

Arts & Entertainment

A weekly guide to music, theater, art, movies and more, edited by Rebecca Wallace

They're with the (big) band

Teen singing trio is always in the mood for the swing era

by Rebecca Wallace

Some classics are classics for a reason. They just keep winning over new fans. As a case in point, take the Honeybee Trio, whose three teenaged singers are smitten with music that was first in vogue a half-century before they were born.

The Vacaville high school girls deftly weave harmonies for "Begin the Beguine," "Bei Mir Bist Du Schön" and "Chattanooga Choo Choo," among many other tunes from 1930s and '40s swing era. Of course, no concert would be complete without the World War II hit "Boogie Woogie Bugle Boy."

"People are always expecting it," said Natalie Angst, who sings in the trio with fellow high school senior Karli Bosler and junior Sarah McElwain.

It's safe to say that the audience can expect the Andrews Sisters classic when the Honeybee Trio performs at Foothill College on Dec. 16. For the second time, the young singers are being featured on the bill for the Palo Alto-based California Pops Orchestra's holiday show. It's a swell fit for the Pops, who specialize in standards,

sing-alongs and nostalgia.

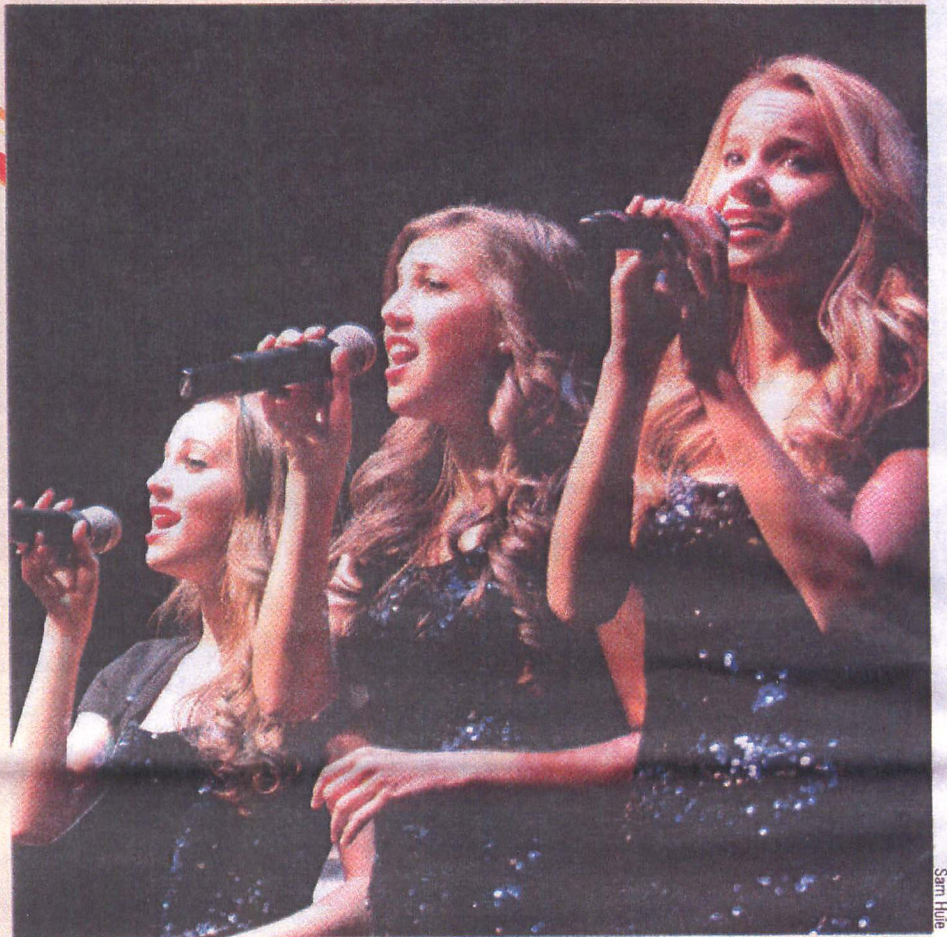
The seasonal program also includes longtime theater singer Pierce Peter Brandt — and State Sen. Joe Simitian, D-Palo Alto, who is the orchestra's regular narrator for "The Night Before Christmas."

Pops conductor Kim Venaas was introduced to the Honeybee Trio by an audience member who had seen them sing. The girls were then only 15 and 16, but they were already cookin' with gas, as Bob Hope might have put it. Impressed with their savvy harmonies and professional panache, Venaas invited them to perform with the Pops and then with his Black Tie Jazz Orchestra.

The teens "can and do handle all the different vocal parts," Venaas said. "No one is stuck with just the lead or just the bottom parts. They swap around and it keeps them fresh and in sync with the others."

It's clear from the trio's performance videos that they share friendship and musical rapport, as well as vintage style. They have

(continued on page 24)



Sarah McElwain, Karli Bosler and Natalie Angst in concert as the Honeybee Trio.

Sam Hilde



Tuba player John Taylor and his fellow brass musicians in the California Pops Orchestra.



Kim Venaas conducts the California Pops, with Pierce Peter Brandt singing to the kids in front.

Sam Hilde

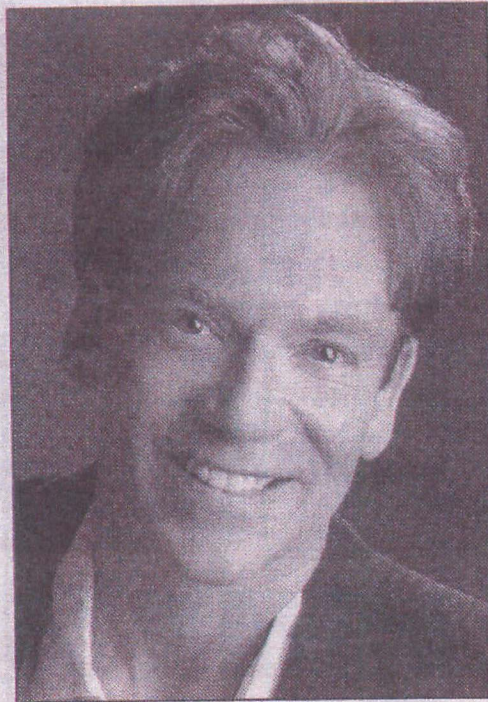
Honeybee Trio

(continued from page 20)

sweet, smooth voices and a dash of swinging choreography to go with their outfits: '40s-esque military ensembles, sparkly gowns and retro dresses and hats. Red lipstick is also big with them. They've shot "Chatanooga Choo Choo"-style photos on a train, and the cover of their third album, "Flight to the Forties," plunks them on an airstrip carrying boxy suitcases. For their brand-new fourth CD, "We Can Sing It," they got dolled up in Rosie the Riveter outfits.

"I love everything about the '40s: what people wore, all their outfits, the music," Angst said. "We buy costumes online, and some are made for us."

The three singers formed the trio in 2008, at the advanced ages of 12 and 13. Their catalyst was a music teacher named Debi McMIndes who wanted them to do a retro performance at a local senior home. The girls already knew each other from musical theater and talent shows,



Singer Pierce Peter Brandt will solo with the California Pops Orchestra.

but they had never been in a trio before.

"It was really exciting. We just really loved it," McElwain said. And the trio took off.

While Bosler often sings soprano, McElwain mezzo-soprano

and Angst alto, the three also like to mix up their parts, as Venaas noticed. Recently, they even added one original song to their swing-era repertoire: A friend wrote them a pert, jazzy tune called "No Worries" that can be heard on their website, honeybeetrio.com.

The singers now have hundreds of shows on their résumés, many for military and veteran groups. They've sung several times at Travis Air Force Base in Fairfield, and on the U.S.S. Hornet aircraft carrier on San Francisco Bay. They agree that performing for war veterans, particularly those from World War II, is special.

"Sometimes for an encore piece we sing an a cappella version of 'God Bless America' and ask them to sing along. You just get chills. They stand up one by one with tears in their eyes and hands on their hearts. It's one of our favorite things, to see how touched they are by our music," Bosler said.

The girls often end up talking to audiences for a long time after performances. People will say, "That song was played at my wedding," or, "I can do the boogie," or simply thank them. When the audience members are veterans, that means a lot.

"It's really humbling," Bosler said. "These are people who have sacrificed for our country, and they're thanking us." ■

What: The California Pops Orchestra performs its "Home for the Holidays!" concert, with guests the Honeybee Trio, Pierce Peter Brandt and Joe Simitian.

Where: Smithwick Theatre, Foothill College, 12345 El Monte Road, Los Altos Hills

When: 3 p.m. Sunday, Dec. 16

Cost: Premium seats are \$42 and general are \$37, with discounts for groups. Youths ages 18 and under pay \$17.