

SHERMAN OAKS SUN

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SUNDIAL Community CALENDAR

Community

Concerts at Church of the Valley

Laura Hall from "Whose Line is it Anyway" will sing excerpts from her new album, "A Woman of Faith." March 16, 7:30pm. 6565 Vesper, Van Nuys. (818) 786-4070

Sherman Oaks Homeowners Association Community Meeting

Meets the third Wed. of every month. 6:30pm social, 7:30pm meeting. Next meeting, March 21. Bruce Rioridan and Jeff Isaacs from the City Attorney's office will discuss Anti-Gang Programs and Operations. Sunkist building, 14130 Riverside Drive. (818) 377-4590. www.sohainfo.com. Past meetings webcast at www.la36.org.

Circle of Care Leeza's Place

"Crop for a Cause" will feature chair massage, raffle and family time. March 24, 10am-5pm. \$30, includes lunch. Limited to 40 people. RSVP to selkins@leezasp.com. A community-centered resource offering programs that educate, empower and energize both caregivers and those recently diagnosed with any memory disorder. Scrapbooking, caregiver workshops, memory fitness, grief workshops and more. 5000 Van Nuys Blvd., Suite 110 Sherman Oaks. For class schedule, visit www.leezasp.com or call (818) 817-3259.

Illusion Screening

El Dustberry Ranch presents the screening of "Illusion," a movie about an old and ailing film director, played by Kirk Douglas, who finds himself in deep regret over rejecting his only child, an illegitimate son. Proceeds go to benefit children. March 23, 7:30pm and March 25, 12:30 and 2:45pm. Chaplain Theater at Raleigh Studios, 5300 Melrose Ave., Hollywood. \$15 www.spiritualcinemanetwork.com or by calling (818) 905-6353

Sherman Oaks Neighborhood Council

Meets second Mon. of each month. 6:30pm. Next meeting, April 18, Sherman Oaks Elementary School Library, 14755 Greenleaf St. (818) 503-2399. www.shermanoakscnc.org.

Springtime at the Japanese Garden

Activities include origami frogs and cranes, story-telling, and a magic show. April 22, 10am-4pm. \$5 admission, \$4 seniors/children; includes refreshments. 6100 Woodley Ave., Van Nuys. Call (818) 756-8166.

Sherman Oaks Neighborhood Watch

Meetings are held the last Thursday of each month at 7pm at the Sunkist Building, 14130 Riverside Drive.

Studio City Farmers Market

Open air market with organic produce, food stands, garment booths and entertainment for children. Every Sunday, 8am-1pm. Ventura Place, Studio City. (818) 655-7744.

The Encino-Oaks Republican Women's Federated Luncheon

Monthly luncheon held on the second Wed. of each month at the Sportsmen's Lodge. Bring friends for lunch, meeting, speakers, and networking. For information, call Maria at (818) 501-3898.

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Los Angeles Youth Orchestra strikes a fond chord with young musicians

Conductor Russell Steinberg creates an oasis embracing the classics at Milken

BY STEFAN GLIDDEN

Eleven-year-old Errol Polus has been playing the cello since he was three.

"I used to live in San Francisco," Polus explains. "I was in the Golden Gate Philharmonic for five years. We thought of our orchestra as our own music team."

When Polus's family moved to Los Angeles in 2005, he began looking for a new musical outlet, but budget cutbacks and foundering interest in the arts made finding a music program nearly impossible. A year passed and he still hadn't joined a new group.

"I really missed it," Polus says, "but I kept practicing, just in case my Mom found an orchestra for me."

The cellist's practicing paid off. Having joined the 75-member Los Angeles Youth Orchestra (LAYO) based at Milken Community High School, he's



(Above) The Los Angeles Youth Orchestra. (Right) Russell Steinberg.



on a mission to get the word out about his new team.

"Now I am playing Beethoven's Sixth Symphony - not even an arrangement, the real one," Polus notes in a heartfelt letter to the organization. "I want everyone to know about the LAYO. Then maybe some other kid who moves to L.A. won't have to wait as long as I did."

Founded by Dr. Russell Steinberg in 1999, LAYO is an orchestra for children in grades four through 12 whose practice space overlooks the Sepulveda Pass. Its members range in age from eight to 18, and travel to the hilltop school from all over the city.

Russell, who holds a Ph.D. in music from Harvard University, was originally asked to

helm Milken's existing music program.

"It was just a small orchestra playing Jewish music," explains Sandi Steinberg, who serves as LAYO's executive director and is Russell's mother. "Russell wanted to create a community orchestra that would embrace all the classics, further goodwill, and be a big melting pot."

Even in his youth, Russell knew an orchestra like LAYO was necessary.

"I grew up in Encino and I just felt like I was living in a place not very open to classical music," he recalls. "I wanted to create an oasis for classical enthusiasts, for young people."

Prospective players must first audition for the orchestra, and if accepted, pay a \$525 yearly tuition, with financial aid

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L.A. River commerce and parkland partnership urged at VICA meeting

BY ANA KACZMAREK

As a part of its monthly Newsmaker meeting series, the Valley Industry and Commerce Association (VICA) held a discussion on the economic impact of the Los Angeles River Revitalization Master Plan on March 8 at their offices in Sherman Oaks.

Councilmember Ed Reyes of council district 1, Shelly Backlar, executive director of Friends of the Los Angeles River, and Valley Economic Development Center president

Roberto Barragan headed the panel, describing the scope of the project and its effect on the San Fernando Valley.

"We're looking to you as communities to give us a sense of range," stated Reyes, who said the multi-million dollar plan to green and improve the Los Angeles River would benefit from a partnership between the businesses and the community to instill a sense of place along the riverbank.

The plan, which would create a River Improvement

Overlay to increase access to the river and reorient businesses toward its banks, has raised questions as to whether it would turn commercial land into park space without consideration for private investment.

"Grasping this vision intimately is one that basically says it's not either/or; it can be both," said Barragan of the compromise between parkland and business. "I think that is what we're seeing come out of this process

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VANC Anniversary ♦ SFV Intl Film Fest ♦ Montclair Golf Prodigy

Habitats

(Inside Valley Real Estate's Places and People)

BY AMY LYONS

Friends of the Gamble House (FOTGH), a support group of The Gamble House, a National Historic Landmark in Pasadena, is sponsoring two architectural programs on designer Cliff May this month.

The first event is an evening lecture on Friday, March 23 and the second is a walking tour on Saturday, March 24 of four homes designed by May. Susan Rose, President of FOTGH and Architectural Director for Coldwell Banker's San Fernando Valley Division describes May as "the father of the California ranch home".

Starting his career in the 1930's and working well into the 1980's, May was inspired by the original Spanish adobes and adapted them to suit the needs of the modern home buyer. The homes were characterized by their easy indoor-outdoor flow and U-shaped floor plan. The late 1940's into the mid 1950's saw a proliferation of these ranch style homes throughout the Westside and the San Fernando Valley. For tickets, call Kori Capaldi at 626-793-3334 x52 or visit www.gamblehouse.org.

The San Fernando Valley Escrow Association, a regional chapter of the California Escrow Association, is presenting their 2007 spring conference at The Sportsmen's Lodge on Saturday, March 31 at 7:30 a.m. The conference, entitled "Spring into Education," is a day-long program focused on current trends, issues and legislation affecting the escrow process.

"Education is the most important factor to success as an escrow practitioner," said Tina Hunter, president of the San Fernando Valley Escrow Association. "This conference is designed to assist industry professionals in keeping up-to-date in our ever-changing industry." The conference will include educational sessions for escrow practitioners of all levels, from beginners to veterans in the field. Greta T. Hutton, Esq., of Knapp Petersen & Clarke, will discuss how to prevent claims and win litigation and a panel discussion featuring various experts will be included.

Conference tickets are \$85 for members and \$95 for non-members. To reserve a seat, call Lorraine Walker at (818) 247-2917 or e-mail her at lwalker@ortc.com. A registration form can be found online under meeting and events at www.laeaescrew.org.

American Idol judge Randy Jackson is selling his Tarzana home. The Otis Avenue villa is situated on half an acre of land and outfitted with five bedrooms, 7.5 bathrooms, a guest house, pool and spa. The home is priced at \$3,199,000.

Before he took on the role of determining America's number one annual musical sweetheart, Jackson played bass for the band Journey, spent eight years as vice president of A&R at Columbia Records and four years as senior vice president of A&R at MCA records.

L.A.Y.O. from page 1 available. The orchestra meets to practice once a week on Sunday afternoons to prepare for their four yearly performances, which take place in the winter and spring at Zipper Hall in Los Angeles and at Milken.

Musical selections range from Beethoven, Bartok, Brahms and Mozart to premiers of new works from modern composers - including Russell's own work.

"Playing the difficult symphonies has made me a much better player," says LAYO bassist Jack Fairley. "Playing in [LAYO] has completely transformed me as a bassist."

"We never forget where we came from," Sandi explains. "We're dedicated to playing music, no matter where it came from."

The orchestra's 75 members are split into two groups: the concert orchestra comprised of beginning musicians, and the chamber orchestra for advanced students. This separation can sometimes lead to competition.

"There's always competition. It's normal. Everybody always wants to be the best," says Sandi. "The orchestra is kind of like a sports team. If you want to play in the best position, you've got to practice."

Although the orchestra is based at a Jewish school, children of any faith are welcome to audition. They do not have to be students at Milken to be in the orchestra.

The main criterion is the love of music," stresses Sandi. "Music is

what holds them together. They come from all over and they all have this common thread."

According to the executive director, there's no such thing as the stereotypical "band geek" - especially at LAYO, whose well-rounded members are also involved other extra-curricular activities including theatre, athletics, and dance. "You won't find a drone in the pack," she says.



Steinberg founded the orchestra in 1999, which draws from students throughout L.A.

Cindy Turkell, mother of 13-year-old violinist Michael Turkell, says she is amazed at the orchestra's level of professionalism.

"You will be blown away that this is a youth orchestra," Turkell says. "You would have thought that this was the L.A. Philharmonic."

Turkell also touted the orchestra's focus on discipline and academic achievement. "The minute that baton goes up, they're in a different world," she notes, a phenomenon Sandi chalks up to

a strict sense of discipline.

Many parents, including Turkell, take an active role in the orchestra's development, including fundraising to promote the group's growth and development.

"They do all the things parents do for a school, but more so," Turkell says.

Recently, the Los Angeles Philharmonic accepted LAYO as a partner orchestra, and has pro-



Steinberg founded the orchestra in 1999, which draws from students throughout L.A.

vided members who teach master classes to the students. Another partnership with the Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra has allowed students to sit in on rehearsals and to meet and talk with professional musicians. Russell says he is confident that even more successes lay ahead.

"The future is extremely bright," he remarks. "I think we're going to be able to build this into one of the finest youth orchestras on the west coast and in the nation."

For its founder, the orchestra has become the biggest part of his life.

"This orchestra has taken me out of my ego," Russell explains. "When I go out [on stage], I feel so lucky to be a part of this. All these kids have formed amazing friendships here. At their own schools, they're a little bit odd, because they spend all this time doing their classical instruments, but here they're completely normal, and that was a huge inspiration for me. I feel like I'm making music with friends."

"He had the vision," says Sandi of her son, "and we've done it. We've actually pulled it off."

Talking to the students who participate, it's clear the effort was worth it.

"LAYO's education not only makes me a better musician," says orchestra pianist and percussionist Alan Grusky, "but also makes me a better person." *

The Los Angeles Youth Orchestra's next performances are March 25 and March 28 at Milken Community High School. World class pianist Joel Fan will be the guest artist. Visit www.sswt.org/swma/layo.html for more information. For tickets, call (310) 903-5712.

FILM FEST from page 5

In addition to the larger number of attendees and films this year, other new festival features include Q&A sessions with filmmakers and the use of the Digi-Beta projection format.

Though submissions this year came from 40 countries - including Thailand, Ireland and England - Salter said an estimated 70 percent of them came from Los Angeles.

Studio City resident and film director Thor Gold, for instance, gained entry to VIFFI with his short film *Something True*.

Gold, a Studio City resident, shot *Something True* in different Valley locations including legendary jazz club La Ve Lee and a house in Toluca Lake.

"We used mostly interiors [at La Ve Lee] and we used a little park right across from Universal. It was a five-day shoot and it was during the torrential rains of January 2005. The house leaked, the bar location leaked... the two exterior shots we got were during the ten minutes of sun," he recalled.

Although Gold, who plucked some of his actors from Play-

house West, has had his film screened in Australia and South Africa, he said he is grateful to see it shown locally.

"I like the idea of having something local. I like that the people who worked on it can come see it; it's nice to have something in your own backyard," he said. "I am excited to see the film with an audience... film is a communal art and I think there is something about watching the work with an audience. I watched it a month ago with an audience and it is very gratifying; it is much more gratifying than giving someone a DVD."

Something True, the feature version of which is currently in pre-production, is about a struggling novelist turned gigolo who becomes involved with a murderous woman - a story that blends the noir genre with a personal tale. Gold hopes to launch a directing career and sees short filmmaking as a viable stepping-stone to that end.

"George Lucas did a short film and turned it into his first feature, so did John Carpenter," the filmmaker said.

Matt Borlenghi, a Valley Vil-

lage resident recognizable for his portrayal of Brian opposite Kelly Ripa's Haley on the daytime drama, "All My Children," also made the VIFFI cut with his short film, *Jack*, a dark drama about an actor turned serial killer. The lead character in *Jack* attempts to escape his fame, but is driven to murder.

Borlenghi—who plays the lead in addition to writing and directing the film—said the idea stemmed from his experience as an actor who could not escape his fans in real life.

"I literally had trouble walking through the streets of New York. On one hand I was very blessed: Kelly Ripa and I were the big couple on the show and we became popular. But at the end of a long day, after taping two episodes, all I could think about was going home. It would take me an hour and half to walk six blocks because people had something to say to Brian," Borlenghi said.

With the making of *Jack*, Borlenghi explored fan mania gone awry.

"What would happen if the wrong person had the kind of fame that inspired that

kind of trust from the general public?" he asked.

Currently a self-professed full-time father and part-time screenwriter/actor, Borlenghi echoed Gold's appreciation of VIFFI's locale.

"I wanted to be able to feel more involved and I have been really fortunate to have a nice dialogue with Randy Salter. I like that I can do hands-on things like deliver by hand a nice poster to be exhibited," Borlenghi said. "I like the opportunity to meet people and hear what drove them to create their projects."

There's no reason for local film buffs not to check out a few of the flicks screening at VIFFI. Contributors like Borlenghi and Gold provide good motivation, and audience members may be surprised at the recognizable faces and places that appear when the lights go down. Though Salter wouldn't single out any one film as superior to the others, he did say Faye Dunaway will appear on the VIFFI screen this year. *

For the full VIFFI schedule of events, visit www.viffi.org.