



TWINKLING THE IVORIES

February 2017

A MILESTONE FOR TESS BROWN – 40 YEARS AT ESPS

This year ESPS celebrates the 40th anniversary of ESPS teacher Tess Brown. Tess has worked with ESPS students since 1977. ESPS' newest teacher Hillary Paul interviewed Tess about this special milestone.

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ESPS: Have you always lived in Edmonton?

Tess: No. I was born and raised in the Crow's Nest Pass (five small towns nestled in the mountains). It is very pretty. There was a wonderful violin teacher who lived there. He created the Crow's Nest Pass Symphony Orchestra which still exists today. My dad and I took lessons from him. Professional musicians came to perform there. We even had our own music festival that was sponsored by the Lions' Club. It really is all about the environment, isn't it? I moved to Edmonton in 1965 to attend university.

ESPS: What is your favourite genre to play on the piano?

Tess: I love the anthems that I play for the choir at church.

ESPS: When did you first start learning music/piano?

Tess: I started learning piano at the age of five. My teacher had never taught someone that young. She lived two blocks away from us so my mom and I went two or three times a week for 15 minute lessons. My mom took notes in a scribbler.

ESPS: When first learning, did you always enjoy music or were there times your parents had to encourage you to practice?

Tess: My mom said I never had to be asked to practice but after the piano exam in June I would close the lid on the piano and not touch it for the whole summer.

ESPS: What encouragement would you recommend to parents to help their adolescent child to practice?

Tess: This is the time to get them going on a second instrument and play in a band or orchestra with like-minded people. Playing music in a group setting provides motivation, friendly competition and the opportunity to socialize. As long as they continue to take piano lessons and some practicing is getting done then it does not become something that they "used to do".

ESPS: What have been your favourite pieces to teach?

Tess: I love the Sonatina by Beethoven (Romance,) the Sonatina by Clementi (Spiritoso) and the Sonata by Mozart K.330 (first movement)

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JAN LISIECKI AND THE STUNNING EFFECT OF CLASSICAL MUSIC

In our times, I think it has become almost impossible not to subconsciously think about our busy lives when we're supposed to be having "a fun night out". However, Jan Lisiecki's concert hosted by the Edmonton Chamber Music Society at the West End Christian Reformed church did not leave any space for those kinds of thoughts. After all, when you're listening to a world-renowned pianist who has a record deal with the "Deutsche Grammophon" (the best classical record company in Germany), there's no way you can think about anything other than his passionately delivered music. Being an Edmonton Suzuki Piano School graduate and the daughter of a piano teacher, I was thrilled when I heard that the 21-year-old celebrity was coming to Edmonton. I cannot begin to describe how I felt upon leaving the concert. But before I attend to a mediocre description of that exhilaration, I will touch on some of the impressions I gathered throughout the concert.

It began with a lovely performance from a University of Alberta second year student, Gabrielle Gagnon-Picard. After an enticing interpretation of Canadian composer Alexina Louie's piece "I leap through the sky with stars", she beautifully interpreted a Faure piece. Next, came the highly-anticipated Jan Lisiecki, and my mother was practically buzzing in her seat. I myself had informed myself enough to be truly excited for his appearance, At the first note of Bach's Partita No. 3 in A minor, there was not a sound to be heard in the church except for the deep and rich music so skillfully executed by Lisiecki.

Chopin's Scherzo No. 1 in B Minor, Op. 20 is technically extremely demanding, but undoubtedly Jan Lisiecki was not unnerved by this in the slightest. After the intermission, I was anxiously awaiting to hear the Nocturnes, since these are some of my favourite works from Chopin, and I just generally rejoice in the atmosphere his Nocturnes exude. The flawless technique and deep dedication to each note was entrancing, and I must say my eyes were strained just trying to watch Lisiecki's fingers fly across the piano. I forgot to blink for longer periods of time, which led to slightly inflamed and irritated eyes, but I don't want to embarrass myself too much so I'll stop there.

After the performance, I felt like I needed to know more about the so - called "*reluctant prodigy*", and I discovered that he plays about 70-80 concerts a year. My only response to that is indescribable admiration. I know how much two recitals a year and a couple of festivals can stress me out, and so hearing this made me feel like I witnessed a super human that night, and for that, I am profoundly thankful.

I'm quite used to seeing many younger children staring intensely at iPads and smartphones which seem to be the principal source of entertainment these days. That's why it was so gratifying to not be able to spot one child holding some sort of gadget during the concert. It seems like the extreme talent and hard work of Lisiecki could keep even the children transfixed, and I think I caught a glimpse of the next generation of classical music lovers. As described in the program, music is like a "sanctuary," and in such a place, there is no space for Temple Run or Fruit Ninja (apparently, these are outdated, but they were very popular during my junior high days). One can only be unbelievably grateful that there is such a thing as classical music and that it has no expiration date in regards to its relevance.

When Jan Lisiecki, a piano genius and celebrity plays in Edmonton, you'd expect him to insist on playing in the grand Winspear centre, yet he shared his music with us in a church where only about 1000 people fit, and his attitude was sincerely humble. It's refreshing to encounter such a deserving and talented person whose modest character has not in the least been affected by fame, like so many of the pop celebrities' have. Of course, I must thank the Suzuki Piano School for promoting this performance so much, and the Edmonton Chamber Music Society for making his appearance possible.

I think it's quite interesting how personal the experience of listening to classical music can be, and as Lisiecki mentioned in one of his online interviews, it is very intimate and resonates differently with every individual. As for me, a 17-year-old high school student, I want to break the stereotype that my age group can only appreciate modern pop music. I take a liking to some songs of this genre as well, but the profound experience that comes with classical music is unique and unforgettable. Watching someone invest every part of his body into drawing out the best tone possible, with such sensitive musicality and perfectionism is beyond engaging. Of course, if I'm 100% honest, I must give in that there have been instances when the younger me peacefully dozed off during an immaculate Schumann performance...I answered my mother's reproaches by claiming that the music was just so calming and beautiful that I couldn't help it. This response to slow and harmonious piano music changed with time, and now I find that these kinds of pieces can be even more engaging than many fast pieces.

All in all, I left the concert having gladly encountered many people I know, and feeling completely refreshed inside and out. The drive back home was of course filled with praise and appreciation for Jan Lisiecki's performance, and it was then that I decided to write this article for the newsletter. I hope I can encourage those of you who couldn't make it to seek opportunities to listen to live classical music, as it will not only enrich your understanding of the Suzuki Repertoire, but also your lives.

Selma Hammad, ESPS Alumni

A MILESTONE FOR TESS BROWN, CONTINUED



*Let us all congratulate
Tess on 40 years of
teaching Suzuki and draw
inspiration from her as a
teacher in our community.
Congratulations Tess!*

ESPS: What led you to become a piano teacher originally?

Tess: It seemed like the logical thing to do after I finished university. I put an ad in the Journal and by the end of September I had 30 students. I did this for seven years. But, I was not very happy. I was thinking of becoming a legal secretary.

ESPS: How did you originally become a part of the Suzuki piano community in 1977?

Tess: Two of my friends from the Bachelor of Music faculty went to a Suzuki conference in Hawaii. They could not stop talking about this “wonderful new method”. I called one of the Suzuki violin teachers to ask if there was going to be another conference that I could go to. She put me in touch with Clarice Moellering who was already teaching Suzuki piano here in Edmonton. I guess you could say I got recruited. The next thing I knew was off to Terrace, BC to my very first Suzuki Institute.

ESPS: What growth have you noticed in your teaching since joining the Suzuki community?

Tess: Oh, this was a real game changer. I loved that the parents came to the lessons and took notes and all the students were practicing! I loved that the students were learning to play by ear which I had always been able to do and ... I was happy.

ESPS: Any concluding remarks about your 40 years as a Suzuki piano teacher?

Tess: I'm not done yet.

NEWS FROM GROUP CLASS:

NANCY'S 1ST ANNUAL CHRISTMAS GROUP CLASS SOIREE

All my ensemble groups had been working on Christmas repertoire during group class as well as Christmas solo repertoire during their lessons and I thought it would be wonderful to have them all play for each other and have a very informal mini recital. So, it was with much anticipation that we gathered at the end of November to play for each other. There were 30 students, moms and dads, siblings, FOOD and a wonderful atmosphere of community and bringing busy families together to enjoy an evening of fine music and their children displaying the pieces that they had been working on.

The Heintzman family was featured and they entertained us with some very cool Big band Christmas tunes. Dad (Brad) did his keyboard thing, mom (Barb) sang and Sam and Anna did their big band thing on their cornets. Oh, and I helped a bit on my trombone. Next year, for our 2nd Annual Christmas group class soiree I am going to include more family items along with all the duets.

Isn't it wonderful the way that music brings and binds us together!

Nancy Thornhill



Nancy's Group Class

Soiree

COMING SOON: SPRING FESTIVAL

On April 22, ESPS invites students to participate in the Spring Festival, our annual event that offers students the chance to perform a polished piece in a non-competitive format for adjudicators. This year, we are pleased to welcome Joseph Fridman, Lana Ramsay and Pat Huck to Edmonton to work with ESPS students. Watch for registration forms at your teacher's studio.

CONGRATULATIONS FEBRUARY GRADUATES

Congratulations to the following students for their hard work and well-deserved graduations:

Volume 1

Darian Cawley
Chloe Chan
Ava Gee
Caitlyn Huang
Eduardo Jordao
Nahrae Lei Kim
Sahana Maan
Edward Xiong

Volume 2

Hershey Fiedacan
Matthew Dyck
Jaxon Stecyk
Sydnie Zapesocki

Volume 3

Asher Thomas

Volume 4

Meredith Graham
Tiffany Phan
Hannah VandenBorn

Volume 5

Jackson Zhou

"Music exists for the purpose of growing an admirable heart."

Dr. Shinichi Suzuki

ESPS AT THE EDMONTON CHAMBER MUSIC SOCIETY – JAN LISIECKI IN CONCERT

Ugh. After missing out on the ESPS offer for tickets to see Jan Lisiecki in concert, I was faced with having to purchase tickets at the door, which meant \$70 for me and two kids. Did we really want to spend \$70 to see a "prodigy" play piano? I mean I've heard great pianists like Lang Lang and Vladimir Horowitz play on Youtube - for free! Hopefully \$70 would be worth it.

As I drove up to the venue, the parking lot and surrounding neighbourhood were full of cars. My expectations for the evening suddenly ramped up. I was forced to park a couple of blocks away from the church venue and trudged through the snow with my two kids in tow. When we arrived at the doors – again to my surprise – there was a lengthy line-up of people who had missed the first act. Fortunately, I could get tickets and one of the remaining programs, as the house was almost sold out. The program revealed that at the young age of 21, Jan had played at Carnegie Hall a year ago, was signed to an exclusive recording contract at 15, and had already played with pretty much all the famous orchestras by the end of his teens...impressive.

After a quick intro from the MC, this tall lanky kid with a good head of hair, springs on to the stage from a back room and bows to the enthusiastic crowd. Then he started playing. Ohhh my. My mouth dropped open and remained in a state of disbelief for several minutes. I exchanged glances with my daughter and the expression on her face mirrored my own - incredulous, at the phenomenal ability, lightning dexterity, masterful control, and amazing nuance that was being demonstrated before us. Jan made short but wonderful work of a complex repertoire of pieces from Bach, Schumann, Chopin, and Schubert. Our minds were literally blown. The audience gave several rounds of rapturous applause and shouts of 'bravo' along with standing ovations. Jan was even forced to play an encore to get us to stop. Newly inspired from the Jan experience– my daughter and son practiced harder than before and I even dusted off some of my old Schubert Impromptus – our piano was constantly going for days. Quite honestly, I don't expect to hear or see a pianist as good as Jan play....ever. It was \$70 well spent.

Ernest Li, ESPS Parent

2016/2017 EVENTS CALENDAR

March 19, 2017 Graduation Ceremony at PCL Hall, MacEwan University

April 22, 2017 Spring Festival at Suzuki Charter School

May 7, 2017 Group Concerts at Suzuki Charter School

June 3,4,10 & 11, 2017 June Recitals at Convocation Hall, University of Alberta

June 18, 2017 Graduation Ceremony at Muttart Hall, MacEwan University

July 17-21, 2017 River City Suzuki Piano Institute – Volume 4 Experience