

Violin Studio of Elbert Tsai

17th July, 2023

Dear Studio - this year's graduating seniors are **Xander Lee** (University of Southern California), **Ryan Wu** (University of Michigan), **Dillon Huang** (Northwestern University), and **Abigail Uy** (University of California at Berkeley). While reminiscing about each outgoing class of students, I am always filled with a great deal of happiness, a little sadness, and much gratitude that I had the good fortune to cross paths with such interesting and ambitious people at the start of their life journeys. Two seniors are featured below, and 3 of 4 will pursue a degree or double major including violin performance. Without further ado:

Constance Kuan is 13 years old and attends Cupertino Middle School. She has won various prizes in violin competitions, including second place at the DVC Philharmonic, first in the chamber music (sonata) category at VOCE, and was featured at the Junior Bach Festival in 2022. She was recently accepted into the San Francisco Symphony Youth Orchestra and plans to join for the 2023-24 season. Constance has been playing piano since she was 4 years old, and performed the Grieg Piano Concerto as soloist with the Golden State Youth Orchestra in May 2023. She also dances competitively, and has won awards with her team at competitions including Starpower and Starquest, earning a ticket to Nationals. Constance is also the Chief Editor and Advisor of her school's yearbook.



Ryan Wu is 17 years old and lives in Pleasanton, California. He has been playing the violin for 8 years and piano for 10 years. He has placed in numerous solo competitions including American Protege, Junior Bach Festival, United States Open Music Competition, United States International Music Competition, and performed in Carnegie Hall. In past summers he has trained at Center Stage Strings and Interlochen Arts Camp, and was selected to participate in California's All-State Symphony Orchestra for 3 seasons. He currently has 3 years of experience teaching violin to elementary and middle school students. Along with his musical passions, Ryan has played soccer for 10 years, playing for his high school varsity team and at the NPL level for his club team. In the Fall, Ryan will enroll at the

University of Michigan, where he plans to complete a double major in Violin Performance and Mechanical Engineering.

Tejas Tirthapura is a 17-year-old violist and rising senior at Saratoga High School. He was principal violist of the CODA All-State Symphony orchestra in 2022 and 2023. This summer, he was selected to participate in NYO-USA and their North American tour with guest soloists Gil Shaham and Hilary Hahn. In his school orchestra, Tejas has served as principal violist for the past 2 years including their tour of Europe during the summer of 2022. He organized his school's student-run chamber festival in 2022 and 2023, and he is the president of his school's chapter of the TRI-M Music Honor Society. Next year, he will join the Young Chamber Musicians program in Burlingame as part of a string quartet. From 2019 to 2022, in addition to the viola, Tejas was an active member in his school's front ensemble in marching band and winter percussion. In this latest marching band season, he was chosen to be their center (principal) marimba player.



Riona Zhu is a fourteen-year-old violinist from Pleasanton, CA. At age 10, she was admitted as the youngest member of the Peninsula Youth Orchestra. She has participated in the Heifetz International Music Institute and Center Stage Strings at the University of Michigan. Riona was awarded the grand prize at the Silicon Valley Music Competition and first place at the Nova Vista Concerto Competition. She will perform the entire Bruch Concerto with the Nova Vista Symphony in the Fall of 2023. She is moving to New York and will attend the pre-college program at the Manhattan School of Music, studying with Lucie Robert. Her other interests include reading and playing chess.

Xander Lee, 18, is a recent graduate of Pacific Collegiate School in Santa Cruz. He is the previous concertmaster of the Santa Cruz County Youth Symphony and an alumnus of the California Youth Symphony. Xander will be attending Center Stage this summer and was recently accepted at the University of Southern California, where he will pursue biology and music.



Summer festivals:

Heifetz International Music Festival - **Jina Han**
 NYO-USA - **Sarah Son, Tejas Tirthapura, and Yuli Choi***
 (longtime student, moved to Korea in 2022)
 Sounding Point Academy - **Samantha Cheunkarndee**
 Sphinx Performance Academy - **Sydney Li-Jenkins**
 Center Stage Strings - **Xander Lee, Ryan Zhu, Riona Zhu,**
Joshua Cisneros, Sydney Li-Jenkins, Ben Jackson,
Samantha Cheunkarndee, Freddy Tak