



Mail Tribune photos/Bob Pennell

Members of the Jacksonville School Pioneer Chorus sing out during the first Invitational Fall Festival for Elementary School Choruses at the Ginger Rogers Craterian Theatre Wednesday.

Harmony takes center stage

By VICKI GUARINO
of the Mail Tribune

School choruses listen and learn

Ruch fifth-grader Heather Ford perched on the edge of her seat, intently listening to the Jacksonville Elementary School Pioneer Chorus. As engaging as the performance was, however, there was a part of the program that Heather liked even better: when she and classmates in the Ruch Elementary School Cougar Chorus took the stage at the Craterian Ginger Rogers Theatre.

"I like it where we get to go up and sing," Heather said.

And everybody got to go up and sing Wednesday in the region's First Invitational Fall Festival for Elementary Choruses. The event drew more than 500 elementary school singers from across Southern Oregon for a session that was equal parts concert, workshop and performance.

Medford teacher Blake Lowey, who brought his Oak Grove Rams' Chorus to the festival, said the session was a unique opportunity for kids to sing, listen and learn — and to become inspired. Lowey understood young Heather Ford's yen for the stage.

"Singing in front of 500 students will just put a charge in them," he

said.

Putting a musical charge in young singers was the purpose of the Fall Festival, the Rogue Valley's first gathering of elementary school singers from across the region.

A children's community chorus from Klamath Falls, the Rag Tag Chorus of the Ross Ragland Theater, joined hosting Rogue Valley Children's Chorus and the school choruses.

Children's Chorus director Doris Sjolund led the session.

She alternated chorus performance with songs and voice exercises for the entire crowd.



Rogue Valley Children's Chorus director Doris Sjolund organized the festival.

"You just pull one note out of the other, sticky as taffy," Sjolund said as she led an auditorium-wide sing-along. Students in the balcony became "angelic singers from above."

Sjolund schooled youngsters on rhythm and movement as well.

"I hear some bad posture," she admonished, peering out into the darkened seats from the bright Craterian stage. "I can't see you, but I can hear you ... Is it fixed? Because it does

make a difference."

Sjolund organized the festival because she wanted to have a local

program that matched a popular regional session in Eugene. For years, she has seen youngsters go to Eugene and gain singing skills and enthusiasm for the rigors of voice training. But the youngsters, their families and schools have struggled with the long bus ride to Eugene and back home.

So this year, Sjolund pulled together the local alternative, inviting choruses from across Southern Oregon to the Medford theater.

Her festival was a hit with kids. Lone Pine Elementary School's Sunlight Singers sang on the bus all the way over from school. They were eager for their turn on the stage.

"I hope nobody sings our song," Lone Pine fifth-grader Nellie Krebs fretted as she and a small group of friends clustered together to wait.

While getting up on the stage was the big attraction, many like Nellie and her friends said they enjoyed listening to other choruses too — groups they otherwise wouldn't get to hear.

Lone Pine fifth-grader Kylie Schwarm said, "I like listening to other kids singing, hearing what they're into, what they're singing about."

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