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Bassist Phillip Serna shows bassists and cellists from Kennedy and Lincoln junior high schools Thursday that their instruments can carry melodies, too.

Bassists, cellists get their moment in the spotlight

Naperville students get lessons from someone who understands

By Kari Allen

Daily Herald Staff Writer

Local junior high school cellists and bassists admit they sometimes feel overshadowed by violinists.

But not Thursday.

That was the day young Naperville Unit District 203 cellists and bassists got their moment in the spotlight.

Bassist Phillip Serna led a workshop for the budding musicians, showing them just how important their instruments are.

While cellos and basses frequently supply the harmony or bass line, Serna directed students in songs in which their instruments carried the melodies.

He performed for them, too.

"You expect low sounds from a string bass, but you can play something lyrical and beautiful," said Serna, who teaches at many suburban schools.

Students were impressed, as Serna moved his hands quickly over the sizable instrument.

They asked questions about his techniques and absorbed his expertise.

Their school orchestra directors wanted students to gain everything they could from the workshop at Lincoln Junior High School.

The Naperville Education Foundation provided a grant to bring Serna, principal bass of the Northbrook Symphony, in for the workshop. The grant brought together cellists and bassists from all five District 203 junior high schools.

Orchestra Parents/Patrons' United Support Association, or OPUS, also supported the program.

Students from Jefferson, Madison and Washington junior high schools met in one group, while students from Kennedy and Lincoln junior highs met in another. Five students from each school were selected to perform in a concert Thursday night that featured Serna as a soloist, along with local pianist and teacher Robert Sacks.

On Thursday, all the cellists and bassists from the junior highs practiced the songs performed at the concert - "My Girl," "Amazing Grace" and "Star Wars" music.

The students had practiced the songs at their own schools, but the musicians came into the workshop not knowing exactly how their cross-district peers had been rehearsing.

"We don't know what tempo they played at," Washington seventh-grader Emily Stone said.

But Serna came up with a tempo and tips that got everyone on the same page.

School orchestra directors Kathy Wunsch, Arthur Foley, Connie Reynolds, Laurie Pettit and Jerry Zitko liked the sound.

"To get this many cellos and basses together is a real treat – to hear this lush, low sound," said Wunsch, Jefferson's orchestra director.

"This is their chance to shine."

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