

SENIOR SPOTLIGHT

Class of 2015

Reflections of Music Study

Shivani Kumar, Memorial High School

Then:

1. How old were you when you started lessons?

I started taking group piano lessons when I was six years old, and then switched to private lessons when I was 12 years old.

2. Why did you start taking lessons?

My parents signed me up! I loved music but was absolutely clueless about piano--during the first year, it was just exciting to press the keys and make a tune.



3. What was your favorite part about lessons?

In addition to playing piano, we would sing songs and use instruments to count out rhythms. I was always excited when it was my turn to use the castanets for rhythms.

4. What kept you going when lessons were challenging?

Mickey's constant encouragement. Mickey can always tell when I've had a bad week with barely any time to practice piano, and she's never made me feel bad about it. Although I don't recommend going through a week without practicing piano, it happens to the busiest of us. Mickey has always been encouraging and understanding when pieces got tough, and her commitment to helping me improve in any way possible always amazes me. With her faith in me, as well as my parents' constant support, I've managed to make it through many rough patches.

5. What is your favorite memory from music lessons?

All of the metaphors and stories Mickey and I form for my pieces! We've found that it's much easier for me to invest emotion into my pieces when I actually have a story in mind, and Mickey's imagination is endless. From cat-and-mouse chases to comparing my fingers to helium balloons, these stories and metaphors help me improve my piece tenfold and make lessons incredibly fun each time.

Now:

1. How has music study influenced the person you are today?

Having been involved with piano, violin, and choir for many years, I would not be the person I am today without music. Music has pulled me through the toughest of times, and has taught me about the hard work and resilience that is important in real life. I take piano as a reminder that if I continue to practice and work hard towards a goal, ultimately I can achieve it.

2. In your opinion, what is the greatest benefit of music study for people your age?

I've always found music to be a great form of catharsis. It gives me a good, relaxing break from everything else in my day, and that's really important for me. It's so rewarding when I realize that I'm actually making my own music each time I play the piano. I think that self-expression is the best benefit one will gain, and studying music definitely encourages this self-expression to start at a young age.

3. What advice would you give younger music students?

Stick with it! It's worth every note you play and every difficult piece that you master. The skills you learn from playing an instrument will stay with you for life, and you'll be thankful that you didn't quit.

4. Do you still get nervous when you play in front of people?

All the time. Performing in front of others has never been my favorite thing to do, and it's taken many years for me to stop worrying about all the bad things that could happen during a performance. I'm not sure if I'll ever stop being nervous, but things definitely get better as you get older--I overcome my nerves by just telling myself to have as much fun as possible.

5. What is your favorite piece of music or composer- and why?

I love Felix Mendelssohn! I've played one of his pieces and sang another, and both were incredibly upbeat, unique and fun to perform. He's got some methodical craziness that he expresses in his pieces, and I definitely recommend his works for anyone who's looking for a fun, rewarding challenge!

6. Practice tips?

Practice in short sections whenever you have time! Repeating hard sections definitely helps, even if it's just for a few minutes.

7. What is your biggest achievement in music so far?

During my sophomore year of high school, I received the Exemplary Soloist Award for my piano solo at the Wisconsin State Solo and Ensemble Festival. It was a very proud moment for me, especially since I didn't even know the award existed until I received it! Receiving this award was confirmation for me that I'm progressing in my skills, and it's always exciting when you realize you're getting good at something.

Shannon Hintz, Verona Area High School



Then:

1) How old were you when you started lessons?

I was 15 when I started taking lessons from Rhapsody!

2) Why did you start taking lessons?

I had just retired from a 10 year Irish dance career and wanted to do something other than just dance onstage. I always loved to sing and act so I started taking lessons to improve my voice so I could boost my confidence, become a better singer, and get cast in musicals.

3) What was your favorite part about lessons?

Warm ups and singing new songs for the first time.

4) What kept you going when lessons were

challenging?

I just kept remembering why I started lessons and where I wanted to be in the future.

5) What is your favorite memory from music lessons?

My favorite memory would be when I ran through a song I didn't know and it ended in a total train wreck. It was oddly satisfying to just mess up and not being able to fix it without starting over!

Now:

1) How has music study influenced the person you are today?

Music study has helped with my confidence. I would have never sung in front of crowds a couple years ago the way I do now!

2) In your opinion, what is the greatest benefit of music study for people your age?

The greatest benefit is the confidence it gives you. It's also a way to keep your imagination and artistic creativity fresh and new.

3) What advice would you give younger music students?

Go for it. Whatever you want to do, just do it and don't let anything (especially yourself) hold you back in any way. Plus, don't give up on your dream when things get tough. It's a wonderful feeling to get past whatever is troubling you.

4) Do you still get nervous when you play in front of people?

Sometimes, but I've always loved people and performing for an audience so I never had too much of a problem with this.

5) What is your favorite piece of music or composer- and why?

My favorite piece of music would have to be "Somewhere" from West Side Story. The song has so much meaning to it and I love to sing it.

6) Practice tips?

Practice even when you don't feel like it. Sing or run through things in the or when you're bored. I really believe in the "practice makes perfect" idea so just keep working at it and never stop practicing!

7) What is your biggest achievement in music so far?

Getting to be in A Midsummer Night's dream with Theatre Lila and Children's Theater of Madison. They've added singing into the play and I'm really excited to be in such an amazing production with so many professional actors!

Haley Prudent, Memorial High School



Then:

1. How old were you when you started lessons?

I started lessons when I was six years old and my feet couldn't yet touch the pedal.

2. Why did you start taking lessons?

I started taking lessons because all my older cousins who I looked up to a lot all played piano and I wanted to be like them.

3. What was your favorite part about lessons?

My favorite part about lessons was probably the end when my teachers would let me play random modern songs by ear, and improv with me.

4. What kept you going when lessons were challenging?

Mostly my parents kept me going. There were numerous times that I said I wanted to quit but my mom would always push me through it.

5. What is your favorite memory from music lessons?

My favorite memory from piano is probably composing with Chris Collins; we would make up our own songs as well as create our own endings and tweak our favorite songs to make them sound better!

Now:

1. How has music study influenced the person you are today?

Music study has greatly influenced the person I am today; it introduced me to a whole new world with new people and helps me view life in a different way.

2. In your opinion, what is the greatest benefit of music study for people your age?

The greatest benefit of music study for people my age is probably just having an escape every day; I find myself playing when I'm upset or stressed out, but also when I'm happy.

3. What advice would you give younger music students?

My advice for younger music students is simply don't quit. You'll thank yourself later.

4. Do you still get nervous when you play in front of people?

My teachers and family especially know that I get extremely nervous when I play in front of other people. I can know a song by heart and play it with my eyes closed and *still* get the shivers before a performance or competition. Still waiting to grow out of it.

5. What is your favorite piece of music or composer- and why?

I can't have just one favorite song, but some of my favorite pieces include Imagine, River Flows In You, Bella's Lullaby, Let it Be, Waves, Halo, and Breathe Me. Oh and The Pink Panther.

6. Practice tips?

Practice.

7. What is your biggest achievement in music so far?

I would say my greatest accomplishment in music so far is probably being district winner in a few of my National Guild competitions. My sonatina scores have been all over the scale, but that's where the nervous factor comes in again. I am planning on minoring in piano at Brandeis University, so then I'll hopefully add that to the list.

Sarah Woody, Middleton High School



Then:

1. How old were you when you started lessons?

I began voice lessons at Rhapsody in 8th grade when I was 13 years old. I started taking piano lessons from an independent teacher when I was 6 years old.

2. Why did you start taking lessons?

I began taking voice lessons because I had some natural talent that I wanted to develop. In addition, I wanted to improve my overall sight reading and technical skills. My mom was the person who forced me to start taking piano lessons and suggested that I take voice lessons. I have since come to love piano and am glad that she forced me to continue.

3. What was your favorite part about lessons?

For voice, I enjoyed exploring diverse styles of music from jazz to classic Italian art songs that I would not have been exposed to had I not taken lessons. I also enjoyed learning how to put piano and voice together.

4. What kept you going when lessons were challenging?

I love musical challenges so "giving up" has never really occurred to me. As an alto I sometimes struggle with hitting high notes, but rather than give up I use drills that Julie has taught me such as singing the high section on lip trills and using hand gestures as a helpful visual aid. On my own I like to use a high part in a pop song and keep modulating higher and higher. Through a lot of practice I got to know my own voice better and greatly improve the quality of the sound in my higher register. In piano I am currently working on Beethoven's "Rondo a capriccio, Op.129." It is a very challenging technical piece that I have been working on for months. I believe that it is worth it to stick with one piece because there is always something new to learn from it.

5. What is your favorite memory from music lessons?

My favorite memory from voice lessons was auditioning for the Overture Rising Stars competition. Julie met me at the audition site and was so supportive. It meant so much to me that she was there! The competition was a fantastic opportunity for me to practice my auditioning skills. I also got to hear a lot of other very talented musicians.

Now:

1. How has music study influenced the person you are today?

Music means everything to me. At home it is rare to have a moment of silence because I am always singing or playing piano or guitar. Music has been a great source of happiness and calm in my life. I would definitely say that it relieves me of stress. Performing has also majorly boosted my self-confidence. I feel more comfortable giving speeches or presentations in my academic classes and talking to new people because of the confidence I have gained through music. I have met many influential friends from my musical endeavors.

2. In your opinion, what is the greatest benefit of music study for people your age?

I think that young people often struggle with self-esteem. Music has the power to build self-confidence. The self-confidence gained from practice and performance translates to academic and social success.

3. What advice would you give younger music students?

Always remain humble and remember that you can always improve your musicianship.

4. Do you still get nervous when you play in front of people?

Oddly enough, I usually get nervous before and after a performance, but not during the performance. When I am on stage I feel confident, if not over analytical. Through experience I have learned how to push past the nerves so that I can enjoy my time on stage.

5. What is your favorite piece of music or composer- and why?

An artist that has had great influence on me and who I admire very much is Etta James. She is the very essence of jazz music and is my inspiration for all things jazz. She possesses such control of her voice that she can go from wailing and growling to sugary sweet in an instant. Last year I sang her song "I'd Rather Go Blind." It was my first exposure to solo jazz music and I loved it. I loved the freedom to play around with different riffs and rhythms and not be confined to the notes on the page.

6. Practice tips?

I hope that you don't feel forced to practice and that you practice because you love it! Always practice the hard stuff the most even though it's tempting to practice the parts that you are good at.

7. What is your biggest achievement in music so far?

One of the best opportunities I have had as a singer was performing as the featured vocalist with the Middleton High School jazz band. I sang at the Union South downtown and got to get all dressed up in a diva dress. I sang the jazz standard "Daydream," a sultry, and beautiful tune. I felt powerful and alive on stage. It is something I will never forget!

Lauren Brown, Oregon High School

1. How old were you when you started lessons?

I took my first lesson when I was in kindergarten.

2. Why did you start taking lessons?

My parents signed me up for lessons but I found that I really enjoyed playing the piano making music so I continued.

3. What was your favorite part about lessons?

Lessons are a structured time that gives me the ability to forget how busy I am. Even if it is just for 45 minutes, playing the piano is very therapeutic for me.

4. What kept you going when lessons were challenging?

When music becomes challenging, I think that the sense of accomplishment I feel after I have mastered a hard part or piece of music is what really keeps me going.

5. What is your favorite memory from music lessons?

I have many but I remember my first lesson with Leo in particular. He asked me to sing a part of my song and at the time, I thought "This is quite odd." But afterward I realized how helpful the singing was in helping me understand the part better. I laugh about it now.

Now:

1. How has music study influenced the person you are today?

Musical study has been extremely influential in the making of who I am today. Music is such a large part of my life, whether it be playing or listening so much so that at the moment I want to pursue an education in neuroscience and ethnomusicology and ultimately do research on how music affects the brain.

2. In your opinion, what is the greatest benefit of music study for people your age?

I think the greatest benefit of musical study is that music allows you to express yourself and it also really exercises your brain. There is a lot going on at once in music and I think that learning to multi-task is essential for success for people my age.

3. What advice would you give younger music students?

Don't give up! I know so many people who took lessons as a kid but stopped and they really regret it, so keep going!

4. Do you still get nervous when you play in front of people?

I definitely still get nervous when I play in front of people. I don't think I will ever get to the point where I am not nervous, but being a little bit nervous is good! It keeps you focused.

5. What is your favorite piece of music or composer- and why?

One of my favorite pieces is Gymnopedie No. 1 by Erik Satie. I think it is really beautiful and relaxing. I also really enjoy a piece that I am playing right now for cello, Elegie by Faure. It's a really powerful piece and it has been really fun to learn.

6. Practice tips?

I would say just try and get a little bit of practice in any time you can. Every little bit helps. I know that life can get very busy sometimes so it may be hard to practice for large amounts of time so breaking it up really helps!

7. What is your biggest achievement in music so far?

My biggest achievement in music so far is probably learning the Elegie by Faure on cello. Those 32nd notes are killer!

Kyra Johnson, Memorial High School



When I started taking viola lessons in 7th grade, I figured I was in for the long haul. Although 12 year old me was terrified of playing by myself in front of somebody other than my family or my cats, how else was I gonna stay first chair in orchestra at school? I powered through my fear and started to improve in leaps and strides, and even learned some cheesy viola jokes along the way. Music is a huge part of who I am today and I would probably be really boring if I didn't have it. From orchestra at school I met my best friends who I also get the pleasure of calling my band mates. Being in my band, Ukulele Wednesday, and also being in my school's orchestra allows me to experience the best of both worlds and let's me play older music in class and more modern music on my own. Since I started performing with the band it has gotten a lot harder for me to get nervous playing in front of people, but there are always those little butterflies. I think having so many outlets for me to play music has also given so many healthy ways to relieve stress and

express emotions I might not feel comfortable expressing otherwise. I think it is important for everyone to have an outlet like this, people just need to find something that they can connect with. I know practice isn't the most exciting part of playing music, but it is sorta essential. My best advice when it comes to practice is: don't push yourself too hard, take breaks, nothing is impossible, and stick with it you have no idea where it can take you.