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Night Visitors

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 piedmontopera.org



WEAVER

ACADEMY OF PERFORMING ARTS

GUITAR PROGRAM

Story by Jay A. Gervasi, Jr.
photos by Jim Tedder

Ethan Ingle walks onto the platform at the front of the Memorial Chapel at First Presbyterian Church and sits on the single chair. He adjusts the small, folding foot stool, then places his guitar on his left thigh. There are no amplifiers, no cables, no colorful lights or scarves. The strings are nylon, and the body of the guitar is plain looking, in a way that belies its careful craftsmanship. After the ritual tuning, nine fingers begin to dance across the strings, producing beautiful music. Ethan is competing in the third annual guitar competition, sponsored by the Music Academy of North Carolina. The repertoire of the performers is mostly a combination of Baroque pieces by composers such as Bach and more recent music written specifically for guitar by various artists from Spain, Cuba, Argentina and the United States, much of it drawing on themes and traditional music of Latin America. During the awards presentation a few minutes later, Douglas James, Director of Guitar Studies at Appalachian State who has come to help judge the competition, comments on the high quality of the performances by the young guitarists, saying that 10 years ago those would have been "impossible."

Of the four finalists in the high school division, two—Ethan and his classmate Worth Crowley—are students in the guitar program at the Weaver Academy for Performing and Visual Arts, which must be among the best kept secrets that no one has ever tried to keep. Their teacher in that program, Patrick Lui, is playfully smug that the other two finalists are a current and a former student of his in private lessons.

The Weaver Academy is part of the Guilford County Public Schools. It was originally opened about 30 years ago, as an educational center, where high school students would go for specialized training in subjects that are not generally taught in "regular" schools. Weaver still has courses in diverse fields, from automotive mechanics to medical careers to culinary arts, which are attended by students who come from their districted

'Classic' guitarist and instructor
for Weaver Academy, Patrick Lui

WEAVER PERFORMING ARTS



schools for part of the school day. Five years ago, Weaver added the Academy for Performing and Visual Arts, a full-time program in which students come from all over the County to take honors and Advanced Placement academic courses, along with a heavy dose of specialized instruction in their chosen fields of the arts—voice, dance, drama, piano, guitar, orchestral strings, visual arts and recording engineering, in addition to several varieties of instrumental music. As part of the public school system, there is no cost to the students or their families.

The guitar instructor at Weaver, Patrick Lui, is a tall, thin man with an open face and an engaging manner. He was born in Hong Kong. As a youngster, he studied piano and did not start playing guitar until he was a teenager. Since then, he hasn't stopped. Lui explains that unlike other instruments for playing "serious" music, the guitar is not limited by a long tradition. He prefers the term "classical" to "classical" guitar, because a diverse and exciting body of guitar music has developed since the turn of the twentieth century.



Lui came to the United States in 1988 to attend the North Carolina School of the Arts and obtained his Master's Degree at Arizona State. He was initially resistant to teaching kids younger than college age, but after trying it reluctantly, he was surprised to be excited by teaching children and teens. He was teaching at Catawba College, when the job came open at Weaver in 2005. His devotion to the improvement of his students borders on obsession. Between teaching at Weaver, teaching some private students, performing and doing other guitar-related things, Lui jokingly admits that "I have no life." Most of his students have his cell phone number, and it is not unusual for them to call him late at night to discuss things other than guitar. He is demanding of his students, but the tone of his relationship with them indicates that they accept the pressure in the way that Lui intends it, as a manifestation of his care and desire that the students become the best guitarists they can be.

The results prove that Lui is doing something right. He emphasizes performance opportunities, pushing most of the students in the program to participate in the recent competition, putting on a student concert last year that was also a benefit for Eastern Guilford High School and arranging for the students to perform at Barnes & Noble in Friendly Center. Everywhere they play, people are favorably impressed. The students do well in competitions, and it has become routine for Weaver guitar graduates to receive scholarships to college music programs.

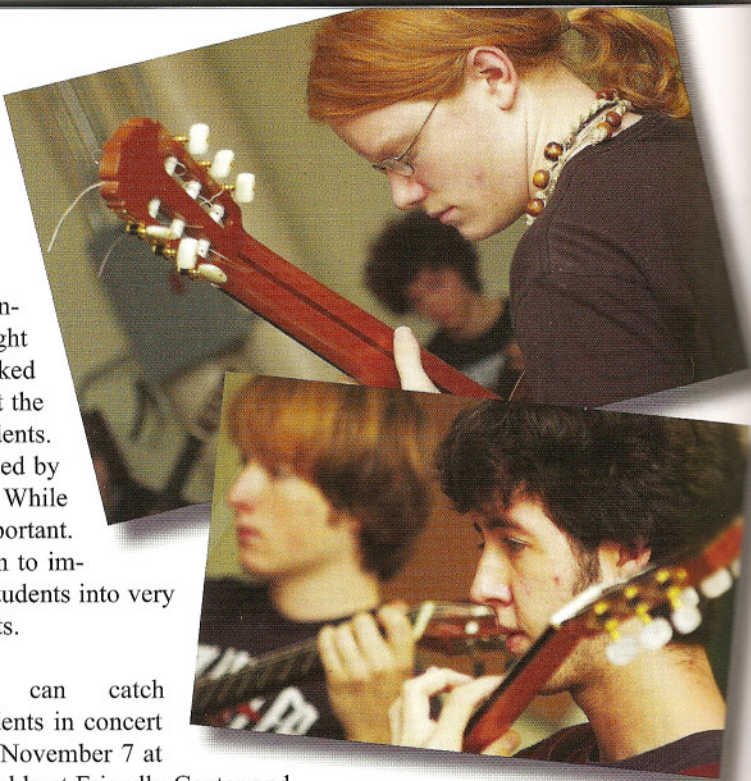
Experts also recognize that something special is going on in the guitar program at Weaver. A visit to Lui's website reveals high praise for his teaching from professionals all over North America. Typical comments include this one from Dr. Andrew Zohn of Columbus State University: "He is surely one of the most dedicated and insightful instructors of young guitarists in the United States today." Jeff McFadden of the University of Toronto says that Lui has a "special talent for relating these complex and detailed matters to young people" so that they "play with a maturity, poise and professionalism which can only be imparted through excellent teaching." Elliot Frank, Professor of Guitar at East Carolina University, is

effusive: "Not only does Patrick provide the highest quality of instruction for his students; he is equally committed to the personal and emotional growth of his students. I know of no other teacher who produces such consistently high results with such young students."

In light of all the success, Lui is puzzled by his program's anonymity. He recounts that once recently, after mentioning that he taught at Weaver during his own performance, a member of the audience asked if he taught auto mechanics. It has been surprisingly difficult to get the word about the program out to the community and prospective students. Lui fears that kids who might love to learn under him are intimidated by a belief that they must be accomplished players before auditioning. While some prior experience is generally best, attitude is much more important. Lui says that he "welcomes all those with a will and determination to improve." His satisfaction comes from turning enthusiastic but raw students into very good guitarists.




You can catch Weaver students in concert this fall, on November 7 at Barnes & Noble at Friendly Center and on December 8 at the Community Guitar Concert in Winston-Salem, sponsored by the Piedmont Classic Guitar Society. Learn more about the program and Patrick Lui at weaveracademy.patrickluiguitar.com.




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