



Amy J. Yang PHOTO: BALÁZS BÓRÓCZ

Weeks of Discovery

THE PROGRAM DIRECTOR OF CURTIS SUMMERFEST'S YOUNG ARTIST SUMMER PROGRAM REFLECTS ON ITS ADVANTAGES FOR HIGH SCHOOL-AGED MUSICIANS.

BY AMY J. YANG

YASP participants experience conservatory-style living with a rigorous musical schedule and opportunities to perform with peers.

The chattering and laughter of 80 young musicians is no match for the silence they fall into when their teachers walk into Gould Rehearsal Hall. On day one of the 2014 Young Artist Summer Program, it's suddenly so quiet you might think that someone has raised a baton.

Like these youngsters, hushed and waiting for my words, I once attended summer festivals as an ardent high school student. I remember my anticipation and excitement for the music I would make, and the music I would hear and learn. But I did not think ahead to when, as program director and piano faculty, I would be the one conducting studio classes, giving private lessons and coachings, creating chamber groups, and choosing repertoire that the students would experience as pivotal moments of music-making in their lives.

My questions about these young students ricochet in my head. Where are they from? What will they sound like in person? How will they get along? How can I work with them most efficiently and powerfully to help them transform into communicative musicians? Will I be able to help them develop enough tools to be successful beyond this brief summer interlude?

The questions recur each year, even though now, three years into the Young Artist Summer Program, I know that both faculty and students will make wonderful discoveries in these brief weeks. YASP can make a real difference for young musicians at a key moment in their development, as they experience conservatory-style living with a rigorous musical schedule

More Online

Follow YASP on Facebook at

www.facebook.com/CurtisSummerfest

and opportunities to perform with peers in an intimate, challenging, and supportive learning environment.

Some will rise to the challenge and embrace a new mindset as they focus their lives toward a musical vocation. For these students, YASP provides a foundation, a first look at the life they will lead. Others will have a great time at YASP, and will understand that music is to be their beloved avocation. All can benefit.

A NEW DIRECTION

The now-familiar questions were just forming for me in 2012 when I met a fourteen-year-old Canadian pianist auditioning for the inaugural Young Artist Summer Program. Harrison possessed a passion for the instrument and the music, but needed a more solid technical and artistic foundation. His progress over the next three weeks would be my charge.

Harrison later recalled that first summer at YASP as “changing his life.” Working alongside other young musicians and being immersed in a challenging musical environment under the direction of the Curtis faculty, Harrison’s musical life moved in a new direction. “I arrived at Curtis Summerfest as an aspiring pianist who had many technical limitations and very few musicians in my circle of friends,” he wrote to me later. Soon after YASP began, he noticed his technique improving at a faster rate. “I started playing with more freedom and less tension, giving me the opportunity to focus on the artistic challenges that my pieces presented, something I had wanted to do for so long.” This also freed him to make a greater contribution in chamber music with fellow participants. “I made lifelong friends, and created wonderful memories with some of the most inspiring people I have ever met.”

Harrison’s mother, at home in Canada, was floored by the rapid change in her son after three weeks of intensive conservatory living. On the phone he was “inspired and bursting to tell us what he had learned,” she recalls. Traveling to Philadelphia for the final YASP performance, she heard a transformed young pianist. “I was surprised by the enhanced tone Harrison was producing. It did not sound like the boy I knew. His shoulders had dropped literally inches, his posture had changed, his arms were in an entirely different position and he appeared far freer in his playing.”

Needless to say, Harrison returned to YASP—twice. He has transformed from an enthused young student to an engaging musician. Six first prizes, a Carnegie Hall debut, and winning first place in the YASP Concerto Competition, all in 2014, indicate a new confidence and a growing command of repertoire and the instrument. He’s also having fun.

Harrison is one of so many young musicians who are having life-changing experiences each summer. I hold pictures in my memory (and on my iPhone) of all of the YASP students, and they often send me news of their competitions, aspirations, struggles, and triumphs. They inspire one another to learn and grow in the three weeks they work together. They also fill my days with joy, meaning, and beauty.

I have benefited from extraordinary teachers: Timothy Hester, Claude Frank, Robert McDonald, and Peter Frankl, not to mention the numerous others who inspired me through chamber music. It’s now time to pass the baton, to give back to music what it has given me.

I look out on this crowd of 80 eager students and see Harrison and few of his fellow YASPers—returning friends—ready to embrace the challenges of the coming summer. I want to tell them that the best contribution we can offer the world is our profound love of music.

I step into the silence; maybe I won’t say a word. Maybe I will simply play. ♦

Amy J. Yang is the program director and a member of the piano faculty of Curtis Summerfest’s Young Artist Summer Program and Chamber Music for Adult Musicians. A 2006 graduate of the Curtis Institute of Music, she is a chamber music mentor for Curtis’s young artist initiative and a staff pianist.



Amy Yang coaches participants in the Young Artist Summer Program. PHOTO: DAVID SWANSON

CURTIS
SUMMERFEST

Summerfest offers multiple programs for adult and high school-aged musicians each summer, including the popular Chamber Music for Adult Musicians and the Jeffrey Khaner Flute Class, in addition to the Young Artist Summer Program. Registration for Summer 2015 begins in December. See www.curtis.edu/Summerfest for details.