Javacya is 'more than music lessons'

Amanda Sieradzki
Council on Culture & Arts

Javacya Elite Chamber Orchestra will perform with Rachel Barton Pine on Feb. 21
JAVACYA ELITE CHAMBER ORCHESTRA

Patrice Floyd wants Tallahassee to know the real reason why celebrated violinist Rachel Barton Pine will be playing with the Javacya Elite Chamber Orchestra on Friday, Feb. 21, as part of their upcoming Arts-in-the-Heart Concert Series.

"It all started with a little boy being bold," says Floyd of her 12-year-old concert master, Phillip Rumlin-Bond. "After Ms. Pine signed his book at a conference, he took his violin off his back and asked if she could give him an impromptu violin lesson."

A little boldness goes a long way. When Floyd was in third grade, she was thrust into classical music in a similar fashion.

Floyd grew up in the latter part of the 1960s right after segregation was ruled unconstitutional. Three Juilliard music graduates visited her West Palm Beach elementary school with their cello and violins. Floyd says she doesn't remember what they played, but when they handed out a flier for lessons, she marched straight home and demanded that her mother sign her up.

She was handed her first violin shortly thereafter, and so began a many decades love affair with the strings that led her to co-found the Javacya Arts Conservatory, a nationally recognized college preparatory music program.

"Seeing those people play such a moving song… moving music is important because just like there's a struggle now, can you imagine the struggle then?" recalls Floyd of her elementary school experiences. "It was a trying time, so seeing that moving piece and seeing someone who looked like me, for me that said you can do that too."

Her early influences include Pinchas Zukerman, David Oistrakh, Isaac Stern, Noel Pointer, Jean-Luc Ponty. Floyd's school mentors recommended she attend summer music camps and took a two-day bus trip to Kansas for one such summer. She went on to earn her bachelor's degree in psychology and music from Florida State University.

Floyd started small as a music educator, teaching lessons to children in her neighborhood. 2020 will mark her 40th year teaching. She is a passionate advocate for representation in classical music education and performance. The conservatory reflects this philosophy as students from every age and background come together to learn from one another.

"My teaching style and music is unorthodox because my life is unorthodox," says Floyd. "I teach from my struggle, but I teach because we as a society have a long way to go. They're more than music lessons, they are life changing experiences."

Floyd tailors her lesson plan for each child to develop skills rapidly. Sometimes she will give students multiple etudes and scales to learn each week. She often involves parents as much as possible, from recommending limited phone access to passing along online video links to enhance home practice.

Her pedagogy follows the World Conservatory of Music in London syllabus to keep the mind musically and intellectually engaged. Students who play in the orchestra range from 11 years old to college age. Floyd says the students get stronger playing with this mix of experiences.

"We have advanced students, graduate students, faculty," says Floyd. "For every child there is an older person sitting next to them and they are mentoring."

Floyd's own role models include Aaron and Alpha Dworkin from the Sphinx Music Organization and Chi-Chi Nwanku from the Chineke Foundation. She was given the opportunity to play across the world, including in Nigeria where she was recognized as the mother of the "Mad Violinist." Her son, Ashanti Floyd, has been nominated for six Grammy Awards as a music producer.

In that same performance, she played one of her favorite hymns, "My Tribute" by Andrae Crouch. To Floyd, the piece sounds like a meditation. While she was setting up satellite music programs across the U.S., she played "My Tribute" in South Carolina and had someone shout an ecstatic "yes" from the audience.

Among her favorite artists today are Itzhak Perlman and Rachel Barton-Pine. Pine will be the featured violinist in the upcoming performance, and her technique and mastery of the violin aren't the only things that inspire Floyd. Pine's Music by Black Composers (MBC) book project is bringing awareness to over three centuries of music by composers of African descent.

Floyd is proud to give Tallahassee the most diverse concerts in the city — she says they go from Bach to rock in the span of one hour. The Feb. 21 concert will highlight many of these composers, including Chevalier Saint-George and his "Concerto in A Major, Op. 5, No. 2." Also on the program is George Walker's "Lyric for Strings."

"It is the music that brings us all together," says Floyd. "We all cry and laugh together, we all come from the same places and want the best for our families. When you're blessed with something, become an advocate for whatever you're going to do. If you're going to play music the rest of your life, you become an advocate for that."

Amanda Sieradzki is the feature writer for the Council on Culture & Arts. COCA is the capital area's umbrella agency for arts and culture (www.tallahasseearts.org).

If you go

What: Rachel Barton Pine, Arts-in-the-Heart Concert Series

When: 7:30-9 p.m. Friday, Feb. 21

Where: St. Peter's Angelican Cathedral, 4784 Thomasville Rd

Cost: $35-45

Contact: For more information please call 850-590-1517 or visit https://www.eventbrite.com/e/arts-in-the-heart-concert-series-rachael-barton-pine-tickets-74621594197.

Patrice Floyd, founder of the Javacya Elite Chamber Orchestra, leads the group in a warm-up at St. Peter's Anglican Cathedral at a Sunday rehearsal.
ANDREW SALINERO/SPECIAL TO THE DEMOCRAT

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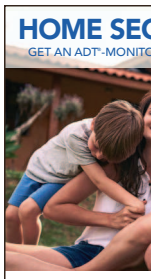

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