

ADVERTISEMENT

Other editions: [Subscribe to the paper](#) | [Mobile](#) | [RSS](#) | [E-Newsletters](#)

Find it: [Jobs](#) | [Cars](#) | [Real Estate](#) | [Apartments](#) | [Classifieds](#) | [Dating](#) | [Place an ad](#)



Search All

- All
- Local News
- Calendar
- Jobs
- More »



[Home](#)[News](#)[Communities](#)[Metromix](#)[Business](#)[Sports](#)[Forums](#)[Obituaries](#)[Opinion](#)[Multimedia](#)[Classifieds](#)[Customer Service](#)

[Young Professionals](#)[RocLoop](#)[RocPets](#)[MomsLikeMe](#)[Finger Lakes Wine](#)[Kids at Play](#)[RocEarthHer](#)[RochesterCalendar](#)[Cozi Calendar](#)



Comment, blog & share photos

[Log in](#) | [Become a member](#) | [Search people](#)

Why miss local news when you're on the go? [m.democratandchronicle.com](#). [Learn More](#)

Piano serves as current of communication for deaf RIT student

Deaf RIT student expresses her imagination, creativity through piano

Anna Reguero • Staff Writer • December 21, 2008

[Print this page](#) | [E-mail this article](#) | [Share](#) | [?](#)

ADVERTISEMENT When Jingjing Pan plays the piano, the notes flow

easily out of her steady hands, and her body swells

with the rising and falling phrases of the [music](#). She sits studiously upright, exuding confidence in her posture, with a wide smile pasted on her face that only diminishes to the range of emotions embedded in the music she plays.

"I'm happy with music," says the 36-year-old on a December morning, warming up at the Hochstein School of Music before her piano lessons. "Playing the piano makes me feel happy."

Despite the simplicity of the statement, it [rings](#) even more clearly when she turns back to the piano to play more, excitedly ruffling



Avoid holiday shopping hassles! Democrat and Chronicle
Order your Democrat and Chronicle gift subscription today!

Related Video

Pan may have music flowing out of her, but the world around her is mostly quiet. She is deaf. With a hearing aid, loud sounds register, and so do ones that are high or low in frequency. But those sounds had little description for Pan before she learned to play piano. Piano has introduced her to a world of imagination, creativity and expressiveness for which she had no prior outlet. She calls playing the piano "an addiction."

Pan developed deafness from a mistreated fever at the age of 1, growing up in China. Her parents bought her a toy [keyboard](#) to stimulate her ears as a toddler, instilling a love and desire to play piano, but she never received the formal lessons she yearned for.

She came to the United States, with a limited amount of English and no American Sign Language skills, to attend Rochester Institute of [Technology](#). Swiftly learning sign language and developing a fluency in English, she started off in RIT's National Technical Institute for the Deaf studying computer technology and then transferred to chemistry studies, where she had opportunities to tutor other deaf students. Pan is now pursuing her master's degree in chemistry, studying polymer electrolyte membranes for fuel cells. But piano, she says, is still her main passion.

"Music is like an electrical current flowing around in me," she says with the help of an interpreter.

Through a period of shifting piano teachers in Rochester, Pan found her way to Wade Richards, the chairman and internship director of the music therapy department at Hochstein. Her studies are called music therapy, a field that utilizes music to reach therapeutic goals. Richards uses music therapy, with the movement-oriented Orff method, to help Pan communicate and be expressive. While Pan was first confused by the title of her class, she now agrees that "music therapy is wonderful."

"A lot of it is the relaxation part and the confidence," Richards says.

In her lesson on the large grand piano in Hochstein's acoustically live recital hall (the resonance helps her to detect the sound), Pan plays "Valse Noble," a sentimental waltz with a regal opening that she only recently began learning. She makes only a small distinction in touch to the piano keys between the opening and the main theme of the music, which should be almost contradictory, and is more timid than in her warm-ups.

"I think we need to add an emotion here," says Richards, who knows enough sign language to communicate expressively.



Jingjing Pan and instructor Wade Richards, chairman of the music therapy department at Hochstein School of Music, go over a piano lesson. Pan, who is deaf, calls Richards her "third ear." (KATHARINE SIDELNIK staff photographer)

Related news from the Web

- [Rochester Institute of Technology](#)
- [Audiology](#)
- [Medicine](#)

Powered by Topix.net

ADVERTISEMENT

Ads by Pulse 360

[Get Listed Here](#)

1 Rule of a Flat Stomach

Cut down 25 lbs of stomach fat in - 1 month by obeying this 1 rule
[KimsDietPlan.com](#)

He makes up a story to go along to the music of trumpets announcing royalty into the room as an invitation to a dreamlike dance.

To help with the opening trumpetlike announcement, he shows the story through body language and hand gestures and then sits down at the piano to demonstrate his hands descending onto the keyboard in a detached, heavy way. Pan tries it. "Too sweet," he says. She tries again, this time pressing more weight into the keyboard so the chords are louder and more bouncy. "Yes," he says with exclamation. "You have the right emotion in this part."

For the waltz, Richards twirls around the piano, circling his hands showing that some phrases seem to gain momentum. Pan watches and understands.

"I'm utilizing movement to communicate music, whether it's Jingjing moving and understanding how the movement relates to the music or me moving to show the music," Richards says. "It's more of a visual approach to create a picture of how the music sounds like and how I interpret it."

Now in her fifth year of study with Richards, Pan has flourished under his tutelage. She calls him her "third ear" and says he has a sense for the kind of music that will inspire her to practice and be best for her ears.

"If the keys are too close together, they sound the same to me," she says. "That's why Wade looks for big, dramatic differences with a robust sound."

Richards chooses music for her that is sometimes inherently visual, such as [movie](#) scores, and asks Pan to watch the movie as part of her practicing.

"It was good to watch the story, the emotion involved in the movie," says Pan about the song "Unchained Melody" in the movie *Unchained*. "I cried. I went back to the piano to make my playing better."

She practices in the afternoon, between lunch and class work, and again when she gets home at night. It has enhanced her social life, introducing her to new people in the music community who have become friends, and gives her motivation to do her schoolwork.

"Members of the science support team were frustrated with how to help her succeed in school," says Liz Ewell, a retired RIT employee who became a friend of Pan's and helps interpret for her. "After she began piano lessons with Wade, something

Oprah's Acai Berry Diet

Learn How A Mom Lost 42 Lbs in 12 Weeks Thanks to Oprah's Acai Diet.

www.TracysWeightLoss.com

Hot Stock Alert - EVSO

Solar Power Your Portfolio With Evolution Solar. Invest.

www.EvolutionSolar.com

happened and she did a turnaround in her studies."

"Music helps my brain to relax to be open to new ideas," Pan says. "Music stimulates my brain, motivates me to persevere and helps me to learn faster."

AREGUERO@DemocratandChronicle.com

In your voice

Read reactions to this story

characters left

NT



Partners: Jobs: CareerBuilder.com Cars: Cars.com Apartments: Apartments.com Shopping: ShopLocal.com

[Home](#) | [News](#) | [Communities](#) | [Metromix](#) | [Business](#) | [Sports](#) | [Forums](#) | [Obituaries](#) | [Opinion](#) | [Multimedia](#) | [Classifieds](#)
[Customer Service](#) | [Site Map](#)

[Contact Us](#) | [About Us](#) | [Work for Us](#) | [Subscribe](#)

GANNETT NEW YORK NETWORK: [Binghamton](#) | [Elmira](#) | [Ithaca](#) | [Poughkeepsie](#) | [Rochester](#) | [Westchester](#) | [WGRZ-TV, Buffalo](#)

Copyright ©2008 Rochester Democrat & Chronicle. All rights reserved.
Mailing Address: 55 Exchange Boulevard | Rochester, New York 14614 | (585) 232-7100
Use of this site signifies your agreement to the [Terms of Service](#) and [Privacy Policy](#) updated March 2007.