



little bird music

# QUARTER NOTES

News | Profiles | Events



Aleksandra Vayner, age 9, with her Certificate of Merit State Honor.

## Little Bird Music Students Earn Certificate of Merit State Honors

On February 23 and 24, 2019, Little Bird Music students Aleksandra Vayner, Ella Nishimori, Kanan Deinken, James Gordon, and Samantha Osborne participated in Certificate of Merit. The music study program, sponsored by the Music Teachers' Association of California, covers a systematic curriculum in piano performance, technique, ear training, sight reading, and music theory. After six months of preparation, Little Bird students performed in front of judges and took a theory exam. Each received exceptionally high scores, earning the prestigious California State Honor.

"It's wonderful to see these students so proud of their hard work," said Alice Cotter. "Certificate of Merit is not for everyone, but it provides opportunities for students to strive for the next level of musical excellence." If you or your child are interested in participating next year, talk to Alice about the requirements for enrollment. All students are welcome to consider the program.

## Bird by Bird

Anne Lamott's book Bird by Bird: Some Instructions on Writing and Life (1994) is a smart and funny guide for pursuing anything creative. Her tips on writing equally transfer to learning the piano.

Most profound is Lamott's story about her brother taking on a school project. It's easy to get overwhelmed when we start anything new, whether an instrument, a piano piece, or homework assignment. But Lamott reminds us to move through the process little by little, bird by bird. Here's a snippet from her book:

"Thirty years ago my older brother, who was ten years old at the time, was trying to get a report on birds written that he'd had three months to write. It was due the next day. [He] was at the kitchen table close to tears, surrounded by binder paper and pencils and unopened books on birds, immobilized by the hugeness of the task ahead. Then my father sat down beside him, put his arm around my brother's shoulder, and said, 'Bird by bird, buddy. Just take it bird by bird.'"



Ella Nishimori, age 9.



Kanan Deinken, age 8.



James Gordon, age 8.



Samantha Osborne, age 15.

### Tips from Little Bird students on how to conquer performance anxiety

"You can't think about what everyone else is thinking. You're performing for yourself. Even if you make a mistake, keep going because most people won't notice or remember. Just have fun!"  
—Susie Greeno, age 16

"Look at your mom and dad, and that will make you calm."  
—Zoe Frumkin, age 6

"Don't pay attention to the audience. Stay focused on playing. Have confidence in the fact that you've prepared really hard. Trust that your fingers will know what to do." —Jordy Goldman, age 18

"You're performing for friends, people who want you to succeed. They are rooting for you!" —Suzanne Carlen



Little Bird Music students at the November 2018 recital. The next recital is on Saturday, June 1, 2019 at the Truckee High School Auditorium.

## Little Bird Student Profile

*Vincenzo Pellegrino, age 18, started playing the piano at age four. He's actively involved in musical theater, soccer, and volleyball. Recently, he won first place in the Rotary Piano Competition for his performance of Debussy's Clair de lune. He also has the lead male role in the Truckee High School production of Newsies. Below he reflects on his influences, compositional process, and love of music.*

I first became interested in jazz when I was a kid and was with my dad in the car going grocery shopping in Reno. We listened to an old Thelonious Monk CD, and I really liked it. So I started listening to more Monk. I then got an iPod Shuffle and put jazz and old rock on it. My interest in music pretty much grew from there.

Playing jazz really started to become a big part of my life the minute I started sophomore year. I went to the UNR Jazz Festival and watched the jazz professors play in a collective. That was the moment I knew I wanted to make jazz my lifestyle. Throughout high school I've played in several jazz bands, and I also listen to lots of classical music and symphonic jazz songs like Gershwin's "Rhapsody in Blue." My friends say, "why are you listening to this?" I reply, "because it's awesome."

My biggest musical influences include, of course, Thelonious Monk because his style of playing is not what most people think of as jazz. People told me jazz was based on standard ABA forms, but Monk made it free. That's why I love the song "Gentle Piece," which I played at the NorCal Jazz Festival. It's not a Monk song, but it's open and free, and when I play it I feel like that's what Thelonious had in his head all the time. He just played what he wanted to play. I also look to Jamie Cullum because he embodies what I want to be when I'm older, which is a singer and instrumentalist. Kendrick Lamar is also influential for me because his choice of



Vincenzo Pellegrino at the piano in April 2019.

words when he raps tells a story. That's what I'm trying to do in my music. I don't have the same past as Kendrick, but I like to tell stories. Bill Evans is also a huge influence because he's one of the most original piano players I can think of. I like that he developed the sound of solo jazz piano with unique voicings and ways of painting a picture without other instruments. I like the balance between Bill Evans's delicate playing and Monk's loud and clangy sound.

When I write a song I think back to eye-opening or amazing things that happened in my life. My song "Glacial Horizon" is about getting off a chairlift. It looked like white snow blinking in the light like crystals. In the song I tried to capture that delicate image. I then dropped into a powder run. It was total freedom. The middle section of the song reflects that. I start the composing process by sitting at the piano and messing around. Sometimes I play something cool and it sticks, and then I think about it in light of something that's happened in my life. I just full-send into it and see what happens.

*Pellegrino cont'd...*

If I were to give advice to anyone interested in composing music, I'd say don't be afraid to write what you want because if you're passionate about it someone will love it. Even if there's dissonance, don't feel like you need to please your audience. Please yourself. Because there will be someone out there who will appreciate it.

The best part of playing music is being able to express myself. Sometimes when I have a hard day I play something hardcore, or if it's been a good day I play something light. I like playing for people. That's why I love musical theater. It's always a risk to throw yourself artistically at a crowd, but no matter how it goes, most of the time people take it and say, "wow, I could never do that. You're awesome."

—Vincenzo Pellegrino, April 2019



Blessing by Tibetan monks at Little Bird Music.

In January 2019, Tibetan monks from the Gaden Shartse Monastery in South India visited Little Bird Music to offer their blessings and teachings. Little Bird students Frances Hamilton (17) and James Gordon (8) played the piano for the monks. It was a profound experience for all. Many thanks to Julie Gordon for coordinating their visit.

## Upcoming Events

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

### **Saturday through Monday, April 27-29**

Reno Jazz Festival at UNR featuring evening and daytime concerts, as well as performances by Little Bird students Jordy Guldman and Vincenzo Pellegrino. Guldman will perform an original.

### **Saturday, April 27 at 7:30pm**

### **Sunday, April 28 at 4:00pm**

Reno Philharmonic plays Richard Strauss, Zhou Tian, and Mozart at the Pioneer Center.

### **May 2, 3, 4, 9, 10, 11 at 7:00pm**

### **May 5 and 12 at 2:00pm**

Newsies the Musical starring Little Bird students Vincenzo Pellegrino and Susie Greeno at the Truckee High School Auditorium.

### **Tuesday, May 7 at 7:00pm**

Grammy-nominated composer-pianist Vijay Iyer and his Sextet at the Mondavi Center at UC Davis

### **Friday, May 10 at 5:00pm**

### **Sunday, May 11 at 1:00pm**

Reno Youth Orchestra Spring Showcase with Little Bird students Samantha Osborne, Jordy Guldman, Frances Hamilton, and James Gordon.

### **Saturday, June 1 at 4:00pm**

Little Bird Music Recital at Truckee High School (please note the change of time to 4:00pm).



Tibetan monks with Little Bird students Frances Hamilton, James Gordon, and Alice, Ingrid, and Cody Cotter.