

Jaya Murthy

Music for Minors

Nonprofit organization aims to keep music programs alive in the East Bay

In Indian culture we are often exposed to music well before we are born, before the spoken word reaches our ears. Whether it's film music played on street corners and radios, devotional songs played in temples and homes, classical music learned or heard in concerts in every city or Western pop music heard via MTV and Hollywood films, music is everywhere, and it naturally permeates every Indian without us realizing it. Therefore the nursery school songs and simple tunes that we hear in children's music here in America are a breeze to master.

Once my children grew up I really missed the music. I became concerned when I learned of the void of music in local schools which had been so important for my children. Can you imagine being a student doing school work day after day without any music class break?

I was grateful to discover Music for Minors II (MFMI), a nonprofit organization that has been initiating music programs in Fremont, Newark, Castro Valley, and Dublin schools since 1988 in a response to severe budgetary cuts in arts education. Carol Zilli, parent and former high school teacher, founded MFMI, modeled after MFMI that operates a similar program in the Peninsula. Zilli's advocacy for music for children continues as she serves as the executive director and training instructor of the program since its inception.

Music for Minors II recruits, trains, and supports community volunteers who become music docents who share half-hour music enrichment per week in preschool and elementary school classrooms. Lessons include singing/signing a wide variety of songs, rhythmic movement/dance, simple instrumentation, and listening appreciation. MFMI also sponsors community concerts and children's showcases to raise the awareness of the need for quality music in everyone's life.

I became a MFMI docent by taking the 10-week fall training class in 2009. It was well organized and such fun. We sang songs and learned how to present children's music every training day. You don't have to be an expert in music to volunteer and



share your love of music but keeping a beat and singing in tune is a basic requirement. The training builds the instructor's confidence and provides her or him with a huge collection of songs, CDs, and free access to four music resource centers and online music resources. My training classmates, Mira and Shweta, became better teachers in their preschool Nature's Gift in Fremont after becoming MFMI docents. Radhika served at Parkmont School, and I became a docent in our neighborhood Ardenwood Elementary School.

As a docent you can visit your own child's class and/or other classes of your choice. I have taught three, second-grade classes weekly. The children love to see me and it feels wonderful to give back to the community.

Last year the children enjoyed an excellent children's recording artist, Charlotte Diamond, in a school assembly and attended and performed with her at a MFMI sponsored family concert. This was the highlight of the school year for them.

MFMI also provides performance opportunities for children in an exciting showcase on a huge professional stage with hundreds of other children in MFMI classrooms in other school districts. Children feel so proud and special to perform before audiences of 500-plus.

Research shows that music develops the whole brain leading to better academic performance and a happier, healthier mental state for children and adults alike. It is therefore in the interest of our society to do all we can to ensure music continues in school curriculum. Given the current state of the economy, volunteers are the only way to fill the musical gap!

MFMI's next docent training is coming up. I encourage those interested to get involved and experience one of the best volunteer opportunities that will make a musical difference in a child's life, and your own. ■

Friday, Sept. 16-Friday, Nov. 18. Fremont, or Castro Valley. (510) 733-1189. czilli@aol.com. www.musicforminors2.org.