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Love of music earns student Pearl violin

By Shelby Audas

Inside a small room just off of Red River Street, UT history senior Phoebe Hunt rests her new fiddle upon her shoulder, ready for rehearsal with her band, the Hudsons. The passion for music between the four members is tangible. They toy with their notes until they sound just so and jump with delight when a good idea comes along. One of the men jokingly asks Phoebe, "Hey, can I hold your fiddle? I want to see what it feels like to hold a \$10,000 fiddle."

Hunt was awarded one of the two prestigious Daniel Pearl Memorial Violins this summer at the Mark O'Connor San Diego Strings Conference. The winners of the award receive one of the violins, one was crafted in 2002 and the other in the past two years, and a scholarship to attend the Strings Conference workshop the following year.

Hunt, an Austin native, is one of three recipients of the memorial violins. Canadian teenage fiddle enthusiasts, twin brothers John and James Abrams, were also awarded scholarships and share the other violin.

The violins were crafted by Maine resident Jonathan Cooper to honor Daniel Pearl, an American journalist who was slain in Pakistan in 2002. Pearl was an accomplished violinist. The violins were crafted as part of the music component of the Daniel Pearl Foundation, which was started by the journalist's friends and family soon after his death.

"It started as a desire to continue the spirit of Daniel," said Judea Pearl, father of the late Daniel Pearl and president of the foundation. "Peace and understanding through journalism and dialogue and music."

Thanks to funds provided by an anonymous donor, recipients of the memorial violin are allowed to keep and play the instrument for an entire year. By utilizing programs such as these, the Daniel Pearl Foundation hopes to spread the message of cultural understanding and peace throughout the world.

Hunt was one of many students from around the world who attended the Strings Conference this summer, which offers instruction in violin, viola, cello and bass to any person age 8 or older who wishes to register. Instructors at the camp select scholarship winners based on their work ethics, musical talent and a generally well-rounded character, Hunt said.

"Throughout the week the teachers watch the classes and notice people who are paying attention in class, learning quickly, trying to help other fiddle players learn faster, and basically loving what they're doing," Hunt said. "That is what this fiddle represents - someone who is spreading the message of peace in the world through their music." During the camp, Hunt was praised for her ability to utilize music in a loving and sharing way while not stepping on other students' toes.

"They didn't talk about [the award] the whole camp. It was on the last day they told me there was this thing called the Daniel Pearl Fiddle, and they wanted to give it to me," Hunt said.



Media Credit: Joe Buglewicz
Phoebe Hunt plays her violin during a performance with the Hudsons Saturday evening at the Saxon Pub. Hunt received one of three violins from the Daniel Pearl Foundation.

Hunt was enrolled in violin lessons at the age of 6. She attended the Austin Montessori School, where she was able to practice the violin during regular school hours. From fifth to 12th grade, she was a member of the Austin Youth Orchestra while also participating in the UT String Project from second to 11th grade. Hunt said she performed in all the solo and ensemble competitions.

"I won best in class a couple of times. I ne-ver took it really seriously though," she said.

Rather than letting the violin become an intense, competitive activity for her, Hunt said it was more a love, something she enjoyed. Her father was a music enthusiast as well, playing classical guitar. She said he was one of her musical inspirations as far as encouraging her musical talents.

"I think his playing at home all the time created a good environment for me to be raised in, around someone who really loves music," Hunt said.

In high school, Hunt began playing without written music. That is when she started experimenting with the fiddle and playing with a band.

"It was the thing to do in high school. Everyone was in a band. Everyone went out to watch their friends play in their bands," Hunt said. "That is what Austin is all about - live music."

Hunt has been in the Austin-based folk rock band the Hudsons for about four years. The group is working on releasing their third album. Hunt also teaches violin at the montessori school she used to attend. The students range from 4 to 12 years old and perform at all different levels.

"They remind me of all the things you forget you had to learn when you were learning your instrument, like what the string names are and where you put your bow and how you hold it," Hunt said with a laugh.

Hunt's mother, Liz Bala Soto, called her daughter an inspiration to her family as well."

People say, 'Aren't you really proud of Phoebe?' and I don't really feel proud, so much as I am honored and humbled that I happen to be her parent," Soto said. "Her middle name is Shanti, which means 'peace' in Sanskrit."

Hunt's family and friends describe her as thoughtful, kind and passionate about what she does. "She was so inspired by the award that I got out my violin," said Stephanie, Hunt's sister.

You can catch Phoebe Hunt playing with the Hudsons Thursday nights from 8 to 10 p.m. at Momo's.