

# PEER TO PEER

THE ST. LOUIS SYMPHONY YOUTH ORCHESTRA AND THE IN UNISON PROGRAM PARTNER ON A PILOT MENTORSHIP PROGRAM.

BY JULIE HOLZEN



DILIP VISHWANAT

Tiernyn Minor and Julie Holzen perform an *On Stage at Powell* concert together in February.

Walking on stage at Powell Hall is a surreal experience. For most people in the St. Louis Symphony Youth Orchestra, their first time stepping on that stage is for their final Youth Orchestra audition, one that determines the course of the coming school year in terms of colleagues, mentorship, and a wide variety of opportunities. That first step onto the stage may also determine the course of one's life.

When I first met Tiernyn Minor, the cellist I have been mentoring since October, the first thing I did after introducing myself was show her the stage door, and watch her walk out. Just then, I saw her experience the same feeling I did when I stepped on stage for the first time: an overwhelming sense of wonder and curiosity about the world of a professional musician.

I was first approached about the St. Louis Symphony's pilot program, *Mentoring the Music: Peer to Peer*, over the summer, when Jessica Ingraham (Director of Education and Youth Orchestra) and Brian Owens (IN UNISON Artist in Residence and Program Manager) contacted me and told me about the opportunity and a little bit about Tiernyn. I have always wanted to be able to work with younger musicians and pass on my perspective, so naturally I agreed to participate in this pilot program. I immediately started thinking about what my goals would be for myself and for Tiernyn.

Tiernyn is a freshman at Lutheran North High School. We meet for tutoring sessions twice a month, attend concerts together, and play in St. Louis Symphony Youth Orchestra rehearsals together. Although I still have so much to learn about my instrument, it is extremely gratifying to have an opportunity to pass on my knowledge, enthusiasm, and experiences to someone so willing to absorb everything I can share. Working with Tiernyn brings back many memories I have of my early days playing the cello, like the first classical CD I listened to, the first St. Louis Symphony concert I heard, and all of the emotions unique to playing my instrument.

In my first tutoring session with her, we spent a lot of time talking about what she already enjoyed about her instrument, like playing at her church, and the St. Louis Symphony performance she had attended. We talked about what she enjoyed most about the concert. It is interesting to see the same joy I have when I play my instrument or go to a concert in someone else, and I absolutely love the opportunity to foster that enthusiasm and help it grow.

Since I already had experience teaching private cello lessons, the tutoring session component of this program was the most comfortable aspect for me. However, the end goal of my mentorship is not solely to transform her playing—I am here to give her a medium through which to express the enthusiasm she already has for music. I also try to show her even more exciting, interesting, and compelling things about classical music that she would not have experienced otherwise.

That said, I have found ways to improve her playing while keeping up her level of excitement.

In one of our tutoring sessions, I gave her the first few measures of the Prelude of Bach's Cello Suite No. 1, one of the most recognizable pieces in cello repertoire. I started off our session by playing through it for her, and her eyes lit up when she heard it. As it turns out, her uncle had taught her the notes not long before I had played them for her, so we were able to immediately connect with it before



Julie and Tiernyn

working on more technical parts of her playing.

More recently, we have been working on Bernstein's Symphonic Dances from *West Side Story*. Like I always do when we start working on new music, I burned her a CD of the whole piece so she could listen to it. The next time I saw her, I asked if she liked it. She responded by asking if I had the soundtrack for the rest of the musical. *West Side Story* has been the most fun for us to work on together, and as part of this program, she is going to sit in on a Youth Orchestra rehearsal and play it with us. We are both really excited for her to get to know the Youth Orchestra and interact with everyone.

I asked Tieryn what her favorite things about the mentorship program are. Her first response: she liked that I am around her age. "So that means I'm not totally lame, right?" I asked. She laughed and said, "Yeah, you're pretty cool."

Tieryn and I do not have a typical teacher-student relationship. When I work with her, it is more of a partnership where her experiences, preferences, and opinions direct the work I do to improve her musicianship.

St. Louis is without a doubt an incredible place for young musicians, and this mentorship program adds greatly to it. It is easy to see the immediate

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results and how it helps young musicians now by giving opportunities that would not be available otherwise. However, it is imperative to consider the long-term effects. The same people who are right now auditioning for the St. Louis Symphony Youth Orchestra may very well show up to St. Louis Symphony auditions in ten years or so. Everything done to educate young musicians has a direct influence on the future music scene in St. Louis. I consider it a privilege to be part of that impact.

*Julie Holzen, a senior at Marquette High School,  
is a cellist with the St. Louis Symphony Youth Orchestra.*