

Music for Many

By Matt Bendell

Children who might not otherwise get a chance to play a stringed instrument, can learn classical music through A Gift For Music.

Possessing a level of musical talent is oftentimes a rare gift, yet for some they may never know because they can't afford music instruction or the price of an instrument. Through the hard work and dedication of one Central Florida organization, A Gift For Music (AGFM), local third through fifth grade students, are able to grow in their musical abilities.

Community partners such as Walt Disney Co., Cirque du Soleil and Target help fund AGFM, which is a part of A Gift For Teaching. With their support, underprivileged students are exposed to classical music and instruction, which has been found to benefit them socially and academically.

The only program of its kind in Central Florida, AGFM is currently offered at six different elementary schools in Orange County with the opportunity for students to continue to participate in their orchestra program during their middle and high school years.

Instruments are loaned to the students to use for home practice, and according to program director Michelle Hicks Feinberg, students benefit from the program, not only musically, but academically and emotionally as well. "AGFM helps students become more self-sufficient, providing them with the confidence, discipline, creativity, self-esteem and leadership they need to reach their full potential."

Nona Middle School student **Asia Bajaña** has played violin in AGFM's program for several years and says she's enjoyed being involved. "When I was in third grade, I heard about A Gift For Music's program where they teach kids in low-income schools how to play a stringed instrument," she says. "I've played the violin for three years and the viola for one year." Asia's favorite instrument of the two is the violin. She says she's better at it because she's played it the longest.

Asia feels she's really progressed in her musical abilities since taking up an instrument and joining AGFM. "When I joined the core orchestra in fourth grade, I advanced to an eighth grade level and within the first year, I made the more advanced chamber orchestra."

Asia's musical abilities don't come without hard work and a strict focus on her music. "Most of my family plays an instrument, but I still have to work hard because violin and viola are both very challenging instruments," she says. "The most challenging thing is studying for school and practicing two to three hours



Asia Bajaña started playing violin when she was in third grade thanks to A Gift For Music.

each day." But Asia enjoys the challenge and getting a chance to play with her friends.

Many times, there is a person that has had a lasting impact in helping to hone one's craft. "My third grade violin instructor Mrs. Laura Golden has been very influential in my life. She is an awesome violinist and when I need help practicing, she is always there for me."

Her orchestra instructor has nothing but praise for Asia's musical abilities as well. "Asia is the prime example of how hard work equals success," AGFM orchestra conductor **Angel Colón** says. "She is extremely talented for her age and definitely teaches all of us a lesson in how hard work pays off."

Who knows what the future might hold for Asia. She says it's her goal to make it into Juilliard one day, but for now, she enjoys the foundation that's being laid through her involvement in AGFM. **L**