

A classical blast

Reaching into the past to touch and inspire today's youth



STAFF PHOTO | PAUL STEPHEN

Barbara McKenzie with Chamber Music of Wilmington performs 'The Story of Papa Haydn: The Boy Who Sang for His Supper' for third-grade students Wednesday at Snipes Academy of Arts and Design.

By Amanda Greene
Staff Writer

Chamber Music of Wilmington has a new way of reaching youth in the school system.

The classical music nonprofit unveiled its first performance of the new musical "Papa Haydn: The Boy Who Sang for His Supper" on Wednesday for students at Snipes Academy of Arts and Design.

Chamber Music's outreach program for the schools was part of its Haydn-themed roster of classical music this season celebrating the 200th anniversary of the famous composer's death. "Papa Haydn" has performances at Codington Elementary School and Sunset Park Elementary School this week. A free public performance of the musical will be at 5 p.m. April 19 in Landfall Chapel. Tickets are available at the New Hanover County library.

The musical is locally written and acted by artistic director and pianist Barbara McKenzie. At first, McKenzie didn't

know how to portray Franz Joseph Haydn in her living history musical. The organization created a Haydn study guide for the schools so students would know something of his life before watching the performance.

"I wasn't sure if I should be his sister or a count who knew him and supported him," she said. "But then I just felt I should be him."

So McKenzie contacted a former tailor for Colonial Williamsburg to make an 18th century gentleman's outfit and wig for the performance. She was able to get some 18th century fabric from a Swedish textiler for some of the details of Haydn's overcoat.

McKenzie's play tells Haydn's life story in first person and involves the audience in the music.

For instance, McKenzie asks her audience to trill for a bowl of cherries just as Haydn was asked to do in his day. She also awakes at her piano asking the audience if George Washington was still president of the United States.

"He considered himself more related to the folk than to the aristocracy," she said. "He had a really tough childhood, and he basically learned to sing for the aristocracy so he would be led to the kitchens to eat."

McKenzie also includes a history of how Haydn rose from a poor family to performing in the St. Stephen's Cathedral Choir in Vienna, his time as a prankster there and his ascension to being a famous composer.

But the point of the performance was to inspire children to strive for greatness, as Haydn did.

"He had this amazing faith in himself, and I think there was this gratitude and joy that is in his music," McKenzie added. "That was a really good message for our kids. The more we can bring to them a message of hope and believing in yourself, that is a way to build success in their lives."

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