's "The Mikado" tomorrow afternoon.

The camp is also open to students' parents, who are invited to attend several afternoon sessions.



Eickmeyer

Parents get the chance to participate in the opera program by working as singers, directors and accompanists along with their children.

"When the parents experience (the camp) with other parents, they have a better understanding of what we're asking their kids to do," said Carol Eickmeyer, assistant principal at

Diggs Elementary.

Several teachers on the Diggs staff are assisting with the camp activities. Diggs has just completed its first year operating as an arts magnet school in a traditional calendar schedule.

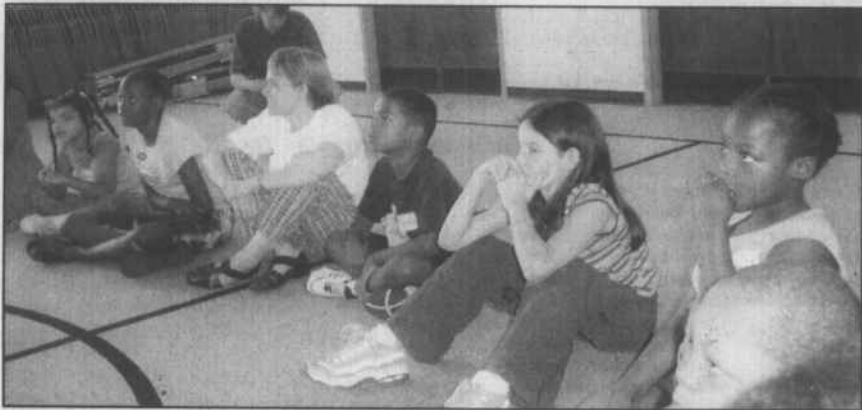
Steve LaCrosse, Richard Heard, Rhonda Overman and Mary Anne Bills are professional musicians from Piedmont Opera spending the week introducing the world of opera to the youngsters.

Overman recently returned from a 15-year stint in Europe, where she has been perfecting her soprano voice.

"We are tickled to have the chance to put Piedmont Opera together with Diggs. We have been looking for an opportunity to get back into outreach and education, and this presented



Steve LaCrosse gives the students a pep talk on the first day of training for the opera.



These students will put on a version of the opera "The Mikado" at Diggs Elementary.

itself as the idea for opportunity," said Overman, who explained that Piedmont Opera has worked with schools in the past in similar programs.

LaCrosse, director of production and touring for the Fletcher Opera Institute of the N.C. School of the Arts, said "The Mikado" was chosen for the students to learn about and perform because Piedmont Opera will entirely next spring and students from Diggs will attend.

LaCrosse, who heads Piedmont Opera's outreach program with Diggs, said he took several songs from the opera for the children to learn — songs that include the basic premise of the storyline.

"The Mikado" tells the story of love between four characters whose relationships intertwine throughout the opera. The story is filled with unrequited love, execution, deception and nuptials.

"I took some of the fun tunes

and condensed it down to about 20 minutes' worth of music...so that they have a very good familiarity with the piece, so when they go to see it next spring they'll know the plot and songs," LaCrosse said.

Eickmeyer said she hopes the arts camp can be offered to students and their parents annually and she would like to expand the camp to last for several weeks to include more performing arts professionals from around the area.

## Hughes

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about the milestone has helped her grasp the fact that she has been on the air at WFMY for 30 years. Her achievements are especially impressive considering that Hughes never set out to be in the television news business.

"I wanted to be an actress. I wanted to be on stage," said Hughes, who was born in Durham but moved to Greensboro when she was 5.

After graduating with a degree in English from N.C. A&T State University in 1969, Hughes searched, in vain, for a teaching position. She went to WFMY one day hoping that she could use her writing skills to compose news scripts.

The station manager at the time told Hughes the station did not need writers but did need on-air reporters. The rest is history.

Hughes said doing the news is sort of like fulfilling her acting dreams.

"Being in front of the camera is much like being on stage," she said. "I just can't see the people watching me."

And many have watched Hughes. She moved swiftly up the ranks at the station, going from general assignment reporter to hosting her own talk show, "Sandra and Friends," within a few years. On the show, Hughes hobnobbed with celebrities and shone a spotlight on local trends and issues.

The debut of "Sandra and Friends" in the early '70s gave Hughes the distinction of being the first African-American woman in the Piedmont to host her own talk show. It was a milestone that not everyone

applauded.

"When I started hosting the talk show, there were several people in the community that were unhappy to see a woman of color on the air," Hughes recalled.

Several times during the live taping of her show, the station had to be evacuated because of bomb threats. Hughes admits to being a little scared during those days, but she said she never thought of giving in to the hatred by ending the show.

"I would have never left," she said.

Hughes broke more ground in 1978 when she became the first black woman in the Southeast to co-host "PM Magazine." The popular news magazine show took Hughes around the world, giving her experiences that she says she will never forget.

Deborah Hooper, WFMY's current general manager, remembers Hughes from her early talk-show days.

"Before I began my own career with WFMY News 2, I felt like I knew Sandra from watching her on 'Sandra and Friends,' as well as 'PM Magazine,'" Hooper said. "We're so happy to be celebrating this anniversary with Sandra and everyone in the Piedmont who has trusted her through the years."

After her run on "PM Magazine," Hughes did everything from host the station's popular "Good Morning Show" to serving as the station's community-relations manager.

Her journalistic vigor helped her keep her trophy case well-stocked. She is the first black woman in the Piedmont to receive the Edward R. Mur-



Photo courtesy of WFMY

Sandra Hughes began hosting her own talk show, "Sandra and Friends," not long after graduating from N.C. A&T.

row Award, which is given by the Radio-Television News Directors Association and is considered by many to be the most coveted in the broadcasting industry. Hughes has also picked up awards from the Associated Press and Gannett Broadcasting, which owns WFMY.

Hughes found time to start the station's first program to help minority students land summer internships. The program encouraged minority stu-

dents not only to consider careers as on-air personalities but also as behind-the-scenes players.

## Stewart

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After blood samples were taken from Mossville, a predominantly black community in Lake Charles, studies showed that the dioxin levels in their blood were substantially high. Lake Charles is home to the Calcasieu Estuary — a dioxin toxic hot spot.

Residents from many of these African-American communities have vocalized concern about their contaminated neighborhoods and have filed lawsuits against some of the PVC manufacturers. A grand jury is reviewing the suit of one community against a Dow Chemical plant located just two miles from the road from a historically black area that was settled by former slaves. The community claims the presence of the vinyl plant has contaminated their ground water that they use for drinking purposes.

Finaldi claims that Louisiana was aware of these toxic hot spots for as long as five years and never informed the residents of their exposure to contaminated materials in their own back yards.

"Some of these (African-American) communities have elected to demand that they be moved. Some communities were moved whether they wanted to or

not when the chemical companies bought everybody out and demolished these towns founded by former slaves," Finaldi said.

Susan Dennis, a spokesperson with the corporate affairs division of Kmart said, "Whenever possible Kmart uses plastics that do not contain PVC."



Mickey

However, Kmart will continue to use packing which contains PVC whenever an equal or better alternative is not available. So, if there is an alternative available that is equal to (PVC) and provides the same benefits, certainly we would choose that option."

Alternative agents that can be used in place of PVC are PET or PP (Polyethylene Terephthalate or Poly Propylene), both of which are more environmentally sound in their production. McLeod explained that part of the problem with PVC is that because the triangular recycling symbol appears on many vinyl products, people assume that it can be recycled. And that is not

the case.

McLeod suggests that consumers get in the habit of turning plastic and vinyl products upside down to look for the triangular recycling symbol with a number in the center of it. If the number 3 appears within the triangle, that indicates it is made with PVC. If products are unmarked, and many are, consumers should call manufacturers to inquire about the contents.

"If (Martha Stewart) can agree to sit down and talk with us, we're more than happy to work something out and work on alternatives to using PVC," said David Mickey with the Triad Environmental Agency.

Since March, more than 12,000 e-mails and faxes have been sent to Stewart's headquarters in New York City. Environmental groups say they have yet to receive a response from the Stewart camp on the PVC issue. Mickey says they will continue to contact her and protest the usage of PVC in her products until Stewart agrees to phase out the toxic material.

Many companies such as Nike, General Motors, IKEA and the Body Shop have begun to discontinue the use of PVC in their products and Mickey hopes that Stewart will do a "good thing" and follow suit in the near future.

## Quality Education Schools Family Day

Sponsored by

Quality Education Institute, Quality Education Academy and Coca-Cola

"We Raise The Quality Of Life Of Everyone We Touch"

Saturday, July 20, 2002

Quality Education Schools, 4381 Carver School Rd.

10 a.m. - 2 p.m.

Sign up and register for the following:

- The Mighty Seraphims boys' and girls' basketball, baseball, and volleyball teams
- Seraphim Winds Band
- High Achiever's Club
- Reading Club
- Quality Schools Chorus
- Cheerleaders
- Chess Club
- Adele Thompson Drama Group
- Quality Schools Dance Ensemble
- Boy & Girl Scouts



For more information call (336) 744-7138