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THE NEWSPAPER OF SILICON VALLEY

Teenage violinist shows pluck

Passionate Cupertino prodigy to tackle 'monster' musical masterpiece



NHAT V. MEYER — MERCURY NEWS (ABOVE); MICHAEL RONDOUT — MERCURY NEWS ARCHIVES (BELOW)

AGE 17 Christine Chon of Cupertino will play the highly challenging "Sibelius Violin Concerto" on Saturday night. Few students take on the piece.



AGE 7 Christine Chon, shown practicing for her debut in 1998, says playing the violin transports her to a "different world."

By Lisa Fernandez
Mercury News

At 7, she was the youngest musician in her symphony, standing no higher than her conductor's belt buckle.

Fast forward 10 years: The child prodigy is now an accomplished violinist.

On Saturday night, 17-year-old Christine Chon is the lead soloist in the Silicon Valley Symphony performance of the "Sibelius Violin Concerto."

Symphony director Michael Gibson called the Cupertino teen a superstar for tackling such a "monster" musical masterpiece at such a young age. Many older students at the Juilliard School or San Francisco Conservatory schools of music, he said, wouldn't even attempt to tackle what Christine now performs very well.

"Playing this piece as a high school senior is almost unheard of," Gibson said.

PERFORMANCE

Silicon Valley Symphony's "Soli & Sorcery," Saturday at 7:30 p.m., Presbyterian Church of Los Gatos, 16575 Shannon Road.

Tickets:

www.bamusic.org; \$20 general; \$15 senior/student; children 12 and under free with adult

VIDEO

Christine Chon practices for an upcoming performance, www.mercurynews.com/news.

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SOLO | Teen violinist to tackle 'monster' piece

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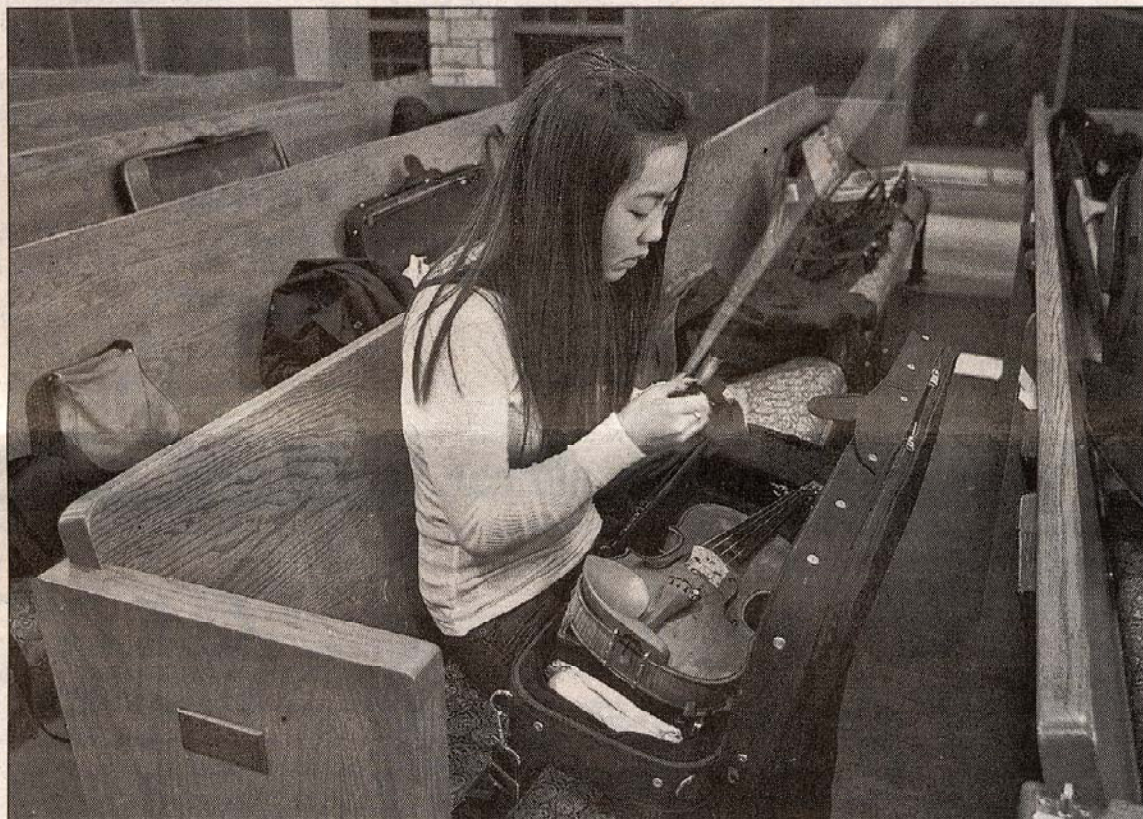
His symphony, comprising about 60 community members — and different from the professional Symphony Silicon Valley — will perform at the Presbyterian Church of Los Gatos. One of the highlights will be Christine's solo.

Christine says she is not that nervous about the upcoming concert. What she's most worried about is being able to "break into people's hearts" with the musical piece written in the 1900s by the great Finnish composer, Jean Sibelius (pronounced: Si-bay-lee-us).

"When people say they think that classical music is boring," she said, "they're obviously not hearing what I'm hearing."

What she hears — and performs — transforms the soft-spoken teen into a mature, dynamic violinist. At a recent rehearsal, she plucked and bowed the strings of her new Ken Su violin with confidence, immersing herself in the music. Her eyes gazed down. Her face looked serious, almost sad. She gently swayed side to side, her fingers deftly pressing the strings in complicated positions. When she finished the 35-minute piece that she had memorized, the other musicians — some, twice her age — applauded.

Christine picked up a violin in elementary school, following the footsteps of her older brother, Tim. But while it was a hobby for him that he has since dropped, the violin became a passion for her. She now practices with the tick-tock of a metronome in her semi-cluttered bedroom at least four hours a day. That's



NHAT V. MEYER — MERCURY NEWS

Christine Chon, 17, gets ready to rehearse with the Silicon Valley Symphony at the Presbyterian Church in Los Gatos. She'll be the lead soloist at Saturday night's concert there.

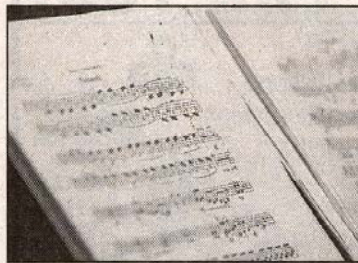
in addition to two hours each evening that she rehearses with the Palo Alto Chamber Orchestra.

Christine's father, Jaeson Chon, a postman, drives her to rehearsals, sitting proudly on the side until she's done. A devout Christian, he thanks God for his daughter.

"She's so good," Chon said. "I didn't push her. She never quit. She's a special girl."

Music is Christine's life. She hopes to attend a top music school after she graduates this spring.

But it also takes a toll. The Monta Vista High School senior often begins homework close to midnight. Finding



time to hang out with friends is nearly impossible.

Sleep? There never seems to be enough time. And then, home hasn't always been easy either. Years ago, she escaped to her room to practice, she said, when her parents argued.

Sometimes Christine gets migraines from the stress.

But playing music is worth the sacrifices, she said, because the melodies take her to a special place. Sort of like an athlete feels playing a sport, she said, or a world traveler experiencing new places.

"When I play violin, I feel like I'm in a different world," Christine said. "I feel adrenaline coursing throughout my body and I'm taken away to a place where there's no more stress. There's nothing that bothers me. It's just music. And that just makes me feel complete."

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