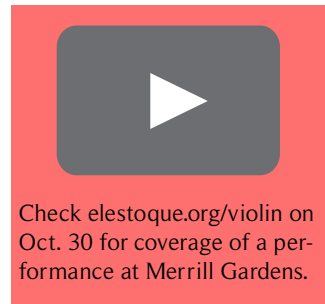


Tugging on heartstrings

A violin instructor teaches her students to serve the community with music **BY ANJALI BHAT**



A metronome ticks at freshman Amritha Anand's feet as she concentrates on the sheet music in front of her — Charles Dancla's "Airs Variés" — and rapidly plays the notes on her violin. This is the song her teacher, Xiaoli Chen, has asked her to rehearse for their upcoming recital at the senior center.

"There is nothing better than being able to give your music. To give what you know to the people," Chen said. "To learn a performing art, and perform for people."

This is Chen's fundamental lesson to her students. She believes in the healing power of music and the responsibility that musicians have in bringing it to the community. Music is joy, and her students — whether they are three or 18 or anywhere in between — understand this.

Chen thinks her students continue to remain so passionate about their music because they play for people who are able to enjoy it too. While she loves to perform, she has never loved standing under bright lights in front of the dark expanse of a concert hall and a faceless audience. She prefers to make music in places where she feels truly appreciated: at retirement communities like Sunny View in Cupertino.

Senior Neha Kidambi is one of Chen's students. In their four years together, she has found Chen's enthusiasm unrivaled. She does not think that any other teacher believes so strongly in service through music.

"I've definitely learned about having a passion for playing," Kidambi said. "When [Chen] plays, she has a smile on her face all the time. And when my parents see me at recitals, they want me to be like her, to enjoy music so much."

To Chen, music means giving back to the community. She first started playing in senior centers when she left her job as a music teacher at Mountain View elementary schools in order to spend more time with her daughter. But when she visited her sister, a

former employee at a retirement home, she learned that residents often expressed a desire for entertainment.

"I told them I played violin, and then I started playing for them," Chen said. "And from their eyes I could tell how much they appreciated it."

According to Chen, no matter what song is played — a show tune, a classical piece or a folk song — the residents always find a rhythm to clap their hands and tap their toes. She wanted her students to have the same

experience she did.

"You can rent an empty recital hall to perform the music," Chen said.

"But then, the only guests are the parents of the students. And they've already heard the students so many times from when they've practiced. It's just showing off."

Instead, at the senior center, Chen watches her students become leaders. She notices

her students smiling warmly at the residents, carefully taking their hands and leading them to their seats. The residents are often excited to be the chief guests of the event.

Anand, Chen's student for over three years, feels instantly gratified by the residents' lively applause. She recalls one performance where residents appeared bored and quiet before anyone began to play. At the end

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violin teacher Xiaoli Chen



DUET TOGETHER Violin teacher Xiaoli Chen and senior Neha Kidambi play Pachelbel's "Canon" during a weekly practice at Chen's home. Chen and her students play both popular classical and contemporary songs for their recitals.

a.bhat@elestoque.org