

Appassionato



VAM Welcomes Henry Shapard to Faculty

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From the President & CEO

Welcome to the Spring 2023 edition of the Appassionato that recognizes the accomplishments of our students, faculty, and alumni. This issue is chock full of interesting and captivating stories. I am delighted that you have picked up a copy so we can share in this together.

Our cover story features the newly appointed Professor of Cello at VAM, Henry Shapard. Not only is he an outstanding musician, he is also a dedicated educator and is looking forward to working with students at the Academy. Please extend a warm welcome when you see him in the hallways.

In addition to the fantastic faculty members, there is much to celebrate when it comes to the Academy's student body and families. Angel Tian-Yu Zhou is an alumna of the S.K. Lee College and has gone on to become a successful pianist as well as actress and model. The Ashongs embody the spirit of family, curiosity, and learning, with the three siblings all involved in VAM activities.

I hope you have enjoyed this edition as much as I have. A heartfelt thank you to all you readers for your contribution and support – however small you think it may be, every thread in the fabric of our community is important.

Musically Yours,

Joseph Elworthy, VAM President & CEO

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Brendan MacIntosh, *Writer*

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From the Board Chair

Dear Members of the VAM Family:

Welcome to the Spring 2023 edition of Appassionato. On behalf of the Board, our faculty, and students, I am pleased to present three featured stories in this newsletter.

The cover story announces the appointment of our new Professor of Cello, Henry Shapard. His style for teaching cello shows how much he values an individualized approach to each student, regardless of the age or skill set. He studied at Yale with Ole Akahoshi, and when Henry became the Principal Cello of the Yale Symphony Orchestra, he was mentored by William Boughton. He has received many accolades and awards and has toured around the world, including China, Singapore, the US of A, Germany, and Denmark. Most recently, Henry was appointed Principal Cello of the Vancouver Symphony Orchestra in March 2020, at the ripe old age of 21 years! His dedication to teaching embraces a philosophy of a compassionate, yet thorough, multidisciplinary approach to his students. He will be teaching pre-college and college students in addition to his involvement in orchestras and ensembles.

Our second feature celebrates VAM alumnus Angel Tian Yu Zhou. Angel is a former student of Mr. Lee Kum-Sing, S.K. Lee College, VAM. She is an acclaimed concert pianist and has performed in many venues across the world, including the Carnegie Weill Recital Hall, concert halls in Beijing and Shanghai, the Barcelona Arts Centre, and the CBC Glenn Gould studio. In addition to her musical talents, Angel is an actor, singer, and music producer. Her work spans print and electronic media, and she has recurring roles in television dramas. Her involvement in the entertainment industry also includes composing and singing theme songs that have placed very high on China's Music Billboard.

Our third feature describes a family that has deep involvement in the culture of our VAM Family. The Ashongs are proud parents of Keenan, Enrelle, and Kaydrian. It is heartwarming to see how much our families encourage a shared love of music and foster support for music education.

Kindest regards,
Raymond Dong, MD,
Chair, VAM Board of Directors

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Meet Henry Shapard, VAM's new Professor of Cello

Henry Shapard, VSO Principal Cellist,
becomes newest addition to VAM faculty

I am thrilled to introduce Henry Shapard, Principal Cello of the Vancouver Symphony Orchestra, as the newest addition to the Cello Department's esteemed faculty. Henry is a keen, intuitive pedagogue, with a wide range of experience as both a teacher and performer, and a profound love for his craft. I recently interviewed him about his teaching philosophy and memorable learning experiences from his musical education, and I hope you enjoy reading through our conversation.

Where did you grow up, Henry?

"I grew up in Cleveland, Ohio, and people don't think of this when they think of Cleveland, Ohio, and rust belt cities in general, but I do feel I really won the lottery growing up there, because Cleveland is home to the Cleveland Orchestra, which is not only one of the finest orchestras in the world, but also has a distinct and very proud tradition of string instrument playing. And from when I first began playing the cello, which was when I was three, up until when I graduated from high school, I was extremely fortunate to have extraordinary teachers. My primary teacher in high school was Richard Weiss, the first assistant principal cello of the Cleveland Orchestra. But I also played for six years in the Cleveland Orchestra Youth Orchestra, which

is a unique program in that it is a resident Youth Orchestra that rehearses in the same hall as the Cleveland Orchestra, is coached on almost a one-to-one basis by the musicians of the orchestra, and performs with many of the same conductors that conduct the Cleveland Orchestra. So, from when I was an early teenager, I grew up very proud of and inspired by the process of orchestral music making, and I feel so fortunate today for having had that experience.”

Do you think that experience changed your outlook on music?

“Completely. It made me suddenly want to practice. It switched almost overnight, and I think what did it was, first of all, having teachers from the Cleveland Orchestra that really emphasized the team aspect, but I also just fell in love with the cello section, because to me, as an imaginative kid, it felt like knights going into battle, everybody gearing up to solve the same problem. It felt so much more powerful than anything that I could do on my own with the instrument, and it was so incredibly thrilling and addictive from the beginning. I still remember my first rehearsal with that Youth Orchestra,” he smiles. “It was just astonishing, the way it felt to be in a group like that, and even now, I think that I do romanticize cello-section playing a lot, because when I was a pre-teen, it gave me my first mature sense of purpose, and it was all about the team. I loved having a stand-partner, having to play in the same place in the bow and match their intonation. I loved how when you sit in different seats in the cello section, the orchestra sounds different, so if you’re on the last desk, you hear a lot more of the winds and the low brass than you do if you’re sitting towards the front. It just opened up a world of sound and socializing and interacting with the world that I had not been previously aware of.”

When you first started playing, did you choose the cello yourself?

“Yes, I did! I actually have a twin sister, and our parents played a lot of CDs for us when we were little. Eventually, when we started asking about instruments, I asked for the cello, and my sister asked for the violin. I was very lucky in that my parents were very supportive and always present during the early stages of my learning the instrument. My mom went to every lesson of mine up until I was about 11 years old, she practiced with me, and I certainly would not be where I am today without that support. It really made a larger impact on me than even any of my teachers, because

my mom was the one who made sure that daily practice was ingrained in me, and I still stand by that.”

Tell me about a learning experience that changed your life.

“The most impactful conversation I had with any teacher was with Richard Weiss when I was about 15 years old. At that time, I was not considering a career in music. I don’t come from a musical family, and I think that my parents, as many parents are, were concerned about the prospects of their child going into a career in the arts. I was very much on the fence, and I was having a discussion with Richard Weiss about this when he asked me, ‘What is your reason for playing the cello? If you want to be a professional musician, what would you want to do?’ And I was thinking of answers like, ‘I really love the repertoire,’ or ‘I really like practicing and I like the thrill that comes from practicing,’ and he made a suggestion that really stuck with me. He said, ‘ultimately, the greatest purpose that you can have as a student or performer at any level is to practice and prepare in such a way that you create a better environment for the people sitting next to you in the orchestra. So, your preparation is not for you, but such that your stand-partner, or the concert master sitting across from you, comes into school or to work and feels a friendly, constructive, productive and prepared environment, and I think that Richard correctly predicted that this is what would be sustaining. So, both what I look for in my students and also what I teach is all about preparation for the purposes of being a good musical citizen and beyond. I like to see my students thrive in terms of their technical ability, and of course, technical ability is a means to an end, so I work strongly on technique such that the preparation to be a better musician is there, but for me, the goal is to have every student who comes in contact with me to leave with an idea of the kind of stewardship and responsibility that come with being a musician at any level. This is why I enjoy

(Continued on next page)



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working with young students as much as I enjoy working with college students or professionals, because I think that at any stage, there are ways that one can learn to be a musician in context, and specifically in the context of other people.”

Did you always feel passionate about teaching?

“Nope,” he smiles. “I didn’t, and what changed that was my own process of auditioning for professional orchestras, which is something that I started doing on a dare when I was 19. I have been rejected so many times, as most people who audition do, but one thing that I did, and that I have done through my process of auditioning, is to keep track of not only everything that I’ve played in every round of every audition, but also how I felt in the moment. I compared it to comments that were offered by the jury afterwards -- if that happened -- and I was able to track not just my progress, but the pitfalls, bumps in the road, and mental roadblocks that came up. So, once I won the job in the VSO and began my position there, I started to recognize that there was a lot of value to sharing those ideas. Because in the field, there is a tremendous stigma against talking about performance anxiety and the mystery of orchestra auditions, and I felt that I had a lot to share. So, that was when I started getting serious about teaching, because not only would I like to make lives in music possible for students, but I also would like to see my field lifted by a rising tide of people entering the profession who are interested, empathetic, hardworking and thoughtful, in addition to the basic technical abilities that are necessary to pass an orchestra audition.”

What else have you drawn from the teachers that inspired you?

“All of my teachers walked the walk. They were performer-teachers who were actively practicing and working on their own projects while teaching, and that meant a lot to me, because I could see that each of my teachers was working in the same way that they were telling me to do, so there was never any element of ‘Do as I say, not as I do.’ It was simply, ‘Here is my process as a teacher and as a performer -- maybe there are some things here you can try to emulate.’ When I was at Yale, my primary teacher was Ole Akahoshi, and he was extraordinary for me because from the first lesson he wanted to challenge me about the idea of what sort of sound could come out of a cello. I’m pretty sure he used the phrase, ‘vocal tone,’ in every single lesson that I had with him over those four years and beyond, and I think I was initially resistant to it because it required a level of creativity that I was not used to: the idea that you would sit, and before you would play, you would imagine the sound that would come out of the instrument. That took a lot of patience, but it made such an impact on me, and I still really savour every moment in those lessons where I was lucky enough to have him demonstrate a passage, because I could see and feel in the room that everything that he was teaching me about breathing, phrasing, and a complete commitment to the sound of the line, were things that he believed in so much when he played, and every note that he drew out of the cello had thought and colour and creativity, and that was so inspiring. Some of my fondest memories practicing at Yale were actually on my own, after lessons with Ole, sometimes



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sitting in a room for a couple of hours just working on a couple of notes to see if I could develop a richer sound, or a more imaginative sound, and it really pushed me. It was a slow burn, but it really pushed me.

“My other big influence at Yale was William Boughton, who is the music director of the Yale Symphony, but has also had an extensive professional conducting and cello career. He was my conducting teacher, but between the conducting and the cello, one of the things he taught me that has really made a lasting impression is that if you have something to say, musically, you first must do the work to be able to back it up so that you’re sure that this is your belief, and not somebody else’s idea. Secondly, when you do believe something, it is your duty to present that in a way that it deserves to be heard. I have always struggled as an anxious performer, somebody who gets nervous, and he gave me armor, because he was so incredibly encouraging about presenting the piece of music for all of its color and drama, excitement and beauty. There is a kind of total commitment there, and heart, that has really made a lasting impression on me. So, when I think of Richard Weiss, Ole Akahoshi and William Boughton, I have a number of enduring ideas that they left me with, and that, of course, will seep through my teaching.”

How did you first begin teaching?

“When I came to Vancouver, it was something that I was pretty quickly asked to do a lot of. Being principal cello of a big orchestra like the VSO is a very visible role, and often you will be asked even informally for advice or to teach students, but in general, people come asking you about your thoughts on things. And I think that, initially, that made me uncomfortable, because I wasn’t sure yet what I could speak to, but I came to realize that part of the responsibility of a job like that is thinking out loud, so to speak, about how to work through all sorts of problems that present themselves when you are working through a piece of music. And as I tell my friends, teaching has quickly become my greatest love. It’s where I feel I get the most meaning in my musical life.”

It was such a pleasure to speak with Henry about his thoughtfully developed approach to teaching, and I can’t wait to see him walking down the hallway, cello case in hand and a smile on his face. I know that he is going to make an amazing addition to VAM’s musical family, and after recently having the chance to sit in on one of his private lessons, I cannot emphasize enough how passionate, open-hearted and attentive he is as a teacher. Cello students of VAM, you are in excellent hands!



VAM Remembers

Jerold Gerbrecht

(1935-2023)

VAM recognizes long-time Music Director for decades of service to the community

Vancouver Academy of Music thanks the Gerbrecht family for preparing this article.

Born in New Orleans, Louisiana, in 1935, Jerold Gerbrecht was the youngest child in an extended family of jazz musicians. It was natural and expected for Jerry to join his father, grandfather, and uncles in playing music as soon as he was old enough to play a brass instrument, and he was given a trumpet and lessons from family. His first teacher was his uncle, Pinky Gerbrecht, a jazz player and band leader whose recordings are in the Smithsonian today.

Jerold, who often went by Jerry, grew up surrounded by music. While he was still a minor Jerry began earning money to help his family by playing trumpet at some of the more colourful establishments in New Orleans. The family lore is that, in order to avoid breaking liquor laws as a minor, he was suspended in a dance cage at the club, and he played with the band from his raised perch.

From the very beginning, it seems, Jerry was destined to do extraordinary things, and to overcome seeming obstacles in the most creative and unexpected ways.



Moving from the world of jazz to the world of classical music is difficult, and relatively uncommon. However, Jerry was intrigued by the technical skill and rigour of classical training, and attracted to the depth and emotional range of classical repertoire. He entered his undergraduate degree at Louisiana State University (LA), studying with Leon Rapier. Rapier was an inspiring mentor, and when Jerry completed his Bachelors' of Music Performance he followed his teacher to the University of Louisville (KY) where he continued to work towards becoming a highly-skilled, classical trumpet player. By the time he was well on in his masters degree studies, he'd discovered his skills as a teacher and conductor, and he broadened his artistry by taking on teaching assistant and conductor roles at the school. It was through his TA position that he first met his future wife, Peggy Kennedy. She was a brilliant young student who had entered the university at sixteen on full scholarship. Both Jerry and Peggy were outstanding students, and after a slightly awkward first meeting (he shouted at her when she marched the wrong way in the marching band he was conducting), they became engaged. They married in 1958.

By the time Jerry graduated in 1958, he had added Vincent Chicowicz and the conducting legend Pierre Monteaux to

his list of mentors, and he continued working with both of them off and on for a number of years. Shortly after graduation from his Master's program Jerry was drafted by the US Army. He served from 1958-1961 as a member of the US Army Band. One of his duties was recording various bugle calls for the Army to use at all of its bases. Jerry enjoyed telling his kids that he made excellent recordings every day, but that he and his co-draftees would often decide to continue re-recording day after day so that Jerry could practice to his hearts' content.

Immediately after his honourable discharge, Jerry joined the faculty at the University of Tennessee in Knoxville, and he and Peggy set up a home and started their young family there. All of Jerry and Peggy's children were born in Knoxville, Tennessee — the eldest Dana, then Karen, son John, and youngest child Alice.

Both Jerry and Peggy were passionate about education, and in 1966 they worked with other parents to open the Knoxville Montessori School. This school marks the beginning of a lifelong commitment to education and education accessibility, and it's worth noting that both Jerry and Peggy not only strove far beyond their own families' means and expectations for their own educations, they also spent the rest of their lives working to provide access to education for others.

In 1969, in an extraordinary move, Jerold flew to Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada to take and win the audition for Principal Trumpet with the Vancouver Symphony Orchestra. He and Peggy loaded up their station wagon with four kids, the youngest still only a few months old, and they drove across the US for the family's first look at the Pacific Ocean and the mountains of the west coast. Jerry began his work as a Principal in a large symphony orchestra and in 1970, motivated by his interest in education, he accepted the Directorship of the newly created Vancouver Community Music School. The school offered lessons in Kodaly, Orff, and Suzuki. Jerry and Peggy's older children had already begun Suzuki lessons in Tennessee (working, remarkably, with Dr. Sinichi Suzuki and the great American Suzuki pedagogues William and Connie Starr) and both parents were keen to see education offered at the highest level while making it accessible to as many families as possible.

In 1972 Jerry and Peggy helped to create the Vancouver Montessori School which was housed with the Community Music School in the Model School building in Vancouver. When it became necessary to move the two schools' locations, the Community Music School evolved (under the care and direction of Jerry and Board Chair Iby Koerner) to become the Vancouver Academy of Music, relocating to its current address in beautiful Vanier Park. The Vancouver Montessori School moved to various locations before settling into their current facility on Barnard Street in Vancouver. It was a point of pride



Left: Jerry playing in a brass quintet in Louisiana; Right: Jerry with wife Peggy



Left: Jerry playing trumpet; Right: with a professor

to Jerry that his wife, Peggy, and daughter Dana were both involved in teaching at VMS, and Dana continues to hold a position teaching there today. The Vancouver Academy of Music at the time Jerry was Music Director also housed a large ballet program, with Soonee Lee as its inimitable department head. Jerry was delighted when his youngest daughter Alice, after a successful ballet career in the USA, moved back to Vancouver and continued to nurture and grow the ballet department at VAM. She would take over from Soonee in 2003. Jerry's other two children, Karen and John, also ended up making their (eventual) homes in Vancouver. Karen is a titled violinist in the VSO, and she played together with her dad in that orchestra for a number of years. John works in business and liked to joke with his parents about being the only kid to successfully avoid an arts or education job.

Jerry thrived in Vancouver, and through his hard work and artistry he created an incredible performing career. He continued as Principal Trumpet in the VSO for thirty years, served as Principal Trumpet in the CBC Radio Orchestra for thirty concomitant years, played first trumpet in the VSO Brass Quintet, taught as a sessional at the University of British Columbia, conducted the Vancouver Youth Symphony Orchestra, and served on the faculty of the Courtenay Youth Music Camp from 1970 - 1998. After retiring from his playing positions, Jerry continued as the Music Director at the Vancouver Academy of Music, retiring in 2010 after 39 years of guiding the school. Under his Directorship the Academy gained diploma-granting status, and VAM through his

years of leadership fostered and educated thousands of students. You will find graduates of VAM in every major orchestra in Canada, many with significant performing and recording careers.

Beyond his impact on the musical life of his adopted city Vancouver, which he truly changed, Jerry was important to his family as a father and grandfather. The family was devastated to lose Peggy in 1999, and Jerry struggled to find his way without her. With time, he created a new relationship with his own children, and enjoyed being grandfather to four boys. He loved hosting large family dinners for every holiday, and watching and listening to his kids and grandkids share their interests with him. Jerry was particularly proud to share his many recordings, made with both the VSO and the CBC Radio Orchestra, and saw them as an artistic legacy for his family and his community.

We are so proud of all that our Dad accomplished, and of how far he came both in his career(s) and throughout his life. He will be remembered as kind, complicated, gregarious, and a diligent, hard-working father. We hope you are able to listen to some of his recordings to have a moment to commune with his artistry. We think he would like that.

PEOPLE IN THE NEWS

ASLAN ASLANOV (alumnus, Amanda Chan) will be graduating from the University of British Columbia this spring after successfully completing his Master of Music in Piano Performance.

JAVIER CANSECO (theory faculty), together with editor Derek Remeš and translator Jane Hines, served as a proofreader and advisor in the first complete English translation of Friedrich Marpurg's "Treatise on Fugue" (1753-54). This project was commissioned by the Fryderyk Chopin Institute in Warsaw, Poland.

ERIC CAO, MACKENZIE HARRIS, OTIS PEAKE, STEPHEN FRANKLIN of the Acer Brass Quartet (Chamber Music, Kristy-Lee Audette) participated in a masterclass at the University of British Columbia's BrassFest with acclaimed French horn player Gail Williams this past January.

ALANA CHAN (piano, theory faculty) recently became an RCM examiner for both remote and in-person examinations.

OLIVIA CHO (alumna, Joseph Elworthy) won 2nd place at the 2023 Sheans String Competition in Edmonton.

SNOO CHOI (violin, Ji Eun Jenny Lim) won 2nd place in the Concerto Category in this year's Vancouver Kiwanis Music Festival.

ROBYN DRIEDGER-KLASSEN (voice faculty) was recently involved in numerous exciting concerts at the Orpheum Annex and Orpheum Theatre with the Turning Point Ensemble performing Berg's *Seven Early Songs* and Schoenberg's *Orchesterlieder*, and as the soprano soloist in Beethoven's *Missa Solemnis* with the Vancouver Bach Choir. She also toured Croatia and Spain with the Turning Point Ensemble in May.

LUCAS GUO (cello, Joseph Elworthy) is a Canadian Music Competition National Finalist.

ALICE LAN (cello, Joseph Elworthy) has been accepted to the University of Toronto with full scholarship; she is also a Canadian Music Competition National Finalist.

JULIAN LEE DE VITA (cello, Joseph Elworthy) has been accepted into the 2023 NYOC (National Youth Orchestra of Canada). After 2 weeks of chamber intensive classes in Ontario, the orchestra will tour around Canada for 3 weeks. They will be giving performances in Kingston, Mont Laurier, Quebec City, Charlottetown, Halifax, Saint John and Toronto.

JIAYU ANGEL LI (violin, Ji Eun Jenny Lim) won 1st place in the Concerto Category in this year's Vancouver Kiwanis Music Festival.

RACE LI (cello, Joseph Elworthy) is a Kiwanis Music Festival Junior 'A' Strings Provincial Festival Representative, and is a Kiwanis Vancouver Cello Club dual medallion winner for the Junior Cello Concerto and Junior Concert Group.

YEKAJIELINNA LIAN (cello, Joseph Elworthy) has been accepted the McDuffie Centre for Strings at Mercer University.

CAROL LIU (cello, Joseph Elworthy) has been accepted to the Oberlin Conservatory.

SUNNY SHE (violin faculty, VAM S.K. Lee College alumna) won the Vancouver Symphony Orchestra first violin audition in January 2023.



Meet the Ashongs: A Talented Trio of Musical Siblings

The Ashong kids: Keenan, Enrelle and Kaydrian. They're the most musical trio of siblings that I've ever met, and yet when I spoke to their lovely parents, Ellen and Kwaku, I was fascinated to hear them profess to have no musical inclinations of their own.

"Actually, neither of us play any instruments," they laugh. "We're not musically inclined."

I had only recently watched Keenan and Enrelle play very long and difficult pieces on the violin for a preparatory recital, and I remember being astonished by the dexterity with which they both played for their young ages — only ten and eight years old, respectively! And so I was quite amazed to hear this from their parents. It made me realize how fundamental an institution like VAM is in the lives of young children, and how teachers and welcoming learning communities can bring out such immense talents in first-generation music learners.

When I asked Keenan, Enrelle and Kaydrian how they feel about VAM, I immediately heard a resounding chorus of enthusiasm.

"They all like it," their Dad laughs. "Everybody at VAM is just really nice. No one's pretentious in any way. Even though people have all these accolades and talents, everybody's just really nice. We'll have them stay there until they're too old to go, basically."

What do you think makes attending classes at VAM such a special experience for your kids?

"It's the camaraderie amongst all the kids. Even though they're all at different talent levels, they just all get along so well. And even the teachers — we've met a lot of other teachers who teach other instruments throughout the school, and everybody's just like a big family," he explains. "When we first started coming here, we obviously

didn't know anybody. But over time, we've met a lot of parents, and all the teachers have been super welcoming, and Joseph is really welcoming as well.

Keenan, what do you like most about VAM?

"My favorite thing about VAM is that I get to play in the orchestra. I like to play in the orchestra because I like to hear the harmony of all the other instruments. With all the harmonies, the music sounds really nice."

How do you feel about playing in an orchestra compared to just playing by yourself?

"I like playing with the orchestra more than just playing by myself."

What is it like studying violin with Domagoj?

"He's amazing! He can catch me when I make mistakes with my articulation, my technique, and my bow hold. He's my favourite teacher."

Mom and Dad, what is the family's weekly musical schedule?

"We've got Violin twice a week, orchestra once a week, on Saturdays, and then also Harp once a week," Dad explains.

"Both Ennelle and Keenan practice all three instruments on a daily basis," Mom adds. "For Ennelle, I would say the majority of her time is spent on the violin and harp, and for Keenan, that would be his violin and piano."

It's wonderful to witness this kind of passion and dedication at such young ages. All three children have such a bright future ahead of them, and I sincerely look forward to watching Keenan, Ennelle and Kaydrian grow up within VAM's musical community.



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Ian Parker, piano

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MAY 26, 2PM | ORPHEUM

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Alumni Spotlight: Tianyu Zhou

Tianyu Zhou is an internationally acclaimed Chinese-Canadian concert pianist with musical roots that began at our very own Vancouver Academy of Music. She has played concerts in over 15 countries around the world, and has studied with Arie Vardi at the Buchmann-Mehta School of Music, Wojciech Switała at the Karol Szymanowski Academy of Music, Marina Geringas at the Royal Conservatory of Music and Lee Kum-Sing right here at VAM. She recently sat down with me for a conversation about her amazing musical journey:

How did you first come to VAM?

“I did a masterclass with Professor Lee Kum Sing, and after that, I decided to study here. This school ended up being the place where I grew up -- my second home.”

You started the piano when you were four. How would you describe yourself as a young learner?

“It’s really funny. A lot of people think, you know, Asian parents, tiger mother,” she laughs. “But no. My mom was like, okay, you’ve practiced for five minutes, please go do

something else! But I was always wanting to play the piano, and she was telling me, ‘It’s so tough. It’s such a long journey. It’s very competitive. Do something else.’ But I just really, really loved it. I remember when I was five, I wrote on a sticky note: ‘I want to become a concert pianist.’ And my mom was like, ‘What! This kid’s crazy. Most kids are just playing with toys!’ And she actually tore it down. But there was this one song that I played by Tchaikovsky -- I think it was Andante or something. I was only four or five years old, and I was like, “Mom, you have to listen to me play. You have to. And it was a really slow, kind of depressing song for a five-year-old, but I was so into it. So I played for her, and she was like, ‘Okay. I need to go talk to your dad. Maybe we should take this seriously.’” And I guess that was when my parents finally realized, ‘Alright, maybe she really does have the talent for this.’”

What happened from that point on?

“I took piano seriously,” she smiles. “I was practicing here [at VAM] like crazy. The piano tuner probably hated me,” she laughs. “In room seven. I was here every day. And I could have practiced at home, but I just would always rather

practice here. Actually, I think I broke my record here by practicing 12 hours in one day. That was the max that I never did again, thank you very much.”

Describe your relationship to music.

“Music is a part of me. It’s a huge part of me. I’m constantly listening to music and practicing, and when I practice, sometimes I get into a very different zone. Sometimes after long hours of practice, I don’t want to talk to anybody. I just want to be in that, that ... It’s so difficult to explain music in words,” she smiles. “Sometimes I get emotional. Sometimes people tell me, ‘Oh my god, you look so serious!’ But I’m just in my zone. If I just practiced a very depressing piece, let me still be in it, you know?”

Which piece or pieces have challenged you the most?

“Goldberg Variations by Bach, for sure. Actually, I wouldn’t say that it’s challenging because I loved it so much, but I think people think it’s challenging because it is 30 variations. It is very, very long, but I really enjoyed the process of learning it, and I still practice it from time to time right now. But it isn’t challenging in the way where I think, ‘Oh, this is a huge mountain to climb.’ No, because I love Bach. But it is challenging to play in a concert, obviously, because it’s so long. I once played it in the first half of a concert, and I still had other pieces to play in the second half. That was challenging. But a piece that really challenged me would be Schumann’s Kreisleriana. It’s my favourite piece, and I actually learned it in Poland with my professor, Wojciech Switała. I had a lot of fun learning that. I think that was my first big piece from Schumann.”

What was it like doing your master’s degree in Poland?

“Poland was unbelievable. I think it was in 2014 that I went to a summer festival there and did masterclasses with several different professors. One of them was Wojciech Switała, and I contacted him afterwards and told him that

I really wanted to study with him. And he is probably one of the greatest pianists that I have ever heard. He doesn’t do many concerts, but his recordings are precious. Precious. Sometimes, in lesson, I would just listen to him play and think, ‘Oh my gosh, can you just play for me for the whole lesson?’ I learned so much from him. Not just musically, but also as a person. He’s such an amazing pianist and educator, and sometimes you can hear him practicing earlier than all the students.”

What was your most memorable performance?

“I’ve had some incredible opportunities. In Poland, I was really honoured to play in many amazing music festivals. But what amazed me -- actually, shocked me -- was being invited to play the piano for both the President of Poland and China. I never imagined in my life that I would meet one president, and there were two of them, sitting there with the first ladies. I was so nervous!” she laughs. “And before the concert, I felt like I was going through airport security, because they have to check your purse and everything. That was a unique experience.”

What advice do you have for current students considering pursuing further education or even a career in music?

“Just be yourself. Enjoy what you do. Love what you do. Really. If you don’t like it, don’t do it.”

After hearing Tianyu share her international musical journey, I know that I speak for the entire VAM community when I say that I can’t wait to see what is next for her. It was incredible hearing how her journey first brought her to VAM, took her through its storied hallways, and then catapulted her career around the world. Her story is an inspiration, I’m sure, to young pianists with the very same dreams.



*Just be yourself. Enjoy what you do.
Love what you do.*



Congratulations!

COMPETITION WINNERS

FEBRUARY - APRIL, 2023

2023 EDITH LANDO GIFTED YOUTH COMPETITION

Name	Award	Teacher
Charles (Jiseop) Lim, cello	Edith Lando Scholarship (\$1,000)	Joseph Elworthy
Jae Park, violin	Chua Tiampo Memorial Scholarship (\$600)	Lawrie Hill
Wallace Lung, violin	Eugenie & Edward Yeung Scholarship (\$500)	Lawrie Hill
Mingzhe (Lucas) Guo, cello	Malcolm G. Aikman Scholarship (\$250)	Joseph Elworthy
Adam Ngui, violin	Ann Lesley Bain Memorial Scholarship (\$250)	Domagoj Ivanovic
Allen Ding, piano	Joseph & Frances Cohen Scholarship (\$250)	Amanda Chan
Sofija Dimitrijevic, violin	Harold & Florence Morris Scholarship (\$250)	Domagoj Ivanovic
Yuxiao Sophie Ni, piano	Yashwant & Tarun Damji Sidpra Memorial Scholarship (\$250)	Amanda Chan

2023 JEROLD GERBRECHT WOODWIND & BRASS COMPETITION

Name	Award	Teacher
Bienne Wu, flute	Senior Category, First Prize (\$300 scholarship)	Paul Hung
Bowen Xiao, saxophone	Senior Category, Second Prize (\$200 scholarship)	Tina Wang
Otis Peake, french horn	Senior Category, Third Prize (\$100 scholarship)	Nick Anderson
Aeri Seong, flute	Junior Category, First Prize (\$300 scholarship)	Brenda Fedoruk
Howard Jin, trombone	Junior Category, Second Prize (\$200 scholarship)	Ellen Marple
Rachel Wei, flute	Junior Category, Third Prize (\$100 scholarship)	Brenda Fedoruk

2023 BARBARA CLAGUE FESTIVAL OF SONG

Name	Award	Teacher
Aaron Yurkowski	Senior Category, First Prize (\$300)	Caroline Jang
Samuel Dezell	Senior Category, Second Prize (\$200)	Emma Parkin
Zhengtong (Maggie) Dang	Senior Category, Third Prize (Tied, \$100)	Kira Fondse
Ryan Tang	Senior Category, Third Prize (Tied, \$100)	Sarah Tatto
Carlos Gao	Junior Category, First Prize (\$300)	Alan Corbishley
Katie MacLachlan	Junior Category, Second Prize (Tied, \$150)	Emma Parkinson
Jingyi Wu	Junior Category, Second Prize (Tied, \$150)	Caroline Jang