

# MacPhail

## CENTER FOR MUSIC

### 2026 Suzuki Senior Essays

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#### DAVID BACHMAN



David Bachman

I began playing cello when I was four years old. Cello has been a part of my life for as long as I can remember, and my private lessons teacher, Joe Kaiser, has been there with me on the whole journey. I have distant memories of practicing posture by balancing a hacky sack on my head, practicing vibrato with a tennis ball, and playing Suzuki review pieces with him playing the harmony.

Throughout my Suzuki journey, I also played many songs with my older brother William, including the Vivaldi double. I want to thank William for always being there for me and helping me to create beautiful music, and of course I want to thank Joe for making it all possible.

Now, there have certainly been times where I wished I could just stop playing and never come back (we don't talk about the Great Haydn Incident of 2024 (just kidding – not a real thing)), and I would be lying if I said learning cello was smooth sailing all the way through. Times when I became frustrated with classical music made me especially grateful for Cello Rock. Cello Rock is a group created by Andrea Glass that brings rock music to a classical instrument. Cello Rock has helped me both in expanding my repertoire and keeping my passion for cello music alive. It has proved a substantial, yet incredibly fun and rewarding challenge. It has also provided me with a strong sense of musical community. Also, we don't talk about the Great Master of Puppets Incident of 2024 (okay, this one is actually a real thing).

Saturday morning cello classes are some of the earliest memories of cello I can recall. I remember being in Da Capo, Camerata, and Sinfonia orchestras, and I have many wonderful memories of group classes and play-ins in all sorts of seasons (yes, even in

Halloween costumes). I remember attending my brother's cello lessons before other group classes (those made for some very early – I mean, *musical* Saturday mornings).

Thank you to all of the MacPhail teachers and students who have helped me along my musical journey. The positivity, enthusiasm, and passion brought by so many members of this musical community are truly inspirational. I will carry these wonderful musical memories for years to come.

## **ANI BHARDWAJ**

Through my time in Suzuki, I have grown to love the violin and understand music as a core aspect of my identity.

I started violin at four years old with a 1/32<sup>nd</sup> size violin. I remember sitting on the rug with my violin in front of me, naming the open strings. I was so excited at the prospect of soon being able to hold the instrument.

Through performances of Lightly Row, note-reading classes, and Suzuki recordings playing on loop, I managed to stick with the violin and maintain at least some enjoyment for the instrument I played.

I truly started to love playing violin around middle school, when I began playing pieces I loved in Camerata and Symphonia, before I joined the Chamber orchestra.

Chamber music has been a huge source of joy for me. My friends and I started playing chamber music together in eighth grade, performing Mendelssohn's Canzonetta in the school auditorium. In high school, I joined the chamber group Ursa Major, where I got experience in playing rock pieces like *Back in Black* and *Bohemian Rhapsody*.

Through this music, I formed some of my closest relationships. Spending hours rehearsing and performing together (and

trading around the token not-wobbly stand) created my closest friendships.



Ani Bhardwaj

There were quite a few times when I was not on good terms with my musical education. I dropped my bow multiple times mid-concert, broke a few strings (two of which were not my own), and played recitals without a tightened bow. Despite all of this, what I remember most is the community: sharing looks with my best friend and trying not to laugh when I miss a note in rehearsal and endless jokes at the expense of the lovely viola section.

Thank you so much to Ruth Bergman for teaching me for the last 7 years. You are truly the best teacher I could ask for.

## MAHEEYA BHATTACHARYA



Maheeya Bhattacharya

When I was five years old, my mom decided that it was time for me to learn how to play an instrument, so I chose the piano because it seemed easy; after all, it was just pressing a bunch of keys.

Not long after that, I began my Suzuki piano lessons with Mrs. Malmin. Despite thinking that it would be easy, I soon learned that it was anything but. I remember learning how to properly lift my hand by making the ghost float and learning the importance of repetition through bribes of stickers. I was initially dismayed by the idea of having to practice every single day. Although practicing was a drag, I really wanted the “1000 Days of Practice” trophy. So, I dutifully set out to practice a thousand days in a row. Soon, the Suzuki piano CDs became the background

music of my life, and I was practicing every day, no matter what. Eventually, I got the coveted trophy on my bookshelf.

In sixth grade, I switched studios and began lessons with Mrs. Sophocleus. However, only a few months later, COVID hit, but with all the extra time, I began appreciating playing the piano. I had gotten to the point where I was advanced enough to play pieces that I could recognize, making learning new music even more exciting than before.

However, when I started high school, I found myself with less free time than before. Balancing school, other extracurriculars, and playing the piano was challenging. Still, the piano remained a constant in my life. Thanks to Mrs. Sophocleus’ patience, encouragement, and choosing pieces that kept me engaged, I was able to navigate managing my time better and practicing more efficiently.

Preparing for my senior recital renewed my love for the piano. While learning Bach’s Concerto in D minor, I found myself spending hours every day over the summer practicing, truly excited to learn the concerto. Yet, learning the piece was not without setbacks. As one of the most challenging pieces I’ve learned, at times, I found myself struggling. Working through those challenges made learning the piece all the more rewarding.

None of this would have been possible if it weren’t for the many people believing in me. I would like to thank Mrs. Malmin for helping me start my piano journey and build my dedication to practicing daily. I would like to thank Mrs. Sophocleus for not only helping me become a better piano player, but also a more confident person. Her endless patience, support, and encouragement to push me to be the best version of myself has shaped me

both as a pianist and as a person. Finally, I would like to thank my parents for supporting me through my musical journey.

Playing the piano has given me so many fond memories that I'll forever cherish, whether it be traveling to Germany, building a community in the group classes, or playing in the Ensemble Festival. It has instilled in me so many valuable skills like persistence, commitment, and self-advocacy.

## **EVIE BIRK**

When I first asked Santa for a harp for Christmas 12 years ago, I never would have thought I'd be where I am now. I never knew it would become such a defining part of my life.

What started as weekly in person lessons with my teacher, Emily, then transitioned into lessons over Zoom or FaceTime because of quarantine during the Covid years. After discovering that we were able to make progress with our virtual lessons, we then continued with them making it much more convenient and manageable to balance soccer, basketball, and playing the harp. And still today we are doing weekly FaceTime check-ins to continue and keep up with my progress.

Growing up playing soccer, basketball and the harp has led me to become the person I am today. My schedule has always been filled with practices, games, and recitals. The harp has been able to challenge me in ways that sports never could and helped me grow into a more well-rounded person. It taught me a completely different kind of discipline, and I now have a wide variety of talents from both sports and harp.

I could never thank Emily enough for always being so flexible with my tight schedule.

Coming into lessons a few minutes late straight from a practice or game, still sweaty and in my uniform. Giving me an unwavering amount of support the entire way through my journey, knowing that I would progress slower than we'd hope with balancing all of my extracurriculars with harp. Yet she never gave up on me, even when I wanted to give up on myself. She wouldn't hesitate to change the time or day of our lesson when I had some inconvenience get in the way and make me have to reschedule. Thank you, Emily, for always persevering and giving me a reason to continue with this journey.



Evie Birk

I'll never regret choosing to play the harp. Even though there's been times when the last thing I wanted to do was practice, I'm so glad I stuck with it. I believe it brought out a side of me that I never would've known I had, and all together made me grow more than what

was imaginable. Playing the harp is like my hidden talent and when I tell someone that I've been playing for 12 years now they are quite surprised.

Thank you to everyone who helped and supported me along the way, I'm very appreciative and grateful for all the sacrifices my parents and Emily made for me to get to where I am now. Today we're here at my senior recital and I've really looked back and reflected on everything that led up until this moment, and I never would want to take any of it back.

## DIMA BLUVSHTEIN



Dima Bluvshstein

By all accounts, I am a newcomer, a stranger, to Suzuki. While most participants started the program at a young age, as intended, I only started three years ago. But that doesn't mean I haven't gained anything from the program. Learning classical guitar at MacPhail has greatly progressed me on my guitar journey, has strengthened my love of music,

and has provided me with a new perspective on learning and community.

My guitar journey has been a very winding one. I started on electric guitar, then, when I found it wasn't for me, I took my dad's advice and switched to classical guitar. From there, I bounced from teacher to teacher for one reason or another until I started with Austin three years ago. And it was through him that I got introduced to the Suzuki method and MacPhail at large. I love how it all gave me so much more structure to my learning, and I've found that I have improved so much in both my technique and musicality in the last few years with him.

Through these lessons, my appreciation for music as a whole has also improved, primarily through a deeper understanding of music theory. In my individual lessons, I've been able to learn so much about chord structure and progression, and overall, why composers do what they do. Group lessons have also done a fantastic job of this, but from a more practical perspective. They've taught me balance and blend, part interplay, and most importantly, how to be a productive group member. This, in part, is one of the main reasons I have grown to love MacPhail and the Suzuki method.

But the greatest way I have been shaped by MacPhail and Suzuki is my approach to learning. While I missed the intended "starting age" of the Suzuki method, I still have gained from the ideas therein. I wholeheartedly agree that anyone can become a musician, and that it is important to develop fundamental skills like a musical ear. I also have grown to appreciate the value of group work, both in music, and beyond. And while I may have slowly picked this up from other areas of my life, MacPhail has done a phenomenal job at hammering this home in my three years attending. That is why, despite

my short time, I greatly appreciate what MacPhail and the Suzuki method have taught me.

## HELEN CHU

More than 10,000 miles driven, 3000 hours practicing, and thousands of dollars spent, my violin journey has shaped me in ways I never expected. While those numbers seem overwhelming, they represent years of hard work and dedication. They tell the story of learning patience, discipline, and commitment, all of which are lessons that have slowly shaped who I am today. While it's easy to imagine all the sleep I missed on Saturday mornings or the trips my family could have taken, those sacrifices became the foundation of everything music has given me: resilience, focus, and a deeper appreciation for the value of perseverance long after the initial excitement fades.



Helen Chu

However, that foundation wasn't built easily. There were many nights when I questioned why I kept going, often arguing with my mom over practice sessions while my arms felt too heavy to keep the violin on my shoulder. In those moments, quitting seemed much easier than continuing. I frequently wondered if I truly loved the music or if I was simply afraid of letting years of effort go to waste. Most of the time, it was simply the routine of practicing and playing that kept me going. Yet, looking back, I realize those moments of doubt were exactly when I was learning what perseverance is.

One moment that reminded me why I stayed was learning *Humoresque*. I remember during our play-ins, I would listen to the older students play pieces that felt impossibly beautiful. *Humoresque* always stood out. For months, I dreamed of the day I would be good enough to play it myself. When that day finally came, it felt almost unreal. The piece came naturally, not because it was easy, but because I loved how it sounded and spent hours practicing it. Standing on stage, playing something I once only admired from the audience, I realized how much growth had happened quietly, without me noticing. That moment wasn't just about one piece; it was proof that the years of effort had led somewhere meaningful.

Violin also gave me skills I never expected to carry beyond music. Through MacPhail's Suzuki program, memorization is a requirement. At the time, I hated it. I wanted to move on to the next piece instead of polishing one for months, committing every note to memory. But later, in classes like AP U.S. History, memorizing timelines, events, and connections came surprisingly easily. Without realizing it, years of musical discipline had actually trained my brain to retain information and perform under

pressure. What once felt tedious became something I was deeply grateful for.

Perhaps the most meaningful change has been my relationship with performance itself. I used to walk onto the stage terrified and hoping I wouldn't mess up. Now, when I step into the spotlight, I smile. Not because I'm fearless, but because I trust myself. I know how much preparation went into that moment. That confidence didn't appear overnight; it was built slowly through repetition, mistakes, and perseverance. Violin taught me that feeling ready isn't about being fearless, but trusting the work you've put in.

So, maybe my violin journey has become something I value greatly. Even when I questioned it, even when I resisted it, it was guiding the way I learn, how I handle pressure, and how I believe in myself. I'm very thankful for my first violin teacher, Kelly Lehr, who patiently taught me the basics, instilled the discipline of practice, and showed me all the things I could do on the violin. I'm also grateful for my piano teacher, Cindy Malmin, whose guidance broadened my musical understanding and helped me see music in a broader context, beyond a single instrument. And I'm especially thankful for my current teacher, Kathy Wood, who pushed my musicality further, challenged me to think more deeply about sound and expression, and taught me new techniques that made my playing more efficient and intentional. Behind every hour of practice were teachers who pushed me when I didn't want to be pushed, and parents who sacrificed time, money, and energy so I could keep going. Long after the music fades, the lessons remain, and for that, I'm truly grateful.

## **CLARA DUNNE**

When I was four years old, my parents took me to Orchestra Hall where I heard and saw a harp for the first time. I thought it was the

most amazing instrument ever and made up my mind that very day that I wanted to play the harp. For two years my parents tried to convince me to pick a smaller instrument or, like my older siblings, play the violin, cello, or piano. I even remember them suggesting the flute as a smaller and less expensive option. However, I was determined to play the harp and no one could convince me otherwise. Finally my parents gave in and signed me up for harp lessons with Nikki Lemire when I was six years old. I remember how happy I was to receive my very first harp - a purple Ogden.



Clara Dunne

My favorite part of the harp program was group class. I loved being able to play my pieces with the other harp students and looked up to the older harpists who played the more advanced Suzuki pieces. What benefitted me most was having an older buddy. It was so fun meeting with her, playing

songs together, and watching her play my favorite pieces from later books. Other experiences that motivated me were attending summer institutes and moving up to the next size of harp. We even drove to the Lyon & Healy factory in Chicago to pick out my first pedal harp and toured the factory to see how harps are made.

Practicing wasn't always fun for me though. Especially during middle school, I hated practicing because it took too long and it was just another chore my mom made me do every day. After Covid and taking lessons online, I switched teachers and have since been taking lessons with Emily Gerard. Right away I knew this was the right decision because Emily knew how to challenge me in ways that helped me become more motivated to practice and progress through the repertoire.

One of the most special things I will always remember are recitals and being able to perform for others. All of my siblings play an instrument and we used to go to nursing homes and perform for the residents. I loved being able to brighten someone's day with music. Also, every year my siblings and I would put together a Christmas concert and we would all play Christmas carols together. Not only would everyone love our music, but it was so special to have that bonding time with my siblings. I have also loved playing in the MacPhail recitals which taught me how to perform. I joined the orchestra at my school during my sophomore year which has been an incredible opportunity to play with my peers and learn how to stay together with an orchestra.

After thirteen years of playing harp, not only have I learned how to be a musician, but it has taught me many life skills. I have learned self-discipline and time management by balancing harp practice, homework, Irish

dance, and time with family and friends. I have learned what it takes to apply myself and work hard for consistent improvement. Harp has taught me how important music is for your life. By always performing a piece as if it's the last time I will ever play it, I am able to pour my emotions into the song, which moves the audience to feel it too—this is the true beauty of classical music. Ultimately, I would not be the person I am today without my harp teachers. Not only have they shaped me into the musician I am today but through supporting my musical journey, I have learned life lessons that I will carry with me for the rest of my life.

## ALLY HSIEH



Ally Hsieh

Music has surrounded my life ever since the age of 3. As I listened to my brother's violin recitals and did homework to the soft sounds of my mom's piano playing, I knew that one day, I would take part in this art as well. As the younger sister to my violin-playing

brother and the competitive nature between us, I couldn't just pick the same instrument he did. I was going to play a different one and become just as good as he was. As I sat in Mr. Kaiser's studio class at the age of 5, I knew that cello was the one for me.

My first cello recital consisted of me with my head turned away from the audience, staring at my dad as I plucked the D-string over and over again. Though it wasn't my strongest performance ever, it began the foundation for my many following performances over the next thirteen years. I never quite got over my stage fright until I was in eighth grade, and there were many other unromantic parts that I didn't quite expect while playing my cello.

There were many nights where I furiously played seemingly simple passages over and over again under the watchful eye of my dad, who had begun to learn the cello alongside me in order to be informed enough to supervise my practices. Many nights, I tried to weasel my way out of practicing, but over time, it became part of my routine. I finally recognized that the songs I wanted to play would require hard work to be put in. This is a mindset that I learned in music that I apply to all other aspects of my life, a mindset I believe has driven me to become who I am today. To my parents, thank you for always reminding me not to give in to my temporary laziness and teaching me discipline. To my teacher, Joe, thank you for always bearing with me through the hundreds of lessons, teaching me to fall in love with music and always encouraging me to pursue the next song and the next opportunity.

Though my earlier days were filled with individual performances in studio recitals and Friday night Suzuki Department Recitals, the Suzuki group class and orchestra programs introduced me to a shared kind of music. For the first time, I was required to depend on

others to make the music come together, and music became a conversation instead of a lonely monologue. Through my experiences in group performances in the Suzuki program, I found that the most fulfilling moments were not solitary, but they were shared.

Learning this, though I continued individual musical pursuits, I was motivated to bring music to others and use it to connect with others. In high school, this realization led me to accompany weddings and retirement parties, and also to mentor orchestra students at my school to continue the gift that Suzuki has given me. As I go to college, I hope to continue playing the cello and engaging in my community through music. The Suzuki program has given me something priceless – the opportunity to grow into a musician who can now spread the joy of music wherever I go.

## **JACK LARSON**

The viola has been part of my life for as long as I can remember. I started playing when I was very young, so music, and the Suzuki method in particular, have been a constant presence throughout my childhood. Because of that, learning music has never felt like something separate from everyday life; it has simply been part of how I grew up and how I understand the world.

Music is also deeply rooted in my family. My dad is a violist who learned through the Suzuki method, and his brother, my uncle, is a professional violist and Nashville session musician. Growing up around people who not only loved music but lived it showed me what dedication, discipline, and joy in music truly look like. Seeing their commitment made it natural for me to take my own practice seriously, even when it was challenging.

I am incredibly fortunate to have received such high-quality instruction at the MacPhail

Center for Music. The combination of private lessons, group classes, and orchestra experiences has shaped me as a musician and as a person. I am especially grateful for my private teachers, Linda Trygstad and Tami Gonzalez, whose support, patience, and high expectations helped me grow.

One of the most meaningful parts of my musical journey has been playing with others. I've loved performing in quartets and orchestras, where collaboration and listening are just as important as individual skill. Traveling on the Germany tour was a particularly memorable experience. It showed me how music can connect people across cultures and languages, and it deepened my appreciation for what it means to be part of something larger than myself.



Jack Larson

One of the most powerful experiences I've had with music happened outside of a concert hall. In 2024, my dad and I went on a church mission trip to the Dominican

Republic. My dad threw out the idea of bringing our violas, and what began as a simple idea became central to the trip. When we played at a cancer hospital for patients, we saw how deeply music can affect people. Through hymns and spiritual songs, we were able to offer comfort, hope, and reassurance in moments that truly mattered.

Music has taught me discipline, empathy, and perseverance, but more than anything, it has shown me how powerful a shared human experience can be. Wherever my future takes me, music will always be part of my life, not just as something I play, but as a way I connect with others and give back.

## NATASHA DEVI LARUSSO



Natasha Devi LaRusso

For as long as I can remember, my mom would host monthly Wednesday night info sessions for prospective Suzuki parents at MacPhail. She would come home from these presentations talking about things like "the Suzuki philosophy," and "nurturing the whole student," and "every child can learn". While these phrases didn't mean much to me at first, as I have grown as a violinist at MacPhail, I now understand the deep influence that being a Suzuki student has had on my life.

I have been involved in numerous activities and events as a violinist that have shaped my

perseverance, dedication, and leadership skills. While I often joke and complain about how much I don't want to practice, I would never want to trade the amazing opportunities I have experienced. I have participated in Saturday group classes and the orchestra program, attended the American Suzuki Institute every summer, participated in the Suzuki Association of Minnesota graduation recitals, played at Orchestra Hall with Vivace Violins, traveled to Germany and Luxembourg, and performed at the Music Matters Luncheon for almost 10 years.

My senior graduation would not have been possible without the unconditional support of many people in my life. Thank you to my mom for your constant encouragement of my musical education and involvement in the MacPhail community. It is so special to have grown up with the balance of you as my support through music, as well as my teacher through Vivace Violins. Thank you to Ms. Kathy Wood for your continual kindness and patience during every lesson, recital, and performance. There are not enough words to express how much your influence in my life has fueled my love of the violin. Thank you to Annette Lee for your support. It's hard to imagine performing at a Friday night concert, Honors recital, or Concerto & Aria auditions without your calm presence accompanying me. Thank you to David Leung for being such a fun and inclusive orchestra teacher. My Saturday mornings are always improved when I hear "pencil time!"

Thank you to my family for always supporting me and cheering on my musical accomplishments. I feel like I could not have gotten through the Suzuki books without my dad singing every song just a bit out of tune every morning. It has been so fun taking lessons with Dominic every Wednesday afternoon and watching him grow into a confident violinist. Thank you to Maia, Lily,

Juliette, Audrey, Madeline, and Eira, who have grown up in the MacPhail program alongside me. It is so special to have built such strong connections through our playing at countless performances and events. Finally, thank you to my many family and friends who have consistently attended my performances, book recitals, and more. I would not feel nearly as confident playing as I do without the knowledge that every one of you cares about me and wants me to succeed.

## JUSTIN LIBBUS

My mom is a Suzuki cello teacher, and I grew up with a lot of music in my house. Some of my earliest memories are of falling asleep every night to the sounds of my sister's violin. When it was my turn to start lessons, I entered Annette Lee's studio as an interested but squirrely 5-year-old.



Justin Libbus

Like many Suzuki Seniors, I can remember so many times when practicing was the bane of my existence, and I didn't focus very well in

lessons (sorry, Miss Annette!), but thanks to my mom's patience I kept going.

When I reached the end of the Suzuki books before my Junior year, I decided to give a recital of all my favorite pieces from Book One through the end of Book Seven. It was a challenge to get so many pieces ready to perform at one time, but preparing for that recital gave me a vision of what I'm capable of. That recital is still my proudest musical moment to date. Since then, I've enjoyed expanding my classical repertoire as well as exploring other styles. I've taken some improvisation classes and played contemporary popular and worship music at my school. It took a long time to get here, but I truly love to play the piano, and I look forward to continuing my piano studies wherever the Lord leads me in the fall.

## **MATTHIAS MURDYCH**



Matthias Murdych

My first exposure to music occurred at age  $\approx$  0.75, when I was exposed to very standard

music, the likes of Mozart and Bach, in the womb. Afterwards, my exposure to music continued, and I began piano lessons at the age of  $\approx$  3.5. This means that in the truest sense, music has always been a part of my life. At that time, I took my first lessons with my teacher, who is still my teacher. My journey with music has been surprisingly stable. I have taken lessons with the same teacher, Annette Lee, for my entire life. Surprisingly, I never truly (in my childhood) desired to cease music. The worst times were having to play an atonal piece by Aaron Copland and learning a very long Mozart piano concerto. However, I didn't truly enjoy music in the sense of actively seeking music until several years ago, when a nonclassical but very tasteful friend played me the second movement of Rachmaninoff's second piano concerto. From there, I suddenly sought out a much greater scope and magnitude of music. It cannot be explained why certain pieces impacted me so. But that is good; perhaps if I could understand and explain why I enjoyed music, it would cease to be special.

My greatest musical experiences were by far playing music in Colorado and Germany. An interesting memory is having performance anxiety in Colorado and requiring a stuffed animal, and more importantly, hearing a very mystical melody which I have held in my mind for 12 years and never identified the source of. My proudest performance was Chopin's Revolutionary Etude, and my favorite genre was always the late Romantic. I thank my piano teacher, Annette Lee, for teaching me super stable technique and my parents for having excellent foresight, and the many serendipitous items of luck which pushed me into discovering the beautiful music which I am learning.

## LYDIA SANTELICES

When I was in fourth grade, I got the option of choosing to play an instrument with my elementary school. I originally thought that I wanted to play the viola, not violin, because I wanted to be a little different. But they didn't have any in my size so I had to settle for playing the violin instead. At the time, I didn't realize that this compromise would turn into such a consistent part of my life.



Lydia Santelices

I remember when I first started learning I didn't do anything more than pizzicato for what felt like forever. I remember being so impatient I would play with the bow, not knowing how to hold it, because I thought pizzicato was boring and no fun. Playing the violin has taught me a lot, not just notes and rhythms, but it taught me about patience. It takes time to learn an instrument; it doesn't just happen overnight. I would get frustrated when I couldn't play a scale perfectly in tune

or a song as fast as I wanted to. But over time, with consistent practice, I could get where I wanted to be. This helps with other aspects in my life too. When I'm studying for a test, it's difficult to cram everything in one night; being consistent a week before a test is the best way to get a good grade. Even knowing this, I am a big procrastinator when it comes to memorizing music, so I would often memorize my song a week before the recital. Even with the procrastination and frustration that comes with playing an instrument, it's taught me to try and be more patient and take things at the pace that works, even if I want to be working faster.

Over Covid, it was hard to find motivation to play when everything was online. I never got to play with other people, and even when I was "playing" with Miya, it wasn't the same. Being so isolated from other people made it difficult to want to improve my skills. When we finally were able to go back in person, it felt hard again, because I had lost some motivation. But the longer I continued to play the violin, the more I grew to love using music as a way to get away from things. It's easy to forget about things that are stressful and just focus on the notes that I am playing, which helps relieve stress from school. It also helps me express myself through pieces that I enjoy, or pieces that express my emotions. Playing in recitals is really stressful and scary, but the more that I do it, the easier it becomes. Even though I still get super nervous, I have come to appreciate being able to play music for people to enjoy.

For the past eight years, playing the violin has been one of the most consistent parts of my life. Through Covid, changing schools, and friends, violin has always been something that I can return to. It is something I hope to continue doing throughout the rest of my life. I am thankful to have such a good teacher, orchestra conductors, and friends that have

made playing violin so enjoyable for the past eight years. Even though there are times that I would barely practice, when I start to play the violin, it is always relaxing knowing that I can play however I want and turn a piece of music into something that can express who I am.

## **KIAN SKIBA**



Kian Skiba

My journey with Suzuki Piano began at the age of four with my first teacher, Julia Clearman, at MacPhail. I have fond memories of those early years when my father would learn and play alongside me. Julia taught me that playing beautiful music was more important than achieving perfection. My second teacher, Benjamin Downs, later taught me the importance of technical discipline and practicing scales.

Finally, Suzanne Greer has patiently guided me through the challenges of middle school and high school, including the pandemic. Through the Suzuki method, I have

learned the value of perseverance and hard work. I enjoy the sense of accomplishment that comes from mastering a difficult piece through endurance and diligence.

These life skills will be essential to my future success. Additionally, playing the piano is a mind, body and soul experience that remains a vital outlet for me to manage stress and alleviate chronic headaches.

## **EVA SPERRAZZA**

Suzuki violin has not been a straightforward path in my life. It has been a long, winding road. Between switching studios and taking a break during the pandemic, my commitment to violin has varied. Throughout all of these changes, however, returning to violin has always brought me joy.



Eva Sperrazza

My parents first introduced me to the idea of

playing an instrument when I was in first grade. I had always admired the sound of the violin on the radio or TV— its grace, delicacy reminded me of a ballerina. So, when it came time for me to choose an instrument, I chose the violin without hesitation.

I remember being filled with excitement the day I went to the music shop. That feeling began to fade slightly once I began to understand the challenges and commitments that came with learning an instrument. Practicing every day seemed like an impossible goal, and I hated performing in front of an audience. For a period of time, these challenges made me want to give up. Despite my constant complaining, my parents wouldn't let me quit. They simply told me that I had to continue until the end of high school. At that time, that day sounded so incredibly distant.

Now, as a Senior entering my final semester of high school and Suzuki violin, I can say confidently that I am glad I stuck with it. Violin has taught me more than technical skills like shifting and bow control; it has also taught me accountability and perseverance. I learned to push myself to do hard things, and that the time and effort outside of class was essential to my growth. This mindset has carried over my academics, helping me develop a strong work ethic and a sense of personal responsibility.

Even if playing the violin doesn't have as big a role in my life after this year, Suzuki violin has built up my confidence and given me skills that I know will support me in college and future opportunities. I am deeply grateful for the experience, the progress I have made, and my teachers and parents who have made it possible.

## CAMILLA TESTERMAN



Camilla Testerman

My experience with Suzuki began with a six-year-old girl asking her parents to learn how to play the harp. Instead, I was signed up to play the piano. I would practice pushing the keys and making sure I kept my pinkies sturdy, but I never felt fully engaged. My parents often tell the story of a time during a childhood piano lesson when I told my teacher that you don't need music, you can just figure out the notes by ear. I have no memory of saying that, but I also don't remember wanting to start harp lessons. However, I don't have much of an excuse there as I write this with a harp sitting in my living room.

A year into playing the piano, I was still pestering my parents about the harp. Finally, they gave in and reached out to Emily Gerard, who invited us to sit in on a group lesson at MacPhail. As I sat and listened, I had one goal in mind: I had to play the gold harp. I still haven't accomplished that mission, but luckily

I began taking lessons and was introduced to the world of Suzuki Harp.

I remember being so excited to play. During my lessons, there was nothing quite like the thrill of choosing what color my playdough was in each of my joints. According to Emily, I was supposed to practice on the days that I ate, and that's what I did. I carefully plucked the strings as I learned the complex melodies of *Twinkle Twinkle Little Star*, *Lavender's Blue*, and even *Mary Had a Little Lamb*. I would high five the snowman in the strings to practice my gestures and pranced around as the elbow fairy in group classes.

Fast forward a couple of years to one of our recitals. I was sitting off to the side in Antonello Hall, watching the oldest girls at the time playing their more advanced pieces. I remember hearing a piece from the fifth Suzuki book and it clicked. As I listened to the various nail glissandos and rhythms being tapped on the soundboards, I knew that I had to keep practicing in order to learn that piece, and I did.

Although I never truly escaped the struggles of practicing, I can confidently say that harp has changed my life for the better. I'm thankful for Emily and my parents, who have always supported my musical career, even if I wasn't always supportive of it.

Thanks to their encouragement, I never gave up on the harp, despite my battles with the metronome. Now, I know that whenever I sit down at my bench, whether I just want to play for fun or genuinely practice, I'm able to rely on my hands to transport me to another world. It feels as though I turn into another version of myself that is able to tune out any external worries that may otherwise cloud my brain. I may not have unlocked all of the secrets to living life to its fullest, but I do know one thing: playing the harp has opened

doors I never even imagined to exist, and I can't wait to see where it takes me next.

## ELIZABETH TUTTLE

Sniff! I cue the accompanist. As I commence my performance of Bruch's "Romanze" for the 200-person Suzuki Association of Minnesota (SAM) audience, joy becomes my essence. When delicately shaping the opening phrase, I feel jubilation swell simultaneously with my crescendo; playing the viola allows me to find my soul's harmony.

"Romanze," through its lyricity, pushed me to experiment with phrasing and dynamic juxtaposition. Intimate pieces like this are why I love music; I can approach them differently during each practice and performance, uncovering new interpretations and evoking new emotions.



Elizabeth Tuttle

Individual performances highlight a musician's musicality, technical skill, and emotional expression. Over the course of my childhood and adolescence, by performing at Antonello Hall, taking lessons at MacPhail, and regularly practicing at home, I have been able to refine those skills while learning the value of dedication and consistency.

Collaboration is another key facet of music; the Suzuki Program has made plenty of group class, orchestra, and chamber ensemble opportunities accessible, enhancing my positive experience as a musician. Playing one of many parts, harmonizing, supporting, and even clashing with the sound of other talented musicians feels fulfilling, and these experiences have helped me develop essential teamwork skills, including listening, cooperation, and empathy.

Furthermore, throughout my time playing the viola, I learned how to be intentional when sharing my love for music. Playing in ensembles of varying sizes gave me a sense of purpose and a nuanced way to interact with my community.

My time spent playing the viola has taught me to be a better daughter, sister, friend, and teammate; I know the skills I have learned through music will be applicable in every aspect of my life. When I attend Yale University in the fall, I am excited to explore the viola opportunities available, see what I can accomplish with the instrument, and use the lessons I've learned to become the best version of myself.

## **BEN VANDERLEY KLAASSEN**

Fourteen years ago, back when I was just four years old, I started my music journey at MacPhail with my teacher Annette Lee. I had no idea how far it would bring me. I had no idea the places it would show me. I had no

idea there were so many doors it would open up for me.



Ben Vanderley Klaassen

Throughout my time on planet Earth, during the highest highs and lowest lows, music has been a guiding force, a constant in the sea of life. While there have been times, maybe more than one, when I haven't wanted to practice, or something felt impossible to polish, it hasn't brought down the joy that always comes from making music.

To my teacher of fourteen years, thank you. Thank you, Annette Lee, for all the patience, encouragement, and guiding wisdom that has shaped who I am today. While I may not have always enjoyed practicing, our weekly lessons have always been something I look forward to. The skills and confidence that I have built from you is something that I will never lose. And to my parents, Heather and Jody, thank

you for always pushing me to be better and strive for excellence.

My world within Suzuki has opened up doors that I may never have noticed. In sixth grade, I joined my school's jazz band, and it was one of my favorite things over the pandemic. Having the skills and confidence to try new things and expand on what I already had was amazing. Continuing into high school, I joined the band and continued to expand my musical journey even farther with the skills I had learned from playing piano.

I remember when I was back in elementary school and was listening to the older kids at one of Annette's studio recitals. I remember listening to the sounds that they could make, and the emotion and feeling that they could express through each note they played. I remember wanting to one day be able to play like they did. All the work and time I have put in for these past years are memories that I never want to forget. The lessons and skills I have gathered along the way are ones that I never want to lose. Wherever the sea of life takes me next – north, south, east or west – piano will always be a part of who I am and will become.

## AUDREY WEBER

When I was three years old, I chose to play the violin out of a lineup of instruments. Now, fifteen years later, it is my life-long passion.

My love for violin started during Saturday morning group class and orchestra rehearsals. I always looked forward to going to DeLaSalle to play our shared Suzuki repertoire and then new supplemental pieces as I grew up. There were definitely a few years when I dreaded getting up early on Saturdays, but I kept going and I now love Saturdays at DeLaSalle again.

The best thing to happen to these Saturday mornings is Vivace Violins. I have always felt

so much friendship and support through this group, thanks to Kamini LaRusso. Not only do I get to call myself a founding member, but we've played so much interesting repertoire and done so many unforgettable things together as a group. We've played before Minnesota Orchestra concerts, we opened the Chamber of Commerce kick-off event, we went to Germany, and we've worked our way from ending Friday night recitals to having our own concert at the end of the year.



Audrey Weber

Ten years ago, I added piano to my activities list. While it has never been my main priority, and has sometimes fallen to the wayside (sorry Annette), I haven't given up on it. Piano has allowed me to understand music in a much deeper way that I wouldn't have otherwise. Both of my piano teachers have made me work through music theory books, which I never liked, but allowed me to gain so

much knowledge and a deeper love of the music on the page. Those dreaded theory books gave me the foundation I needed to love my music to the fullest.

Suzuki is the foundation of my love of violin, but not the only thing that has kept me motivated and loving my instrument. Adding the Greater Twin Cities Youth Symphonies (GTCYS) to my Monday and Tuesday nights was one of the best decisions I've made. I still remember my first rehearsal where I immediately fell in love with playing in a full orchestra. The other thing that kept me motivated were camps and festivals. Every time I would come home from one, I would have this overwhelming desire to practice that I didn't have before I went to the camp or festival. This has been especially apparent the past two years, especially this year (which is very good for my college audition prep). The people I met and experiences I had have changed my life for the better.

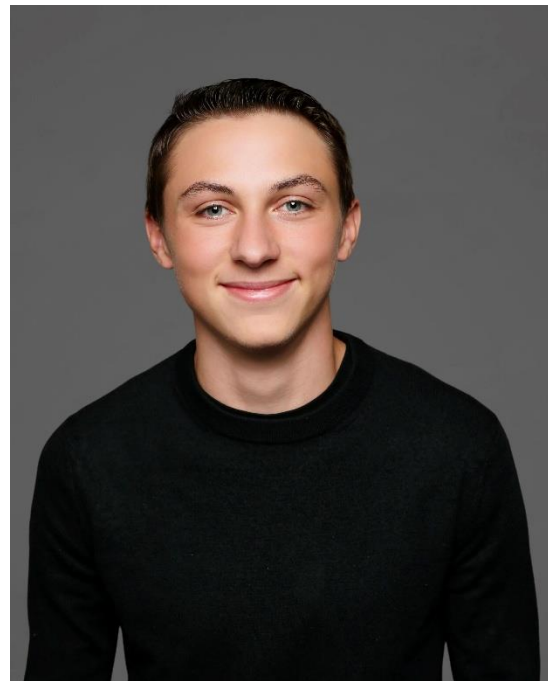
I wouldn't have any of this without my parents and teachers. Thank you to Andrea Noteboom for being my first teacher. Thank you to Margret Haviland for being my teacher for most of my violin career thus far. A huge thank you to Tamara Gonzalez for being my teacher for the past four years and for helping me become the violinist I am today; I am so honored I've been able to be your student. Thank you, Julia Clearman, for being my first piano teacher. Thank you, Annette Lee, for not only being my piano teacher for the past eight years, but for also being my collaborative pianist for countless recordings and auditions. Thank you to all my conductors and chamber music coaches for continuing to help foster a love of playing in me.

Thank you to my parents for telling me fifteen years ago that I was going to play an instrument. You've both taught me so much about being a wonderful person who doesn't

give up on her dreams and goals. Thank you to my little sister, Elise, for being my built-in best friend and playing so much music with me. Maia, thank you for being my best friend since before either of us can remember. I wouldn't trade going through the Suzuki program with you by my side for anything. Thank you to all of my friends who've played with me and supported me throughout everything I've done – I wouldn't be where I am today without all of you.

The Suzuki program has taught me many lessons about not just how to be a good musician, but how to be a good person. I am forever grateful for these years in the program, and will look back on it fondly for the rest of my life.

## **SOREN WINIKOFF**



Soren Winikoff

I started playing guitar by accident. Early on, I was exposed to classical music as I listened to my sister's Suzuki violin CDs on repeat in the car, "strumming" along on the stringless cardboard violin my dad created for my sister when she first started Suzuki. When she

moved on to a real violin, I adopted the cardboard cutout and called it my “biolin,” — we were inseparable.

I would walk around the house strumming the imaginary strings of the “biolin,” accompanying myself as I sang the Suzuki violin repertoire. Eventually, my parents decided it was time to upgrade to something that actually made sound, so they gave me a ukulele. The addition of strings expanded my options, and I started to learn songs using plastic chord charts. Eventually, I was old enough to start formal lessons at MacPhail, and guitar was the clear choice.

Whenever I have the chance to talk to or play with visiting artists, I like to ask the question, “what do you think about while you play?” I have received a wide variety of responses. I remember one person describing the chaotic, fairy-tale-like stories they create in their mind to accompany the pieces. Another great guitarist told me that he doesn’t need a story because the music itself is speaking. Yet another artist described their careful process of color-coding the music by section and musical arc to ensure expressive and thoughtful playing.

Whatever approach you take, whether storytelling or color-coding, I have found that music has a unique ability to evoke emotions difficult to express in words. I have always been drawn to music because it allows me to create a transformative experience and connect with others through my playing.

Throughout my time with the instrument, I have played in musical ensembles. These groups have taught me the joy of creating music with others, and the fantastic teachers at MacPhail taught me lessons about dedication and perseverance that are applicable far beyond the music.

The love of classical guitar I found through MacPhail is in no small part due to my teacher Alan Johnston, who has been an incredible mentor for many years. In addition to putting up with four squirrely, teenage boys in our ensemble, he searches far and wide to find exciting repertoire, finds opportunities for us to compete, exposes us to inspiring musicians, and teaches us to play musically and also pay attention to the fine points. From him, I have gained a deep appreciation for the versatility and unique sound of the classical guitar and a love of music that I will carry with me to college and beyond.

## AIDAN ZINN

“Four beats in a measure, a quarter note equals one beat.” My Mother told me, holding a music theory book as I recited time signatures. I looked at the pages, the numbers and lines floating in and out of my vision, fighting for a place in my memory. So many phrases to remember, so many configurations of little numbers, lines and dots. Each holding an importance and a meaning I would come to understand.



Aidan Zinn

“Four beats in a measure, a quarter note equals one beat.” My musical journey began when I was very young, starting with MacPhail’s early childhood classes.

Countless hours downtown, always supported by my mother, later progressing to piano and cello lessons. While I do not remember much else from the start of my musical career, that phrase has stuck with me till this day, playing through my mind anytime I set eyes on a new piece.

“Four beats in a measure, a quarter note equals one beat.” I do know however that my entry into music was never smooth. My piano lessons being a product of fate, my great grandmother's piano being enough reason for my parents to have me enrolled. Despite this, my later experiences cemented my love for music. During and after Covid, my classes gave me something to look forward to, supporting me through the isolation at that time. Even more recently I have used performances as a way to manage my emotions, my instruments always a companion by my side, bringing a source of consistency to my life.

“Four beats in a measure, a quarter note equals one beat.” To me it has become more than a phrase, helping me overcome loss and failure, leading to my greatest successes. I look to the future with excitement, carrying the confidence and dedication of countless performances. With the skills music has given me, I have the confidence to try anything, with failure only being an excuse to get better. To this day anytime I step on stage, doing anything from a speech to a graduation, I swear I can still see a piano in the corner of my eye.