

Student Spotlight: Sam Moraes

Junior Samantha Moraes was five years old, nearly six, and very shy when she first held a violin. Her kindergarten teacher had recommended some activities to help Sam become more outgoing.



T-ball, soccer and music were the answer. “You have to play either the violin or the piano,” her mother Lisa said. “Too many people play piano,” Sam answered. “I’ll play violin.” The next day she had her first lesson...



After just two weeks of instruction at the Kadima Conservatory, she was placed in their youth orchestra; she was the youngest child. Sam started as third violin (her own little part) and the conductor soon suggested, "Can we please put soap on her bow?" which makes the instrument silent. Sam laughs about these first months, and credits her first teachers Jonathan Rubin, Beth Elliott and Hubert Pralitz for her passion for making music. "When I was little, my teacher said that I had to touch the violin every day, even if that meant simply opening the case and holding it. So I would turn my cartoons on mute and make ugly screeching noises while they were on."

Jesús Florido, Sam's current violin teacher, has been working with her since she was nine years old. Sam first met Jesús, a native of Venezuela, at the Mark O'Connor Fiddle Conference in San Diego. "I remember it was exactly like looking at myself," Jesús recalls. "She was shy, as I was as a child. She wouldn't talk to me. Music was her way of expressing herself." After they became friends, he moved to Los Angeles from Chicago and began teaching Sam. Now he's like family. "Sam learned to verbalize things by discussing the music that she played. All of her success in life has happened because of the violin. She attacks her schoolwork with the same passion as her music."

Now Sam practices two to three hours every day, and up to six hours a day before a challenging

recital. But she practices about thirty minutes at a time and breaks it up by doing homework and other activities. Through the focus and commitment required to prepare for recitals, Sam has developed a work ethic centered on long-term goals. "In a year [of practicing], I work on things for my recital, college auditions, orchestra pieces and other little things like weddings." Recently, while playing with the Debut Orchestra, a pre-professional orchestra in Los Angeles, and completing



her third solo recital this August, Sam performed challenging works such as Bach's Solo Violin Sonata in G minor, Mozart's Sonata in B Flat and Cesar Frank's Violin Sonata in A Major. Her summers have given her time to participate in the Credo Chamber Music Camp at Oberlin University in Ohio, the Idyllwild Arts Symphony Summer Orchestra, or other events and competitions.

Whether it's practice time, a casual jazz session, or a formal recital, Sam prefers to play the violin barefoot. Long dresses

usually cover her feet so the audience cannot see her toes moving to the music. "The instrument becomes a part of you," Sam explains. "Playing violin is a very physical undertaking. When I'm barefoot, I like the feeling of being grounded." Her motions are calculated to make sense with the music. "When I visualize the music soaring, I'm up on my toes. During an angry part, I'm standing like a man. I stomp a lot, and I don't wear shoes so it doesn't make sounds."

Passion for both classical and jazz music gives Sam an edge. She focuses on classical music to master her technique, but loves jazz for its senses of fun and curiosity. "Combining [the study of] jazz and classical music is an important thing," says Sam. "Both have different aspects that compliment each other, and you become a better musician when you study both of them. Classical music has boundaries that you stay within. Jazz is completely your own because you're improvising." Does Sam like classical more than jazz? "No, I'm torn about what I want to do when I get older. In a perfect world I'd do both. If I played in an orchestra like the L.A. Phil, I'd be paid for the classical and do jazz independently."

Such intensive musical study leads families to make creative education decisions. "So many of my musician friends are home-schooled," says Sam. "I take pride in going to school. This environment and these experiences apply to my playing, and I'm a more well-rounded musician because of that." Her teacher Jesús credits Greg and Lisa, Sam's parents, for "making it all happen," and thanks Mrs. Vercillo for taking care of her at Louisville. "It is so hard to find a traditional school that supports her passions. Louisville is the best place for Sam."

While other young musicians are determined to go to a conservatory like Julliard or Curtis, Sam wants to continue her traditional education and earn a degree in music. "I want a college experience. I'm interested in other things, and I'm afraid of getting



burnt-out or bored. I'm looking for a university with a good violin teacher. If I had my way, Stanford would be my top choice."

Naturally, many people ask Sam about her career plans. What a very powerful question for this competitive teenager who not only enjoys her music, but also excels in English, math and science.

Sam says, "I'm not sure what I'll do to combine these things." She would be a marine biologist, writer or English teacher if she were not a musician.

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"I would even love to combine music with outreach programs or international relief agencies like the Peace Corps." Her violin teacher, Jesús, tells his students that through music they learn about life, not just the violin. "It is about creating possibilities. She can apply everything she's learned about the violin to her life. That's the ultimate goal, whatever she chooses to become."✿