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Opening a World of Creative Wonders to Children Hollywood Bowl series lets kids experience music, dance and art from faraway places.

By BRENDA REES, Special to The Times

For parents who think they have exhausted all the typical summer activities for their out-of-school kiddies (and out-of-town guests), help is available at the Hollywood Bowl. Weekday mornings throughout the rest of the summer, kids can listen to storytellers and musicians, dance in a patio, create art in a parking lot and learn the origins of music from hands-on displays.

The Bowl's Open House season, now in its 32nd year, features performers who take their audiences on musical journeys to faraway places such as Ireland, Africa and Vietnam. This is the first year the Open House series is held in the covered patio area next to the Hollywood Bowl Museum.

"We really want to provide a day of fun for families," said Leni Boorstin, public affairs director for the Bowl. "The Open House shows are connected thematically to the Sunday evening concerts at the Bowl where we explore music from all over the world."

The Open House shows are lively and upbeat, with musicians often playing traditional ethnic instruments. Storyteller David Prather--who's been hosting the Open House series for four years--welcomes the audience with a tale and, during the musical performance, invites kids to dance and sing. In between songs, performers often talk about their instruments and the musical history of that country's culture.

After the show, kids are encouraged to participate in workshops where they can create an artistic memento or, in some cases, learn a new dance step or tell stories with puppets. Workshops are broken down by age, with younger kids working on slightly different projects than older children.

"The Open House is a wonderful place to introduce music to kids," says Marcella Saunders, a teacher from Santa Monica who has been bringing her 10-year-old niece, Lexi, to the Open House series for seven years.

Recently, Saunders' other niece, 3-year-old Nikki, came along for her first Open House experience. Nikki sat cross-legged with her sister in rapt attention as an African group pounded and clanged on drums, bells and gongs. Later, both sisters got lost in the crowd of squealing kids who were jumping up and down, shaking and dancing to the infectious rhythms. Even moms with young babies on their hips swayed back and forth.

Saunders says she appreciates the multicultural flavor of the Open House programs because they "can teach kids about respect for diversity. Overall, the concerts are kid-friendly, and the tickets are reasonable. There's no reason why not to come here. We look forward to this every year."

For many adults who bring their kids to an Open House show, the day just begins once the scheduled performance and workshops are over. Many families pack picnic lunches and wander up to the Bowl to listen to musicians as they rehearse for that night's performance.

Later, some families will stroll to the gift store while others trek over to the Hollywood Bowl Museum to check out the historical exhibits and the interactive display "Come Make Noise," a hands-on exhibit designed with kids in mind. At the huge wooden displays, kids can pluck a harp string, bang on drums, push air through a pipe organ and slide a bow across a huge violin.

"Kids can learn how musical sound is created and see how instruments from other cultures work in the same way," says Carol Merrill-Mirsky, director of the museum. Thirty-four traditional instruments from Ethiopia, Java, Yugoslavia and other countries are placed around the upstairs exhibit hall as a reminder of how universal music is, says Merrill-Mirsky. "After an Open House show, kids love to come in here and give the instruments a try," she adds.

In addition, the museum's computer center has various multimedia programs of interest for kids that include movies and cartoons featuring the Hollywood Bowl.

All in all, the Open House series may be a child's first experience at a "formal" concert, says master of ceremonies Prather. "What's great about the series is that every week it changes with new performers," he says. "I often see the same kids every week for the entire summer. That's a lot of fun for me and them."

* Open House at the Hollywood Bowl, 2301 N. Highland Ave., Los Angeles. Different musical programs are featured each weekday with performances at 10 a.m. and 11:15 a.m.

Workshops directly follow each program.

Upcoming concerts include: July 17-21, "Singin' the Blues," guitarist Chic Street Man plays blues from around the world; July 24-28, "Celtic Dreams," musical group features Irish harmonies, instruments and stories; July 31-Aug. 4, "Rhythm Routes," swing ensemble performs waltzes, ragtime, folk tunes and more; Aug. 7-11, "Sounds of Vietnam," the Khac Chi Ensemble plays melodies and songs on traditional instruments; Aug. 14-18, "Family Folktales and Fables," told in English and Spanish, the "We Tell Stories" theatrical troupe blends song and tales about different family lives.

Cost is \$5 per adult and children age 3 and older. A \$1 materials fee is charged for the workshops. For more information and reservations, call (323) 850-2000.

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