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"Hymns" for solo piano

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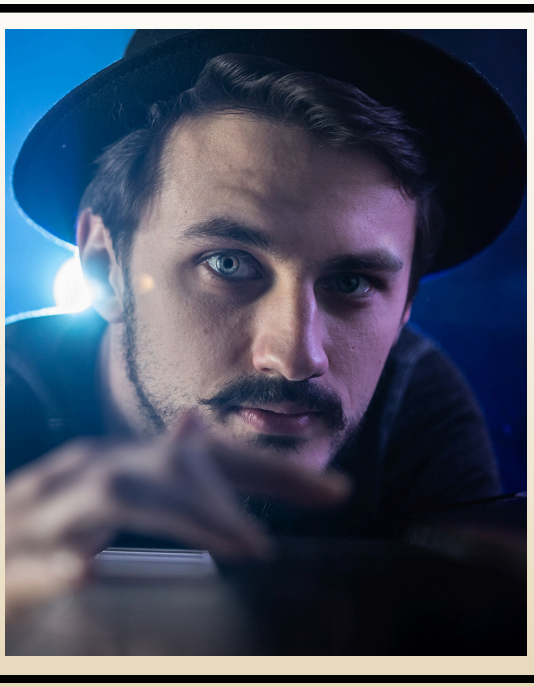

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11 years old, Absolute Winner in the 4th World's Best Musicians Competition, First Prize in 2024 BACH International Music Competition, Classical Music Stars International Competition, "PCO" International Competition for Pianists, and many other (about 40) piano competitions all over the world. Last spring he made his debut at Carnegie Hall, New York, where he will return on 6 October.

How did it happen that you started playing the piano?

My father and my mother are both pianists, and professors in two different Italian Conservatories of Music. I've always been immersed in music. When I was four, I asked my father to teach me how to play the piano. I remember that at first I didn't want to study with my mother, because I couldn't imagine my mom as a strict teacher!

What is your typical day like? How do you manage to balance school and practicing?

I practice a lot, even 5 or 6 hours a day when a concert or a competition date is approaching... so it's very difficult to balance school and practicing! Since last year I have been homeschooled. I love homeschooling, because I am close to my parents, I am free to learn at my own pace, and I get more work done in a fraction of the time!

What was the most challenging piece you played and why?

It's without any doubt Chopin's *Scherzo* no. 1, op. 20. It's extremely difficult, both technically and musically. I took a long time to learn it! The beginning and the end of the piece have to be played at an astonishing speed, and the central part is a lullaby that requires a great sensitivity.

Who are your favorite composers and why?

I love Mozart and Chopin, because they started composing when they were very young, and so I feel so close to them.

I remember that when I was seven I started playing a Polonaise composed by Chopin when he was seven. He was so young that he couldn't even write music. He improvised at the piano and someone (maybe his teacher) wrote it down. That's incredible!

How do you feel when you perform and share your music with an audience?

Before a performance I'm a bit nervous, so I need to stay close to my mom and squeeze her hands! But when I begin playing, I'm completely absorbed and I don't think of anything else. After a concert, it's amazing to receive applause and congratulations from the audience. I even had to learn how to bow properly. At the end, I am a little ashamed, and I run to hug my mom!

What are your biggest dreams for the future?

My biggest dream is to win a prestigious piano competition, like "Busoni", "Chopin" or "Van Cliburn", and to become a famous pianist and conductor, traveling all around the world.

What do you like to do in your free time?

I love doing sports, like football and swimming. I also love drawing, building lego sets and playing online games with my best friends, like Greta and Emmanuele.

How do you celebrate your musical achievements?

After a performance, my parents usually give me a nice present, or we go on a trip together. They often share my successes on social networks, like Facebook or Instagram, and post my best videos on Youtube. I am so grateful to them and to my piano professor at Palermo Conservatory of Music, for everything they have done for me.

Without their sacrifices, support, guidance, and teachings, my achievements would not have been possible.

Would you recommend other young pianists to participate in online competitions such as World's Best Musicians, Piano Competition Online, Classical Music Stars, or Bach?

Of course! I won all of them, and they are helping me to be known all around the world!



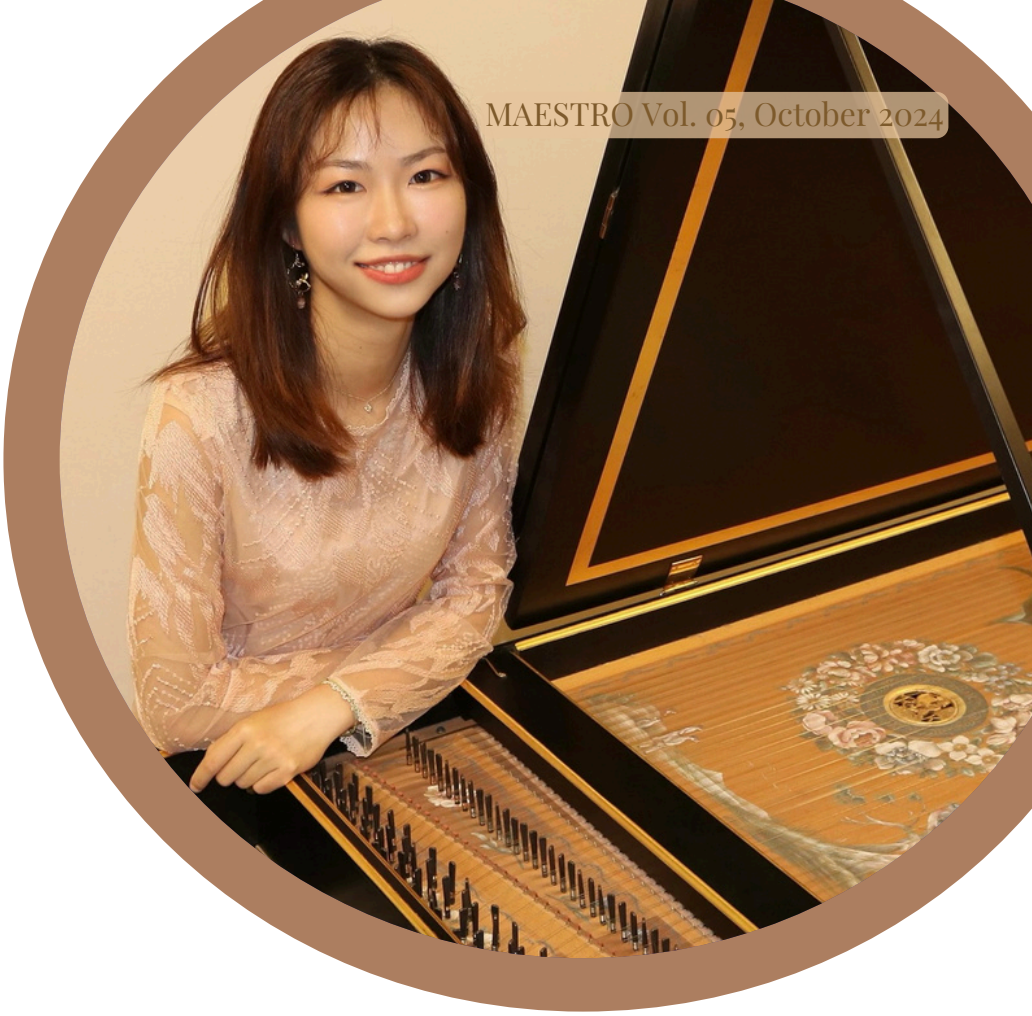
Anyi Cai

"It was "ear"-opening when I first listened to a live harpsichord performance. It was transformational.



You were a classically trained pianist, how did it happen that you began to explore the harpsichord?

Yes, I was a classically trained pianist since I was six. I was still a sole piano performance major, collaborative pianist during my undergrad, but I was granted the opportunities to study secondary harpsichord lessons with my first harpsichord teacher, Dr. Robert Horton, who is also a wonderful, prize-winning organist, at the time employed at my undergrad school. Growing up, I often found it unfulfilling when playing any Bach pieces on the piano. So it was "ear"-opening when I first listened to a live harpsichord performance. It was transformational. The performance was J.S. Bach's Goldberg Variation on a French double manual Kingston by the phenomenal harpsichordist, Dr. Heidi Salanki, who later became one of my most significant music mentors. When I learned I could take harpsichord lessons during undergrad, I eagerly pursued it. I learned so much from Dr. Horton, not just how to play the instrument, but all the logistics behind it, such as tuning different temperaments, changing strings, plectras, playing continuo for other instrumentalists and so on. I was a sophomore piano major, and that was a fascinating new world to me.



Do you perform the same repertoire on both instruments?

Most of the time, I try not to. I tend to save anything Bach wrote and earlier on the harpsichord, because to me, that is how they were supposed to be. On the other hand, I enjoy playing pieces in the romantic style on piano such as pieces by Brahms (my favorite romantic composer) . Usually when I program my harpsichord recital, I like to set up a menu of various nationalities. We love to show different styles and spirits.

What are the opportunities for harpsichordists today?

One of the reasons that I was drawn to the harpsichord/early music field is that there is so much that harpsichordists do than pianists. Harpsichordists are in huge demand for collaborations. We work a lot with singers, in either chamber settings or choral settings, to play with them in operas or cantatas. We learn their languages when doing that, musically and literally. We also work a lot with instrumentalists, especially low strings for continuo. We play in trio sonatas, instrumental suits, overtures, to just name a few...

Most important above all, we learn so much in these collaborative settings, we are "forced" to be a holistic musician by being a harpsichordist.

Do you think learning the harpsichord is important for pianists?

Absolutely! With the absence of sustaining pedal, music dynamics, and with the cruelty of note decay on the harpsichord, our main focuses are the articulation and finger controlling which should also apply to piano playing but are often overlooked. I will put in a funny and simple way, the barriers of playing the harpsichord, help pianists to learn the importance of articulation, and how to play with the minimum arm/body movements, which sometimes could be unnecessary on the piano and at the same time injure the player while still achieving the same level of musicality, or even more. Circling back to my answers from the previous question, we learn so much by doing what we do. For example, we learn the different styles of dances in a keyboard suite. How is a German style Allemande different from a French style Allemande, how is an Italianate Giga different from a French Gigue? What are the different types of dance steps in a Courante?

Those are some of the important questions that could totally change a pianist's perspective when they are practicing and eventually transform their performances. Also frankly, I think it makes sense to learn the history behind something that you want to do for your career.

What repertoire is your favorite? What have you played and what do you plan to play?

Everybody of course loves playing Bach on the harpsichord. I am currently learning his Italian Concerto. Besides him, I personally love playing 17th century French keyboard music on the harpsichord. Dances and ornamentation are a huge part of the French keyboard repertoire and there is so much to learn beyond it. It is fascinating to learn how Couperin's ornaments are different from d'Anglebert's, also notational wise. I would also advocate every pianist to try one of Louis Couperin's unmeasured preludes. It is a whole new world of experimentation and excitement. It is also a great chance for pianists to really set themselves to be free at the keyboard.

What are your professional plans and dreams for the future?

As a big baroque fan, as much as I enjoy playing them, I want more people to get to know it and be able to access it more. So I plan to be a professor teaching harpsichord, and baroque performance practice hopefully at a university in the future. I would love to be able to balance my teaching track with my performance track as well.

What kind of person are you outside of music? What are your interests? What do you do for leisure?

I am a big nature person. I love to go hiking, jogging, going to the beach, and exploring different parks. I am also a dog person. If I could, I wish to have a samoyed so I could take him/her to go explore nature with me, haha.

"Playing the harpsichord ... could totally change a pianist's perspective when they are practicing and eventually transform their performances.





"Hymns" for solo piano

presented by

Dominik Kisiel

absolute winner of World's Best Musicians Competition

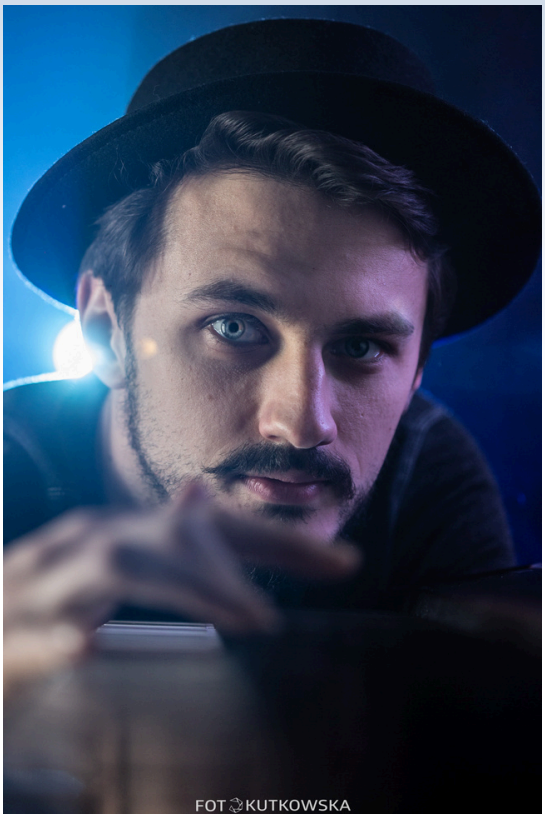


The album 'Hymns' ('Hymns of Time') for solo piano is an author's project calling for finding personal vibration in everyone's life. It is also a kind of thanksgiving to the Creator of the universe, to the Source - for being able to receive music and pass it on. Musically, it is a combination of improvisation (inspired by pianists such as Brad Mehldau, Keith Jarrett) and 'Hymns' drawing from classical music - Chopin, Rachmaninov, Ravel, Debussy, and with added instrument preparations - string damping, Sitar and harp sound effects, percussion instruments. These are compositions created through improvisation, later written down and refined, and finally performed also by improvising them from the present moment. They come from my thoughts - where does music come from, how does what the artist creates come into being, and how does the listener-recipient relate to it?

I perceive improvised music as an intuitive transcendental experience that is a conscious process of directing one's thoughts in the form of intentions. Discovering and containing intentions is the most important stage of improvisation - the openness and attentiveness to transform what comes into music. As a performer, therefore, I contain intentions to find oneself and to grow in Love - I take listeners on a journey of self-discovery through sound experiences. The melodies on the album 'came' to me while searching for vibrations, while trying to pour life into music, and at the same time learning the greatest lessons from the practice of musical exploration. My intention is to explore music as an opportunity for spiritual rebirth and growth, paying attention to myself in doing so, and raising the vibration of Love. The Love that each of us carries within us and that each of us has the task to discover and carry further, to discover as a Divine Particle - as the existence of the Universe.

About Dominik Kisiel:

Pianist, improviser, composer, and doctoral student at the Academy of Music in Gdansk, Poland. He strives to maximize the sonic possibilities of the piano and seeks harmonic relationships that create naturally beautiful consonances.
Improvisation is the most important part as music therapy, soul release and connection with the universe. The music, while telling stories, flows in an uninterrupted stream, taking those participating on an incredible journey beyond the everyday perception of the world and experience of reality. It is a peculiar exploration of the sound space at the level of conveying emotions, discovering geometry and cosmic energy in music, inspired by its different variations - from the Middle Ages, to the Modern Music. The Confrontation of the whole with reality, life and musical experiences form the picture of music created by Dominik.



Album premiere - 12/07/24 - CD and streaming
Premiere concert - 12/07/24 at the Jazz Jantar Festival in Gdansk, Poland.

Jessica Yaerim Lee



What first inspired you to start composing music at such a young age, and how did that passion develop over the years?

From a young age, I loved spending time with musical instruments and naturally explored various genres of music, which allowed me to develop a deep connection with it. When I began learning the piano at the age of 8, I often found myself thinking, "This piece could have taken a different direction and been even better." This curiosity sparked my interest in modifying pieces, and soon after, I began composing my own music.

As my passion for composition grew, I had the opportunity to enter the Music and Gifted Academy for young talents at the Seoul Arts Center when I was age 10 in 2017.

As a composer, you also have a strong background in piano performance. How does playing an instrument influence your compositional process?

I love playing musical instruments and have learned various ones, such as percussion, violin, piano, and guitar, because I wanted to experience and play different instruments myself. This has helped me deepen my understanding of each instrument's techniques, allowing me to compose more flexibly. Not only does this benefit me when I listen to my own compositions, but it also helps me when I perform them. I have a particular love for the piano and often experiment with the instrument's limits through a first sight-reading.

Even with the same passage, how I use the pedal or assign fingerings can significantly affect the character of the piece and the instrument's tone. The better I become at playing, the more I can explore and reflect on different aspects of composition. That's why I believe being skilled at playing instruments is crucial when composing music.

Could you walk us through your creative process when you're starting a new composition?

Before I compose, I gather the scores of pieces I want to play, regardless of genre or era, and perform them on the piano to awaken my senses. As a composer of diverse pieces from the Baroque to the modern era, I start by sketching out which era I'd like to focus on for my composition. While I enjoy listening to and performing the works of great composers, I often compose experimental pieces that deviate from conventional harmonic progressions and forms, as I want to showcase my unique style. After establishing the foundation of a piece, I improvise at the instrument, exploring countless melodies and harmonies within the confines of the 88 keys to complete the composition. When writing tonal music, I immerse myself for hours, combining notes until a melody that inspires me emerges. Once I have a beautiful melody, I layer various harmonies on top to create a delicate and emotional theme. Afterward, I revisit this theme to brainstorm several ideas and record my improvisations. I spend a considerable amount of time the envisioned structure. For contemporary pieces, I invest significant effort into aspects like rhythm and sound, focusing on the combination of instruments and the use of modern techniques in my compositions.

Do you have a preference for composing for certain ensembles?

I enjoy composing for various ensembles, including solo, duet, piano trio, string quartet, piano quintet, and orchestra. I find great appeal in expressing the unique colors of each instrument, which is why I do not particularly prefer composing for specific ensembles. However, I recently developed an interest in string quartets and composed a modern piece titled "BrAin CEllS," based on a scientific approach to brain cells. In the future, I would also like to compose for larger ensembles, such as string orchestras.

> *I find great appeal in expressing the unique colors of each instrument.*

What are your future goals?

I aim to continue growing as a composer by exploring various genres and expanding my musical spectrum while connecting with people's hearts. I believe that music is a unique medium that transcends language, conveying emotions and serving as a bridge between people. It is a complex art form that is created collaboratively, involving not just the performer and the audience but many others as well. Therefore, I want to engage with more people through music and share profound emotions. I also aspire to have my works performed more frequently on stage and to increase opportunities for me to participate
in performances.

Experiencing the resonance of sound alongside the audience through both auditory and visual means is always a valuable experience, and I wish to present my compositions on more stages while accumulating experiences in collaboration and creation. In addition to classical music, I have a strong interest in film music and enjoy the powerful sounds created by the fusion of electronic sounds and classical instruments. I hope to become a composer who can actively engage in a variety of fields.

Outside of music, what are some of your hobbies or interests, and do they influence your compositions in any way?

I entered university a little bit early, where I have been exposed to a variety of majors and educational experiences, allowing me to expand my own spectrum through interactions with people from diverse fields. Recently, I had the opportunity to participate in short film production, where I gained hands-on experience working as a director, actor, writer, sound producer, and music director on several films. These experiences have deepened my understanding of the medium of film. I have come to realize the
importance of sound in cinema, and I find myself paying greater attention to it while watching films. Exploring how these sounds are created has become an engaging hobby that further broadens my musical spectrum. By immersing myself in various genres, including classical, electronic, and film music, I have become more proficient in using different software programs. This new musical experience has positively influenced my composition process. As I compose pieces that are sometimes fresh, sometimes emotional, and at times experimental, I feel my musical spectrum expanding in real time.

If you had the ability to travel through time, would you prefer to compose for the distant future or for a historical period? How do you think your music would fit in?

That was a very interesting question, and I enjoyed pondering it. I would like to go back to the past and compose music. Music in the 21st century often features more complex and experimental sound works compared to earlier eras. While I'm curious about how long this trend will last, I feel that my music resonates more with the characteristics of past eras, which is why I chose this direction.
Currently, I compose contemporary music and create a variety of pieces without being limited by specific time periods. However, the times I find most enjoyable and fulfilling for composition are the late Romantic and Impressionist eras. The way notes combine to create beautiful, colorful harmonies, along with the lyrical melodies that are sometimes poignant and at other times powerful, brings me great happiness. All eras have their unique qualities, but I believe that works from the Romantic and Impressionist periods delicately touch our emotions and evoke intense feelings. The music from those times is deeply engraved in my heart, and I think it will never be forgotten, even as time passes. These compositions possess a timeless quality, providing memorable experiences for listeners. My own music aims to achieve this as well, which is why I have chosen to focus on the past.

"I believe that music is a unique medium that transcends language, conveying emotions and serving as a bridge between people.



Kenkichi Sakai

Tell us about yourself. What is your musical background?

I began composing music under the influence of the Japanese nationalistic composer Akira Ifukube.
I am also influenced by his compositional philosophy.
So I would say that traditional Japanese and Asian music, art, festivals, and folk customs are the source of my music.
My compositions are a mixture of traditional Japanese and Asian sensibilities and contemporary musical techniques in one piece.

Where do you get your inspiration from when composing?

I often find inspiration for my compositions in Japanese and Asian folk songs and ethnic music.
I also come up with ideas for compositions in my daily life.
I often come up with musical ideas while walking, reading a book, cooking, gazing at clouds, and in many other situations.

What are you planning to work on in the coming months?

I am currently composing a symphony for orchestra and women's choir for a local women's choir. I hope to finish it by the end of this year.

What is your biggest dream?

I have two dreams.

I am currently the leader of the Philharmonic Orchestra Nagasaki, an orchestra in Nagasaki, Japan. My first dream is to develop this orchestra so that many people can hear its music.
My second dream is to create an opera or ballet based on Japan's oldest historical book, the Kojiki.





What kind of work did you submit for the Competition?

The work I submitted is "Ode Concertante", a concerto for oboe and orchestra.
It is in one movement and consists of six parts.
I composed this piece in memory of Daisaku Koyama, former bassoonist of the Saito Kinen Orchestra and conductor in Nagasaki, who passed away in 2017.
The original sequence of notes in the piece was created from the spelling of Daisaku Koyama's name.
The title of the piece, Ode, was chosen to honor the life of Daisaku Koyama.
The submitted work was performed by Makoto Suehiro, one of the best professional conductors in Japan, with soloist Chiho Nishikawa, one of the leading oboists in Japan, and the Philharmonic Orchestra Nagasaki, which was founded by Daisaku Koyama.
Everyone involved in the performance was very pleased with my award.

What made you take part in the WBMC competition and what are your impressions?

My wife told me about this competition. I was very happy to see that there was no age limit in the composition category and they accepted any kind of work.
The fact that it was an online competition meant that I did not have to travel, which was another reason why I submitted my work to this competition.
WBMC is a great competition. I sincerely hope it will continue for a long time.

What are your interests, what do you like to do in your spare time?

I like to watch movies. I go to the cinema or watch them on Netflix, etc.
I also like to grow seasonal vegetables in my vegetable garden.



Yichen Xu



You started playing the cello not long ago and have already achieved amazing results. How much time do you spend practicing?
I started learning cello when I was 7 years old, and I usually spent about 1 hour a day practicing when I first started learning the cello, but as time went by, I spend about 3 hours a day practicing cello.

You are making rapid progress musically and technically. What areas have you focused on recently?
I like all kinds of music, not just the cello, music is very beautiful, my teacher has always said that the best technique is no technique, maintain a pure and love for music, enjoy the beauty that music brings me, so I am very happy in the music world.

How do you manage your school work alongside your dedication to cello playing?
Every day I go home and finish my homework for the day with high quality and speed, and then the rest is my practice time, school lesson and cello are all very important to me, and I hope to balance the two in the limited time.

How do you feel when you perform and share your music with an audience?
When I share my music with an audience, I feel joy, satisfaction, and the joy of growth. During the performance, I will be fully engaged, infusing my emotions and energy into every note and rhythm. This total dedication made me forget about myself and feel like I became one with the music. Sharing music also made me feel the joy of growing up.

Every performance is a new challenge, and I need to constantly improve my skills and expressiveness to better present my music. The joy of presenting a piece to the audience according to my feelings, and I hope the audience will enjoy and appreciate my performance.

How do you celebrate your musical achievements?

I shared the news of my award with my family, teachers and classmates, and they were very happy for me. Especially my teacher Luo, Weixi, he is very happy for me to be able to win the GRAND PRIX of SCO, he started teaching me when I was 7 years old, without his encouragement and guidance, I would never have been able to achieve such good results in this short period of 3 years from a child who does not know how to play the Cello. Here I would like to thank my teacher mentor Luo, Weixi who is the teacher from The Music Middle School Affiliated to Shanghai Conservatory of Music. I will continue to strive for higher achievements in music. At the same time, I am very happy that SCO has also given me a generous scholarship, I will use the scholarship to buy some music books that I like.

"This total dedication made me forget about myself and feel like I became one with the music.

What do you enjoy doing besides music?
Music is my biggest hobby, and in addition to music, I also play sports in my spare time, such as swimming and cycling. Fish farming and fishing are also my hobbies.

What are your biggest dreams for the future?
Music is beautiful, and I hope that in the future, I can become a good cellist like Yo-Yo Ma and bring beautiful music to audiences all over the world.



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