

Bringing Latin American sounds to Waldorf

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Cantaré lead vocalist Cecilia Esquivel and a 2004, 2007 and 2008 WAMMIE (Washington Area Music Association) award winner, plays the bombo drum at the P.D. Brown Memorial library in Waldorf.

Staff photo by TIFFANY WATSON

Local children went on a tour of Latin America through song and dance with award-winning group Cantaré, a duo that performed an entertaining blend of songs in Spanish and Portuguese — while also sharing Latin American culture and historical background.

On July 13, Cantaré brought Latin rhythms and exotic instruments — a donkey jaw, a goat toenail rattle and armadillo shell guitar — for children to experience at the P.D. Brown Memorial Library in Waldorf. The musical program was lead by vocalist Cecilia Esquivel and guitarist Dani Cortaza from Argentina. Esquivel is a 2004, 2007 and 2008 WAMMIE (Washington Area Music Association) award-winning Latin vocalist.

“The type of music we have is fun for the kids and the adults, which is not that common for most children’s music,” Esquivel said. “Some of the children’s favorite parts of the program were dancing to the merengue and the Chocolaté song while I played the box drum and bombo drum. But I always say the ones that we cannot do without are the jawbone and armadillo string instrument. Those are my personal favorites.”

Cantaré is a Latin American music program based in the Washington, D.C., metropolitan area, offering performances that draw from the musical heritage of the Caribbean, Central and South America regions. The group is the 2006 winner of a Parents' Choice Award for its *Al Agua Pato* CD and has released three recordings since 2002. In 2006, Cantaré recorded the companion CD for the award-winning book "Arrorró mi niño: Latino Lullabies and Gentle Games" by children's author and illustrator Lulu Delacre.

"We are trying to maintain the culture and the original instruments from the Latin American culture, which is very important to us," said Dani Cortaza, Cantaré guitarist. "The children have a fun and joyous time every concert program and it's a good feeling for me to see them happy. They love the instruments, especially the bombo drum, because the sound of the bombo is booming."

Cortaza has been a professional guitar player for 35 years and traveled around the world playing percussion. He began playing with Esquivel 10 years ago and enjoys playing for the kids, leaving them with smiles on their faces.

"I think it was great," said Janai Smith, 8, a student at Mary Matula Elementary School. "I like how the instruments are made out of animals and my favorite instrument was the one made from an armadillo. They shave the shell and put it together. I also like the dancing and how they did different places of the world."

Her mother, Rachel Smith-Donald of Waldorf, said she enjoyed the program as well and has a personal love of Latin American music. The music program's interactive performance included a Latin American tour exploring how indigenous, European and African cultures shaped Latin music. Smith-Donald loved how Esquivel tied the information into African-American heritage and said it was recently learned that Brazil is mostly of African descent.



"I think it's important because it builds the children up culturally and they are not just bound to their own four walls," Smith-Donald said. "They need to understand what's going on outside in the world. It also gives them curiosity to want to go out and explore. That's what I hope for my daughter, that she wants to go out, explore the world and take chances."

Esquivel hopes the children and their families realize how much diversity there is in Latin America because it's very rich in culture.

"Latin American culture is such a big part of American culture, with Latinos being one of the largest minorities now," Esquivel said. "I think it's important that we don't fall into stereotypes, so we present them with different rhythms, instruments and languages, to better connect them to the Latin American culture."

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