

Mission for music; Teen will take love of violin to poor children

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Arielle Barrientos, 18, a Biloxi home-schooled senior with five years of violin training and the passion to make a difference, may be about to make musical history in Saltillo, Mexico.

Ever since she was there last summer and accepted the priest's invitation to return to teach the children to play the violin, she's been on a mission to make it happen.

This week she heads back to Saltillo with a detailed instruction plan, 10 donated violins and everything needed to play them, as well as at least \$2,000 to pay an instructor to keep teaching after she returns home. All told, she has spearheaded fundraising of \$13,000 in order to make the trip in conjunction with the WINGS With Strings program at Lynn Meadows Discovery Center.

The WINGS group, to which Arielle and her sister, Gabrielle, 16, belong, will put on a multicultural puppet show for the mission involving classical music and legends. The puppets and script will be left behind, and the kids there will be shown how to make their own. End result is the Saltillo kids will know how to create and stage their own puppet shows.

Arielle said they will try to present the puppet show in Spanish, "but if there are some of the stories we cannot do, my dad is going to translate it." Her father, Sal Barrientos, is fluent in Spanish and will be in the wings to also help with translation of any questions the Saltillo children have.

When the WINGS group leaves July 4, Arielle, Gabrielle and their mother, Traci, will remain until July 19 for Arielle's violin camp. As she's still a long way from the 21-year minimum age required to stay there by herself, Arielle is already mentally listing family and church possibilities for her next trip.

By the end of this first violin camp, her goal is to leave the children with the capability to continue working on their own.

"I hope that the kids will grab a sense of music in general," Arielle said, "and what you can do with the violin. I'm hoping they will grab onto the concept of violin and want more and will have the passion for violin and be able to learn it and be able to use it as a tool for the future and be able to help their community with it.

"Father has picked some of the children (for the camp) and they sing in a choir at their church so I'm hoping some of them have a background in music. I think it will be pretty much teaching them how to read music. I'm going to take 10 violins and 10 students for the first time and see who fits the violin. If they all do, that would be great."

Her plan, Arielle said, is "to use the Suzuki method and Suzuki does it by listening so there will be a CD with it. Dr. Suzuki's theory was that children could learn to play music before they can talk so what you do is repetitiveness. They made a CD to listen to constantly so that the children can recognize it by hearing."

She has to purchase everything from CDs, CD players, headphones and batteries to pencils and erasers.

"The violin and everything they need to learn the violin stays with that child in Mexico," Arielle said.

Traci Barrientos said of her daughter's violin project, "I thought it was a wonderful idea. I think the whole point of the mission and getting the teenagers down there is building relationships. It's also on creating possibilities within the whole Hispanic community, the Mexican community, to support itself rather than depend on handouts.

"I knew that Arielle's heart was with the mission and she wanted to be more involved with the mission in a long-term plan. I knew it was a perfect outlet for her with her talent. It was a good place for her to pour her energy. She is a strong-willed, energetic teenager. It made sense that it would all fit together."

The violin project has been recognized with a \$50 award by the Kohl's Kids Who Care Scholarship Program and is now being considered for a regional scholarship worth \$1,000. She got a \$500 grant from "DoSomething.org" and a \$1,000 donation from the Gulf Coast Symphony board of directors. Arielle plays in the Gulf Coast Youth Symphony.

"This is a passion for her," said symphony board member Charlotte Gunn. "She wants to make a difference to the world. It's not short-term with her. She plans to go again next summer."

Said Arielle, "I feel it is so important to do this because the last time I went down there (I saw) the overwhelming sense of poverty that they have. I felt very strongly I wanted to do something but wasn't sure what and then the violin came up, and I was very willing to do this... anything that could help is what I was thinking."

The Arielle file Training: Began taking violin in fourth grade in a pilot program offered by St. James in Gulfport, which ended after fifth grade. Currently takes private lessons from Dr. Stephen Redfield at the University of Southern Mississippi in Hattiesburg. Family: Daughter of Sal and Traci Barrientos; siblings are sisters Gabrielle, 16; Brittani, 15; and brother Jonathan, 13. Plan: To give violin lessons on the Coast to children in the Hispanic community. The violin: "I feel like it's a part of me now, just because I've put so much time and energy with the violin. If someone were to take it away from me, I would not know what to do with my time."

