

Music on a Another Level By Yushi Bai and Ishan Kamar

They all knew what an opportunity it was, and they were ready for it.

"All-State is a band and orchestra for the most talented kids in Michigan," explained 8th grader Yitong Li (27), one the five middle school students who earned a place in the 2023 all-state ensemble. "It is an event in the MSBOA (Michigan School Band and Orchestra Association). It is a big deal because people all across the state audition, but there are not a lot of spots in the ensembles, so it is very competitive." On January 19-21, approximately four hundred students from around the state met in Grand Rapids. Joining this elite group is Li, Jaiden Swami (28), Zubin Namei (28), Keara Schultz (28) and Andy Yu(27). Students were divided into five ensembles which include a middle school band, middle school orchestra, high school full orchestra, high school band, and high school jazz ensemble.

"I wanted to audition again because I wanted to try to challenge myself," said Yu who participated in the 2022 event. "This year, I preformed three octave scales instead of two octave scales so I could impress the judges. Also, I spent more time on sight reading."

For Li, "after hearing about All-State from the school, I thought that if I could get in, I could learn a lot and improve my playing. Even if I couldn't get in, I could still learn from the audition, so I decided to try it."

Alongside Li, approximately 2500 auditioned last October 19-23 at different high schools in Michigan."

"I auditioned for all-state to get better at music and have fun. During band class my teacher explained this opportunity for about ten minutes. At first, I thought it would be fun if I went to perform with the top band students in Michigan. I could also get better at clarinet, the instrument that I play. I worked on the suggested music for three hours over the course of two weeks leading up to the audition," Swami said. "I worked on site reading for a quarter of the time, worked on scales, C, G, F major, Chromatic scales, for 25% of the time and practiced the piece for 50% of the time. Some of the skills I worked on were articulation, consistency of tone, and phrasing. This is like trying to get good at ball handling in basketball or specific moves in soccer. I felt the preparation was necessary to my success."

After hearing about the opportunity, Swami's mom, Lisa Bohra, said, "We discussed with Jaiden that we thought it would be a great thing to try for. At the very least, he would become familiar with an audition process, and at the very best he gets the opportunity to perform with a group of very talented children and grow as a musician."

"It is a wonderful opportunity to meet young musicians from the entire state and get a well-rounded musical experience. It [also] provides motivation to practice and improvement for students," Mary Zhang, Yu's mom, added.

According to Yitong, it was about two months after the auditions that they found out the results.

"I felt anxious when waiting for the results, but I also felt excited to find out," she said.

Yu added that, "while I was waiting for the results, I had lots of pressure on my back. My parents really wanted me to get in and so did my clarinet teacher. Although I was a little bit anxious about my results, I had confidence in myself, and I believed that I could make the band, but there's always that chance that I might not."

But all the tension was released when they found out that they had gotten in. "I just got home from school one day when I went on my phone and saw I got an email from Mrs. Hurd," Yu said. "In the email she congratulated me on getting in All-State. I was glad and relieved about my acceptance to the All-State Band. This made me very happy and proud of myself."

For Swami he "was at my house unpacking from the seventh-grade interim trip when my dad told me that I had gotten in. My parents received an email. I am proud of myself because I put work into something, and it was worth it."

And Yitong's excitedness echoed the others' when she got the news that she had been accepted.

"After I found out that I was accepted into the All-State Orchestra, I felt lucky to have this opportunity. I also felt glad that I can continue exploring music and excited to play in the orchestra. I feel lucky to be able to participate in All-State. I am thankful to be able to audition and I am grateful to have people who helped and supported me during the process," she said.



Smaller Ensemble Provides Opportunity

Not all music ensembles must be large in size to excel in performing. The Cranbrook Kingswood Middle School Chamber Ensemble is a perfect example of this concept. Made up of only seven students, this elite group has proved themselves worthy of this honor. "These seven students had to audition at the beginning of the year to be a part of this group," Chamber Ensemble conductor Katie Lorts said. "They also have to be part of the Presto Strings in order to try out for Chamber Ensemble" Due to the group's small size, Lorts remarks about how the pieces they play are more rigorous and complex.

"The pieces they play are really high-school level, and really are much harder. Sometimes I choose an upbeat one that might sound simple but might have some difficult rhythm or technique. Also, because we only rehearse once per week, it's up to [the students] to really practice their part." There is also some pressure outside of rehearsing for Chamber Ensemble students "These musicians have to give up one of their study halls per week to come practice," said Lorts.

She continued saying that there are plenty of challenges Chamber Ensemble members must overcome, but there are also many reasons why students should consider joining.

"[Chamber Ensemble] really gives these students an opportunity to shine. Since it is such a small group, they are really heard when they play. In a larger orchestra, you might not really hear an individual person," she said.

For MSG Yitong Li (27) "I really enjoyed playing in Chamber Ensemble. I like that there are less people, so we don't have to spend time correcting everyone's mistakes. Plus, it's a great chance to play more challenging music." Agreeing, Li's Mom said that, "Chamber Ensemble is a great opportunity. It challenges the students to work harder."