



ANTON ARMSTRONG
WITH THE SFYCA

The Next Generation

OBF'S STANGELAND FAMILY YOUTH CHORAL ACADEMY CULTIVATES THE FUTURE OF MUSIC

BY ANNA GRACE

What would you do with a room full of 80 teenagers? Turn on the television? Order pizza? Lock the door and run for cover?

At the Oregon Bach Festival, the standard approach to the younger set is treat them like musicians, and allow them to soar. OBF offers a number of kid-friendly events, but none is more moving than the renowned Stangeland Family Youth Choral Academy.

The SFYCA attracts youth singers (who must audition) from all over the country for a 14-day immersion, June 30 to July 13, in the Bach Festival, grounded in technical classes (musicianship, body singing, vocal technique) and participating in exacting rehearsals with SYFCA Director Anton Armstrong, OBF Artistic Director Matthew Halls, former Artistic Director Helmuth Rilling and SFYCA

Assistant Director Cole Blume. The packed schedule will crescendo with a performance July 9 at First United Methodist Church; they will also be joining OBF's closing concert, Verdi's *Requiem*, July 13 at Silva Concert Hall.

EW caught up with Armstrong, who has been with the SFYCA since its founding in 1998.

"If we don't nurture them now, we're not going to have participants. We're not going to have attendees," he says. But beyond building a future audience, Armstrong notes that, "More profoundly, when we develop young people, we develop a culture."

That culture, Armstrong believes, is a culture of "servant artists." Music in service to others, according to Armstrong, is what separates the Bach Festival from similar programs. "This is not about the diva. It's about what we do as a community."

Former SFYCA member Chelsea Young agrees. "You step away from high school and into this family of

world-class musicians. You sit in the audience for these breathtaking performances, and then you're in rehearsal with those same musicians the next afternoon, or you're one table over from them in the dining hall. How cool is that? To see your heroes as real people, how hard they work ... to see them embodying the Bach Festival ethos, which is that music is a great and vital connector."

Armstrong says he hopes audience members walk away from the SFYCA performance with an understanding that "young people can make great art," noting that the word amateur has its roots in the word *amour*. An amateur, according to Armstrong, is a great lover.

Young says one of the most valuable efforts the SFYCA makes for young musicians is saying, "Welcome. You're joining us here as a member of our artistic body, *not* as a summer camper. And, as a fellow musician, we expect you to rise to the occasion. You as a group of young artists bring something unique and invaluable to this festival." ■

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