

March is the start of Music in Our Schools month. Every year an organization, Opera For The Young, performs for over 75,000 school children across the midwest. This group, founded in the 1970’s in Madison, Wisconsin, has visited the River Valley School District and has educated groups in our elementary for decades, thanks to the coordination of staff—specifically music educator Mr. Nick Ehlinger.

Opera for the Young brings live, professional opera to elementary school audiences with annual tours. The organization brings young professionals to work with our students to teach them the storyline of classic performances and to introduce them to the concept of opera. Students even appear onstage in choral and small speaking roles, performing for their peers right alongside the professional artists. All productions are costumed, sung in English, and adapted especially for kids. Opera For The Young offers programming through the generous support of individuals, corporations, and foundations, combined with school funding.

On the day of the performance, the cast arrives at the school and travels to individual classrooms to lead discussions about opera and to prepare students for their upcoming roles as chorus and audience members. In the afternoon, the cast of four professional singers and one pianist (along with 16 students in chorus and cameo speaking roles) presents the opera for the entire school in the school gym.

This year we were fortunate to hear and learn the opera, “The Magic Flute,” originally written by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart in Vienna in 1791. “The Magic Flute” is a fairy tale of darkness, light, and finding your way in the world (very appropriate for a young learner in an elementary school). It was performed in both singing and spoken dialogue (a bit like a musical) and captured the hearts of the kids.

The story opens in the middle of the action. A prince is lost in a foreign land and is being chased by an enormous bird-like, dragonish monster. He is rescued by a three-headed character who kills the monster and gives the prince a picture of a beautiful princess with whom he falls instantly in love. He tells the prince that she has been captured by a powerful and evil monster and, of course, he vows to rescue her. (So far, this is just like a soap opera.) But, then there is the gift of a magic flute, and with the assistance of the monster/dragon/bird catcher, Papageno (who has become reluctantly involved), the prince sets off on a quest. In the end, through word and song, everyone is in love, everyone is safe, and goodness overcomes evil.

Special occasions at school take the extra effort of talented staff. River Valley continues to support great opportunities like this for our students as we go above and beyond state mandated expectations and create special events for our kids. River Valley has a tradition of excellence and we are proud of the everyday occurrences for our students and staff. Congratulations to our elementary team and to the kids for learning from “The Magic Flute!”

Sincerely,

Loren Glasbrenner, District Administrator
River Valley School District