

Pianist Cindy Lam Overcomes All Hurdles to Play Beautiful Music

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PASADENA NOW



By PRECY DUMLAO Published: Thursday, September 20, 2012 | 5:36 PM

Ten years ago this month, pianist Cindy Lam was a hard-working high school senior who had just graduated from Polytechnic School, when tragedy struck her that forever changed her life.

Sept. 2 marked the 10th anniversary of an event that changed Lam's life.

On that day in 2002, just as she was about to begin studies at the USC Thornton School of Music, Lam's dream of becoming a concert pianist was almost cut short.

She was out with her boyfriend, who was driving at a high rate of speed, when the car crashed into a telephone pole, hurling it over and seriously injuring them both.

Fortunately, they survived the accident; however, shards of glass cut into Lam's arm so deep that they damaged a critical nerve area. Doctors told her that her prognosis was uncertain in terms of ever performing again, and it would take two years or longer for her nerves to partially rejuvenate.

After processing the diagnosis and what seemed to be a grim future, Lam embarked on her journey to healing, defiantly and relentlessly doing everything that she could to regain use of her hand and play again.

She visited an assortment of doctors who prescribed various treatments, including surgery for the removal of glass in

her arm. Happily, despite the permanent damage caused by the glass and a resulting traumatic neuroma, Lam is now able to play at a higher level than she ever did.

Today, Lam is one of the most highly sought-after pianists in Southern California. She regularly performs with world-renowned musicians year-round at special events and performances. She is also driven to share her talent and help a variety of charities.

Lam spoke with Pasadena Now to recall the journey she took to become one of California's most-sought – and most inspirational – pianists.

"I didn't always keep going," she began her tale. "There was a time that everything was a little stagnant. It was at a point in my life where everything was weird in my arms and it took away my spirit that I didn't even want to practice."

But then hearing other people play beautiful music triggered a sudden dawning in Lam and she was awakened with a strong determination to play again.

She said, "It hit me. I'm tired of doing this [being stagnant]. Suddenly I want to keep on playing and I will do it. I got sick of not doing what I want to do. I got tired of hearing all these kids playing amazing pieces. So I got back on the horse and told myself, even if I can't do it, I'm going die trying. I've always been determined. If someone says I can't do it, then I will try my best to actually do it."

And thus reignited her passion to play beautiful music again and entertain people. Lam rediscovered her love of music. In fact that same love for music had started Lam to take up piano lessons in the first place.

Lam's professional musical career was sparked the first time she saw a piano at the age of three. She started lessons immediately and spent her childhood and adolescence honing her skills and developing her talent.

But that didn't start without any problems either. Lam recalled her mother took her to take a piano lesson at the age of three but the piano teacher refused to admit her in her class because she was "too little."

Even at that tender age, Lam already showed her determination that the incident with the piano class did not deterred her from learning how to play piano.

"At pre-school there was a piano teacher. One day I told the teacher that if she doesn't teach me how to play piano, I won't eat my lunch. I haven't stopped playing since then and I would practice up to three hours each day to improve my skills," she recalled.

Despite being acknowledge as one of the best pianist around, Lam admits that she regained her confidence only about three years ago when the concert master of the Pasadena orchestra called her up and asked her if she wanted to play with them. One play led to another and now she is playing at concerts regularly.

One of her goals is to play concerts regularly. In the beginning she was only playing one concert per year then the next year, another concert was added. Each year, the number of concerts where Lam plays increases. She currently play between four and five concerts per year. But the most exciting part for her, is that she gets to play with established people that she looks up to.

"There are many amazing pianist now and I want to be where they are ten years from now," she dreamed.

In the near term, Lam says she is focusing to learn more repertoire as much as she can. She is excited to develop her skills that whenever people asks her to play with them, she says yes "because that is one way to learn."

On inspiration and encouragement According to Lam, it is important to teach people that encouragement and inspiration comes in many ways and nobody is suddenly inspired and never gets let down or is never discouraged again. From her experience, Lam admits even she was discouraged before and still gets frustrated "again and again," especially with her arms that are still giving her problems to do other things aside from playing the piano.

"Luckily it [arm injury] doesn't affect me playing the piano but it affects some aspects of my life because of the nature of the injury. I have problem with my grip and sometimes, when I practice a lot, there are things that I cannot do," she told Pasadena Now.

Although she is very grateful that she can play again. Lam thanks her determination and positive thinking that allowed her to achieve her level of skills. But more importantly, Lam says it is very important to have a strong support system “because I don’t think anybody can do it alone.

She is extremely grateful for her family and friends who served as her “incredible support system” who never allowed her to quit especially during times she wanted to stop and sulk. “But I have people who encouraged me.”

“It is important to have people to tell you that you are good in what you do and tell you not to quit. To have people who tell you to keep on going is very important. Hearing those voices of encouragement and telling you that you can do it, you get down on yourself and keep on moving,” Lam says.

A highly respected, trusted and in-demand piano teacher, her students include the children of very notable parents including Travis Barker of Blink 182, Katia Popov, concertmaster of the Hollywood Bowl orchestra, and world-renowned cellist Lynn Harrell, among others.

For more information, visit her website: <http://www.cindylam.com/>