

# Perlman Program's Super Strings take stage

By Susan Rife , Herald-Tribune / Friday, January 2, 2015

What happens when the zipper gets stuck on your violin case shortly before you're going onstage to rehearse with violin superstar Itzhak Perlman?

No need to panic. A fellow musician borrows a pen, uses insight gained from a YouTube video on how baggage handlers break into suitcases, and voila! Your instrument is released.

John Lin of Bradenton breathed a sigh of relief Friday afternoon as he and 33 other members of the Super Strings prepared for their turn in the spotlight with the Perlman Music Program/Suncoast Winter Residency.

PMP Suncoast brings about three dozen middle- and high school-aged students to Sarasota for a 17-day residency each winter in the art of classical string musicianship. "Super Strings" is an adjunct program that brings roughly the same number of students from Florida to Sarasota for two preparatory workshops, a rehearsal and the chance to rehearse on the Opera House stage under the baton of Perlman himself.



Itzhak Perlman takes questions from members of the Super Strings during an open rehearsal with the Perlman Music Program Suncoast Winter Residency students Friday, January 2 at the Sarasota Opera House. (STAFF PHOTO / RACHEL O'HARA)

Kenneth Bowermeister, conductor of the Venice Symphony, was part of the faculty working with the Super Strings, who donned azure blue T-shirts as they rehearsed — and this is important — the first movement of the "Bach Double," Bach's Concerto for Two Violins in D Minor, BWV 1043.

"The big challenge is matching playing styles," said Bowermeister, "everyone playing with the same part of the bow, the same amount of bow." To get 34 individuals who don't play together regularly "to hold that tempo and hold it as a group" requires practice, he said.

And then there's the issue of practicing in a low-ceilinged room in the Opera House where the acoustics are, shall we say, less than ideal.

"We can't really tell what the balance is going to be until we're on the stage," said Bowermeister.

His young musicians included seven repeat participants from last year, nine students from Miami, two from Tallahassee, two from Gainesville and the rest from the greater Tampa Bay area.

Lilly Paggio, 10, was plotting what question she might ask the maestro onstage, considering how much time he spent practicing when he was a child (rejected as lame by others in the group) and what advice he'd have for busy children.

When the time came, her hand shot up and she asked her question: What advice do you have for busy kids on how to be more focused?

"The most important thing is for you to practice slowly," said Perlman, "and then to get organized." What time are you in school, he asked. Eight to three, she replied.

"My advice is forget about school," he quipped, to cheers from the kids. "It's just too much."

Lilly has been playing violin since she was 3 years old.

"I've done a competition, a couple of recitals. It's something I want to do," she said.

She'd been wanting to learn the Bach Double, so the chance to audition for Super Strings was ideal.

"It's definitely one of the most complex pieces I've played," she said.

Onstage, Lilly and the others had to conquer their nerves and adjust to Perlman's sense of humor.

"We're going to play the second movement? The third?" he asked as the kids who'd learned the first movement looked uneasy.

But the first movement it was; the musicians tuned to an A note, and "Here we go!"



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