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MSU renews innovative music program for pre-college students on the autism spectrum

College of Music announces the return of Celebrating the Spectrum: A Festival of Music and Life.

Contacts: Michael Sundermann, communications director, 517-353-2043, sunderm7@msu.edu
Derek Polischuk, MSU associate professor of piano, 517-353-9043, polischu@msu.edu
Deborah Moriarty, MSU professor of piano, 517-353-9121, forgerd@msu.edu

EAST LANSING, Mich. – “[Celebrating the Spectrum: A Festival of Music and Life](#)” will take place **July 25-30**, renewing an innovative piano program after a two-year pandemic hiatus.

Providing advanced music students on the autism spectrum with instruction, performance opportunities, lectures, and on-campus living, this beloved program immerses students into a complete collegiate experience. This one-of-a-kind summer piano festival created by artists at the Michigan State University College of Music offers students a glimpse into the life of a music major with a rigorous schedule that culminates in their own public recital.

“Celebrating the Spectrum is a true celebration of the artistry, sensitivity, and musical potential of these talented young adults,” says Professor Deborah Moriarty, program co-founder and chair of the Piano Area at MSU. “The intense week-long festival is an inspiration for all involved, and we invite everyone to join us for the final recital on July 30.”

In addition to the experience the program creates for its students, a primary goal of Celebrating the Spectrum is to improve perceptions about the potential of students on the autism spectrum attending college. Program organizers also hope that it makes a meaningful contribution to research and teaching methods, and they have traveled to local, national, and international events to speak about autism, piano pedagogy, and the program’s positive outcomes.

“After an unfortunate break, we are excited to bring back this festival which has established itself as an effective learning environment for cultivating the talents of advanced pianists on the autism spectrum,” says Professor Derek Polischuk, program co-founder and Director of Piano Pedagogy at MSU. “We are excited to welcome new and returning students, track their progress, and create a tremendous experience for them as they are immersed in this full week of learning.”

Students participating in this year’s program include two returning participants, David Ginther and Masha Staples, and four new students, Nathan Chen, Christopher Dugas, Aditya Kandala, and Owen Whitman. While past patrons of the public recital may recall the skill of Ginther and Staples, they will also enjoy learning about and hearing the new participants who hail from Washington DC, Missouri, Massachusetts, and Louisiana, and bring experience as performers and multi-instrumentalists.

Their experience at MSU features daily master classes 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 rounds out with guided Pilates for rest and relaxation and to raise body awareness, classes in chamber music and jazz improvisation, and meals and evening activities on the MSU campus.

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A special element of the return of the festival this year is the generous sponsorship by MSU alumnus and donor Merritt Lutz. In memory of his late wife, Candy, the College of Music honors her by also declaring the festival *A Celebration of the Life of Candy Lutz*. Not only does the support of Mr. Lutz provide essential program funds, it also helps support the talented program assistants who are crucial to the festival's success.

A team of program assistants made up of high-level pianists and teachers, who train under the piano faculty at MSU, guide the participants throughout. The program assistants will perform their own recital on the opening night of the festival, Monday, July 25 at 6:00 p.m., and the program participants will perform in a **Finale Concert on Saturday, July 30 at 4:00 p.m.** Both recitals are in Cook Recital Hall in the MSU Music Building, 333 W. Circle Drive, and both are free and open to the public.

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 presented by the Michigan State University College of Music with generous support from Merritt Lutz, the MSU Federal Credit Union, and Dean Transportation.

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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