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**Florida history set to music**

***Symphony show covers conquistadors, Overseas Railway***

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Hundreds of school children enjoyed a musical journey that reinforced what they've been learning in history class, as the South Florida Symphony Orchestra performed a multimedia production for them Thursday morning at Tennessee Williams Theatre.

"Tales of Legendary Florida: 500 Years of History Through Music and Art" was brought to town by the Florida Keys Council of the Arts, and Donna Wissinger and Joy Myers of Artz Out Loud. It's the second year that Wissinger and Myers have come to the Keys to bring their musical adventure to area classrooms and Tennessee Williams.

The two performances of the show on Thursday reached elementary students from Horace O'Bryant School, the Big Pine Academy, The Basilica School, Sugarloaf School, the Sigsbee Charter School, and Gerald Adams Elementary School.

Through beautiful symphonic music composed by Robert Kerr, richly detailed paintings by Jackson Walker, still photography and video, the show traced the history of Florida, from the arrival of Ponce de Leon, through to the building of Henry Flagler's Florida East Coast Railway to Key West in the early 1900s.

At the conclusion, the students were taken for a "triumphant" whistlestop tour of East Coast Railway stops that finished with a crescendo at the terminus, in Key West.

All through the production, Wissinger and Myers availed themselves of costume changes, transforming themselves from conquistadors to explorers to conservationists as they explained the evolution of the state -- warts and all. It's explained that on his way to building his immense fortune, Flagler "hurt a lot of people," but that later in life, he turned his views -- and actions -- around.

"It's a pretty dynamic program to teach history to elementary school students," said Liz Young, Florida Keys Council of the Arts Executive Director. "And I love the message that's being taught, that we can and should all be better people, and take care of each other. This is our next generation of children. If five kids out of all those who attended become professional musicians, it was be win-win."

South Florida Symphony Orchestra Musical Director and Conductor Sebrina Maria Alfonso said that she enjoyed very much sharing the stage with Wissinger and Myers.

"We've been doing these children's concerts for many years now, but with the addition of Joy and Donna, we've been able to take them to a whole new level. It really is a perfect fit for us. It's more of an outreach program now, with their involvement."

The two Artz Out Loud artists generally spend between seven and 10 days at the participating schools, getting the students up to speed on the coming performances.

They'll be back in town in January, working on a similar program for pupils in higher grades.

"The kids really enjoy it because they can interact," Alfonso said. "That's important, as it makes the show something that they're really going to be able to remember. It's our hope that some of these students will be inspired to become involved in the arts down the road."