

spin art. Preschoolers can enjoy a favorite story that inspires their latest creations during the Paint Me a Story series, and there's a toddler play area. 1720 Linda Dr., Pleasant Hill, 925-680-2500, www.artgeckostudio.com.

Children's Theater Workshops

Two venues proved to be Family Favorites for aspiring young actors to develop their skills in a fun-filled setting. **Star Struck Children's Theatre** in Fremont offers voice instruction for all ages and a summer class that fosters improvisation, imagination and movement for children ages 7-10. Actors who participate in the year-round productions are schooled in singing, dancing and acting. 510-659-1319, www.starstrucktheatre.org.

And, **Kids Take the Stage** offers technical and performance classes to children ages 3-18 in several Bay Area locations. Culminating in full-scale productions, students are taught such related skills as creative movement, structured improvisation, language development, scripted dialogue and monologue, stage makeup and application. 510-864-7061, www.kidstakethestage.com.

★ Editors' Pick:

Diablo Light Opera Company in Pleasant Hill – the renowned community theater organization – has expanded its youth theater programs, and now serves children ages 4-18. It starts with Starlettes, ages 4-6, then moves into StarStruck, for kids ages 7-12. Finally, teens are able to audition for the acclaimed Stars 2000 musical theater company. 925-944-1565, 925-939-6161, www.dloc.org.

Music Classes

Always popular with parents, **Music Together** offers music and movement classes for infants, toddlers and preschoolers and their caretakers. The developmentally appropriate and research-based classes teach music through playful activities in mixed-age groups. And the program offers music learning opportunities for children ages 5 and 6 through "Big Kids Family Music" – a 60-minute class featuring game songs, folk dances, dramatic play and more. Various locations in the East Bay, 800-728-2692, www.musictogether.com.

And, our readers feel it's high time for the long established, award-winning **Piedmont Children's Choirs** to get its due. Since 1982, the organization has been offering choral training and two concert experiences each year for more than 350 Bay Area youth, ages 6-18. It also features an intensive summer camp where children of all abilities learn music theory and voice instruction in a picturesque setting. 510-547-4441, www.piedmontchoirs.org.



Performers put on a rousing rendition of *Peter Pan* at Star Struck Children's Theatre.

PHOTO COURTESY OF STAR STRUCK THEATRE

Dance Classes

Bay Area Parent readers have selected a couple of places for their children to trip the light fantastic. **Dance Dynamics** in Brentwood offers instruction in tap, ballet, jazz and hip-hop for ages 2 to adult. The school also offers a competition team and a production company, as well as summer workshops for dancers, ages 5-10. 700 Harvest Park, Suites O and P, Brentwood, 925-240-5556, www.brentwooddance.com.

Meanwhile, **Kids 'N Dance** features a playful, imaginative way to teach dance to kids with its weekly themes, music, costumes and prop. Its programs are in schools throughout Alameda and Contra Costa counties. 3369 Mt. Diablo Blvd., Lafayette, 925-284-7388; 3841 MacArthur Blvd., Oakland, 510-531-4400, www.kidsndance.com.

Foreign Language Immersion Classes

When it comes to a popular language immersion program, readers gave a gold star to **Viva El Español**, with two East Bay locations. The classes are taught by native speakers and music, art and dancing are among the fun thematic activities that facilitate children – preschool to eighth grade – to learn a new language. 3451 Golden Gate Way, Lafayette; Lake Merritt United Methodist Church; 1330 Lakeshore Ave., Oakland. 925-962-9177, www.vivaelespanol.com.

Readers also resonate with the curriculum at **A+ Spanish Academy**. The immersion program is for children as young

as preschool age. There are parent/child classes, group instruction for children in kindergarten through eighth grade – and private tutoring for high school students and adults – that combines the academic acquisition of vocabulary and

“My children are so inspired by the passion and creativity of the teachers at Viva el Español that they forget they're learning Spanish!”

– Meg McAdam, Lafayette

verb conjugation with other modalities, such as art, music and movement to reinforce learning a new language. 9260 Alcosta Blvd. Bldg A, St. A-1, San Ramon, 925-803-2333, www.aplusspanish.com.