

# GLENDALE NEWS-PRESS

## **A Day At The Opera**

Rodney Tanaka

**GLENDALE - Verdugo Woodlands fourth-graders are showing a little muskrat love.**

Students of fourth-grade teachers Sheila Abranlian and Mari Charlton have worked for five weeks with members of the Los Angeles Opera. They performed Tuesday as the chorus for "Muskrat Lullaby," a tale of a muskrat who loves to sing.

The muskrat forms a band with other musical animals. They perform at the Alligator Ball, but the host plans to eat them at the end. The muskrat sings a lullaby and puts the alligators to sleep, and the band escapes to play another day.

The program gets children actively involved in opera and teaches them what goes in to putting on a professional show, said Eli Villanueva, who plays the toad. The L.A. Opera goes to 15 elementary schools in the fall and 15 high schools in the spring for similar programs, Villanueva said.

"We all hope it sparks an interest into the realm of opera and breaks stereotypes of what opera is," Villanueva said. "We're basically trying to get a more positive, down-to-earth idea to young kids."

Carolyn Manning, 9, said she used to think opera was boring.

"It's boring because grown-ups do it," Carolyn said. "You just sit and watch and daydream and don't get into it." Working with the opera is fun, said Sabrina Yeghiazarian, 9, because they meet professionals.

Going from an opera house to an elementary school takes some adjustment, Villanueva said, and an up-close performance requires more energy.

"Our basic role is not for them to sing with classical techniques of opera," Villanueva said. "We want them to have fun, and to not be afraid."

Working with the opera teaches students how to focus, a skill they need to learn, Charlton said. Members of the opera visited Tuesdays and Thursdays, and students also practiced in class.

The opera singers are good, said Beatriz Moreno, 9, but singing isn't hard.

"It's easy as long as you put your mind to it," Beatriz said.