



ALUM AMANDA CHENG

Music learning is precious but difficult to embrace. Learning and practicing an instrument involves significant self-learning, limited coaching, and slow progress. From that perspective, it is an activity that requires great perseverance before minute success. No 5-year-old, or even 17-year-old, will relish every practice.



Birthday Celebration with PS2 in 2002

I love music for its mystery and challenge. Consider the piano, my instrument. It takes years to train the hand to distinguish each finger as a separate instrument, and then play them together like an orchestra. Each finger, like an instrument, has its own sound and characteristic.

The hands themselves are not solely in control of the piano. The weight and balance of the body creates the musical qualities of the notes. The movement of the spine changes the degree of loudness. The wrist flexibility allows of the liquid connection of each sound. And of course, the inner emotions give the music soul in your performance.



Certificate day with Mrs. Minicozzi and Mrs. Draney

Sticking with piano for twelve years brings as many rewards as it does challenges, and any despair over practice is overshadowed by incredible experiences and the confidence you develop in your own abilities. So what if no one knew you just spent three hundred hours to learn that piece? It was for art!

Natural ability cannot substitute the formal training and hard work that will enable a musician to fully express in performance what she innately feels (I had no natural talent at all!). When I first started at age five, it was a miracle if I stayed on the piano bench for twenty minutes.

It took my parents' patience to teach me every day to learn the names of each note, to sit with me and keep me company, and to drive me, as they still do today, to all my competitions and cheer me on through three-hour recitals so that they can hear me play for two minutes. Those precious moments cannot be replaced or explained by natural talent.

Competitions are challenging, and I have been faced with failure over and over, but it is an outcome I accept in piano competitions and bounce back from. It is opportunity to reflect on the results and develop focus towards improving. Fittingly, failure has taken away my fear of failing. That bit of fearlessness makes me undaunted to try new things and enjoy the first early stages of being allowed to be terrible at something.

Westmont was the early encouragement for me to be independent and to focus as long as I needed to discover and enjoy myself. These same principles are what drive me in my music and academics today. I was taught to take responsibility for my own learning and to be as curious as possible. I sought my own solutions rather than be overcome with boredom.

Music works in the same way. We are self-reliant to uncover the unique qualities of existing notes and pieces and make them our own. My work on the same activity for long periods of time, as I did in my Westmont classroom, enables me to make connections about an idea, concept, or process in innovative ways. That is why art is forever a work in progress.

What I remember most at Westmont was how happy I was. I was always playing, and years later, I have found new ways to play and perform. Westmont was truly one of the most enjoyable times in my life, and it is a tremendous place to have been.

Amanda was in PS2 with Mrs. Sandy Minicozzi from 2001 to 2003. She is a senior at the West Morris Mendham High School. A competitive pianist with more than 50 competition awards, Amanda has made appearances at U.S. and European concert venues including Carnegie Hall, Lincoln Center, Merkin Concert Hall, Steinway Hall, Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City, the Mayo Performing Arts Center and at venues in Budapest, Hungary. She was a U.S. National finalist in 2015 and 2016 in duet piano, advancing after winning the U.S. Eastern division and the New Jersey state rounds. Looking to enter college as an engineering major, Amanda will intern with the ASEAN CSR (Association of Southeast Asian Nations Corporate Social Responsibility) Network summit in Singapore this summer where ASEAN countries will convene on sustainability initiatives in the region. Amanda will next compete in the duet piano U.S. national finals in San Antonio, Texas in April 2016.



Alice Tully Hall, Lincoln Center, in New York



Zankel Hall, Carnegie Hall, in New York



with duet partner Irene Koc after winning the 2016 U.S. Eastern division finals