



July 12, 2023

One-of-a-kind music program returns to MSU

College of Music Celebrating the Spectrum provides unique opportunity for young musicians on the autism spectrum, including a public concert.

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EAST LANSING, Mich. – Culminating in a public concert that applauds the achievements of talented young musicians on the autism spectrum, the unique and inspiring piano program “[Celebrating the Spectrum: A Festival of Music and Life](#)” returns this summer from **July 24-29**.

A free concert, open to the public and featuring these young musicians, will take place on **Saturday, July 29 at 4:00 p.m. in Cook Recital Hall of the Music Building** at Michigan State University. It will mark the triumphant conclusion of a week of study on campus for advanced music students on the autism spectrum who have received instruction from MSU music professors, mentoring from MSU piano students, lectures, and on-campus living that immerses them into a complete collegiate experience. This beloved summer piano festival, created by artists at the MSU College of Music, begins with a free concert by the MSU piano student mentors on **Monday, July 24 at 6:00 p.m., also in Cook Recital Hall**.

“Each year, the students who attend our Celebrating the Spectrum program amaze and inspire us,” says Professor Deborah Moriarty, program co-founder and chair of the Keyboard Area at MSU. “These talented young adults give it their all during a fun but intense week, and the finale concert on the last day is truly a celebration of their achievements. It’s inspiring and uplifting for everyone involved, including those who attend the concert.”

The primary goal of Celebrating the Spectrum is the experience it provides the program participants and their family members who accompany them, but there are also other positive outcomes. It improves perceptions about the potential of students on the autism spectrum attending college, provides a meaningful professional and personal experience to current college students who serve as mentors and teachers, and makes meaningful contributions to research and teaching methods. Program directors have traveled to local, national, and international events to speak about the program, autism, and piano pedagogy.

“We call this a festival because it truly is a celebration of what musicians on the spectrum are capable of accomplishing,” says Professor Derek Polischuk, program co-founder and director of piano pedagogy at MSU. “It’s about music, it’s about life, and it is bigger than any one individual in the positive impact in can have. We have established this program as an effective learning environment for cultivating the talents of advanced pianists on the autism spectrum, and there is a lot of joy that comes from that during the finale performance on the last day.”

Students participating in this year’s program include four returning participants, David Ginther, Masha Staples, Nathan Chen, and Owen Whitman, and two new students, Matthew Miller, and Jude Nyame Yie Kofie. Jude, who goes by the stage name Jude Keyz, may be recognizable to some from his YouTube videos and appearances on America’s Got Talent and The Kelly Clarkson Show. Newcomer Matthew Miller brings a wealth of performance experience, and the skill of our returning participants is highly praised by those who have witnessed their performances in past years.

continued on next page

Program attendees experience daily masterclasses on piano repertoire taught by Professor Moriarty and Professor Polischuk, as well as informative lectures by MSU professors in musicology, music theory, and neuropsychology. The week also includes guided Pilates that promotes rest and relaxation and body awareness, classes in chamber music and jazz improvisation, and meals and evening activities on the MSU campus.

For the second year in a row, MSU alum and donor Merritt Lutz has provided a generous sponsorship of the program in memory of his late wife, Candy. By declaring the festival *A Celebration of the Life of Candy Lutz*, the College of Music thanks Mr. Lutz for providing essential program funds including support for the talented program assistants who are crucial to the festival's success.

Once again, the program assistants, who spend the entire week mentoring the program attendees, are high-level pianists and teachers who train under the piano faculty at MSU. They guide the participants throughout and kick off the festival on opening night.

The College of Music works with various departments and resources across campus to provide the essential support, services, and special accommodations necessary for the participants.

Celebrating the Spectrum: A Festival of Music and Life is sponsored by the MSU Office of the Provost, Lauren Harris, and corporate sponsors, the MSU Federal Credit Union, and TechSmith. Special thanks to Dean Transportation for generously providing all transportation needs for festival participants.

Private support helps provide dollars to sponsor each student participant, enabling them to attend the festival tuition free. Funds also cover stipends for College of Music student mentors who play a critical role in the experience of festival participants.

To learn more about the program, visit [Celebrating the Spectrum online](#).

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