

ARTS **for Youth** SPOTLIGHT

Gao Yung Chen says music has always been a part of his life.

"Ever since I can remember, my brothers and sister have been exposing me to classical music, whether it was through listening to them practice or listening to literature in the car. My family influenced me to start piano lessons when I was around 4. In middle school, I picked up saxophone to join the band, and that's how I discovered a passion to call my own."

Gao played saxophone in the Virginia High School band and was drum major of the marching band his junior and senior year. He was in the Symphony of the Mountains Youth Orchestra in his middle and early high school years.

He recently placed second in the Bristol Music Club scholarship competition playing the saxophone. He is a 2018 winner of the John Phillip Sousa Band Award, which recognizes superior musicianship and outstanding dedication. He was first chair in the All-District Band in 2017 and 2018 and was an All-State competitor in 2017 and 2018. He also plays the violin.

His favorite musical highlight is the summer he spent at the Brevard Music Institute. "I had the chance to immerse myself in six weeks of nothing but music and nature, studying under world-class teachers and alongside some of the best high school musicians in the country," Gao says.

Gao says that music is both a science and an art. "Music theory is almost mathematical in how notes combine to go from sound to emotion, yet the way

Gao Yung Chen has a passion for music

every performance is unique to the artist and setting means that no interpretation will ever be the same.

"To me, music is an outlet for emotion. Where words lack impact, music is there without fail. I believe that everyone brings their own background and experiences to a performance. What an audience member takes away from my performance will be totally unique to them. Whatever my music means to them is good for me," he says.

His favorite genre is classical, but he also likes the soaring anthems of alternative music. His influences are numerous. "I am eternally grateful for all of my instructors who have equipped me with tools to always grow as a musician, my incredibly inspiring peers and lastly my family for their unconditional support. In terms of recording artists, saxophonist Don Sinta and pianist Yuja Wang are some of my favorites." Gao says.

His next step is attending Dartmouth College in Hanover, New Hampshire. He isn't sure what his major will be, but it will not be music. "While I did consider music, I believe that being able to support my passion as a hobby as opposed to relying on it is the ideal situation for me. I hope to keep playing music for the rest of my life, however I want to choose how I enjoy that passion," he says.

When he isn't working on his music, he enjoys writing, basketball, tennis, video games and cooking. He competed in original oratory as part of the Virginia High School's forensics team. He was the class valedictorian.

Gao is 17 and is the son of Xian Chen and Kang Ying Wei. *A!*



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