

VARSITY ARTS

Artist of the Week: Danielle Liu

By **HEIDE JANSSEN** | Orange County Register

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Danielle Liu is not only a top scholar, she is also a top musician. She and her sister, Sarah, were the featured violinists for the Pacific Symphony's "Symphony in the Cities" program under the direction of Maestro Carl St.Clair. She is also a grand prize winner of the Satori Strings contest, received numerous awards via the Southwestern Music Festival, won first place in the American Protégé Piano and Strings International Competition and has performed as a soloist at Carnegie Hall.

Academically, on all six Advanced Placement exams she took during her junior year – calculus BC, physics I, language and composition, U.S. history, psychology and Spanish – she received fives, the highest score that can be earned. She plans to take seven more AP exams during her senior year and attend medical school in the future.

Name: Danielle Liu

School: Crean Lutheran High School

Grade: 12

Hometown: Yorba Linda

Q: What instruments do you play?

A: The violin is my primary instrument, but I also play the piano and the tuba.

Q: We heard that you took six AP tests last spring and scored a 5 on all of them. Tell us how you were able to do this in balance with your music activities.

A: I am blessed to be a student at Crean Lutheran High School, where my teachers played an essential role in preparing me for my AP exams with their incredible support and clear delivery of instruction. The effort that each of them put into preparing the students and teaching the classes also motivated me to try my best in my classes, so I am very thankful for them.

Balancing my academics with my music activities this past year required me to keep my priorities in check. Since I am pursuing a career in medicine, my academics are always my first priority; if I have big tests coming up — like the AP exams — I will study sufficiently before I start practicing. On the other hand, as music is also an important commitment in my life, I try to set aside as much time as possible to go through my solo, quartet and orchestral repertoire; sometimes that means practicing during lunch break at school. Writing out what I need to do in the day and creating a schedule for myself helps me to stay on top of everything that I need to get done, including practicing.

Q: How did you get involved in music?

A: Music has been a part of my life for as long as I can remember. My mom has always been a part of the worship ministry at our church, and she led the children's choir when I was a baby. She asked me when I was 4 years old whether I wanted to learn the violin or piano first; I chose the violin. At that young age, I practiced three to four hours a day, not because I was forced to, but because I enjoyed learning the music and improving on my instrument. At the age of 6, I started learning the piano, and music has ever since been an integral part of my life.

Q: Who have been your influences? Did you have a mentor in your development as a musician? If so, how did they help you?

A: My mom is the greatest influence in both my music and academic careers. When I started violin, my mom sat with me for hours, playing the piano alongside me so that I could hear and match the pitches. My mom is the one who always encourages me to try my best in all I do, to be expressive in my music and to remain humble. My younger sister, an incredible violinist, pianist and oboist, has also influenced me: She is my second set of ears in every practice session (and her ears are far sharper than mine), and her drive to practice all three of her instruments consistently while still being the top student of her grade inspires me to always work all the more diligently.

My previous violin teacher, Miss Eunhee Kim, mentored me for eight years and brought me to where I am today as a violin performer, especially influencing my phrasing and musicality. In the two months during which I have studied under my current violin teacher, Mr. Sam Fischer, he has already stretched me with challenging repertoire and has helped me to improve my tone, technique and control in playing. Miss Helen Weed, conductor of the Prelude Strings Orchestra, was the first mentor who taught me at a very young age what it means to act professionally. Mr. Jonathan Pratt, conductor of the Crean Lutheran High School orchestra, has allowed me to develop my skills as a leader, sometimes allowing me to take the podium in rehearsals. Mrs. Irene Kroesen, conductor of the Pacific Symphony Santiago Strings; Maestro Alejandro Gutierrez, conductor of the Pacific Symphony Youth Orchestra in my freshman year; and Maestro Roger Kalia, current music director of the Pacific Symphony Youth Orchestra, have truly impassioned me to be an artist, influencing me to love the orchestral repertoire and cherish the intimacy of great music-making with other phenomenal players in the Pacific Symphony Youth Ensembles.

Q: What inspires you?

A: The greats of violin (in my opinion) — Itzhak Perlman, Sarah Chang, Hilary Hahn — inspire me. Perlman's deep tone and powerful vibrato, Chang's personality in her music, and Hahn's flawless technique and clarity are all attributes in my music I strive towards.

Q: Other than music, are you involved in any other activities? If yes, what are they?

A: Outside of music, I am the president of my school's Science Olympiad team, National Honors Society and Christian Club. Further, I am a part of the Crean Lutheran High School Medical Cohort program, and I volunteer at the Orange County Global Medical Center, helping in the maternity ward. I also started a music therapy club at my school called the Healing Sounds of Music, in which students play soothing music in medical facilities and senior centers. Another activity I am involved in is the Ambassador Internship program at Crean Lutheran High School, in which students are given the opportunity to not only develop their professional skills but shadow prospective students and advocate for the school at various admissions events.

Q: What is something people would be surprised to know about you?

A: I am an actress! I enjoy acting and will jump at every opportunity I have to act. Speaking in various accents is another hobby of mine.

Q: The next challenge I want to take on is ...

A: Senior year! I will be taking seven AP classes, serving as co-concertmaster of the Pacific Symphony Youth Orchestra, leading as president of five different clubs at school, and all the while working through college applications. Thus, I know that staying on top of all of my academics and activities will be a huge challenge, but I am excited to embrace it.

Q: How do the arts figure into your long-term goals?

A: Although I want to be a medical doctor, music will always be a part of my life. I would love to continue teaching violin privately and participating in orchestra and chamber ensembles through college and beyond.

Q: What is the best advice you have received?

A: "Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves." — Philippians 2:3

Q: I hope my legacy as an artist will be ...

A: An inspiration. I hope to inspire the generation of musicians younger than me to fall in love with classical music and the beauty of the art. Further, I hope to touch the lives of many through the power of music.

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