

impromptu

Member Newsletter ■ September 2025

ARMTA Calgary Branch

LETTER FROM THE EDITORS

Welcome to the latest edition of Impromptu! As summer winds down and we ease into the rhythm of fall, we hope this newsletter finds you feeling refreshed, inspired, and perhaps even a little impromptu in your own musical adventures.

In this issue, we're shining a spotlight on **Franz Schubert**, an especially fitting choice given our publication's name. Schubert's Impromptus are among his most cherished works. Though his life was brief, his musical legacy continues to resonate deeply.

Did you know Schubert composed over 600 art songs (Lieder) before his death at just 31? He also worked at a remarkable pace, once writing an entire symphony in just a few days. Despite his extraordinary talent, Schubert spent much of his life in relative obscurity, overshadowed by more celebrated contemporaries. Still, he was surrounded by a devoted circle of friends who organized intimate musical gatherings (Schubertiades) where his works were performed and loved. It's a powerful reminder that creativity and community go hand in hand.

At ARMTA Calgary, we strive to embody that same spirit of support and artistic connection. Whether you're teaching, performing, composing, adjudicating, or simply enjoying music in your daily life, you are an essential part of our vibrant and generous musical community.

Among some of the familiar ads that you see in this edition are some new and exciting sponsors! We are pleased to include them, both old and new, in our newsletter. The remarkable loyalty of our "old" sponsors consistently amazes us; we are delighted with these ongoing relationships. And it is with an Ode to Joy that we welcome the newest sponsors to our newsletter.

We could all return the favour to our sponsors by sharing our newsletters with our students, parents and colleagues. Perhaps you could email a digital copy of each issue to them. Or...even easier, enroll to start receiving hardcopies mailed directly to you and put them in your studio for anyone to peruse. To sign up for this free service, just email armtaofficers@gmail.com.



"Schubertiaden" by Julius Schmid, 1897

If you didn't take part in this year's CFMTA Conference in the unique and beautiful Montréal, Québec, you definitely missed out! Did you know that we offered a generous grant for up to three branch members to attend? Two astute members applied and received \$1000 each. They both wrote about their experiences and you can practically hear the elation behind their words. Be sure to read their reviews on pages 12 to 15.

And are you aware that our branch sends the Chair to each CFMTA conference? If it is held in Calgary, we will reimburse the cost of the conference ticket. If it is held within driving distance from Calgary, we will reimburse up to \$1000 to cover additional costs such as hotel, gas and meals. And if the location requires plane travel, we will reimburse up to \$2000! Is that incentive to serve on the board as Chair or what?! Read what our current Chair, Sandra Joy Friesen had to say about her experience on page 4.

Thank you for all you contribute to our community. Like Schubert's Impromptus, may your music making this season be spontaneous, sincere, and richly expressive. We encourage you to take a moment (perhaps with a cozy cup of something warm as autumn arrives) and enjoy this edition of Impromptu. ■

Rachel McLellan & Maryellen Pankratz



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EVENT CALENDAR: <https://armta-calgary.com/event-calendar/#!event-list>

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For a detailed list of our board and conveners, sign into <https://armta.ca/calgarybranch/>

GREETING FROM THE CHAIR

Sandra Joy Friesen

As we greet the new season of lessons, classes, performances, competitions, concerts, festivals, and so on, I hope we are all able to do it with inspiration acquired through different types of professional development activities this past summer. I am sure everyone has at least one highlight of their summer that can spur imagination and energy for the upcoming season. The highlight of my summer was attending the CFMTA National Conference in Montréal QC, July 3-5, 2025: A Meeting of Musical Cultures and it was inspirational from beginning to end. This report lists my highlights from the conference and fortunately for all Calgary Branch members, a YouTube link (available until September 1) was sent July 21 for everyone to enjoy!

But first of all, THANK YOU, ARMTA Calgary Branch, for supporting me to attend this fabulous conference! There was so much wonderful and new material presented from a variety of music educators. The historic École de musique Vincent-d'Indy provided an elegant ambiance for the presentations and piano competition, and our lunch hours on Thursday and Friday in the recently added glass-window atrium were serenaded by young students playing. In the Trade Show area, Canadian music publishers (Red Leaf Piano Works for example) and RCM always have a presence at these conferences as well as representatives from a variety of music-related organizations, such as the Esther Honens Competition and Steinway Pianos; plus, there were a variety of music-program representatives sharing their material. One in specific I want to highlight is the "Creative Music" program founded by Josée Allard, <https://creativemusic.ca>. Her approach to teaching music through improvisation is compelling and it is my hope that we have her share this approach to our teachers in the near future.

It was impossible to attend all the presentations, but I made a concerted effort to be everywhere I physically could, gleanings as much as possible in a short time. 8 sessions I was able to attend:



- 1) Midori Koga & Jess Johnson sharing their expertise on "whole-body processes" for learning, practicing and performing music,
- 2) Lois Svard (in absentia, presented by David Potvin) sharing her extensive research on how music study activates specific brain activity that builds "cognitive reserve" essential for mental longevity,
- 3) Ana Ortuzar & Rama X'icam teaching South India's ancient rhythmic art form "konnakkol" which is a superb method for learning rhythm and developing musicality for any style of music,
- 4) Jacques Després offering his artistic interpretation of Debussy's Preludes Book I,
- 5) Asher Armstrong introducing us to 3 relatively unknown female composers: Henriette Bosmans, Varvara Gaigerova and Katherine Parker,
- 6) Isabelle Héroux giving a lively workshop on balancing discipline and artistic freedom in teaching,
- 7) Jarred Dunn providing an informative look at filiation of music editions/publishers and impressing the importance of doing our research to help us understand a composer's intentions with respect to fingering, pedaling and music markings,
- 8) Iris Hung presenting her research based in the principles of Dispokinesis towards a "touch-based approach" to teaching.

In addition to this packed schedule of presentations, I enjoyed hearing 2 of the semi-final programs on Thursday - pianists from New Brunswick and Québec. On Friday evening, the 3 finalists showed their wonderful talent and I was so proud of our young Albertan pianist, Jaydon Zhuang, who received the award for "Most Promising Pianist"! On Saturday morning, the open-air bus tour included in the conference package was a delightful excursion to see important architectural and cultural sites, and it was made that

much more fun with our tour guide's sense of humour. The final event was the luncheon with keynote speaker Claude Webster, author of "The Performance Handbook" who engaged us all with his entertaining approach to dealing with the very real and critical issue of stress management and mental preparation for performance.

Many of the presentations were cross-disciplinary, beneficial for teachers of any instrument, and applicable to speech arts with respect to developing and exploring creativity, artistic interpretation, stress management, and performance preparation. I would strongly encourage all teachers to consider attending conferences that provide so much essential material, as well as being a place to network and connect with teachers across the country. It was completely inspiring, and so again, I thank our Calgary Branch for their encouragement for me to attend.

Wishing all teachers a richly rewarding teaching year. ■



WELCOME OUR NEW BOARD MEMBERS!

I became a member of ARMTA in 1995, moved from northern Alberta to Cochrane in 2002, and promptly joined the Calgary ARMTA Branch. Over the following years I have worn many hats in ARMTA, AMEF, NATS and the CFMTA. Now, as an official “senior citizen”, I am maybe not up to juggling a dozen balls at a time anymore....but I am happy to lend my time and share ideas with Calgary ARMTA once again. I look forward to seeing the creative teamwork of our Board, and serving our Calgary Branch teachers in 2025-2026 year ahead. ■



Nathene Arthur

Nathene has served on our board many times before and we are thrilled to have her back again this fall after a brief absence!



Marissa Feria

Marissa was born in Taiwan and moved to Calgary, Alberta at the age of 12, where her love of music truly began to blossom. She earned her Performance Diploma under Peter Turner at Mount Royal University, followed by a Bachelor of Music from the University of Calgary, studying with Marilyn Engle. Marissa also holds a Suzuki Piano Pedagogy Diploma from MRU, having trained with Merlin Thompson.

Her passion for connecting with others through music led her to volunteer for singalongs in retirement and nursing homes—experiences that inspired her to pursue a Master’s in Music Therapy from Wilfrid Laurier University, which she completed in 2007. ■



Looi is passionate about music education and has operated two studios in Calgary since 2001. She is presently the director of Musica Academy. Her passion and leadership have evolved into starting a mentorship online platform - TeachMusic.Academy for young teachers interested in the Music education industry. Looi is also actively involved in the local arts community. From judging at local talent shows, performing at local plays to jamming with local musicians, she continues to be an influence in the local music and arts community. Looi is also a mom of two teenagers and lives with her husband in Calgary. ■



Looi Tan



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Franz Peter Schubert 1797 – 1828 (lived to age 31)

Franz Schubert demonstrated an early gift for music. As a child, his talents included an ability to play the piano, violin and organ. He was also an excellent singer. In 1808, he earned a scholarship that awarded him a spot in the court's chapel choir at the Stadtkonvikt. One of his educators included the esteemed composer Antonio Salieri, who lauded Schubert as a musical genius. In 1812, Schubert's voice broke, forcing him to leave the college, though he did continue his instruction with Salieri for three more years.

In 1814, Schubert fell in love with a young soprano at his church named Therese Grob. He wrote many of his Lieder and soprano solos in larger choral works for her, including the soprano solo in the Mass in G Major. His hopes of wedlock were crushed by a law at the time that prohibited marriage if the man could not prove the financial means to support a family.

The young composer had written a number of piano pieces by 1814, and had produced string quartets, a symphony, and a three-act opera. Under pressure from his family, he enrolled at a teacher's training college in Vienna. He took a job as an assistant at his father's school and worked as a schoolmaster for the next four years. But he also continued to compose music.

For much of his childhood, Vienna was under siege by Napoleon's army. Following Congress in 1815, Vienna was essentially a police state. Growing up in this ever-changing political landscape had a profound influence on the composer.

Schubert did have one other significant relationship. He purportedly fell deeply in love with the unattainable Countess Caroline Esterházy, whom he had tutored beginning in the summer of 1818. The two shared a close relationship, but the difference in their social status made marriage impossible.

In 1818, Schubert had grown tired of teaching and left to pursue music full-time. He contracted syphilis in 1819. The treatment in those days was mercury, which is now known to be toxic and the diagnosis sent him into a deep depression. And yet, he turned to music for escape by continuing to produce at a prolific rate. None of the finished pieces brought him the fortune he deserved or so greatly needed. His prosperities began to change in 1821, when he began offering his songs on a subscription basis. In Vienna especially, Schubert's harmonious songs and dances were popular. Across the city, concert parties called Schubertiaden sprung up in the homes of wealthy residents.

More about syphilis:

A chronic and infectious disease, syphilis is primarily transmitted through sexual contact. If left untreated, it can cause severe long-term health problems affecting the brain, heart, and nervous system. The disease has had a major impact on human history – in particular before the discovery of antibiotics, when it was often untreatable and led to debilitating physical and mental conditions.

In the 19th and early 20th centuries, many prominent composers, writers and artists were believed to have contracted syphilis. Other composers believed to have suffered from syphilis include Robert Schumann, Scott Joplin, and Jean Sibelius. The disease's long-term effects include mood swings, hallucinations, paralysis, and dementia.

By late 1822, Schubert became severely sick. On March 31, 1824, Schubert wrote miserably to a friend: 'I feel myself to be the most unhappy and wretched creature in the world. Imagine a man whose health will never be right again, a man whose most brilliant hopes have perished, to whom love and friendship have nothing to offer but pain. Each night, on retiring to bed, I hope I may not wake again, and each morning but recalls yesterday's grief.'

Oddly enough, his first and final public concert took place on March 26, 1828. This proved successful enough to allow him to finally buy himself a piano. On November 5, Schubert went to bed with a fever. The syphilis and the toxic medications he was taking for it, were taking their toll, and his immune system was breaking down. On the evening before his death, Schubert went to bed with a fever. His brother Ferdinand wrote to their father that Schubert had been delirious. Though only half-conscious, he said to me: 'I implore you to take me to my room, not to leave me here, under the ground.' Schubert died on the afternoon of November 19, 1828. ■



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Schubert Fun Facts!

COMPOSER CORNER

Born, raised, lived and died in Vienna, Austria

Until young Franz was four years old, the family lived in a one-room apartment.

Many of Schubert's works were hidden in his own chests or in the houses of his relatives.

Schubertiaden: Informal evenings held on a regular basis by Schubert's wealthy admirers. In addition to music, they often included poetry readings, dancing, and other social activities

Beginning at the age of 15, Schubert composed over 600 Lieder (German art songs), which masterfully fuse poetry and music. Many of his songs are miniature dramatic works in which the piano accompaniment is an integral character. "Der Erlkönig," has three distinct characters, sung by one person and the piano accompaniment takes on the role of the horse.

Schubert adored Beethoven—he was awed by him, to the point that he was too timid to even introduce himself to the musical giant when the two passed one another on the streets of Vienna.

The fourth surviving son of a schoolmaster and his homemaker wife. The couple went on to have 14 children, but sadly, only five survived infancy.

Quotes

"I try to decorate my imagination as much as I can."

"Happy is the man who finds a true friend, and far happier is he who finds that true friend in his wife."

"When I wished to sing of love, it turned to sorrow. And when I wished to sing of sorrow, it was transformed for me into love."

"The world resembles a stage on which every man is playing a part."

"A mind that is too easy hides a heart that is too heavy."

"My compositions spring from my sorrows. Those that give the world the greatest delight were born of my deepest griefs."

"Why does God endow us with compassion?"

References

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<https://www.brainyquote.com>

At the Cinema, A Night to Remember

by Bronwyn Schuman

A night at the cinema with music from the movies: create a night that your students and their families will never forget! Amy Melnychuk, a piano teacher originally from Calgary, recently held such an event for her students. I got the chance to interview her to hear all about her event and to share it with other teachers! Read on to learn more!



Bronwyn: Hi Amy! Can you describe your recent event?

Amy: I recently hosted a “Music from the Movies” event, where students performed musical selections from movies such as Star Wars, Amelie, Moana, Pirates of the Caribbean, Godzilla, Titanic, Inside Out, Up, Harry Potter, and The Hunger Games, to name a few. I rented a community space, set up a projector, and created a little movie theater. I handed out popcorn and guests watched piano-themed short

films (featuring Tom and Jerry, Marx Brothers, and Victor Borge) while settling in. Then, students each performed their chosen pieces with corresponding movie scenes displayed on the screen. Afterward, the projector resumed showing short films while guests mingled and enjoyed snacks. Over seventy-five people attended!

Bronwyn: Wow, that sounds like an event I would have LOVED as a kid — and an event I would now love as a teacher and parent! What gave you the idea to have this event?

Amy: For the past few years, I have been hosting monthly events for my students. The Halloween event is always popular: there are scary decorations, students wear their Halloween costumes, everyone plays spooky music, I give out lots of candy, and families take photos in the photo booth. This mid-fall performance improves the pacing of the first semester and can be an effective way to encourage new performers to embrace the feeling of “the spooks” when going up in front of a crowd. A few years ago, at the start of our Halloween concert, a friend and I performed Saint-Saëns’ Danse Macabre, arranged for violin and piano. We used a projector to silently display the 1980s PBS cartoon of the piece while we played. This reminded me of the role live pianists played during the era of black-and-white silent films — setting the tone, enhancing emotions, and filling the silence — before movies had their own sound. I thought it would be fun to give my students the opportunity to provide music for their own favorite movies, and some even practiced along with their video clips to sync their playing to the visuals!

Bronwyn: You are so creative. What did you notice with your students’ playing as they prepared for this event?

Amy: My students were highly motivated, making great progress and tackling more repertoire than usual. The students’ role was to add emotional depth and atmosphere to the on-screen events, and I found that their playing became more expressive as they understood what they were trying to convey and could articulate it to me. This focus on representing scenes, characters, colours, or moods will hopefully carry over into future repertoire.

Bronwyn: And how did your students’ families respond to this event?

Amy: Families loved the event! The combination of live music and film created a unique, interactive experience. Some family members even participated in the music-making, like a brother joining The Pink Panther on clarinet, or a dad singing along during Aladdin. One parent mentioned that it was fun and nostalgic to rewatch so many clips from shows he hadn’t seen since childhood. Another parent sent me this: “What an absolutely fabulous movie night — it was such a brilliant idea! The boys had an amazing time and couldn’t stop talking about it. Thank you for making music such a fun and special experience for the kids. Your creativity and effort really make a difference! Bravo!”

Bronwyn: Wow! What in specific do you think made this event such a success?

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Amy: I've tried many different recital formats, and the winning elements seem to be food, a theme, family involvement, and a fun activity. Unprompted by me, many students chose to dress up as characters from the movies from which they were performing music! This event allowed students to share their work in a less formal setting, and those with stage fright felt more comfortable knowing the audience was focused on the screen.

Bronwyn: That's such a good point. Students often feel more relaxed when they know the visual focus is elsewhere. How did your students respond to this event?

Amy: Many students are already begging for another Movie Event! It was rewarding to see them enjoying the experience with their friends and families, and they were very engaged, laughing loudly during funny moments, silently absorbed in emotional pieces, and exclaiming with excitement when a movie they liked was announced.

Bronwyn: Are there any other pedagogical thoughts you would like to add?

Amy: Hosting regular events motivates efficient practice and reduces performance anxiety. Students prepare more thoroughly with performance deadlines and look forward to the social time, treats, and activities, building a strong positive association with the instrument. I mix student-chosen and teacher-chosen music, encouraging them to explore new repertoire. Often, students approach me with requests of pieces they have heard other students perform at events. Themed events expose students to a variety of styles and engage a

wider range of learners. Piano can be a solitary pursuit, but regular events create a sense of community as students get acquainted and motivate each other. I also encourage collaboration — students play together, or parents join in on duets or other instruments.

Bronwyn: And do you have any tips for teachers who might like to do this project with their own students?

Amy: Yes! Bring a stand light for the piano (the lights will need to be off for the projector)! Ensure video clips are prepared in advance to avoid delays or ads and make sure they don't autoplay. If students want their efforts to count toward an upcoming exam, there's a lot of graded movie music in the RCM Popular Selection List. Popcorn is a key part of creating the movie theatre atmosphere, but it's messy, so buy pre-popped and make sure your venue is okay with the smell. It is also salty, so make sure you have plenty of water or juice boxes available. I used a donation box at the entrance with a suggested minimum of \$10 per household, which covered space and food costs. Finally, set up a hand-cleaning station near the piano—students should use hand sanitizer before performing to keep the piano clean and prevent greasy fingers from damaging the keys! There will inevitably also be popcorn bits all over the floor, so bring lots of cleaning supplies for afterwards.

Bronwyn: Thank you so much for sharing your time and idea, Amy! I know that other teachers will undoubtedly love to hear about this event and try it out!

Amy: Thanks for the interview, and to all the other teachers: I hope your piano movie nights are awesome! ■

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Music Marathon Celebrates 10 Years

by Lorna Sewell

The 10th Anniversary of Music Marathon was a huge success. Sunridge Mall was very happy to work with us and is looking forward to partnering with us again next year. Performers, family members, mall patrons and teachers all offered positive feedback.

As in years past, Steinway Piano Gallery provided at no charge, their Boston GP 217, 7ft Grand Piano. Nadia Khlynovskaya's husband, Russ, very generously took care of arranging, delivering, setting up, and monitoring the sound equipment rental from Long & McQuade for the entire event. April Leung volunteered all morning as a "floaters/photographer" and Mary Martell volunteered for part of the afternoon. Thank you to all the volunteers who brought Music Marathon 2025 to fruition.

Our chair, Sandra Joy Friesen checked students in and ensured that the photo consent forms were signed for each performer. She then directed the flow of people to Lorna Sewell. She collected and recorded donations and wrote tax deduction receipts as requested. Nadia Khlynovskaya handed out a special 10th Anniversary Music

Marathon music book bag to each performer. This was well received. Sandra Joy skillfully took on the role of master of ceremonies throughout the day between studio groups. She also kept the piano singing to fill the gaps.

The student who raised the most funds was Tia Podesky from Karen Gerelus' studio. She raised a whopping \$625 and received the grand prize, donated by Studio Bell. Margaret Chen from Sandra Joy Friesen's studio received second place for raising \$300. Third place was a tie for raising \$200 and this was between Christian Bracho from Nadia Khlynovskaya's studio and Michael McGuire from Amanda Kinnear's studio. Three additional students received prizes for random draws held throughout the day. Thank you to our sponsors who donated these generous prizes: Studio Bell, Stage West, and Calgary Philharmonic Orchestra.

NEW THIS YEAR! The Studio Spirit Award went to Nadia Khlynovskaya, the teacher whose studio collected the most total donations. Nadia's studio alone contributed \$1821.44 to this year's fund-raiser! ■

**Participating
students raised
\$3,856!**



For more pictures, prize
and sponsor details, visit
our webpage at [https://
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music-marathon/](https://armta-calgary.com/2025-music-marathon/)

We are looking for a fourth convener to join our team! Interested in becoming a co-convener for the next Music Marathon? Please email Lorna Sewell at lorna@asongforlife.ca. As the saying goes, "many hands make light work"!

The tentative date for next year's marathon is Saturday, May 30, 2026

2025 Creative Poster Competition Winners

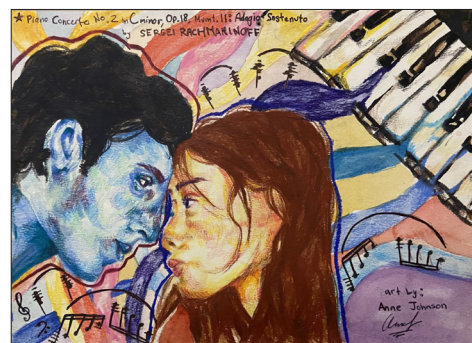
Senior Age Category



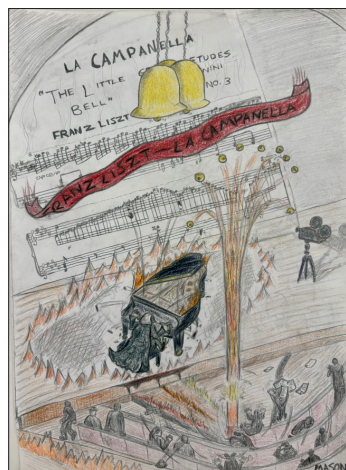
First Place
Riyanika Mishra, Piano
Student of Looi Tan



Second Place
Tanya Li, Piano
Student of Nadia Khlynovskaya



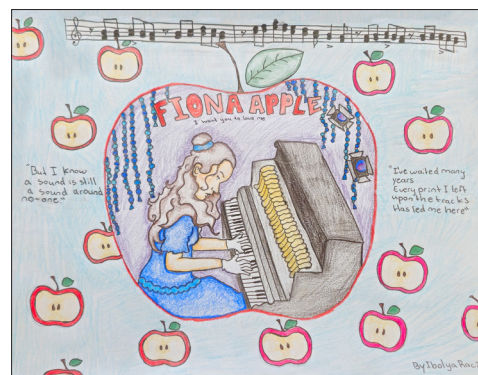
Third Place
Anne Johnson, Piano
Student of Melodie Archer



First Place
Mason Green, Piano
Student of Marissa Feria



Second Place
Anika Smith, Violin
Student of Gloria Chu



Third Place
Ibolya Racz, Violin
Student of Lorraine Carpino



First Place
Bryson Green, Piano
Student of Marissa Feria

Elementary Age Category



Second Place
Sofia Bella-Asunio, Piano
Student of Esther Bing



Third Place
Claire Tung, Piano
Student of Esther Bing

2025 CFMTA CONFERENCE GRANT RECIPIENT

Nathene Arthur

**\$1,000
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My Five Days in Montreal

My husband Rick and I arrived in Montreal a couple days before the conference. We took the bus-line from the airport and had a four block walk through the crowds heading to the Montreal International Jazz Festival. We spent Tuesday and Wednesday walking and enjoying the many free outdoor music concerts. On Wednesday night we met up with CFMTA members and went to Ruebens for some famous “Montreal smoked meats”. The vibe of Montreal was wonderful with fountains, statues and busy sidewalk cafes.



ARMTA Provincial Presidents (Past and Present)

Rosemarie Horne 2023-24 (Edmonton Branch)

Annette Bradley 2024-current (Red Deer Branch)

Nathene Arthur 2022-23 (Calgary Branch)

Conference Day 1 Thursday morning, shuttles drove us from the hotel to the magnificent L'Ecole de Music Vincent-d'Indy (EMVI), our venue for the conference sessions. The registration desk, swag bags, meals, free coffee service, helpful volunteers and evening socials all went well. The Trade Show had interesting vendors. I especially liked the “Solfege and Music Dictation” a new workbook series by Marie-Jose Timperley which fills a need with students – see <https://tnlnk.co/SolfegeMusicDictation>. The atrium boasted a \$320K Steinway “Bolduc” seven foot grand piano, which some of us played, and on which talented students performed beautifully during our lunch breaks. There were 25 sessions and showcases in addition to the Trade Show and National Piano Competition semi-finals. Choosing which sessions to attend was not easy.

My first session was presented by Julio Gonzalo, who described the syllabus and goals of the Examination Program at the EMVI. I wanted to hear what they do in comparison to the RCM, CC or the CCMC, each of whose syllabi I have worked with. They have around 500 student exams and competitions per year, and their examiners

have a very precise rubric which discusses sound, technicals, lyricism, rhythm and style with after-the-exam written comments at every exam level. Their main goal is to cultivate a lifelong love of music. See: emvi.qc.ca/programme for more details or contact jgonzalo@emvi.qc.ca for access to the English version of their syllabus.

My second session was entitled “Might Music Lessons be The Fountain of Youth for Older Adults?” This was based upon a research paper entitled “The Musical Brain”. If you google the clinician’s name (Lois Svard), you can see her research about the neuroplastic changes that occur in students (even older adults) after one year of music lessons. The brain can build its “cognitive reserve” especially well with music, as music includes all sides and portions of the brain as we practice/play our instruments. And this reserve can help later on in life with issues of cognitive decline by providing a larger “bank account” of neurons and pathways to draw from as the brain ages. Another bonus is that when we are emotionally involved (playing music we like), the interest and excitement uses even more parts of the brain. Interventions for age-related cognitive decline were discussed with the Hanover-Geneva Study exploring brain reactions to a group of seniors with a “music culture class” versus a “piano playing class”. Both groups did better than the control (non-music) groups, but the piano playing class maintained their brain’s white matter and increased the grey matter over the other classes. Great news for sure. You can check it all out at <https://www.themusiciansbrain.com/>.

I spent the afternoon at the Piano Competition Semi-finals (more about that later). Then the shuttles whisked us back to the hotel, where we had a 90 minute outdoor patio cocktail hour while a talented classical guitarist played for us in the sunshine.

Conference Day 2 The RCM Showcase with Janet Lopinski highlighted the new RCM Singing syllabus. There will now be 11 repertoire books, including a Grade 10 level. Levels 5-8 will include acappella selections. For piano there are new optional requirements for ear tests including melodic improvisations levels 5-10, and more. There is also a chance to include lead sheet reading in levels 5 and up.

After this session ended I jumped right into the last third of “Baroque Dance for Musicians”, led by Natasha Finlay. Natasha has a bubbly personality, and is a dance notator, talk show host for the National Ballet of Canada, RCM Examiner and Gold Medalist. This was a unique and fun session, with teachers taking turns playing the piano while the others viewed and then practiced the dance choreography. I was able to get a group picture of everyone, including Natasha in her lovely baroque gown.

To finish the morning sessions I attended “Exploring the Invisible: Interbellum intercultural Piano Works by Women”. This lecture recital was led by Asher Armstrong of Toronto and our very own Sandra Joy Friesen. The piano works of three (between-the-world-

wars) women composers were highlighted: Henriette Bosmans, Jean Coulthard, and Katherine Parker. Sandra Joy then performed the Six Preludes by Violet Archer. These were very engaging, and I particularly fell in love with Prelude 3, for which I was able to imagine all kinds of exciting story lines.



After lunch, I attended an absolutely one-of-a-kind session presented on a large screen by 2018 Honens winner, and current instructor at Juilliard and CUNY, Nicolas Namoradze, entitled “Neurorecital: a New Frontier in Music and Science” sponsored by Honens. Nicolas used “Glass Brain Technology” showing how neuroscience can deepen our understanding of music’s profound effects on the mind and body. He used a brain cap, EEG recordings, and a SPIRIO piano playing and re-playing while wearing a headset, so he could reproduce the identical timing of performances. The pictures which were taken of the brain (he had the cap on 8 hours a day) were then colour coded. We could see on the real scans which area of the brain were being used (red indicated “theta” 4-7 hertz, blue indicated “alpha” 8-12 hertz, green indicated “beta” 13-20 hertz). Then the show began! While we listened to the Bach piece he was playing, we could see on the large screen different areas lighting up, different colours, sometimes looking like stars, other times like rivers, highways full of traffic, sheet lightning, lightning strikes, fireworks. To me, it looked “cosmic”! This was so fun to watch and see how his brain reacted to the different musical demands and emotions. I already have tickets to the documentary video coming this fall sponsored by the Calgary 2025 Calgary Honens competition. It will be held on October 15th at 8pm, Infinity Dome Theatre, TELUS Spark.

The last talk covered the history of Chinese music including all the early beginnings and dynasties, where the six main traditional “arts” were archery, equestrian, math, calligraphy, literature and music. The speaker, Dane Ko explained that early operas were the most important genre of Chinese music and beginning notations did not include explicitly notated rhythms until the 19th century. He explained the oral traditions of teaching, and the literary and programmatic intent of almost all of the music. As literature was considered a higher rite than music, most music also has a story associated with it. Traditional Chinese music is for self-cultivation instead of simply for performance or entertainment. It is used to build integrity and character, regulate emotions, align with moral virtues and contribute to social harmony. Dane shared many thoughtful comparisons to western music. For instance, practice itself is to be considered an opportunity for meditation, reflection and spiritual growth, and not just something to prepare for an upcoming event. He was ultimately chosen as the 2025 winner of this competition.

The National Piano competition semi-finals and finals were held on Thursday and Friday, respectively. What an excellent opportunity for these students to represent their provinces and showcase their gifts. We were drawn in by the magnitude of the stage presence and artistry of all three finalists, representing Quebec, BC and Ontario. Jaydon Zhuang, representing our province won the \$1,000 Quebec Musical Education Foundation “Award for the Most Promising Artist”. Congratulations Jaydon!

Conference Day 3 Keynote speaker Claude Webster discussed in a very personal way how musicians can learn to perform under pressure, speaking as a 1980’s competitive pianist who eventually went to University and studied psychology. He is now a performance-coach to professional musicians, athletes, and public figures. He shared how to normalize stress/danger responses with many examples of what works, and what doesn’t, mental and physical preparation, result goals versus mastery goals, last minute “tools” (five minutes before going onstage) and reminded us that the brain “performs best when having fun and feeling grateful”. I am looking forward to reading his book this summer “The Performance Handbook”. He has an easy and fun approach and it will not feel overly academic.

As I look back on this amazing conference, I am so glad I was able to go. I want to thank ARMTA Provincial and ARMTA Calgary for making this possible through their Conference Grant programs. **If you are thinking you would like to go to the next conference in Nova Scotia 2027, remember to apply for the grants.** This can be an amazing experience you will always remember, and shouldn’t break your bank account. ■



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2025 CFMTA CONFERENCE GRANT RECIPIENT

Rita Thurn

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CFMTA 2025 National Conference in Montreal, Quebec

July 3rd 2025 marked the first day of this year's national conference and the next few days will be very busy.

We all received a Complementary selection of Piano Music for our perusal along with a CD "Diamond Jubilee Collection". It had been recorded in the Glenn Gould Studio, by CBC. There were nine piano finalists to compete in the National Piano Competition for CFMTA.

There was an overwhelming selection of clinics to attend. Far too many, so I had to pick and choose which ones I would find to be the most intriguing.

Julio Gonzalo provided us with an insight to the Ecole de Musique Vincent D'Indy's Exam Program that they use in their collaborative methods of teaching. The Piano program has certain objectives. Theme of Autonomy in practicing, Self awareness, Methodology as well as Stress and mood management. They have four levels of study. Beginner "O", Elementary 1-3, Intermediate 4-6 and Advanced 7-8. Their method teaches Artistic training, technique, Lyricism and coordination. They abolish the Time period, Each student studies at their own pace. Exams are held in December and May. The students gain a positive experience. Somewhat different than RCM or C.C.

Lois Svard: "Fountain of Youth for Older Adults." This Clinic was mostly in reference to Anatomy of an Individual. The session discussed in detail the Brain Neurons, which consist of Dendrites, Axons, Axon Terminals, Myelene sheaths becoming Neurotransmitters. The neuroplasticity causes change in the brain due to learning and experience. The summary broke down the functions of Memory, Impulse and cognitive flexibility. Music practice does prevent age related cognitive decline. The Geneva Study had 155 retired Adults ages 62-78. They studied piano for at least a year. They were tested on 6-12-18 month periods. Coordination and episodic memory improved. Grey matter increased in size and the white matter stabilized. More information is available at www.musiciansbrain.com - scroll to CFMTA 2025.

Francisco Luis Reves (My photo shows this class in session) "A Bailer La Bamba. Each of us in this clinic had the opportunity to play various percussion instruments. Trying Rhythms of various cultures, eg. Bamba Regions, Ponce Catano, Guayama etc.

Ana Ortazar & Rama Xicam (KONNAKKOL) This clinic discussed the Rhythmic Art form in the Music Education of South India. They explored possibilities within the Western Influence. The different use of Konnakkol as an aid in Music Pedagogy, broadens vocabulary (Ergonomic & Onomatopieic (SOLKATTU). It teaches grammar by allowing the use of complex phrases and structure, rather arithmetic and Geometric. They showed different positions of teeth, tongue, lips & hard palate vocally. A very interesting session.

Natasha Findlay: Baroque Dances for Musicians. Natasha demonstrated these dances. We became participants on the dance floor having the opportunity to learn them in detail, paying particular attention to the tempo of these various dances (Photos of our participation are included).

Asher Armstrong & Our Very Own Dr. Sandra Joy Friesen. "Exploring the Invisible Interbellum, Intercultural Piano works by Women. Impressionist: - Henrietta Bosman: A Dutch Composer & Pianist. 1895-1952. Wrote for strings, piano & some voice. "The Preludes for Piano". Jean Coulthard 1908-2000, Canadian Composer & Educator. Wrote music for Strings, Piano and Orchestral. 13 Piano Preludes.



Rita with Sandra Joy Friesen in Montreal

Varvara Gaigerova (1903-1944) 4 Sketches - mostly like Scriabin. Very Talented, She went back to Moscow in 1939 and was hospitalized for 4 years. Sonata #3 E- was written in 1925. Katherine Parker 1886 - 1971. An Australian Composer & Pianist born in Tasmania. She is best known for her Piano Piece "Down Longford Way". She wrote 7 Piano Solo's between 1925 & 1936 Her Nocturne #4, pianism had great symmetry, harmonically rich and melodically very robust. Dr. Sandra Joy Friesen gave us an Outstanding Performance for the remainder of the Clinic. She was Our Highlight of the Conference.

Student Presentations were given by Steven Zhai, Olivia Adams and Megan Dufrat in B209. This also gave me some time to attend a Master Class as well as the Semi Finals in the Piano Competition, especially our very own Albertan Jayden Zhuang of Edmonton.

My last session was "Pedagogical Exploration of Selected Solo Works". Reena Esmail (1983-) Music written to Poetry of 1398-

1448 in Hindi by Kabir Das - "Dhire-Dhire (Little by Little), from a Song cycle of Kabir Songs. This was commissioned by MTA of California Foundation It premiered on July 3rd, 2022. It was based on Raga Megh (ascent \& Descent).

Kamala Sankaram USA (1978 -)Opera "Thumbprint 2014, a 90 minute Opera. Librettist-Susan Yankowitz. Based on the Oppression of Women).

Naresh Sohal 1939-2018 (Punjab, India) Poems of Tagore I. Many passages of microtones, slides with movements from dissonant to consonant melody. It is advanced musically. You will find the excursion of vibrato in this work. The microtonal scale explores microtones between principal tones, becoming aware of the amount of space between whole and half steps. There are 22 microtones within an octave.

I had some time to venture into the Trade Show. It was great to network with other colleagues in Canada as well as one from Japan and another from the U.K.

Thank you ARMTA Calgary Branch for giving me this opportunity to attend CFMTA 2025 National Conference. ■



*Karen Gerelus with
Co-Presenter Amy Boyes, SRMTA member*

The Music Teachers National Association (MTNA) held its annual National Conference from March 15 to 19, 2025, at the Hilton Minneapolis in Minneapolis, Minnesota. This event brought together a diverse group of music teaching professionals for a series of educational and networking opportunities.

Some of the highlights included sessions regarding phrasing & voicing, early childhood learning, and a major theme of the conference proved to be incorporating AI in the studio activities. The advanced masterclass was captivating as Michelle Cann worked with advanced piano students on connecting gestures with tone production. It is always inspiring to connect with colleagues from around the world, including Leila Viss (US), Samantha Coates (Australia), Janet Lopinski (Canada), and Pamela Pike (US). My fellow ARMTA member, Jani Parsons, presented a relevant & timely session regarding burnout and career balance.

Overall, the 2025 MTNA National Conference in Minneapolis served as a platform for professional development, collaboration, and celebration of excellence in music teaching. ■

WORKING HARD VS. WORKING SMART

The Key to Meaningful Musical Success

Merlin B. Thompson, friend and colleague of ARMTA

As a music teacher, have you ever encountered students who believe that sheer effort equates to progress? I know I have. Take, for example, my student Alex who was determined to master the second page of a three page piece. Every time he sat down to practice at the piano, he laboured through the page with unwavering focus, no matter how long it took. Working through the page was a painstaking endeavour, taking lots of energy, which he took as confirmation that he was getting lots done. Yet, at his lesson, there wasn't really much to show for all his hard effort. I estimate it most likely didn't go any better during the lesson than it did on his first day of practicing at home. And judging from the look on Alex's face, he may even have been mystified as to why after all that time-consuming and energy-consuming hard work, things don't go any better.

What I've come to understand is that there's a difference between working hard and working smart. Working hard means students put lots of effort into their practice. Whereas working smart means students use their awareness and reflection to evaluate what's going on. They practice with a particular goal or purpose in mind and they pay attention to whether or not they're getting closer to the goal or further away from the goal. If my student's practice had included working smart instead of working hard, he would have noticed that there wasn't really any improvement day after day - a signal that he should probably try a different strategy.

The problem with working hard is that students may misinterpret their effort as an indication that they're getting things done, when actually all they're doing is putting in lots of effort. And especially, when the pull of getting to the end of a page or similar goal post may be so strong that students frequently give up working smart in order to work hard.

The most important part of any student's practice is their reflective capacity. Thinking about how they're practicing and what they're accomplishing is what will further students' successful development. Had my student practiced smartly, he might have recognized the lack of improvement early on and adjusted his approach. With reflection, he might have seen how testing his progress as we went along or breaking the page into smaller sections or isolating challenging measures would have been more effective than repeatedly slogging through the entire page.

The pitfall for students is equating effort with accomplishment, especially when they're fixated on reaching a visible milestone, such as completing a page. As music teachers, we can help students overcome this pitfall by engaging their reflective capacity - encouraging them to assess their practice strategies and make adjustments as needed. We can guide students toward working smart by fostering their ability to self-evaluate with questions like:

"What's working well and not working well on this page?"

"What part of this passage is challenging for you?"

"What could you do differently to master this section?"

The good news is that music teachers can help our students transition from working hard to working smart. With regular reminders about incorporating strategies that work, we can help students build and exercise their own reflective approach to practicing by exploring the tools and strategies of working smart. It's all about empowering students to practice with intention, reflection, and adaptability.

What about your studio? Do you have students who fall into the trap of working hard? How can you guide students towards working smart? Where are they successful? Where are they unsuccessful? Are you ready for conversations with your students about working hard and working smart?

As music teachers, I think we can all appreciate how such discussions offer us keys to supporting students' potential and helping them achieve the meaningful, lasting music making success they're looking for. ■



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Calgary Concerto Competition

The Calgary Concerto Competition Gala “Rising Stars” took place on June 1st at the Jack Singer Concert Hall. Each year, Calgary’s most talented rising stars compete in the Rotary Calgary Concerto Competition for the chance to perform with the Calgary Civic Symphony. Four inspiring performers were heard in a special pre-concert recital. Another four incredible young artists performed a movement from their chosen concerti with the full orchestra.

Several of our ARMTA Calgary teachers were represented as teachers and or accompanists of these talented young musicians. The winners performed superbly to an enthusiastic audience at the concert with the Civic Symphony. On behalf of the Provincial ARMTA Recognition Fund, Barb Robertson presented a \$1,000 cheque to each of the two of the winners at the Rising Stars Concert. ■



Barb Robertson (right) presenting award to pianist Coco Zhang



May 23, 2025

Masterclass taught by Jon Kimura Parker (middle)

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Announcing...

Endowment Society of the Calgary Registered Music Teachers INAUGURAL STORY COMPETITION WINNERS

Read all the winners' stories on pages 18 to 27!

Elementary Age Group

Middle Age Group

Senior Age Group

First Place

Max Nedeljkovich
Student of Nathene Arthur

Olivia Chung
Student of Gloria Chu

Sophia Li
Student of Barb Robertson

Second Place

Katie Hughes
Student of Lorne Pankratz

Ruby Day
Student of Nathene Arthur

Jeanne Ye
Student of Susan Roggensack

Third Place

Bhuvi Mohan
Student of Lorne Pankratz

Emilie van der Merwe
Student of Katrina Thompson-Fost

Gabe Guenette
Student of Christina Martin

The Silver Bird, by Max Nedeljkovich

First Place, Elementary Age Group

In an old house, L.V. Beethoven wondered what he would compose next. He went outside and tried to make up songs in his head. Then he saw a bird. A silver bird. He never saw such a gorgeous creature before. Suddenly the bird flew away.

Beethoven followed the bird that swiftly glided over the trees. He wondered where the bird would land. After the bird landed, Beethoven sat down on an old stump. When he caught his breath, he saw the bird landed on a tree. He then realized that he was on Max Nedeljkovich's property. "I better jump over the fence", he said. With presto, staccato jumps, he was back on his own property.

Beethoven started to hear a sweet soft melody. He wanted to write it down. Beethoven wrote it down on paper. After that day, every day he went to the tree where the silver bird sang the song. In the 1800's, he finished the song. He named the bird "Elise". It just fit perfectly. L.V. Beethoven named the song Für Elise. I wonder if any of his other compositions were inspired by other creatures? ■



At just 9 years old, Max is a young creator who is passionate about piano, trumpet, and the world of business. He spends his days using his imagination to compose original symphonies or craft airplanes and boats from wood. When he's not building new inventions, you'll find him creating epic Lego worlds with his two younger sisters or playing with his baby brother. Every day is an adventure filled with music, creativity, and family.

Soccer is My Favourite, by Katie Hughes

Second Place, Elementary Age Group

Once upon a time, there was a girl named Katie. She loved soccer. Once she was doing some tricks, and then she took a drink and her soccer ball was gone! The family was looking and looking but it was not there, and she was sad. Then eventually, she went to bed. When she woke up, she noticed that her shoe was gone. She went outside and her dog Gracie was playing with her shoe. Katie followed Gracie to her dog house, and found her soccer ball! Katie had to go to soccer and she was ready. Then the family lived happily ever after. ■



Katie is 7 years old and lives in Calgary, Alberta. She is in grade 2 and attends French immersion elementary school. Katie can speak English, French and Japanese. Katie loves soccer, ice skating and playing piano. Katie has been practicing piano since September 2023.

Space Walk by Bhuvi Mohan

Third Place, Elementary Age Group

Once upon a time there was an astronaut named Cindy. She journeyed to far off planets. One time she went to a planet called Kliventine. The aliens there were called Kizzys. They were very aggressive, so when Cindy approached them, they attacked. When they attacked her, she didn't get hurt because she was wearing her space suit. The aliens got mad because they didn't manage to hurt her. So the Kizzys sang a song, summoning their deadliest creature yet. It was called the Zarmenth. Luckily, Cindy escaped it by jumping to her spaceship. The sight that she saw out of her window was not pleasant.

The Zarmenth was scarier than it seemed. It was black and slimy and it had tentacles sprouting all over it. Cindy noticed that the Zarmenth had a body shaped like a giant piano. The Kizzy's were furious because she escaped again! They kept clawing at Cindy's window. Cindy accidentally pressed the "Go to random alien planet" button in her spaceship. So now she was zooming off to another planet. She finally reached another planet!

This new planet was called Wildagold. This planet was bright pink and the aliens were yellow. When Cindy jumped off the spaceship, the aliens she saw were nothing like the Kizzys! The aliens were called Wildys and they were the opposite of the Kizzys. These aliens were shy and kind! As Cindy approached them they squealed and scampered. But as she hopped back disappointed, the aliens finally came to her! They were very curious about humans and that's why they finally decided to come to her. When the aliens asked her why she was there (they spoke a little bit of English) she said that she only accidentally came there.

The aliens discussed whether they should let her stay or to tell her that she should leave Wildagold. The aliens spoke in Iat, their native language. The aliens finally decided to let her stay for as long as she wanted. They played the piano because that was what they would do when they welcomed guests. The song they played was very good, and Cindy applauded them. They said that the song was called Space Walk. So then Cindy said to them that she should probably go to another planet to explore. (By now she had changed her mind about going to Earth.) So then she went into her spaceship and zoomed off into space again.

This time she went to a planet called Moma. The aliens are called Momys and they are like giraffes but they are blue. They said to Cindy, the moment she stepped onto the planet, that she should definitely go back because there was going to be a meteorite shower. Then they hurried back to their homes (craters). Cindy looked around for shelter but the meteor shower was already starting. Cindy shielded her face but the meteors just whooshed past the planet. Cindy realized that the meteors were headed somewhere else. She decided to go back to Earth because she had had enough excitement. but when she went to Earth, she was hit with a wave of chaos! She found out that the meteor shower was coming to Earth! And so she came back to space.

She went straight to the planet Moma. She told them that the meteors were going to Earth so that was why she had come back to Moma. She said she was going to other planets to explore. And so she went to a planet called Darma. The aliens there were called

Dammys. They had very short feet so they had trouble walking.

Luckily for them, Cindy came to them and asked why they didn't have wheelchairs like back on Earth. They said they didn't know what a wheelchair was so Cindy showed them a picture of a wheelchair so they would get the idea. They asked Cindy whether or not she had some spare wheelchairs in her spaceship's trunk and she did because the spaceship had originally belonged to her dad, James Bastein.

Her dad had to get around in a wheelchair and in space, planets are really rough so that's why there were a lot of wheelchairs. She gave them each two wheelchairs. And they were really grateful that they gave Cindy a gift. The gift was a brand new shield to protect the Earth from meteors! Cindy thanked them and gave them another gift of gold and their applause crescendoed. Cindy also played piano she had brought with her on this adventure; she played scales and everything else she knew. Then she went back to Earth and protected it from the meteors and she lived happily ever after. THE END ■



Bhuvi is a cheerful and curious third-grade student who loves reading books and chatting with her friends. She enjoys learning to play the piano and often spends her free time drawing adorable animals. Her favourite activity is creating imaginative stories filled with funny, quirky characters. Bhuvi dreams of becoming a paleontologist when she grows up, inspired by her fascination with dinosaurs and ancient life.

The Magic Cello, by Olivia Chung

(Based on "Salut D'amour" by Edward Elgar)

First Place, Middle Age Group

"Zap", the fortissimo lightning struck. "Woooooo", the wind howled in the waves of a crescendo and decrescendo. "Dipple dabble" came the leggiero pouring raindrops. "Swish slash" were the sounds of stringendo footsteps slushing through the mud of people hurrying home. It was a dark and stormy night, Hildegard ran the fastest she could to escape from the orphanage. Anywhere was better than living with Mrs. Edward who treated all children at the orphanage like servants. Hildegard was shivering and huddled close to a tall apple tree deep in the forest. She took cover under the large branches of the leaves.

"Help, help", she heard a pianissimo sound coming from the darkness. The voice was faint and sounded like an elderly man. Hildegard was a loving and caring person, she stepped into the darkness and shouted "Hello, how can I help?" Her voice resonated in the dark woods. "Over here, by the berry bush", said the tired voice. Hildegard walked at an andante pace towards the berry bush and saw an old man laying on the ground. She immediately ran over and helped him up.

"Thank you, my dear. I came out to pick some apples and got caught

up in the storm,” explained the elderly man. The man had a hunch on his back and a long white beard. He carried a walking stick which Hildegard assisted him in getting. “Let me help you home”, Hildegard offered. Hildegard walked beside the old man at a large pace. Eventually they reached a tiny wooden house. When they entered in, Hildegard saw a small chair and a tiny bed. Hanging on the walls were what seemed like a hundred violins. In the corner was a small table with strings and wooden bows.

The old man, named Elgar, turned to Hildegard and said: “You saved my life little girl. I would have drowned out in this storm. As a token of my appreciation, I want to give you my most prized possession. It was passed down to me from my master teacher. You see I am a luthier, I make violin and cellos. My master teacher passed down to me a very special cello. It will only sound when played with the wooden bow made of red oak. For over 50 years I have lived in these woods in search of red oak but have not found it. I now give you this cello, one day when you find red oak, turn it into a wooden bow and hear the beautiful resonance from this cello.” Hildegard accepted the cello and hugged the old man. She had never received a gift ever before at the orphanage. She felt so much love within the walls of the tiny wooden house.

Elgar took Hildegard in and mentored her to become a luthier. He taught her how to carve the wood, setup the sound post, make the bridge and most importantly, how to make a cello bow. Hildegard lived with the old man for 10 years and together they lived in the woods making instruments. Each day they would search the woods for red oak but returned empty handed.

One day, Hildegard went out in search for fresh berries and apples. She noticed a small hole within a row of bushes. Hildegard have never seen these bushes before. She peaked her head through the small hole and immediately froze. On the other side of the bushes was another forest, with rainbows in the sky, birds flying, waterfall trickling down the rocks, and fresh flowers all around. Standing tall in the middle of the forest, with roses all around was a red oak tree. Hildegard pulled off a large tree branch and ran presto speed back to the tiny wooden house. When Hildegard burst through the doors, she found Elgar very sick in bed. Hildegard showed Elgar the red oak wood she found, the old man had only a small smile before he had to close his eyes to sleep. Elgar had become very ill. Hildegard tried nursing him back to health but nothing seemed to work.

Then one night, a piano whisper woke Hildegard. “Make the bow,” whispered Elgar. Hildegard took care of the old man during the day and stayed up late at night to carve the wooden bow from the red oak. By the eighth night, the bow was finally finished. Hildegard was super excited to show the old man, but he barely had any energy to open his eyes. Hildegard tried playing the cello with the red oak bow, there was no sound. Hildegard was in tears, the old man was the only family she had. Mrs. Edward had treated her so poorly but the old man cared for her like no one in the world. She did not want Elgar to die. A drop of her tear dripped onto the hair of the red oak bow. Hildegard tried one more time to play the cello with the new bow, a cantabile sound rang from the cello. Hildegard was in shock, she tried another bow stroke, another sound rang from the cello. Hildegard was so happy; she immediately took the cello and red oak bow to the bed side of the old man.

“Listen, listen to the cello ring!” said Hildegard with excitement. Hildegard sat down with the cello. Immediately her fingers knew

where to be placed. The red oak bow seemed to guide Hildegard’s hand across the strings. “Mi so mi re do ti do fa fa fa ...” The tune of Edward Elgar’s *Salut d’amour* resonated from the instrument. The more Hildegard played, the more she felt the energy of the piece. The sound from the cello was the most beautiful ringing tones. The strings vibrated, the body of the cello resonated with every pitch. The music was so beautiful even the birds and squirrels stopped to listen to the melodious sounds coming from the tiny wooden house. Elgar’s fingers began to respond to the sound, and as Hildegard played the final notes of the authentic cadence the old man’s eyes opened and slowly sat up. The lyrical music had healed his soul and body. Hildegard hugged the old man, her eyes were crying with joy. Together Hildegard and the old man continued to make beautiful instruments and each night Hildegard would play *Salut d’amour* for Elgar and the whole forest to enjoy. Truly, the power of music can heal anything. THE END ■

Ten-year-old Olivia Chung is a passionate performer who fell in love with the cello at age three. She has received multiple awards, including the 2023 Most Exceptional Performer from the Global Musical Arts Competition and First Prize with Honours from the International Youth Music Competition. A student in the Mount Royal Academy Program for Young Artists, she also composes music and is part of the NowBeat Project where her new composition will have its World Premiere at the Juilliard School in May 2025. Olivia sings and dances with the Young Canadians and performs for an international audience of over 150,000 spectators at the Calgary Stampede. She also excels in speech arts, earning two Gold Medals from the Royal Conservatory of Music.



Drifting Away by Ruby Day (Original Composition) Second Place, Middle Age Group

Once “Goodbye.” I whispered, so quietly I could barely hear my own voice. “Be safe darling,” My mother said as I kissed her goodbye. Her blue eyes were puffy from tears and her dark brown hair was pulled into a loose bun making her look as worn as ever, and making me pull her into one more hug. “I will,” I promised, pulling away from her then hugging my father, and crouching down to hug my brother. “Take care of mom and dad for me will ya?” I asked my little brother Joey, hugging him as hard as I can, afraid to let go. “When will you be back?” He whispered into my ear. “I am not sure, but come visit me alright?” I told him. He nodded and then all that was left to do was take the leap of faith into the canoe and begin my journey.

Hot tears streamed down my face, I had never felt so sad in my life. Every bone, muscle, tendon in my body was aching with sadness, tearing me apart. Leaving my family was harder than I thought. “I love you all.” I said, finally finding the courage to stand up, rumple Joey’s messy brown hair, and get into the boat.

My father gave the canoe a push, and then I was on my way. I slowly paddled through the shimmering water, forcing myself not to look back. The trees swayed in the breeze, autumn leaves fell to the ground as I listened to their soft melodies. I sat there, slowly drifting away from my family, heading to take on the bigger world that the river would take me to. Every paddle was one paddle closer to my future as a piano artist but one paddle further away from my family, and my home.

Suddenly I got an idea for a new song. It would be called Drifting Away and it would carry sadness and hope – a perfect song to start off my career! I set down my paddle and pulled out a piece of manuscript paper and started writing. I closed my eyes, trying to hear the song in my head, swaying to the breeze as I scribbled down notes and ideas, the tempo of the river keeping the beat. After a day I had my song almost complete, and the river started to pick up speed – or as I like to call it, the river got very allegro.

But on day two the water started to get dangerously rapid, and then I saw it. A waterfall. My heart lodged into my throat, preventing my scream. But there was no time to be scared even though my brain was in full panic mode. I grabbed my bag, tucking my Drifting Away draft into a plastic bag, and then I held on for dear life. 3..., 2..., 1..., Then I was falling, falling, falling. Leaving my stomach at the top of the cliff. The fall felt like it lasted for an eternity until... splash! I landed in the bottom pool of the waterfall, thanking the universe to have landed upright. But my bag was soaked, and so was I. Oh no, I thought. What if my Drifting Away paper got ruined? I paddled over to the shore and tied the canoe onto a rock. I layed there on the sand coughing and hacking until all of the water was out of my system. Then I grabbed my bag and rummaged through it until I found the paper I was looking for. It wasn’t wrecked. That seemed to be the only good news that day.

I placed my bag back in the canoe but before I got back in to leave I realized how hungry I was, so I quickly pulled out a piece of bread and sat there on the shore for a minute longer. Ok, let’s do this, I thought to myself as I hopped back in and untied the canoe. Then it was back down the river and I was really hoping there would be no more waterfalls. Now I was drifting away from the waterfall and paddling closer to my destiny. The sun was setting, painting the sky with yellows, pinks, oranges, and purples.

Any other time the scene would’ve made me feel happy but nothing could cure my homesickness. I missed my family so much, the heartache was unbearable. I closed my eyes for what only felt like a second but when I opened them the moon was half in the sky and everything was covered in inky black shadows, making it hard to see. I tried to stay awake, tried to speed the process up by paddling faster, but my arms started to ache, and drowsiness started to take over. And even when I tried to fight it, it took over and I fell asleep.

When I woke up the sun was high in the sky, but when I looked around I wasn’t on the river anymore, and I wasn’t alone. I was washed up on shore. And there was a raccoon that had gotten into my bag and was eating all of my food!

“No!” I yelled, then I picked up my paddle and started waving it around in an attempt to scare it away. Finally it scurried away but it was too late, all of my food was gone and who knew how many days of traveling I had left? I fell down to my knees, shaking my head. Why did everything always have to go wrong when I needed it to go well the most?

I sat there on the shore for a long time until all of my tears dried up and I was able to stand again. I grabbed my Drifting Away piano draft and started adding to it, changing it so it could fully capture my journey so far. Basically making the song miserable, because that had been my adventure so far, but I tried to make it happy and hopeful. Once I finished adding the notes I knew that I had to eat something, so I headed into the trees and tried to find some fruit. I got no such luck. After what must’ve been an hour I gave up and continued down the river, hoping I would get to town soon so I wouldn’t starve to death.

The river carried me farther and farther until finally I could see buildings in the distance. My heart swelled with pride. I had made it, on my own to town. Which was no small feat. A smile crawled upon my face as I slowly approached. I could now pursue my dream as a musician!

Now as I am writing this I know I will never forget how much my journey changed me. I will never forget how Drifting Away became a hit song, starred in many movies, giving me enough money to purchase my own home here in town. And it really is hilarious to tell people the waterfall story, it was on the front cover of the Newspaper yesterday, too. In big, bold, black ink, the title read: Famous Musician Ruby Day Finally Reveals The Inspo Of Her Famous Song, “Drifting Away”. I even hung the Newspaper up on my wall to remind me of my journey.

Since then I have written more on my piano. But there is one thing that brings tears to my eyes living here: I miss my family. All of a sudden somebody knocks on my door. I stand up to go check who it could be. I can’t think of anyone, no one talks to me that much except my music producers and sometimes my neighbour. But when I open my door, my heart slams against my ribs as tears stream down my face like a waterfall. They’re happy tears though. Because standing right in front of me are the people I have missed the second I had to say goodbye. Finally, I’ve been reunited with my family. ■

Ruby Day is 12 years old and lives with her family near Bragg Creek, Alberta. Music and Language Arts are two of her biggest passions, so when this contest came along, she was excited to write a story to accompany her most recent composition. When she isn’t reading or playing piano, she enjoys playing volleyball, spending time with her family outdoors, or snuggling with her two adorable dogs. Ruby’s biggest musical inspiration is Taylor Swift – ask her any song or lyric and she will surely know it!



Mouse Dance by Emilie van der Merwe

Based on "Mouse Dance" by Jakub Metelka

Third Place, Middle Age Group

Chirp! Flutter, flutter, flutter, went a few sparrows in the bushes. Molly the mouse jumped in fright because she had not expected noisy birds behind her. Molly was in the garden playing with her friend, Sam the snail. She sighed loudly because playing with an adagio snail was no fun at all! Real mouse friends was what Molly really wanted, but she has had no mouse friends since back in preschool. It was not that she was mean to anyone or anything like that, it was just, no one seemed to like her because she was very shy. Yet, Molly was not ready to give up! She was determined to make some mouse friends!

First, Molly bought a bag of candy and brought it to school, hoping that if she gave some to mice that looked nice they would be friends with her. But instead of being nice to Molly, the mice Molly had shared her candy with grabbed the candy bag and scampered off. Molly felt very dolente. How could they be so mean? Luckily brave Molly was not ready to give up! The very next day she invited some mice from her class over to her house. The two snobby girl-mice got to Molly's house, saw that there was no cake to eat and marched off back home. Poor Molly was absolutely devastated. How could everything go so wrong? Molly slowly walked up onto the porch when she saw a white envelope with a golden seal sticking out of the mailbox. What could it be?, Molly wondered as she scampered over to the mailbox. She opened it, and was very surprised to see her name printed neatly on the envelope. She opened it curiously, suddenly interested and saw a very pretty card covered in delicate flowers. Molly opened the card and read it. Then she read it again, and again. What luck! Molly could not believe her eyes! By noon Molly had the card memorized. It went like this:

Dearest Molly, My name is Charles.
I am the mouse prince, and I
invite you to come join me at
the Royal Ball. It is held at 4 o'clock
tomorrow afternoon at the palace.
See you there!
Charles

Molly couldn't wait! The prince! A ball! She was sure she would have an amazing time! The next day Molly could hardly contain her excitement. She and her mother went to the mall and Molly picked out a very pretty dress with light pink roses neatly embroidered on the dark blue silk. Before Molly knew it, it was time to go. The morning flew by so fast! Her dad dropped her off at the palace and left. Now Molly was on her own! She couldn't help but to feel a little lonely. Don't worry Molly!, she told herself, Charles will be here soon, right? Fifteen minutes later Charles still didn't show up and Molly was starting to worry. Just then the announcer silenced the orchestra that had been playing and the big crowd of mice went silent. "Ladies and gentlemen, Prince Charles is no longer able to join us tonight due to illness. Please partner up so we can begin!", he said. Oh no! Molly thought. Now she had to partner up with a stranger! Molly nervously strolled past three mice and awkwardly smiled at them. They just stared at her and then walked away. I am never going to make friends, Molly sadly thought as she sat down in

a corner. Suddenly Molly felt a tiny paw tap her on the shoulder. She slowly turned around and saw a tiny white mouse smiling up at her. The tiny mouse said "Hi! I'm Alice, and I'm here all alone. Want to be friends?" "Of course!!" Molly squeaked! The rest of the evening was wonderful! Molly and Alice spent the whole time laughing and dancing to the swaying beat of the lovely vivo and pianissimo music, composed by Jakub Metelka, that came from the huge orchestra. A week later Molly and Alice were best, best, friends! Even though Molly still sometimes played with Sam the snail, Molly and Alice did almost everything together. Alice had lots of friends at school, and Molly became friends with them all! Soon enough Molly, Alice, and all their other friends started a dance club called Mouse Dance! (because that was their favorite song by Jakub Metelka). Molly was overjoyed to have so many friends, and she was a very happy mouse for the rest of her wonderful, musical life! ■

Fine (The End)



My name is Emilie and I am in grade 5. My favorite subjects are Language Arts and Science and I also love music! I have been playing the piano since I was 6 years old, and it is absolutely amazing. I also do Irish dancing and I love animals, especially bugs!

The Leafy Sea Dragon by Sophia Li

Based on "The Leafy Sea Dragon" by Ina Dykstra

First Place, Senior Age Group

They say the ocean never forgets. I wish that were true. The waves had barely grazed the sandy shores of the beach before retreating back into the endless horizon, as if snatched away by the sun itself. Dazzling rays of light danced across the surface of the water, making it look as though the whole ocean was set ablaze like a flickering candle. The sky was a warm glaze of marbled watercolor hues. It was during times like these that the world seemed to hold its breath and still for just a moment.

But nothing ever lasts forever, and no matter how much you may hate it, the night is always sure to fall. My name is Levi Murray, youngest son of legendary fisherman Warrin Murray. I've spent my entire life on my father's boat, alongside my brother - Oliver. Tying knots and throwing nets; hauling in what the ocean would give us, all day every day. It was hard work, but my father had always taught us that hard work will pay off eventually.

"The sea favors those who can endure," he would tell us, with a smile so bright you felt as though you could go blind just by looking at it. I wanted to inherit his strength and large build so badly. Both him and my brother never seemed to get cut from the pointed rocks that lined the coast. Never lost trying to fight a large catch when it started pulling drag. It's been so long since I've heard him say that. So long since I've seen him smile that way. Or at all for that matter.

I had always loved the ocean, with its unpredictable, fleeting

elegance; the near-tangible brinniness in the cold wind as it whipped around my body. The colorful array of shells that I selected from the water's edge and displayed proudly in my room. I wonder how much dust they have collected by now. So I've learned to bite my tongue when I'm dragged out to go fishing in the early, unreasonable hours of the morning, and I silently bear the constant stinging sensation that courses through my hands when those thick ropes dig in and leave marks on my skin. Because despite everything I had always loved the ocean, just like my father. It gave us everything we have. And then it stole away my brother.

"Levi! Are you just going to stand around there like a statue or are you going to help me haul in this catch!?" came my father's voice from behind me, gruff and angry. The entire boat seemed to rock with the sound, as if startled out of a deep slumber. I didn't bother turning around. I couldn't look into his eyes. Those pale blue irises that used to remind me of the sky on a clear summer day. Now all I can picture when I look at them is ice.

"Sorry father," I mumbled robotically, hardly audible against the crashing of the waves. The sea was a rolling expanse of grey and blue today, almost like the churning in my stomach when he turned away silently. Apologizing was little more than a practiced motion now. Bow, duck your chin, avert your eyes, rinse and repeat. I'm sure he's probably tired of it - father always seemed tired and irritated nowadays - but it's become a habit nonetheless. Something safe, something to cling onto, like the anchor for a ship. If I lose it, I'll surely drift away into the open sea and be lost forever. But maybe then, I would be free.

My hands moved on instinct alone as I tugged at the net. It was heavy, weathered and rough, a lattice of braided ropes with the occasional strand breaking off at its ends. We had been meaning to get a new one to replace it, but things changed after the incident. Some things suddenly, some things gradually. Either way, it was always there. You could always feel it. I don't remember too much about it, and I'd never dare ask my father, but deep down I can't imagine it's anything special. A stormy sky, an angry sea. His cries were sharp, staccato - cut off as his head vanished under the water yet again. Every sailor knew of the dangers of the sea.

Flashes of lightning broke through the darkening sky. It wasn't fair. How my father seemed so unaffected. He never even cried, not even when my brother's sodden body had washed up on the shores near our house, as if trying to come home one last time. He just seemed angry. How the world could just move on as if nothing had happened.

They say the ocean never forgets, but it seemed it had already forgotten my brother. Sometimes I wonder if my father would be happier if I drowned instead. "Tch, must be a kelp patch somewhere," he scoffed in disdain as he stared at the mesh I had pulled in. Sure enough, it was completely adorned with layers of thick, dark leaves of seaweed that it probably picked up when we dragged it across the ocean floor. Except one blade looked strange, out of place. It was just that bit too curved, a bit too light in color. Not enough to severely throw you off, but enough to make you stop and question. Or at least, enough to snap me out of my thoughts for a bit.

"Is that...?" I wondered out loud as I reached out and peeled it away from the net. It couldn't be. No. But of course, it was. "Drop that. Just a worthless piece o' trash." I froze at my father's command,

harsh as ever. A fisherman could always tell when something was a fish, even if said fish was a master of disguise. My father barely talked at all these days unless it was important. But I couldn't listen. Just this one time I couldn't bring myself to obey. I'm still not sure why; it was as if my body wasn't my own anymore. Like my strings were being pulled by someone else for once.

I quickly took the creature in my hands and plunged them into the water so that it could breathe. The exasperated groan from my father pierced my heart like an arrow. I remember Oliver used to take me out to the ocean in this little red canoe he and I had built over the summer. We would travel somewhere offshore and then jump into the water with nothing more than the clothes on our backs. He had especially loved the stronger currents. "Every sea creature has a different response to them," he explained once. "Really highlights the diversity hidden in the marine, don't you think? Some fish run away from it, some predators use it to hunt their prey, other animals simply let themselves drift away wherever. But my personal favorite is this one."

Without hesitation, he dived down into a nearby patch of seaweed. I took a deep breath and followed, even though the water was unusually cold today. The kelp forest shivered as Oliver gently brushed aside a leafy frond, as if he was drawing back a curtain in the morning. Only, there was nothing on the other side of the blades. Or so I thought.

A tiny creature, barely visible against the translucent, sunlit sheet of green poked out its head, revealing twin orbs that seemed to shine with guarded mystery. Its delicate tendrils flowed gracefully in the



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water in brown and green stripes that mimicked the seaweed that surrounded its tiny body. Like something right out of a fairytale. I was mesmerized.

"It's called a leafy sea dragon. Whenever the currents grow strong, it will cling on tightly to a kelp leaf with its tail and wait it out," he told me when we resurfaced. "Isn't that cool, Levi? It just goes to show that even a small, delicate body can harbor more strength than you know!" He gave me a knowing wink before laughing, hearty and rich. It made the water feel just a bit warmer at the time. Even though I didn't understand it at the time, I nodded my head in a starry-eyed daze nonetheless. I think I get it now. It takes a lot to weather through a storm, patience, resilience...Hope.

The leafy sea dragon in my hands right now looked nothing like the one from my memories. It was thin, even for the species, with their small, lithe elegant build that they had helped them adapt and survive. Worse, it was hardly moving as I tried to resuscitate it, not even a faint twitch or jerk. If not for the subtle movements of its eyes, I would've assumed it was dead. I couldn't let go. Not now. Not without giving it a chance. That was what my brother would have done.

"Levi, you've got to let it go! Can't you see that the storm is picking up?!" Like how you let Oliver go? I hadn't even noticed that the sky had faded into a dull, muted livid color; layered with clouds. It would surely rain soon, and the sea was already starting to lash out like a whip. The boat oscillated and thrashed in protest as it was thrown around effortlessly by the waves like a tossed salad, despite my father's frantic attempts to reel in the movements with the steering wheel. Thunder clapped from somewhere in the distance, and the wind's howling crescendoed as it bared its sharp, icy fangs. But despite everything I never let go of the leafy sea dragon.

"LEVI MURRAY-!" Steadying the half-alive creature in one hand, my other reached back to hold the edge for balance, gripping it so hard my knuckles turned white. But it wasn't enough. Slowly but surely I could feel my body tipping towards the water, as if being sucked into a vacuum. Static rang in my ears, along with my father's shouting from somewhere in the background. Salty water splashed in my face, cold and tangy on my tongue; droplets completely blurring my vision. Chills bled down my spine. It was useless. Even a small, delicate body can harbor more strength than you know. I'm truly sorry brother. I wish that was true.

I closed my eyes as I waited for the inevitable. The leafy sea dragon went limp in my grip for just a split second before drifting away like a fleeting dream. Large, rough hands wrapped firmly around my arm, but couldn't pull me away from the boat's edge. Not even my father could fight fate. If only he could. Maybe Oliver would still be alive. He would have been a great fisherman, maybe even better than my father. Or perhaps he would have gone on to become an athlete, or even a music composer like his idol, Ina Dykstra. He had always dreamed about meeting her. Now he never would.

But then, right before gravity could plunge me into the water, the hand seemed to get a new burst of energy, and a strong wave sent both of us backwards, flying into the opposite side of the boat. My father's body cushioned my fall, arms wrapped tightly around my small, shivering frame. I couldn't remember the last time he had done that. He was shaking too, I realized. From the cold, or from fear, I couldn't tell. He hugged me as if I was the only thing in the

world that mattered to him. I had nearly forgotten the feeling. Maybe he didn't forget about Oliver after all.

I don't know how long I spent there, clinging onto my father like a lifeline, but eventually, just as suddenly as it had started, the ocean's temper mellowed. Its surface fell back to an easy quiet, as though nothing had happened. From the corner of my eye, I could barely spot a small, stick-like shape in the water, curled around a blade of seaweed.

The night is always sure to fall, but the sun will rise all the same the very next day. So maybe if you just hang in there - if I just stay right here - it'll be enough. Hope against hope. The leafy sea dragon looked as though it was nodding to me. ■



My name is Sophia Li. I am a ninth grader born and raised in Calgary, Alberta and stories have always been a huge part of my life, whether that be in the form of pop-culture media or classical literature. I have always been a very passionate writer, and I believe that it is through my ability to find inspiration in unconventional places that I am able to solidify my unique voice as a writer; something that unites all of my best received pieces. I hope to continue honing my craft in the future.

Classical and Pop Music by Jeanne Ye

Based on "Four Romantic Pieces, II, Allegro Maestoso" by Antonin Dvorak

Second Place, Senior Age Group

In the exam room, next to the piano, I place my bow on the strings of my violin. I hear my examiners say the name of my first piece, which is "Four Romantic Pieces II, Allegro Maestoso" by Antonin Dvorak. I cue my accompanist with a quick nod, and begin. My first three chords ring out with passion and intensity; I sway and lose myself in the music. But only briefly.

In my bedroom, I leaned in closer to my music stand as I continued practicing the same passage over and over again. It was the ending - a quiet yet fast-paced run that ended ridiculously high on the E string - that didn't make sense to me. Why would something so grand be played softly, when the other proud passages were played with weight and strength? But no matter. I simply resolved to practice until I got it right.

My phone buzzed, and I jumped. I put my violin down and picked up my phone to see the class group chat text inviting everyone out to pizza. Not that they would miss me, but I told them I needed to practice more, and declined their invitation. I kept playing for hours, but the pizza stayed in the back of my mind. As I play in the exam hall, playing becomes an almost out-of-body experience. I crescendo and decrescendo as if Dvorak himself were directing me through clairvoyance.

I sat alone on the playground bench, halfheartedly tapping my left fingers on my right forearm to practice my violin even when it wasn't there. I never used to mind being alone - I don't even think I noticed - until one day Preston brought his saxophone in to play Careless Whisper for the entire class and suddenly was the most popular person to ever exist. I thought that there was nothing he was doing that I couldn't do. That passage probably took less than ten minutes to learn, while I practiced day and night. Why was it that playing banal modern music made you popular, while an advanced musician such as myself was forced into loneliness? So for the first time, when the group chat sent an invite to work together on our sixth grade science fair at the library, I agreed. Even though I had more practicing to do.

At the library, I tried to talk with other people. Maybe they'd like me more if I reached out, like Preston did. But when one of my classmates asked what classical piece I've been so busy practicing, for some reason I told her that I don't play classical. I said that I've been playing Toxic, by Britney Spears, even though I hate the song. Surprisingly, she and her friends began to eagerly discuss Britney Spears with me. I didn't know much, but I tried to smile and nod along with them as I enjoyed this strange newfound company.

Onstage, I begin the passionate crescendo where I alternate between the melody and the harmony with my accompanist. On my way up to the grand chords, I feel my fingers slip on the fingerboard and my right hand accidentally moves several inches up on the bow. The intonation doesn't falter too much though, and I continue playing as if nothing happened.

When we returned to school the next day, I got a few friendly smiles from the girls that I'd discussed pop music with. Maybe Britney Spears wasn't that bad. At lunch, I tentatively walked over to their table and asked if I could sit with them. I usually went home to eat so that I could spend any extra time I have on practicing violin, but it wouldn't hurt to socialize a little. I had researched and learned all I could about Britney Spears last night instead of practicing anyway, and I wanted to show off my knowledge.

The girls agreed and slid over on the bench to give me a spot. But instead of talking about Britney Spears, they discussed the science fair and what projects they're doing. I hate science, but since they like it I figured I should listen. When one of the girls begins to complain about her parents' expectations that she does a complex project on genetic engineering, I felt a little excluded and couldn't help but chime in with something, anything. Even if it was false. I told her that I understood how she was feeling (I didn't) because my parents were harsh on me too (they aren't). I tell them a story where I went home with a 95 on my math test and got yelled at (although this has never actually happened). The girls comment sympathetically, and for some reason I feel my mood boost a little. Badmouthing my parents formed the feeling of a small lump in my throat, but I swallowed it down and kept telling them my stories.

When I got home, I eyed my violin a little before decidedly sitting down at my desk and spending my practice time surfing the internet for interesting science experiments. My fingers rush up and down the fingerboard during a sixteenth note passage with rapid string crossings. My right arm bounces the spiccato and tries to brush the strings with grace, but something is wrong. I don't even notice that

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I'm speeding up until I hear my accompanist stumble a bit to keep up with my pace. I see one of the judges write something down. A growing feeling of panic begins to rise inside me, but I keep playing.

On the day of my exam, my new friends and I waited at the front door for our parents to come pick us up. My dad was going to pick me up and drive me to my exam after. While we waited, Jenny, the girl who spoke to me at the very beginning about Britney Spears, asked why I continued practicing violin if I don't like playing classical. I don't even hesitate before I lie to her. I say that I wish I could quit, but my parents have such high expectations of me to do well on my upcoming exam. I tell her that I hate the violin, because it was always just so boring. The lump in my throat grew larger, but I enjoyed ranting, even if everything was untrue. The other girls listened to me and their eyes widened at all the right moments. But as I talk, I notice Jenny's eyes shift. Eventually I become fearful that she finds me boring, so I quickly stop talking and turn around to see what she's looking at. My dad stood behind me, frowning.

The car ride was silent, except for at the end when he told me that he will sell my violin as soon as my exam is over; he never liked the ruckus I made with it, and clearly neither did I since I hardly practiced anymore. I started to protest by saying that I just didn't have time to practice anymore. The lie sounded weak, even to me, and my father didn't answer. I grumbled a bit about him not understanding me, but inside my stomach starts to twist and the lump in my throat grows even more.

When we arrived at the exam hall, I met my accompanist, and together we organized the sheet music for the exam. I didn't have time to memorize my pieces because I was too busy these past few weeks meeting up with Jenny and the others. I tried to hide my small tremble and swallow the tears that welled in my eyes as I set up my violin; this will likely be my last performance. When everything is ready, I walk into the hall and step onstage. My accompanist follows, taking his seat at the piano bench. In the exam room, next to the piano, I place my bow on the strings of my violin. The violin that I'm about to lose. I hear the examiners say the name of my first piece...

Onstage, as I near the end of my *Allegro Maestoso*, I make more mistakes as I approach the main motif near the end of the piece. My previous mistakes have frustrated me into trying to force more weight and meaning into it, instead of returning to the same passion and all-encompassing emotion I had at the beginning. All that comes out is poor intonation, unintentional dissonance, and incorrect bowing. I should have practiced harder, and the realization only angers me more. I desperately try to fix my errors, but this only confuses my accompanist as I jump back and forth in the passage. The brief passage ends up disastrously loud and ugly.

After the exam, my hands shook as I placed my violin back into its case and handed it over to my father, who snapped a photo and posted an ad on a buy and sell website. Within minutes, someone responds and arranges to pick it up next week. I realize that I desperately, desperately, want to keep my violin. I regret not putting in the effort to prepare adequately for my exam. But it was too late, and I wouldn't be able to change anything now regardless of what I said. Clearly my lack of practice, not my promising words, had proven to be true. I opened the envelope that the examiner had handed to me when I left the hall, to find that I had failed.

Back at school the next day, Jenny and her friends talked amongst themselves about the newest gossip. I did not join in, and eventually they stopped looking over. My left hand tapped on my right forearm, practicing the shifting and the fingering out of habit. I'd gone back to being alone once more.

Onstage, I finally reach the ending phrase of *Allegro Maestoso*. Somehow, this ending that I once couldn't understand winds up being the best I've performed in the entire piece. I finally understand the soft piano to pianissimo decrescendo unexpectedly with the fast paced sixteenth notes - not too extravagant or attention seeking, while still remaining dramatically emotional - and I conclude the piece with a contrastingly slow *ritardando*. I let my bow trail off during the fermata on the final note. I take a bow and present my accompanist to the judges. Then I walk offstage. ■



Jeanne is an avid violinist and beginner pianist. In her free time, she enjoys volunteering, reading classics, and swimming. She always romanticizes the small moments: rainbows over train stations, sunbeams through car windows, and patterns of xylem weaving through the bottoms of poplar leaves. Jeanne also loves spreading her knowledge, and aims to empower others through speaking and writing.

The Spy by Gabe Guenette Based on "*The Spy*" by Nancy Faber Third Place, Senior Age Group

It was a bright and sunny day in late August. I was just finishing up my last case in Calgary when I got a call. It was a woman with a high pitched voice that sounded as though she was in distress. I then proceeded to tell her that I was a spy but not a regular spy, but a spy that specializes in thievery in musical art. This led the woman to tell me that one of her most precious musical collectors pieces was gone.

Many days later I found myself on a flight to New York City. The mysterious woman gave me one name that name was my only lead. She was a professor in Juilliard School of Music, her name was Nancy Faber. This was one strange case. The woman on the phone told me that the rare first edition Mozart manuscript was taken from the archives of the school. It had a value of 3.1 million dollars. The only person that saw the thief was a teacher that was grading theory pieces late in the library. A few hours later the plane landed on the rough landing strip. As I was about to open the large oak doors of the library I stopped when I heard the staccato tap tapping of a cane on the white granite floor. It was a large man in a blue dress coat with a wooden cane, "Greetings" he said "welcome to my beloved library, you must be Gabe Guenette the spy for the robbery last night". "Yes" I said and who are you I asked questionably. "Oh dear" he said "I am so sorry I forgot to introduce myself, I am the Dean of the school and I overlook everything that happens in this school even the robbery". "Well I best be off then." As he proceeded to turn and walk off. I noticed that he had a limp, but I put it off my mind and entered the large library. Once I got into the library I then finally

realized the vastness of the place with hundreds and hundreds of rows of books and tables with the occasional student studying and reading in complete silence.

As I went up the stairs the thump thump of my shoes hitting the tiled stairs echoed through the entire library. When I got to the top of the spiral staircase I was met with even more rows of books and students. As I looked around I found who I was looking for. She was just sitting at one of the tables and was grading a theory worksheet about the difference between Piano and forte. "Hello" I said as she turned her head to look at me. Nancy had dark sea blue eyes and a long slim face with dark red lips and long curly hair that was a bright autumn color. She was very beautiful. "What can you tell me about the robbery?" I said. She then gave me a worrying look and said "I was at the library that night. I was in this very spot marking a students work when I heard a loud crash and saw a large man running down the library with a duffel bag. Just before he made it to the stairs he ran into a large wooden desk at full speed. He then was limping to the door and down the hallway and out of sight, but I did see him turn to the stairs of where the teachers offices are." "And did you try to stop him at all?" I asked with a questionable tone. "Yes" she said "But as I went to stand up I ran over a students backpack and twisted my ankle so that is why I couldn't catch him." "That is reasonable I said so we are looking for a man with a limp." I said and then it hit me: the Dean must have taken the music piece. But why I asked myself as I thanked Nancy and went to my hotel.

I had been spending lots of time at the school interviewing students and teachers. The odd thing was that whenever I saw the Dean he would try his hardest to avoid me. This was very suspicious, as when I looked at him he would turn his head and limp out of the room in distress. Almost every teacher that I had interviewed said that he had

gotten a limp after the robbery. This still wasn't enough evidence that he was the thief of the piece of music that was worth millions. I only needed a motive now, so I got the idea to try to sneak into his office after the school closed. I hid in the library behind a large bookshelf with a big hard cover. As I flipped the pages I found a nice looking song called the Spy. This looked like a piece of music that was destined for me, but the school had just closed and the lights had gone out. It was time. Under the cover of darkness I moved quickly but quietly with almost no noise at all. The only people that should be in the building are the janitors but it was easy to sneak past, and after what had felt like hours I had made it to the Dean's office. The light was out as I slowly opened the door and crept inside. The room was small with a desk and a closet for coats and a small filing cabinet. As I searched the drawers I heard a noise coming from outside and the sound of that cane tapping against the ground. It was the Dean! I ran into the closet just as the door was opening. I was as still as a statue barely even breathing as the Dean muttered about how I was too good at my job. This was very suspicious and then my foot slipped over a piece of paper and when I looked down I was shocked. It was the stolen music piece. I wasted no time taking out my phone and calling 911.

Minutes later I heard the crescendo of sirens. From inside the closet I saw the police storm into the Dean's office. He was flabbergasted when the leading officer yelled "You are under arrest!" I then jumped out of my hiding place and with the music piece. I had gotten the evidence I needed to arrest the Dean and that is what happened. The next morning I was on the plane ride back to Calgary with another case solved under my belt. Once I got home the phone began to ring. That was my call. "Hello" a mysterious lady said as I answered the call to my next case. The End ■

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