

Getting Their Time In The Spotlight

Middle schoolers to perform at NYCB Theatre at Westbury

BY DAVE GIL DE RUBIO

DGILDERUBIO@ANTONMEDIAGROUP.COM

Superstorm Sandy may have made its initial impact three years ago, but for a group of Long Beach middle schoolers, their latest chance at being able to shake off its aftereffects will come on stage at the NYCB Theatre at Westbury on Monday, March 16. It will be here where they'll be joining Irish-American tenor Andy Cooney to perform two of his songs. It's the kind of magical moment that Kathleen Mucciolo-Kolins, president and founder of the nonprofit Music and Theatre Legacy Foundation (MTLF), fully expects to be quite an experience for these kids.

"They have marvelous parts and are singing two marvelous songs with Andy, 'Calling Us Home' and 'A Bright Brand New Day.' It's something that they never in a million years would sing or hear," she excitedly pointed out. "It's beautiful music. The parts are written for them, so they're a little challenged, but they're learning and they're loving it. And they sound absolutely angelic."

Mucciolo-Kolins' Garden City-based MTLF made this creative connection possible and is keeping with her organization's mission to form a bridge between children and world-class performing arts.

"At the heart of the foundation is the commitment to transform young people and their communities through arts and music. And to promote active engagement through live performance, so they're not just watching a concert or a show, they are a part of it," the Floral Park native explained. "Through their performance with professional musicians and actors, they learn. It's hands-on and powerful. We can call it collaborative learning. We can call it engaged learning. You can call it all of those things. It's arts and education at its very best and most powerful, which is to learn by doing."

This commitment has been the case since MTLF was founded in 2009. An experienced performer who's spent time on and off Broadway working in production as well as performing, Mucciolo-Kolins is adamant about wanting children to have that sensation of performing live and the rush of confidence and pride that comes from working hard towards a goal that allows for such



Kathleen Mucciolo-Kolins and Andy Cooney with the Long Beach Middle School chorus

tangible feedback. Through MTLF, she's been able to sponsor children East Meadow's Parkway Elementary School and Westbury's St. Brigid's Elementary School to sing at Italian-American Night at Eisenhower Park back in 2013. She was able to give a scholarship the prior year for professional performance studies to a young lady from New Hyde Park Memorial High School who didn't wish to have her name published. And now, the Long Beach Middle School chorus is getting its time in the spotlight alongside Massapequa Park native Cooney, someone Mucciolo-Kolins felt was perfectly suited to work with the children.

"Through the years, we have discussed the possibility of collaborating. He's very supportive and a great advocate of arts, education and advocating. He calls himself child-friendly and he truly is," she said. "Andy just completed his sixth concert at Carnegie Hall and he will work with nonprofit organizations whether it be a church or whatever it is. He will align himself with them, so he's very comfortable with headlining

a show with a tag that's a nonprofit. So we started to talk and brainstorm and figure out how to make this work and we arrived at this."

Cooney, who is sharing a bill with soprano Marissa Famiglietti, is also excited about this upcoming gig, which will also find him celebrating St. Patrick's and St. Joseph's Day in one show. The man dubbed America's Favorite Irish Son has already had several rehearsals with the kids and is thrilled with what he's heard.

"I'm happy we were able to give these kids something to smile about; they have really rehearsed and worked hard," he said, adding that the chorus will be singing two songs from his new CD, *Bright Brand New Day*.

For Mucciolo-Kolins, going into Long Beach two days after Super Storm Sandy hit made her want to help beyond donating the instruments, stands and sheet music donated to the music department by the foundation. She wound up approaching school principal Dr. Michelle Natali and Superintendent of Arts Dr. Dale Johanson about the

foundation, arts and entertainment and the possibility of having the school chorus perform with an artist of Cooney's caliber. And with the show just around the corner, Mucciolo-Kolins is thrilled with how far this project has come and how it will benefit the children in the end.

"I hope that this concert will create a memory that illuminates the creativity within each of the students," she said. "It has been a great pleasure to collaborate with the Long Beach Middle School Chorus and teacher Michele Bennett. The school community readily embraced this opportunity to provide their children with this performance experience that takes it from page to stage."

Andy Cooney and Marissa Famiglietti will be performing with the Long Beach Middle School Chorus on Monday, March 16 at 2 p.m. at the NYCB Theatre at Westbury. For more information or to purchase tickets, please call 516-455-9393 or visit www.musicandtheatrelegacyfoundation.org.

—Jennifer Fauci
contributed to this story.