

American Heritage School honors veterans with program

Barbara Christiansen - Daily Herald | Posted: Saturday, October 30, 2010 12:20 am

With the rapidly decreasing numbers of World War II veterans alive today, there are many youth who will never have the chance to learn from them what it was like to serve their country in that conflict or the sacrifices they made during the war.

To move that learning from a chapter in a textbook to one that evokes feelings in the students, American Heritage School is presenting "The Price of Freedom," a tribute to those veterans.

"We are trying to connect the rising generation with those called the greatest generation who fought in World War II and established our freedom," said Michael Bohn, associate director of development for American Heritage. "I remember talking to people who fought in World War II. My children and others don't have that opportunity."

The musical tribute will be on Nov. 6, just prior to Veterans Day, and is more than a concert. It includes nine professional actors and singers, recounting excerpts from actual letters written during the war. There is also archive footage from the war.

"The stories of four young soldiers are brought to life by an impressive display of live musical theater, authentic newsreels, photographs and radio broadcasts in a storyline compiled from real life World War II soldiers," said Kayson Brown, lyceum orchestra director. "The result is a powerful combination of modern-day media and music that both informs and inspires."

American Heritage put on the same performance for last Veterans Day, with a sold-out show. This year there will be two performances -- at 2 and 7:30 p.m.

Brown said the audience response last year was one of the most positive he has had.

"I don't believe that I have ever seen such a reaction from an audience," he said. "So many individuals approached me after the concert expressing how deeply they were moved, and how they wished that they could share this experience with others, that before the night was out we determined to do an encore performance of the work in 2010."

Because of its basis in fact, the participants and the audience get a feeling for what the times were like during World War II, he said.

"A lot of people don't really know what that was like," he said. "Whether you were serving in the military or at home, it was a difficult time."

"These people gave their lives for our freedom," he said. "Every day we are losing so many of the survivors. They don't always like to tell the stories. It is difficult to give us a real feeling of the sacrifices they made. Seventy-five million people died in World War II."

Through actual letters written during the war and footage from the National Archives, the audience may get a feel for the times.

"It tells the story of four young soldiers and the families they left behind," Brown said. "It shows all different parts of the war without concentrating on one story line."

"It is the right balance of patriotism and tragedy. It is not a depressing show. It is a wonderful mix of humor, patriotism and tragedy."

Composer Rob Gardner and songwriter McKane Davis collaborated to create "The Price of Freedom," which premiered in 2002. It has been performed across the country, and the American Heritage Lyceum Philharmonic in 2009 produced the first performance of the work by a non-professional orchestra. The 75-member group has been twice voted "Best Youth Performing Ensemble" in the Utah Best of State competition and has been recognized nationally as one of the country's premier young orchestras, Brown said.

Brown said the school may choose not to do the performance again, at least not for several years.

"This is the second year and probably our last year," he said. Brown said that the students don't learn as much from too much repetition.

"The educational value diminishes over the years," he said.



Tickets are available at www.american-heritage.org or by calling (801) 642-0055. Tickets are \$10 in advance, and \$12 and \$15 at the door. American Heritage is at 736 N. 1100 East, American Fork.