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# MUSIC FIT FOR A PRINCE

## Buckhead Youth Orchestra to perform in Monaco

By Denise Taggart

The children who make up the Buckhead Youth Orchestra (BYO) will perform this month for a prince and help raise money for athletes with Olympic dreams.

The 55-member BYO is slated for three performances in Monaco, including a Mass and requiem dedicated to Princess Grace. In attendance will be Prince Albert, who has worked closely with organizers to help bring the orchestra to the European principality. The performances are part of a collaborative fund-raising effort for the DeKalb International Training Center (DITC) for Olympic athletes at the Brook Run facility in Dunwoody.

Juan Ramirez, a composer and violinist for the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra (ASO), founded the BYO in 2000 and serves as artistic director and conductor. Ramirez has been working with Marc Daniel Gutekunst, co-chair (with Andrew Young) and chief executive officer of Forging New Tomorrows, the sponsoring organization for the DITC. It was Gutekunst who made the connection with Prince Albert to bring the concerts to Monaco's Grand Cathedral.

"Four years ago we decided the best way to present DITC to children was through a series of concerts, since music is the common language among countries around the world," Gutekunst said. "Prince Albert, who is honorary chairman of Forging New Tomorrows, wanted to provide a stream of financial support from Europe to help ensure DITC as an ongoing legacy to the Atlanta 1996 Olympic Games, similar to the Olympic Village which was located at Georgia Tech."

Established by Ramirez under the auspices of the Atlanta Virtuosi Foundation, Inc. (which he also founded), the BYO provides an orchestral experience to metro area musicians ages 7 to 18 who are selected through auditions. Its program is a comprehensive musical curriculum for string instruments and is designed to provide in-depth traditional, classical and cultural music.

"Teachers often ask why there are no woodwinds [or other instruments] in BYO. I did this to fill a void," Ramirez said. "String instruments are very difficult to learn, espe-

cially when you are competing with an oboe or trumpet. Many children miss being taught master works by master composers." Intensive preparation for public performance, development of basic technical skills and professional coaching sessions are enhanced by local and regional concerto competitions, summer music festivals and student scholarship opportunities.

This year Ramirez started a new music program for young children through the Atlanta Virtuosi Foundation. "Music for Success!" is an educational program partnered with metro area schools to encourage and support artistic creativity for elementary and middle school children of many backgrounds. It is also a chance for students to receive instrumental and orchestral string training from professional musicians. Last January Ramirez was named the Lexus Leader of the Arts by WABE Public Radio and WPBA for his outstanding contributions, his pursuit of excellence in music, and for initiating and serving several community music



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organizations in the arts community (including founding the Hispanic Festival of the Arts and Casa de la Cultura de Atlanta). The BYO offers eight public performances throughout the concert season, a concerto competition, a regional young artists concerto competition, the Parvaneh Mehdi Memorial Scholarship, weekly rehearsals (at Northwest Presbyterian Church) with a professional coaching staff, and participation in the Golden Isles Summer Music Festival. BYO also contributes special performances to support organizations such as the Breman Jewish Heritage Museum, the Buckhead Business Association, the Starlight Children's Foundation, the Consumers' Choice Awards for Business Excellence, and the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra Decorators' Show House.

Richard Kirby, president of the BYO Parents Association, explained how his group supports Ramirez and the administration of BYO. "The kids practice six hours every Saturday with multiple breaks and we provide the refreshments for them. Plus, we do the set-up, tear-down, and ushering at the con-

certs. And beyond that, we help in selling advertising, fund-raising, etc." He also said that while the children's yearly tuition is \$350, the parents also pay annual dues.

Since its inception, the BYO has been endorsed by the Buckhead Coalition. "Sam Massell was the first to endorse our organization," Ramirez said. "In fact, we named it the Buckhead Youth Orchestra because of him." ■

*For more information on auditions, concert season or tickets, call (404) 246-1393, or e-mail Lisa Ellinger at [personel@buckheadyouthorchestra.com](mailto:personel@buckheadyouthorchestra.com).*