

Making music at Three Rivers summer camp

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Teresa Douglass
tdouglass@visalia.gannett.com



Sena Cho, 8, left, and Ava Miralles, 10, rehearse at Center Stage Strings, a summer camp for gifted young musicians in Three Rivers.

Students at Center Stage Strings, a summer camp for gifted violinists, violists and cellists, are not your typical students.

They want to practice as much as they can. Back home, they may practice four hours a day, but during summer camp in Three Rivers, the sky is the limit.

On Friday, both faculty and students were fine-tuning complicated pieces of music for concerts Saturday night and Sunday afternoon, the final performances of the two-week corresponding music festival.



Camp founder Danielle Belen coaches Adam Millstein, 16. TERESA DOUGLASS

At CSS, the learning curve is exponential, said Danielle Belen, 28, who founded Center Stage Strings last summer. The Colburn School of Performing Arts faculty member chose Three Rivers to have her camp because her parents retired there two years ago, she said.

"You can get as much work done in two weeks [here] that might take six months at home to do," she said.

The teachers are amazing, said Cameron Mittleman, 14, of Pasadena.

Indeed, Belen pulled together an A team of faculty members from the Colburn School, Juilliard, the University of Puget Sound and the Chamber Orchestra of Philadelphia. She also asked her high school orchestra teacher, Kay Crask of Yorba Linda, to teach the youngest violinists, ages 8-10.

"She put me in charge of the little ones," Crask said.

She and three pint-size violinists entertained a full house at the Three Rivers branch of the Tulare County Library on Friday morn-ing. Local artist Nadi Spencer took photographs of their performance.

"It was awesome," she said.

She said she attends every concert during the two-week festival even though she is not a musician.

"I always go an hour early to get the first seat in the front row," she said.

The students audition to get into CSS and, so far, no local children have applied. In the future, a scholarship will be available for one local student, Belen said.

"We're hoping they apply," she said.

Cost for the two-week summer camp is \$1,600 per student. About half of the 20 students attending this summer are on partial scholarships, Belen said. The 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization relies heavily on donations and volunteers.