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Music From the Heart

My hands reach to the zipper in the back of my violin case just as the blaring dismissal bell honks.

“Oh, and next week is break so remember to bring your instruments home!” the school orchestra teacher reminds our class.

“Break,” the blonde boy in the chair behind me mutters. I turn around as he asks me casually, “Shannon, are you going to practice six hours a day?”

Taken aback by his question, I take several seconds to fully digest his words before I stammer, “Uh, what?”

But before he can speak again, I stand up, strap my violin onto my shoulder, and exit the classroom. My fast feet carry me away from the blonde boy and his stereotypes.

At home, as usual, I open my laptop to rewatch, with reverence, my favorite YouTube videos of superstar violinists Sarah Chang, Ray Chen, and others. This time, out of curiosity, I scroll down each video to read the neverending list of comments. I beam at the showers of praise I see, but sprinkled here and there I read “Duh... Asians”, and varieties of “Another Asian robot!” My fast finger presses the power button and I watch the computer screen and the unpleasant comments fade away to black.

I can imagine what most people would think of at the sight of a kid with straight black hair clutching a violin case. Their thoughts are: robotic; zero love or passion. Beaten to practice. Just another Asian musician trying to enter a top school with their musical abilities.

However, my school orchestra has many Asians, but every day, each face entering the door of the classroom is radiating with enthusiasm. The rush to see every new seating chart posted on the wall, the triumphant smiles flashed at every concert - these prove how eager, how thrilled we are to be united at school as musicians.

With this happiness, we bring happiness to our local area; our city. Every time I visit the local community health center to bring some music into the lonely building of seniors, their lips curl up, their old faces crinkle in joy, and sparkles appear in their weary eyes. I can feel their silent or unspeakable delight, and how much the elderly people love what we bring for them.

We are not the only ones who feel joy from music. The beautiful noise we make brings smiles to the community.

And to the world. Countless prestigious international violin competitions are held around the globe, and Asian Americans are almost always eager participants. Contrary to the belief of the majority of people, not only do Asians win trophies - they win the astonishment and captivation of every audience member and judge. A journalist documenting a world acclaimed international competition vividly recalls a young boy, who “starts playing Kreisler with an authentic Viennese tone and you see tears on the faces of the hardened judges.” That writer also notes on how another Japanese competitor made his “jaw drop” at the splendid, heartfelt musicality he heard from the young musician.

“You can’t make a beautiful sound unless you *love* your music.” Those words have been spoken by every teacher I have experienced, regardless if they are Asian or not. How did such young musicians attract and stun even a *Spectator* journalist? What made the residents of the community health center’s eyes light up at the sound of music? There is only one way we all could have communicated such emotion. Because we, the *machine-like musicians who play without imagination or passion*, love our music.

My hope is that one day, in the future, nobody will judge a musician based on a glimpse of their skin color. Someday, I hope everyone will take their stereotypic labels off of Asian musicians and recognize us for our passion and abilities, not for our trademark bone-straight black hair and narrow eyes, because our love for music is not weaker than anyone else’s.