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## **Celebrating the Spectrum: A Festival of Music and Life**

*College of Music hosts third annual summer program for pre-college students on the autism spectrum*

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**EAST LANSING, Mich.** – For the third straight year, the Michigan State University College of Music will host a one-of-a-kind summer piano festival specifically designed to benefit advanced music students who are on the autism spectrum.

“[Celebrating the Spectrum: A Festival of Music and Life](#)” will take place **July 16–21**, providing students with instruction, performance opportunities, lectures and on-campus living designed to immerse participants with a complete collegiate experience and a rigorous schedule offering a glimpse into the life of a music major.

Students hail from throughout the State of Michigan, to Chicago and as far away as Southern California. Daily academic rigor will include piano master classes, lectures, chamber music classes and jazz improvisation, in addition to plenty of rehearsal time for concerts that will round out their week.

The culmination of their week-long experience includes their own public recital in an intimate private dinner setting, followed by a **Finale Concert on Saturday, July 21 at 11:00 a.m.**, with participants, faculty and College of Music piano students. This free and open to the public event will be held in the College's Cook Recital Hall, Music Building, 333 W. Circle Drive.

Derek Polischuk, MSU associate professor of piano and director of piano pedagogy, teaches piano to students with autism through MSU's Community Music School. A few years ago, he and Professor of Piano Deborah Moriarty, chair of the College of Music Piano Area, contacted the RAIN D Program — the MSU-based institute for Research in Autism, Intellectual and other Neurodevelopmental Disabilities that serves students with autism. They discussed a weeklong, immersive experience, and the idea came to life.

“Every year we look to build on our successes, and find new ways to elevate the experience of our students,” says Polischuk. “Our students demonstrate a remarkable amount of progress in just one week, and with the introduction of jazz improvisation last year, I’m always amazed to discover how adaptive and confident these young pianists are.”

In addition to the music instruction, practice and performances, the critical goals of “Celebrating the Spectrum” include improving perceptions about the potential of students attending college, and making impactful contributions to research and teaching methods, says Polischuk.

RAIN D is made up of a coalition of scholars and researchers from MSU that are focused on meeting the needs of communities through research, outreach, artistry and education.

“RAIN D is a multi-disciplinary effort, and involving the College of Music adds further dimension to what we do,” says Ian Gray, who helped create the RAIN D Program. “Celebrating the Spectrum gives the College of Music a place at the table to talk about research with other university colleagues. The

Spectrum program is very positive, and increases the visibility of MSU as an institution committed to enhancing the lives of others through community engagement, inclusion and research.”

For the student musicians who attend, their schedules include:

- daily master classes on piano repertoire taught by Moriarty and Polischuk;
- informative lectures by MSU professors in musicology, music theory and neuropsychology;
- guided Pilates for rest and relaxation and to raise body awareness;
- classes in chamber music and jazz improvisation; and
- meals and evening activities on the MSU campus.

Each student is paired with a College of Music student mentor. The College also partners with various departments and resources across campus to provide the essential support, services and special accommodations necessary for students.

Organizers of Celebrating the Spectrum have traveled to speak about the program’s positive outcomes locally, nationally and internationally at conferences and events about autism and piano pedagogy.

“Sharing our program’s experience with subject matter experts demonstrates the unique nature in partnerships between art and science,” says Moriarty. “When you listen to these children and young adults play the piano, and see what they can do, it humanizes the study of autism, and shows that music can help changes lives and advance research.”

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*Private support helps provide dollars to sponsor each student participant, enabling them to attend the festival tuition free. Funds also cover stipends for College of Music student mentors who buddied-up with the festival participants.*

To learn more about the program, visit [Celebrating the Spectrum online](#)

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