*Spotlight on Staff*

**The Heights Connection**

Music camp connects present Cleveland Heights-University Heights School District students with people who have walked in their shoes. Part of our mission is to keep alive the Heights tradition of musical excellence by nurturing a new generation of enthusiastic music students. There is nothing like learning from coaches who have been students in our schools, and whose musical interests have been built and nurtured through their school experience, and in some cases music camp.

**Alumnae**

Like our high school mentors, these long-time camp staff members developed their musical identities while students in the Heights schools.

As a student**, George Blake** was surrounded by friends who were enthusiastic about playing music together, and music teachers who offered direction and opportunities that developed his skills on the flute and piano and his interest in jazz. A hockey teammate introduced him to the flute, and in 4th grade at Boulevard Mr. Hungerford was his first music teacher. During middle school he participated in the Music School Settlement summer camp directed by Fred Mayer, who was Heights High orchestra director at the time. Heights Summer Music Camp is modeled after that camp.

Mr. Altonen encouraged George to perform during middle school graduation with classmate Mario Gant, and supported the Monticello jazz band to perform at Cain Park as part of *HeightSwings*, a jazz concert featuring Heights alums. When he attended Jazz Night at Heights, he was blown away by the great musicians and knew what he wanted to do. He also played flute in the symphony and several chamber groups, and as a senior was awarded the James Bane Jazz Scholarship, named for the teacher that invited him into jazz band at Heights.

At Wesleyan University George played in the jazz band directed by Anthony Braxton, and double majored in African American Studies and music. His combined interest in race politics and music led him to the University of California, Santa Barbara, where he earned his masters and doctorate in ethnomusicology. He has taught music to preschoolers and college students. He returns to Cleveland Heights nearly every summer to work with Heights musicians.

Music is a big part of **Diana Drushel’s** life. “It shaped how I work through problems, and taught me that hard work produces positive outcomes.” Deeply interested in enrichment opportunities for young people, Diana takes time off from her job each summer to be part of the camp clarinet staff and all-around trouble shooter.

Diana chose the clarinet as a 4th grader at Boulevard Elementary School because it was the closest to a recorder and her sister already had one. Mrs. Adamson was her teacher. She played bass clarinet at Heights High in Symphony and Winds. As a history major and education minor at the College of Wooster, she continued to play for fun in the marching band. She was an early camper, starting as a rising 8th grader during the second camp season. She is thankful to work closely with Mrs. Adamson, a great mentor and teacher who has shaped her teaching methods. Together they organize the camp recital.

**Gretchen Drushel** is headed to the Peace Corps after camp, bringing to an end a multi-year run as a camper and staff member. A 2018 graduate of Bowling Green University with a degree in Asian Studies and a minor in Peace and Conflict, she plays the trombone. Gretchen chose this instrument in 4th grade because it was big, in demand, and “would put me in the front of the marching band.” She was first chair in both Winds and Symphony during her four years at Heights. Marching Band was part of her high school and college life. Music continues to be her hobby. She occasionally performs in a local jazz band with her father and with Theresa May. Mr. Adamson was her elementary band teacher at Boulevard, and now they both work with the camp trombones.

**Kym Carter** is a camper turned counselor turned music educator. She has been part of the camp violin and string jazz staff for the last two years, and for six years during high school and college. Mrs. Gray taught her piano in first grade in an after-school program at Fairfax Elementary School. In 4th grade she began violin in the school program. Mrs. Adamson was her teacher. She started camp the next year and started private lessons with Kara Tweed, her camp counselor. During all four years of her high school career she played violin in the Heights Symphony.

She developed her jazz skills in the J@MS, jazz program at the Music School Settlement, attended a summer program at Berklee School of Music, and spent four years at the school, graduating with a degree in music and certification to teach. Her mentors - Mrs. Gray and Mrs. Adamson - also inspired her career choice. She is an elementary music teacher at Superior Elementary School in East Cleveland.

**Christina Wynne** started piano lessons at 4 and added the violin at age 7 as a student at Noble Elementary School. She settled on the viola while at Monticello. A 2017 graduate of Heights High, Christina played viola in the symphony, and saxophone in jazz and Marching Band. She is an active composer. “My school music programs taught me to hear all music as beautiful because everyone’s sound is unique to who they are…you can learn to hear and complement each other’s sounds in ensembles and orchestras.”

Christina’s association with the Heights Summer Music Camp started in 5th grade. She hasn’t missed a summer since. She leads the ukulele elective, is part of the viola staff, and enthusiastically welcomes every day and every chance to contribute to the camp. She frequently works behind the scenes organizing music, composing, or arranging.

She says her high school experience and camp “helped foster my love of music and taught me the skills I needed to become a strong player and eventually, have a career in music” She just completed her second year as a Film Scoring major at Berklee College of Music.

**More Heights Connections – Parents of Heights Students**

**Stew Pharis** lives in Cleveland Heights and teaches violin and musicianship at music camp. He started playing in his school music program in Auburn, Alabama at age 10. His father was a college professor so he moved several times growing up. He attended Northwestern University where he majored in violin performance, and for his masters’ degree switched to viola. He married his violin stand partner. Together they took positions with the New World Symphony in Florida. After a few years working as a freelance musician, Stew changed directions and became a lawyer.

His two children, who are graduates of Heights, attended music camp and he came with them. He generously shares much of his time working with students at the middle school and high school, and keeps coming to music camp. He is a master of details and helps keep us organized.

Both of **Chris Vandall’s** parents were music teachers. He started piano lessons in first grade, and in 5th grade started percussion in his school music program in New Philadelphia, Ohio. By 11th grade he focused primarily on percussion. His percussion teacher urged him to pursue his interests so he entered college at the University of Akron as a biology major. He missed playing music every day, and after a year switched to percussion performance, and earned a second degree at the Hart School in Connecticut before returning to Ohio.

His music career started as a freelance musician, which also allowed him to be a stay at home dad. When his youngest child started school at Noble, Chris started school too and earned his teaching certificate at Cleveland State. He teaches music in South Euclid.

When one of his children signed up for camp, he came along as the percussion specialist and has been part of the staff since 2012. He’s been an invaluable resource and creative teacher of small ensembles and the ever changing percussion project elective.

**Derek Snyder** will soon become a Fairfax Elementary School parent when his daughter starts kindergarten. Mrs. Gray will be her music teachers. He became the camp cello expert a few years before becoming a parent.

Like his daughter, he started as a Suzuki student. Derek grew up in Ann Arbor and started cello when he was 6 because the violin class was full. He liked the social aspect of playing with peers which helped motivate him to practice. In high school he knew he wanted to be a musician and selected Western Illinois University because of the cello teacher there. In his senior year he transferred to the University of Michigan. At the New England Conservatory of Music he earned a cello performance degree.

His musical interests are broad. He runs the orchestra programs and teaches at the Music School Settlement, has a private studio, and teaches in several area schools. He continues playing music with other people, including Mr. Heim and Mr. Rhodes.