

## WSO's 'Stars Of Today' Align With High Schools' 'Stars Of Tomorrow'

By VICTORIA MCCABE  
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

**WESTFIELD** — Saturday's WSO concert was absolutely exhausting.

The good kind of exhausting. The kind of workout where you flop down on your couch, totally drained but energized at the same time, so proud of whatever physical exercise you've just done that, in spite of your tiredness, you think, 'wow, I can't wait to do that again.'

Well, perhaps in this case, that sense of accomplished exhaustion really belongs to the musicians — the Westfield Symphony Orchestra (WSO) and the Westfield High School (WHS) Concert Choir and Chamber Orchestra.

After all, they were the ones doing all the work at Saturday evening's concert. But their performance was so supremely overwhelming that the audience couldn't help but feel deeply connected to their energy.

Piano soloist George Vatchnadze began the concert with the crisp opening chords of Beethoven's Choral Fantasy, and the fine instrumentalists supported him through his invigorating interpretation of the work. He lovingly introduced the piece's dolce theme, and his dialogues with the flutes and with a rich quartet of the string principals exuded incredible emotion. It was wonderful to watch WSO conductor David Wroe and his orchestra commu-

nicate so beautifully with their piano soloist; piano and lower strings shimmered in one of the piece's more reflective moments, and at other turns the entire group would explode with all the ferocity that Beethoven's works so often demand.

The high-school musicians exhibited both professionalism and talent. The Concert Choir singers (under the direction of Bill Mathews and Sharon Reynolds) looked and conducted themselves like a professional choir during the lengthy instrumental part of the Choral Fantasy, and their performance, albeit brief in the grand scheme of the night, certainly ranks among one of the group's finest in recent memory. The student soloists who performed the vocal sextet were stellar; their blend and tone quality far exceeded anything one would expect from high-school students.

In perhaps the concert's sole disappointment, the orchestral frenzy during the last minutes of the Choral Fantasy nearly drowned out the choir at several points; the fury of instrumental activity overpowered the superb male soloists for a good portion of one of the exposed vocal solos.

That small imbalance aside, the performance of the Choral Fantasy was a tremendous achievement — three independent musical groups merged seamlessly under Mr. Wroe's baton to deliver a powerful performance of a colossal work.

The students of the WHS Chamber Orchestra, under the direction of Raymond Wojcik, had the opportunity to weave themselves into the WSO configuration and play among the professionals for both the Choral Fantasy and Handel's Royal Fireworks Music. One might have expected the resulting orchestra to display at least a few hints of wavering intonation or have some phrasing or ensemble glitches, but Mr. Wojcik's chamber group responded to the challenge like seasoned musicians; indeed, it was nearly impossible to distinguish the student instrumentalists from the WSO professionals surrounding them.

"Stars of Tomorrow" was an apt title for the evening's program, but the caliber of all the student performers proved its label a bit ironic. The 'stars of today' who garnered top honors in the New Jersey Music Teachers Association (NJMTA) concerto competition were nothing short of awe-inspiring.

Ninth-grader Melissa Chan's dexterity infused emotion into Ravel's Piano Concerto in G, first movement. A pastoral moment she shared with the

CONTINUED ON PAGE 23



ROLL OUT THE ROYAL CARPET... 'Prince George,' also known as George Minium of Scotch Plains, left, reads "Puss and Boots" to first-grader Anuva Geol of Piscataway on Fairy Tale Day at The Wardlaw-Hartridge School. The annual event crowns the first graders for a day and allows the fourth graders to dress in costume to present classic tales to the little ones.

## HOME & GARDEN TRENDS



Add Some Spring Zing To Your Home

By CHRISTIE STORMS  
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

Ever step outside on one of the gorgeous spring days we've been having and wish you could just bottle up the warm sunshine, vibrant blossoms and gentle breezes to take back inside with you? While I'm sure someone somewhere has probably claimed to have done this and is now selling it for a ridiculous price on eBay, there are other ways to bring a touch of spring into your home.

Flowers can add an instant burst of color and fragrance, but for ultimate impact, try thinking outside the vase.

Jamie Burke of KaBloom in Westfield recommends floating Gerber daisies in water over Oriental grasses in a globe-style bowl.

"It's almost like a crystal-ball effect, and it's so easy to take care of because the flowers are already floating in water," Mr. Burke said. "You can even put flower additive and preservative in there and it should last at least two weeks."

Kurt Christoffers of Christoffers Flowers in Mountainside said Ranunculus flowers create a dramatic effect floating in a bowl.

"They look like little tissue paper cabbage roses," Mr. Christoffers said. "They're chubby blossoms with many, many petals and their colors range from white to fuchsia to chartreuse, orange and pastels. Try using a low, dark bowl with bright flowers."

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Mr. Christoffers also added that containers need not be traditional planters. "Try using an old soup tureen or other serving bowl that maybe has a chip in it and is no longer used for food. Add flowers and turn it into a special accent that looks much more personal than a plain vase."

Lisa Mohn of Apple Blossom Flower Shop in Scotch Plains said, "You can put flowers in anything that can hold water. Try old pitchers, creamers, mason jars and teapots."

Lori Flowers of Scotchwood Florist in Fanwood cited a current trend where people are doing away with containers altogether.

"You can just layer some greens with individual blooms like orchids directly on your tablecloth in the dining room," Ms. Flowers said. "Works great combined with small candles as a centerpiece."

And spring displays need not be limited to flowers.

"I've filled a row of little glass cubes with stones and placed sprouts of Oriental grasses in them," Mr. Burke said.

"There are also many types of vines that have become popular, such as one called a potato vine, which is bright chartreuse," Mr. Christoffers explained. "Mix greenery like ivy with some annuals to make topiaries," Ms. Flowers said. "Use a wire frame in any shape, and the greens will grow into that shape."

Also keep in mind that spring flowers and plants need not be restricted to tabletop displays.

Mr. Christoffers suggests, "You can take a wicker wall basket and line it with poly foil so you don't damage your porch or front door. Try filling it with ivy and a blooming plant like New Guinea Impatiens."

While Mr. Christoffers cautioned that caring for a wall basket long-term

CONTINUED ON PAGE 23

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## Arts & Entertainment

### Beauty Queen Uses Platform To Promote FOP Awareness

By MARYLOU MORANO  
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

**MOUNTAINSIDE** — She's only been Miss Teen N.J. Galaxy for a few months, but already she is making her mark in the world — and in our immediate area.

Gabrielle Apigo, an 18-year-old from Mountainside, was crowned Miss Teen New Jersey Galaxy in December at the East Brunswick Hilton.

The mission of the Galaxy Pageant is to celebrate "beauty, culture and style." To win her title, Ms. Apigo had to be photogenic, as well as participate in an interview. She was also judged on her appearance in a swimsuit, evening gown and other fashions.

A freshman at Farleigh Dickenson's Madison campus majoring in chemistry, Ms. Apigo hopes to eventually have a career in medicine.

This explains, in part, her decision to focus on awareness of the disease Fibrodysplasia Ossificans Progressiva (FOP) as the platform for her yearlong reign.

FOP, a rare disease that turns connective tissue and muscle into bone, eventually causes immobility. It is genetically transmitted.

"I will do anything I can to raise awareness and help find a cure for FOP," said Ms. Apigo.

There are approximately 500 cases of FOP worldwide; 14 are in New Jersey. One of these, 14-year-old Whitney Weldon, is from Westfield.

"We are so thrilled that Gabrielle chose FOP for her platform. Her generation will be the next researchers and scientists of the world," said Hillary Weldon, Whitney's mother.

"Gabrielle's FOP campaign will help people understand that a cure will have far-reaching implications for treatment of common disorders such as fractures, osteoporosis, hip-replacement surgery and other forms of heterotrophic ossification that occur in trauma and burn victims," Mrs. Weldon continued.

Ms. Apigo's interest in FOP began when, as a sophomore at Governor Livingston High School in Berkeley Heights, she wrote a report on the disease for health class.

"FOP is not very well known, and if I can raise awareness, more doctors will become interested. This may eventually affect my career and the way I practice medicine," Ms. Apigo noted. Ms. Apigo plans to attend as many

events as possible in the next few months to get her message about FOP out to the public.

In January she attended the inaugural ball of Governor Jon Corzine, where she handed out leaflets about FOP.

Not all of Ms. Apigo's appearances, however, are as well-planned as the inaugural ball.

"Sometimes I hear about an event at the spur of the moment and I just go," she said.

She recently took part in the Fifth Annual Comedy Show to Benefit Weldon FOP Research Fund held at the Mountainside Elks Lodge. The event raised \$25,000 for FOP research, according to Ms. Apigo.

Ms. Apigo also plans to visit the University of Pennsylvania Medical Center in Philadelphia, where the disease is being studied intensely, to see for herself how FOP research is conducted and to speak with researchers. Ms. Apigo has recently received recognition from the Borough of Mountainside, as well as the Union County Freeholders, for her tireless dedication to FOP. For more information about the Weldon FOP Research Fund, log on to www.ifopa.org.

### Foundation 432 Acts to Benefit FW's Murphy Family

By LINDA B. CONDRILLO  
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

**FANWOOD** — As reported in the April 20 edition of *Westfield Leader and The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times*, Paul Murphy, a surveyor from Fanwood and beloved husband of Judy Singer Murphy, father of five and grandfather of three, passed away in March. A benefit concert in his honor was held last Saturday evening at the Millington Baptist Church, where Mr. Murphy had been a member of the choir.

Words rarely come easily to those asked to describe a loved one who has passed away. Music sometimes works better. The family Mr. Murphy left behind has the good fortune of being part of an extensive group of friends, family and church members — many of whom are musically inclined. At

the concert, acoustic guitarist and childhood friend of Mr. Murphy's widow Chip Mergott provided not only consolation but also inspiration while playing a collection of Christian folk songs.

Mr. Mergott, a singer-songwriter and producer, was first to thank his sister, Carroll Owsinski, and Dean Pratt of Fanwood for organizing the benefit, which he would like to see become an annual event in honor of his friend.

Mr. Mergott told *The Leader and the Times*, "Right after Paul passed away, I said I'm available if anybody wants to do anything — which is easy to say, but it was Dean Pratt and my sister, Carroll Owsinski, who were the real motivators in getting it done. Being here and playing music is the easiest thing in the world to do for a friend's family. Paul was a great man of faith and a shining example to many of us, and I'm honored to do this in his memory."

Mr. Pratt explained to the crowd, many of whom drove from afar despite the elements, that the fund set up by Millington Baptist Church to assist families in need, called Foundation 432, has a special meaning. Mr. Pratt said, "The 'foundation' for the foundation stems from Acts Chapter 4, Verse

32 (King James Version), which reads, 'And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common.'"

In that spirit, Mr. Pratt told *The Leader and The Times*, "The proceeds from the fund will help a family who has had the breadwinner pass away after a very debilitating disease," noting the financial expenses for maintaining a household as well as the cost to educate the kids.

Initially set up as a fund to help the family of a boy from the parish suffering from leukemia to help defer treatment costs, Foundation 432 is now set up with a separate sub-fund to benefit not only the Murphys but also other families in need. Mr. Pratt noted, "Half of the proceeds from the benefit concert will be divided between the Murphy family and another needy family."

Jim Winder, also a singer-songwriter of Christian folk music, was on stage throughout the evening performing selections from his CD "The Hard But Right Way — a Pilgrim's Journey," which was largely inspired by John Bunyan's classic allegory "The Pilgrim's Progress."

CONTINUED ON PAGE 23



Linda B. Condrillo for The Westfield Leader and The Times  
IN MEMORY...Chip Mergott, Jim Winder and Kimberly Winder pose at the Murphy Benefit Concert at the Millington Baptist Church last Saturday night.

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