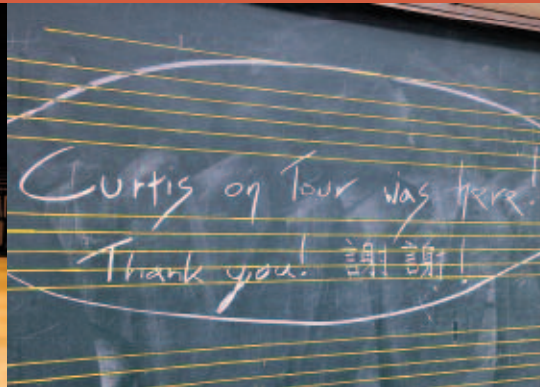




BY KRISTEN B. LODEN

# Asian Adventure

Connections created—and renewed—during Curtis On Tour's latest journey



**The scene unfolded over just an hour.** After listening attentively as a Curtis On Tour string sextet performed Tchaikovsky's *Souvenir de Florence*, Op. 70, the members of the chamber orchestra at Diocesan Boys' School (DBS) in Hong Kong arranged themselves in a large circle in the school's rehearsal studio. With the Curtis group joining in, they played through the entire piece again, exchanging smiles and furrowing their brows in concentration. As the second run-through drew to a close, it was clear that this musical exchange had made a profound impression on a group of young people for whom music was already a deep passion and serious pursuit. This pattern of discovery and

**Top:** Sextet members Marié Rossano, Eunice Kim, Roberto Díaz, Timotheos Petrin, Oliver Aldort, and Born Lau at the Chiang Kai Shek Memorial Hall in Taipei



Roberto Díaz teaches a chamber music master class at Hong Kong Baptist University.

delight recurred often during a groundbreaking tour that would deepen the abilities of the young performers, touch the hearts of their listeners, and garner new friends for the school.

Asian connections to Curtis run generations deep. In the past several decades, hundreds of Asian students have traveled to Philadelphia—some making significant sacrifices to leave their families or relocate with them—to pursue their dream of a Curtis education. Today one-third of the school’s international students come from Asia, and many more have other associations through relatives or teachers.

The Curtis network in Asia extends even further. Alumni hold significant posts in orchestras and conservatories, and Curtis faculty members are in high demand as performers, composers, and teachers. Asian parents of current students and alumni take tremendous pride in their connection to the school, organizing gatherings and performance activities to extend the Curtis experience to the other side of the globe.

So it was a natural fit for Curtis On Tour to travel last fall to Hong Kong, Seoul, and Taipei, where longstanding relationships harmonize well with the educational aims and international interests of the school. Curtis was able to strengthen its existing ties to the region and create new ones thanks to Asia tour funding from longtime Curtis trustees Sheldon M. Bonovitz and John McFadden.

The tour involved a string sextet comprising four students, 2014 graduate Eunice Kim, and Curtis’s president, Roberto Díaz. After performing their program of Strauss, Brahms, and Tchaikovsky at Field Concert Hall, the group left for an 18-day trip that included public performances, private house concerts, master classes, and school programs in Asia, as well as added performances in Dresden and Berlin on the way home.

Though all of the musicians have performed extensively during their time at Curtis, none besides Mr. Díaz had participated in such a wide-ranging and fast-paced international tour before. The journey brought them to a new level of readiness for professional life as performing musicians. Viola student Born Lau, a Hong Kong native, appreciated learning to deal with “obvious challenges” such as overcoming jet lag and cultural differences, but also notes a subtler one: The group learned to adjust its ensemble playing based on the varying acoustics of several halls. “We had to be flexible, to play our best under any circumstances and conditions,” he says. “These are not things that can be learned in any classroom—they have to be learned by doing. I came out of this journey a better musician than I was going in.”

Violin alumna Eunice Kim agrees the tour was “a great learning opportunity.” A Californian with relatives in Korea, she enjoyed an added dimension: “My extended family in Seoul rarely gets the chance to see me perform. Seeing them in the audience from the stage made this trip even more meaningful.”

## RECONNECTIONS AND REUNIONS

Audiences responded warmly throughout the tour, with calls for encores at every public performance. Mr. Díaz gave master classes for enthusiastic young violists in each city of the tour, and the sextet engaged curious students and community members through post-concert question-and-answer sessions.

## By the Numbers

Tour activities over the course of 18 days included:

- 7 master classes
- 5 public performances
- 5 media interviews
- 4 private/house concerts
- 3 concerts for students
- 2 outreach events
- 1 press event

Estimated attendance/reach:

1,750 general public, friends of Curtis,  
invited guests

1,250 students

**3,000 TOTAL**

Asian connections to Curtis run generations deep. Today one-third of the school’s international students come from Asia, and many more have other associations through relatives or teachers.

Perhaps most meaningful were the multiple opportunities, both organic and planned, to reconnect with alumni and parents and meet new friends—affirming at every turn the power of the Curtis legacy. One friend of Curtis, Leslie Yuen, seized on the tour as an opportunity to arrange a family reunion, gathering three generations of his relatives in Hong Kong and mainland China to attend a performance. Their account of a “truly wonderful concert ... and memorable evening” was e-mailed to family members worldwide.

In Hong Kong the outreach efforts of Curtis trustee Harry Lee created a web of connections to musical families, presenters, alumni, and representatives of the city’s leading performing arts organizations and conservatories. Several of them assembled for an intimate concert and dinner in the home of Patricia Chiu, whose extended family has long enjoyed ties to leading conservatories in Asia and the U.S.; Curtis musicians, including former president and director Gary Graffman, had visited the Chiu home in years past. “I knew I was in for a big treat,” recalls Ms. Chiu. “But the performance and musicianship far exceeded my expectations. I was so impressed by the sextet’s spirit and dynamism. It was ‘awesome’ indeed.” Kenneth Fung, who co-hosted the evening with his wife Nelly, added that the performance brought them to tears, as they were “touched by the emotions so vividly conveyed through the masterful playing.”

The public performance at Chinese University’s Lee Hysan Concert Hall attracted alumni, parents of current and past students, musicians, and online learners from the school’s massive open online courses (MOOCs) through Coursera, who received the sextet with palpable relish.

Also in Hong Kong, Curtis collaborated with the Asia Society, whose chairman, Ronnie Chan, invited the sextet to give a special performance at the organization’s impressive campus on the site of the Old Victoria Barracks, a former explosives magazine compound built by the British Army in the mid-19th century. The group also performed for more than eighty students representing five schools in Asia Society’s community network, and answered their questions following the performance.

Curtis alumni and parents embraced the musicians throughout their stay in Seoul. Led by alumna pianist Kyung-Sook Lee, this group handled transportation arrangements and organized group dinners, backstage meals, and other activities—and helped publicize a public performance at Kumho Hall that drew some 350 attendees, including alumni, their students, and guests of Curtis friends and trustees. Viola graduate You-Young Kim hosted a private dinner and concert in her lovely home, introducing several new friends to the Curtis community who “talked about [the concert] for days.” Her guests, she reports, “said they had never heard a sound like that night!”

In Taipei the sextet performed at the Koo Foundation Sun Yat-Sen Cancer Center, whose founder and president, Andrew Huang, described the experience as a “beautiful and intimate demonstration of musicianship and ensemble playing.” He added that physicians from the Cancer Center must learn from such an example of “seamless and dedicated” collaboration in the way they care for their own patients.

Chuan (“Sunny”) Fu and Lang Ou-yang, parents of current cello student Nana Ou-yang, arranged a press event attended by members of the media and the Curtis community—and even a few eager young musicians who aspire to attend Curtis one day. Piano alumni Chiao-han Liao and Mei-Ling Wang ensured a friendly reception at public performances at National Taiwan Normal University and Taipei National University of the Arts. Faculty members from both schools joined local alumni for informal post-concert gatherings.

The network of interest and friendship created by this tour will extend well into the future. For the performers, the memory of the experience lingers as well. Says cello student Timotheos Petrin, “This was my first tour abroad with Curtis, and [it was] by far the best one!” ♦

*Kristen B. Loden is senior vice president of development at Curtis.*



Born Lau coaches a young string quartet at his alma mater, the Diocesan Boys’ School in Hong Kong.



Dinner at the Chiu home in Hong Kong (l. to r.): Tisa Ho, director of the Hong Kong Arts Festival; host Patricia Chiu; Yip Wing Sie, music director and principal conductor of the Hong Kong Sinfonietta; Andrew Lane, director of Curtis On Tour



Sung Kim (center), United States ambassador to Korea until October 2014, congratulates the sextet backstage.