

July 6, 2016

Celebrating the Spectrum: A Festival of Music and Life

MSU College of Music offers summer program for pre-college students with autism

Contacts: Michael Sundermann, communications director, 517-353-2043, sunderm1@music.msu.edu
Deborah Moriarty, MSU professor of piano, 517-353-9121, forgerd@msu.edu
Derek Polischuk, MSU associate professor of piano, 517-353-9043, polischu@msu.edu

EAST LANSING, Mich. – A first-of-its kind summer piano festival through the MSU College of Music will provide advanced music students on the autism spectrum the chance to preview life as a collegiate musician.

Slated for July 24-31, the 2016 “Celebrating the Spectrum: A Festival of Music and Life” will immerse five pre-college students in a daily schedule that emulates a week-in-the-life of a music major in a college setting. The festival culminates with a concert free and open to the public on Sat. July 30, featuring students, faculty and student mentors, beginning at 4:00 p.m. in the College’s Cook Recital Hall, Music Building, 333 W. Circle Dr.

“Our number one goal is to provide an incredibly inspiring, high-level artistic experience for these students,” says Derek Polischuk, MSU associate professor of piano and director of piano pedagogy. “We’d also like to improve perceptions families may have about the possibility of having their student with ASD attend a university.” Polischuk teaches piano to students who are on the autism spectrum through MSU’s Community Music School. He discussed the festival idea with Professor of Piano Deborah Moriarty, chair of the piano area. The two then contacted the RAIN D Program—the MSU-based institute for Research In Autism, Intellectual and other Neurodevelopmental Disabilities that serves autistic students through research, outreach, artistry and education.

“We’re a multi-disciplinary effort, and bringing music in adds to the program,” says Ian Gray, who helped create the RAIN D Program. “As faculty, we’re constantly learning from one another. I love thinking about and seeing all things our university can do to improve the lives of others.”

The eight-day festival will include daily master classes on piano repertoire taught by Moriarty and Polischuk, hour-long lectures by national and international educators, guided Pilates for R&R, and lunch, dinner and evening activities on the MSU campus. Guest lecturers include Randall Faber, master teacher for the World Piano Pedagogy Conference and co-author of bestselling book *Piano Adventurers*; Lauren Harris, MSU professor of psychology presenting childhood influences in “Music Matters;” and Michael Thaut, a National Research Award recipient and University of Toronto music professor sharing neurologic research about music and brain function.

Each student will be paired with a College of Music student mentor, while the MSU Office of Disability Services will consult with families and aids about special accommodations students may need. Organizers also plan to analyze the effectiveness of particular teaching methods, the effect the daily musical routine on attitudes and behaviors, and how the festival experience affects the perceptions students and families may have about attending college.

“Music is a language that speaks across many borders and often opens unexpected doors,” Moriarty says. “We hope that celebrating and highlighting the abilities of young musicians on the autism spectrum will provide an exciting and enriching experience for students, families, and audience members as well as increasing awareness of the RAIN D program and MSU’s commitment to this project.”

“Celebrating the Spectrum: A Festival of Music and Life” is sponsored by Michigan State University as part of the RAIN D Program. To learn more about the program, visit www.music.msu.edu/spectrum/ or contact Deborah Moriarty at forgerd@msu.edu.

-end-