



little bird music

# QUARTER NOTES

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New York City's Metropolitan Opera at Lincoln Center

## Culture is everywhere around us

On November 9, Little Bird Music students and their families will have the opportunity to experience the live broadcast of the New York Metropolitan Opera's production of Giacomo Puccini's *Madama Butterfly*. We'll see it in Grass Valley at Sierra Cinemas, one of 2,200 theaters in 70 countries worldwide where the live performance will be transmitted that day.

The opera, composed by Puccini in 1904, tells the story of a young Japanese woman, Madama Butterfly, who marries a visiting American naval officer. Shortly after their wedding, he leaves Japan for America only to remarry and start a new life. Butterfly meanwhile gives birth to his son and patiently awaits his homecoming. Three years go by, and when she realizes he will likely never return, his ship arrives in Nagasaki. Butterfly learns that he and his new wife, Kate, have come to take her son back to America. Shocked, Butterfly bids farewell to her young son and then, in a tragic act, stabs herself to death.

## How to Cope with Performance Stress

The thought of performing in front of a large crowd can be enough for anyone to run for cover. As Little Bird students prepare for the fall recital, the topic of stage fright frequently comes up in our lessons. "I'm scared," some students will say about performing alone onstage.

Recent studies show that this type of performance stress isn't necessarily bad. In fact, it can help us perform even better. When we're about to do something important, maybe our heart pounds, our breathing gets faster, our palms feel sweaty, or our hands shake. For most, this is not pleasant. But if we rethink these physical signs as being normal responses to help us get more oxygen to our brain and to give our

Puccini's score masterfully represents Butterfly's inner emotional world. For instance, the opera's most famous aria, "Un bel di," comes in Act II when Butterfly faces the decision to either remain devoted to her husband or abandon her hope of his return. The aria, which can be heard [here](#), begins dreamily as Butterfly imagines their reunion. She moves through intense expressions of longing, only to realize at the end that the dream of his return is a delusion. The music throughout the opera also depicts the conflict between Asian and American cultures. Puccini uses Japanese folk songs, traditional Japanese instruments, and pentatonic scales to transport listeners to late nineteenth-century Nagasaki. In contrast, western major and minor scales, as well as quotations from The Star-Spangled Banner, represent the U.S.A. and American naval officer. As the opera goes on, these contrasting musical languages begin to overlap and collide alongside the story's complex themes of fidelity, justice, cultural and sexual imperialism.

Watching and listening to an opera invites students to become immersed in and think critically about history and culture. When I was a graduate student at Princeton, just an hour away from Manhattan, my classmates and I made monthly trips to the Metropolitan Opera. For just a few hours, we'd leave our book-strewn carrels and academic stress in the library, head to the city, and become lost in the sweep of live music and drama. The operas we saw, whether Verdi's *Aida* (1871), Puccini's *Turandot* (1924), or John Adams's *The Death of Klinghoffer* (1991), always caused good controversy. On our late night train rides home, we'd have fiery debates about art and politics. These conversations, I later realized, helped each of us figure out what we believed. We were transformed by one another's ideas and encouraged to expand our thinking in new ways.

Experiencing art together can allow us to connect, create meaning, and change how we think about our world. This is what culture is all about. And it's everywhere around us.

There's still time to sign up for the Little Bird field trip to see *Madama Butterfly* on November 9 (email Alice!). Even if you can't make it to the performance, all are welcome to attend the opera lecture over cheese and wine at Little Bird Music on Sunday, November 3 at 7:00pm.

#### Performance stress cont'd...

body the surge of energy it needs to perform at our best, then we can become less anxious and more likely to get into peak performance mode.

Kelly McGonigal, a health psychologist at Stanford who wrote the book *The Upside of Stress* (2015), tells us that how we think about stress makes all the difference. When we *believe* stress is bad, we often get into trouble. But if we recognize that certain types of stress responses are helpful, then we can use this information in a positive way.

So when your child expresses anxiety about performing, remind him or her that this is totally normal! All those unpleasant physical signs of being nervous will help them do their very best. And their courage will inspire others find courage, too.



Anthony Minghella's production of Puccini's *Madama Butterfly* will be broadcast live on November 9.

## Little Bird Student Profile

*Kelly Conley has been playing the piano since she was a child but recently picked it up again in a new way. She is an avid skier, mountain biker, designer, and mother. Below she reflects on the piano and her love of music.*

I have been playing the piano since I was five or six years old. I remember my dad and sister practicing and begging my parents to let me take lessons. One night, a friend of my parents came over for dinner and sat at our piano. She could play anything you asked her to play—all by ear and with virtually no training whatsoever. I was in awe and wished I'd had such a gift. I tried to become a music major in college and played the oboe but realized in my second year that I didn't have a good enough "ear" to continue. But I am still in awe of those who do.

Many years went by as I graduated from college, had a career, and moved to Truckee. I started taking guitar and, later, voice lessons to bring music back into my life but in a less stressful and more playful way than as an oboe performance major. When I first met Alice and we signed my son up for piano lessons, I had been singing for awhile but the passion was still there to dig deeper into the ear training and to fulfill a new goal of playing the piano and singing together. Slowly, we started unraveling my musical history together. The process has been an interesting one. I went from bringing in my tried and true classical pieces to wanting to learn popular music I love to wondering why sheet music is often inaccurate to, finally, Alice encouraging me to make arrangements myself. At first, I didn't think I could do it and then one day found the right piece to get started. This began a conversation on theory, and my old college courses came slowly back to me. Relearning my inversions unlocked an



Kelly Conley

entirely new world for me and allowed me to finally sing and play together.

Often I find that one gleaned piece of information leads to more questions but also leads to answers as well. I have taught myself the music notation software Sibelius. My ear is getting better, and I can figure out the notations more quickly. Online scores help me get started, mostly to find the rhythms. I still hold that passion for unlocking a better "ear," but I mostly enjoy the process of searching for solutions and notating what my ear tells me. It also starts a great dialogue about having the "perfect" score and just being able to sing and play the music I love. It is still a process I imagine I will continue for the duration, but I'm so happy I found Alice and finally got the "push" to start!

—Kelly Conley, October 2019

## Little Bird News

Little Bird Music is a proud new member of The National Guild of Piano Teachers (NGPT), a division of the American College of Musicians. All Little Bird students are eligible to participate in NGPT Guild Auditions, which take place at the Miners Foundry in Nevada City, CA each spring.

Participating students will work with Alice to design a custom program of anywhere from one to twenty pieces. As long as the piece is published, any type of music is acceptable, including film music, pop music, jazz, and classical repertoire. There are no age or level restrictions, so even the youngest students, as well as beginners and adults can participate. Students then perform their program in front of a judge and receive friendly feedback on their successes and areas for improvement. The program is non-competitive and meets students right where they are in their studies.

The main difference between NGPT and Certificate of Merit, a separate program available to Little Bird students, is that NGPT has fewer repertoire restrictions. In general, it is a bit more relaxed and inclusive of all learning styles, student levels, and repertoire choices.

The goals of NGPT, as stated in their syllabus, are:

- To prevent aimless drifting, give music study direction, and provide a measurement for progress.
- To furnish suitable incentives for piano students of all levels and grades.
- To provide a sympathetic hearing for each student. (The Auditions are private – student and judge only.)
- To supply a dignified recognition, as well as opportunities for cash prizes and scholarships, on a national basis.

Every Little Bird student is invited to participate! Talk to Alice if you or your child are interested.

## These little birds told me...



Jordy Goldman, age 6, and Alice Cotter at Jordy's first piano recital in 2007. Jordy is now a freshman studying music at Oberlin College and Conservatory of Music in Ohio.



During the summer of 2019, Jordy did a teaching internship at Little Bird Music. Here he is with one of his very first piano students, Anna Shefftz, age 5.

"Oberlin has been a great experience so far. I am surrounded by inspiring and intelligent people, and I have been working hard on music and academics. It is very different from Truckee, but a great chance to broaden my horizons and put some hard work into what I love."

–Jordy Goldman, age 18

"I like making up songs with Jordy."

–Anna Shefftz, age 5





"I like the fact that you can make different kinds of music by using different chords and keys. You can play high and low, make light sounds and dark sounds, and use different patterns."  
 –CJ Fogg, age 10



"There are so many keys, sharps and flats, black and white, and many different hand positions that allow you to play better music and lots of songs."  
 –Zane Fogg, age 7



"My favorite song to play is *Carol of the Bells*. The song has a really good rhythm that excites me when I play it because it is very interesting."  
 –Cruz Snover, age 7



"I love hearing the music I play and listening to what it makes me feel. I love all the songs."  
 –Lily Ryerson, age 8

## Upcoming Events

Mark your calendars! Below are just a few of the many cultural happenings in our area this fall:

**November 2 at 8:00pm:** Joshua Bell, violin virtuoso, live at the Mondavi Center, UC Davis

**November 3 at 7:00pm:** Madama Butterfly opera lecture over wine and cheese at Little Bird Music. All are welcome!

**November 9 at 9:55am:** Madama Butterfly Live MetHD at Sierra Cinemas in Grass Valley

**November 9 & 10:** Reno Philharmonic performs Chausson, Haydn, and Elgar's Enigma Variations

**November 12 at 7:00pm:** Reno Youth Orchestra Fall Showcase featuring Little Bird students Samantha Osborne and James Gordon at the Pioneer Center in Reno

**November 16 at 2:00pm:** Little Bird Music Fall Recital at the Truckee High School Auditorium

**November 23 & 24:** Reno Chamber Orchestra performs Beethoven's Violin Concerto at UNR

**December 13 & 15:** Truckee Tahoe Community Chorus Holiday Concert in Truckee

**December 14, 15, 20 & 21:** The Twisted Nutcracker performed by members of the Truckee Dance Factory at Squaw