

Attention Music Lovers!

By Gina Folsom and DeLores Hawkins

You will be privileged to know that we have some very talented young musicians right here in Ames. Chris Kyurim Kim, 11, is a Fifth Grade student at Fellows Elementary School, and Joanna Kim (no relation to Chris), 16, is a junior at Ames High School. They won the 2018 Young Artist Competition sponsored by the Central Iowa Symphony Orchestra and will be soloing at the March 4th concert to be held at the Ames City Auditorium at 3:00 p.m.

Two of us from the board of the Central Iowa Symphony were so interested in learning more about the backgrounds of these talented students that we ended up in the kitchen of Chris and his mom, Yesun Choung. Chris and his family represent a portrait of devotion and unity. Over *yuja* tea, a drink sweetened with citrus peel, we visited with them about the experiences that help make a musician. Chris's mom, Yesun, explained that she brought her two children with her when coming to Iowa State University to study public policy in the Political Science Department, where she is working on a thesis under the direction of Professor Mack Shelly. She does balance a busy and very hectic schedule, the core of it probably being Chris's musical ambitions. Chris's face radiated an embracing smile as he waited for the first round of questioning to begin. His younger sister, Chaeyun Kim, a Second Grader at Fellows Elementary, paid more attention to the plate of bananas and pears that her mother had set out for them than to Chris and the adults at the table. She, too, plays the violin, and, according to Chris, she is on "...Book 3 of the Suzuki Method." On the day of our visit Chris's father, Daewon Kim, was visiting from Seoul, South Korea. He could not move with his family to Ames due to his job at the National Housing Corporation of South Korea.

So how *does* such a young person transform to such an accomplished musician? Chris volunteered that his favorite toy when he was three was a toy violin, and by age four, while still living in Seoul, South Korea, he was taking violin lessons, utilizing the Suzuki Method. He was soon referred to a professional to be taught, and he continued violin until coming to the United States and to Ames in 2016.

Chris's music career took off in a number of ways following this move. Not only does he play violin in the school orchestra, but he also plays flute in the school band. He plays piano as well. He practices about an hour and a half each day and on weekends for about five hours, especially when he is preparing for a special event. Recently Chris participated in Ms. Simone Porter's Violin Master Class with the Des Moines Symphony, where he performed Pablo de Sarasate's *Zigeunerweisen, Opus 20*, at the Des Moines Civic Center.

In 2016, at the age of nine, he joined the Des Moines Youth Symphony Philharmonic as a member of the first violin section. He became the Assistant Concert Master in 2017. He already has his eye on composing a symphony one day. He attended a music camp where he composed *The Fantasy Overture*, a piece inspired by the music of Gustav Mahler. He imagined mountains, rivers, and nature in general while composing this. We were treated to a recording of this piece. What are some of his other favorite works and composers? Chris stated that he also loves *Zapateato* by Sarasate. Another favorite is Paganini's *Caprice #24*.

Chris recognizes the role that his family and teachers have played in his musical development. The family has always listened to classical music, and Yesun recalls that when Chris was just two he would wave his arms and hands in rhythm with the music. One of Chris's teachers was Julie Fox-Henson of Ames, who is the Assistant Concertmaster of the Des Moines Symphony Orchestra. He is currently studying with Jonathan Sturm, Concertmaster of the Des Moines Symphony orchestra and Professor of Music at Iowa State University.

When we asked Chris about his plans for the future, he did not have to hesitate to tell us that he will basically "go pro." His goal is to "play around the world." While we have no doubt that he can accomplish this, he is by no means absorbed only in music. He says that he loves science and math and that he looks forward to learning Latin and Chinese. He explains that another goal of his is "to invent something." His teacher at Fellows Elementary, Mrs. Alice Wright, keeps him very busy with homework. As Chris states it, "I like to sleep in, because I have so much homework to do late at night!"

Being in the company of this gracious and warm family we must recognize that the most influential and supportive people in Chris's life are his family and their love for music and his dream. We said our goodbyes after taking quite a few pictures of the whole family (and they of us). We felt a bit guilty for our long visit, thinking that Chris might have to stay up late, bent over homework. At the upcoming concert he will be playing Mozart's *Violin Concerto #4*. We do so look forward to seeing him take the stage on Sunday afternoon, March 4th at 3:00 p.m. and hope that many of his friends and classmates will take in this wonderful occasion! And what is Chris's advice to any young person wishing to play a musical instrument? "I would say to persevere, that it will come!"

It was quite a bit more difficult to nail down an interview with Joanna Kim. First, her phone number didn't work, and we later learned that it was a wrong number we had obtained. The "*All circuits are busy, please try again later!*" that we kept hearing when we tried to reach her by phone turned out to be a mantra for this young woman's busy life. She is a high school junior taking four AP courses and already leading what appears to us to be the life of a professional musician. As it happened, only one of us could be present at the interview due to our own rather busy and often hectic schedules. We agreed to meet in the staff lounge of Ames High School's Media Center and were fortunate that her mother could join us later on in the interview.

Joanna was born in Berkeley, California to parents Soo-Hee Shin, her mother, and Jinoh Kim, her father. They came to the United States from South Korea some twenty years ago and met while he was studying for his PhD at Iowa State University. Jinoh Kim is a professor of biology at Iowa State's College of Veterinary Medicine, and Soo-Hee is a teacher's assistant for the kindergarteners at Fellows Elementary School. They have exposed Joanna and her older brother, Timothy Kim, (currently a freshman at the University of Southern California) to a number of diverse cultural influences, in part due to Soo-Hee's spending a great deal of her own childhood growing up in France and later in Cameroon. This might explain in part Joanna's choice of French when she was a middle school student in California.

After her dad completed his graduate work they headed to California, and, after Berkeley for his postdoctoral work, they moved to UC Davis for his next job

when Joanna was in first grade. It was here that Joanna began studying piano and violin, but she recalls that she was not very enthusiastic about either one. She quit piano after two years and violin after three. She said she found practicing quite tedious at that time in her life.

Were her parents musicians, too? Joanna smiled and reported that they were not musicians but that they both have always enjoyed listening to classical music and have always been very supportive and encouraging of Joanna's musical ambitions. Her brother played clarinet and saxophone for a while, but he did not continue with it.

It was in the fourth grade that Joanna began cello and found that she loved it. Sometimes teachers can make all the difference. She singles out Julie Hochman, her cello teacher, as being a true inspiration in her life. Practicing was no longer so tedious with the cello. When asked how she happened to get involved with this particular instrument, she chuckled and noted that several of her friends played it, so she wanted to as well.

In addition to playing in her high school orchestra, Joanna began playing in a piano trio. When she was a freshman she and her trio mates entered a chamber music competition at Sacramento State and won first place. Joanna's final year in Davis saw her entering her high school music competition, where she played the *Cello Concerto A Minor* by Charles-Camille Saint-Saens. She notes that she didn't win, but she was not too upset, "...because there were so many other good players."

Joanna played in both the elementary, middle, and high school orchestras before coming to Iowa in 2017. She has been involved in All-State music every year since she was in seventh grade, a personal tradition she carried with her when she moved to Ames. Her most recent All-State performance was this past November at the Hilton Coliseum. In addition to her All-State competitions, Joanna won 2nd Place in a recent competition in Cedar Falls. And, in addition to the upcoming performance with the Central Iowa Symphony March 4th, she is looking forward to a competition with the Fort Dodge Symphony orchestra this April 15th.

Joanna enjoys playing with a piano trio here in Ames. She is the cellist, Ana Jan the pianist, and Ryan Jeong the violinist. Ryan is a senior at Ames High and will be graduating soon, so their group will miss him and have to recruit a new violinist to keep going. They are currently preparing for an upcoming competition. She also plays with a group that calls itself “Cyclone Strings,” a small chamber orchestra made up of interested high school students. Her favorite involvement, however, is with the Des Moines Youth Orchestra, composed of ninth through twelfth graders. Joanna is currently studying cello with George Work, Professor of Music at Iowa State University.

One might think that such a busy musician would be all work and no play, or that such a person would have limited interests outside of music. This is certainly not the case with Joanna. In her free time she tutors children at Fellows Elementary. She likes to play tennis, although she is very modest when describing her skills. When the weather gets warmer she would like to try out for the Ames High School tennis team. Most of her friends are not musicians, so Joanna is exposed to many other interests as well. She enjoys the Science Bowl team and thinks that when she goes to college she would like to study biology. She is thinking about the health care field and would like to become a doctor, although she is not sure which type of one. She looks forward to continuing her music in college, so she thinks that USC might be a good choice, as it has, in addition its great research options in science, an excellent music program.

The upcoming Young Artists Concert with the Central Iowa Symphony will truly be a rare treat for anyone in and near Ames. Tickets may be purchased at Gilger’s in Ames or at the door for \$20.00. Students of all ages are admitted free of charge. Visit our homepage at www.cisymphony.org for more information and concert updates.