

ARTIST

A MONTHLY NEWSLETTER FROM THE PIANO STUDIO OF DR. JOVANNI-REY DE PEDRO
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Music in the Time of Conflict

The day after Thanksgiving, Jeremy and I boarded a flight bound for Medellín, Colombia, where I was invited to give a recital and masterclass at the University of Antioquia. Medellín – once known as “the most dangerous city in the world” – has made huge strides away from its troubled past to become a city of great innovation and growth. Hipster neighborhoods juxtaposed with large shopping malls make it a popular tourist destination, and its temperate climate earned it the nickname “City of the Eternal Spring.” It is also home of the oldest and one of the best universities in Colombia – the University of Antioquia (founded 1803).

However, soon after arriving, we came to learn of the crisis currently plaguing universities across the country. Despite Colombia’s 1991 Constitution which guarantees free, high-quality public education as a universal right, the current government has decreased funding despite rising enrollment numbers. The deficiency of adequate resources has left many of Colombia’s public universities on the verge of closure. Additional reports of government corruption, together with a proposed financial reform package that raises taxes for the poorest people in the country has further angered students, teachers, workers unions, and opposition parties. This has resulted in numerous protests over the past 54 days (and counting) and a nation-wide strike at 32 public universities.

Despite the halt of general classroom courses, the piano faculty at the University of Antioquia have continued to teach private lessons to ensure the progress of their students. During my



Dr. J with piano students and faculty of the University of Antioquia following a masterclass

masterclass, I was inspired by the five wonderfully talented, hard-working students who intelligently performed pieces by Bach, Mozart, Beethoven, Tchaikovsky, and Haydn. I was warmly welcomed by the faculty and their students, who were all eager to learn more about music, and enthusiastic about opportunities to further their studies abroad.

However, on the day of my solo recital, tensions heightened as protests broke out across the country between students and

police/government officials. Many streets of Medellín were shut causing a traffic nightmare. Once on campus, I captured video outside the recital hall of *papa bombas* (“potato bombs”) going off and tear gas being thrown. We were quickly evacuated, and my recital, cancelled.

But the evening was not lost. We relocated to the home of one of the piano faculty members together with a few other colleagues and a small group of students. We shared a meal, I gave an impromptu masterclass, and ended the evening performing my recital program for them before heading to the airport to catch the redeye flight to Mexico. Although events of this day were both heartbreaking and eye-opening, it was uplifting to witness and reflect on how much laughter and joy was shared that night. If only for a moment, a love for music and learning made all of us forget the noise outside.

As a pianist and educator, this experience left a strong impression on me. It has made me more grateful for both the education I have received, and the opportunity I have to teach without fear or uncertainty. It was also a reminder of the unfortunate circumstances and challenges many talented and diligent music students around the world face in their education. The strike in Colombia, for example, has left students in limbo, with many uncertain when their diplomas will arrive despite having completed all requirements. On top of that, the weak economy makes studying abroad almost impossible.

Student Success

- 13-year old **Lynnsean Young** won one gold and two bronze medals at the Spokane Piano Competition last month, and also came in third at the Idaho Music Teachers National Association junior division category. The judges praised his “gorgeous cantabile”, “excellent artistry”, and “thrilling” performance. Lynnsean, who has been my student for the past four years, performed works by Bach, Beethoven, Chopin, and Kapustin.
- **Olivia Jones**, a Samford University senior, was selected to perform the first movement of MacDowell’s Piano Concerto No. 2 with the school’s orchestra in February.

As some of you know, part of my mission over the past 25 years has been to support a cause through music. This has helped raise more than \$100,000 for dozens of civic and religious organizations around the world. As we begin the holiday season, I would like to ask you, my supportive readers, to assist me as I expand my role as an advocate for accessible music education. You can help create a meaningful and unforgettable experience in a young musician’s life in one (or more) of three ways:

1) **The Pianissimo Foundation**, founded and directed by University of Antioquia piano professor Dr. Ana Maria Orduz, organizes the largest piano festival-competition in Colombia (www.pianissimo.com.co)

2) **Mélange Vienna** seeks to fund a limited number of scholarships to students in need, especially those from developing countries. For details, please write to me or visit www.melange-vienna.com/scholarships-donations

3) **Samford University School of the Arts** welcomes gifts to assist undergraduate and graduate students (www.samford.edu/arts) Please write to me for details

Thank you, and I wish you all a healthy, happy, and blessed holiday. “Talk” to you again in the new year!