

STUDENT SPOTLIGHT

Jasmine Mikesell '22 and Ivan Tarasenkov '23, Concerto-Aria Competition Winners



From left to right: Runner-up and Alternate - William Lum, euphonium, Winner - Ivan Tarasenkov, piano, Winner - Jasmine Mikesell, flute, Judges - Cristina Valdés, Thomas Harper, Jeffrey Snedeker, Randolph Kelly

The School of Music recently hosted its Concerto-Aria Competition after a two-year hiatus due to the pandemic. The highly competitive program has been a long honored tradition since 1981, when the first winners were chosen. Each year, students prepare their solos and the selected finalists perform in a celebratory Final Round concert before an audience and panel of guest judges. Winners are offered opportunities to perform as soloists with the School of Music's Symphony Orchestra or Wind Ensemble.

This year's winners were junior pianist Ivan Tarasenkov and senior flutist Jasmine Mikesell. As a senior, Jasmine had the opportunity to perform with the orchestra in April. Ivan will be performing next academic year, when he will be a senior. We spoke to each of them about their experiences, from how they practiced, to what they enjoyed, and what role music will serve in their futures.

Ivan Tarasenkov '23 – piano

Last summer, Ivan heard a recording of the first movement of Gershwin's "Piano Concerto in F," and he was quickly drawn to it. He recalled thinking, "I need to start this piece now," immediately after he finished listening. Ivan promptly learned the piece within a week, and had it memorized by the end of the next. During fall semester, however, he largely dropped the piece from his practicing repertoire, so when he picked it back up over winter break, he had a lot of relearning to do. If he were to change one thing about his preparation methods, he told us, it would have been to keep practicing the piece throughout the fall semester. Once the competition was only a couple months away, he went "full steam ahead every week" working on it with Isabella Jie, interim piano instructor and collaborative pianist, and then Jeff Orr, collaborative pianist and Ivan's duo partner.

When asked what winning the Concerto-Aria Competition meant to him, Ivan replied that he was "beyond happy to have just made it to the final round." He enjoyed the process, and was simply glad to play in front of the audience.

On top of the Concerto-Aria Competition, Ivan also had to prepare for the Wind Ensemble's March 16 concert. Just a couple weeks prior, he had been working overtime on the Gershwin piece, and once the competition was over, he did a hard switch to "Kaintuck" by William Grant Still. While preparing for both events in such quick succession was stressful, Ivan was able to work through the challenge and deliver two great performances.

Ivan is heading into his senior year, and will be graduating next spring with a double major in music and math. “I’m still weighing both options,” he told us, but emphasized that he never wants to stop playing music. He highlighted a particular desire to continue playing with orchestras, which he thoroughly enjoys. Right now, he is working on Beethoven’s Piano Sonata No. 26 in E Flat, Chopin’s Andante spianato et grande polonaise brillante, and the first and second movements of Ginastera’s Piano Sonata No. 1.

Jasmine Mikesell ’22 – flute

As Jasmine began to prepare for the Concerto-Aria Competition, she wanted to ensure she gave herself enough time to truly understand what the piece meant and what she wanted to say with it. For Jasmine, having a deep understanding of the piece gave her a good baseline comfort with the notes and musical ideas and allowed her to focus on making her vision come across in performance. This meant she started working on “Airborne” multiple semesters before the competition and performed it in front of the flute studio many times to make sure she could convey what she wanted to on stage in a performance setting. She was fortunate enough to compete during her freshman and sophomore years and was able to evaluate and refine her process of preparation due to her prior experience.

Jasmine found the entire process extremely gratifying! In addition to seeing her music connect with people, she also appreciates the recognition of the skills she’s worked so hard to develop. One aspect of this performance that will be rewarding long into the future is the recording. Currently, there are no recordings of “Airborne” with strings, and Jasmine has enjoyed working with the Symphony Orchestra to bring character to the piece!

You definitely wouldn’t be able to tell this as an audience member, but Jasmine is actually a biochemistry major. Over the years she has learned good time management and balance skills to maintain her commitments to both areas. Her most successful way to prepare for the day is to look at her detailed calendar and create a good mental picture of how the day is going to go so she is prepared for all of her switches. While she enjoys having a full plate, Jasmine also knows how important managing stress is. Taking time to prioritize projects and ensembles that she has the time for and letting things go to focus on the most important tasks has been one of the most beneficial skills Jasmine has developed.

Jasmine’s plan now that she has graduated is to work in a lab doing chemistry research. She wants to gain more experience and perspective in the industry so she can hone in on exactly what she wants for a career. Mikesell currently isn’t planning on pursuing music as her primary career, but she would certainly like to continue playing in ensembles.



Jasmine Mikesell performing “Airborne” by Gary Shocker at the April 30 Orchestra Concert