


The Portland Tribune

The education of Aaron Meyer

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Rock violinist's tribute concert honors his father and longtime mentors



COURTESY PHOTO - In his holiday concert, Aaron Meyer, Portland's popular rock violinist, will give thanks to people who have helped him, including his father Julian, producer Tim Ellis and the Fannings from Vermont.

Church, 1126 S.W. Park Ave. (www.aaronmeyer.com). Adding to the tribute, Ellis has also become a mentor of Meyer's, a sidekick guitarist and owner of Kung Fu Bakery Recording Studios, and a partner in most music endeavors. They'll all play together in the Holiday Concert Series.

Perhaps other grown children might blame a parent for a misguided youth, but Meyer says he can't thank his father enough for his positive help.

"Whenever I begin a project, or head onto the stage to perform, I hear my father saying, 'Give it all you've got, or don't do it at all,'" Meyer says. "He instilled in me an incredible work ethic and a deep passion for the violin, and for life.

"My dad pushed the violin on me and my sister, Rebecca," he adds. "We were forced to play, but I was entirely into it. I tried to quit at 11 and my parents made me play. Four years later, I got serious."

Julian Meyer, now 72, no stranger to playing with his son, watched as Aaron Meyer went from classical training to hobbyist to rock violinist. Meyer attended Indiana University (and studied math), then moved to Portland to attend

As the story goes, Aaron Meyer wanted to quit playing the violin at age 11.

He had grown up the son of a violinist, and was strongly encouraged to be a violinist, as his father started teaching the son at age 4. Meyer had a lot of interest as a child, perhaps because his father, a private instructor, once presented a cake to one of his students as a prize — a cake in the shape of a violin.

"The whole reason I kept going was the violin cake. I wanted a violin cake," Meyer says. "But I was pretty much ready to give it up."

But his father, Julian Meyer, wouldn't allow him to quit. Meyer looks back fondly at the time, now. Yeah, his father pressured him into continuing to play, and Meyer has become grateful for the parental intervention. At the same time, Meyer started attending Point Counter Point, a summer camp on Lake Dunmore in the Green Mountains of Vermont, run by Emory and Diana Fanning. He went to the camp for four consecutive summers as a student and a counselor.

It changed his life.

"I went to the camp and there were more kids like me. At the camp, it was cool to play violin," he says. "Emory and Diana became lifelong family friends."

Paying tribute, Meyer and musical partner Tim Ellis welcome his father and the Fannings — Emory plays organ, Diana the piano, and both taught at Middlebury College in Vermont — for their 15th annual Holiday Concert Series, Dec. 17-19 at First Congregational

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(Cont'd)

Lewis & Clark College (and study pre-medicine), then spent time in Southeast Asia. Returning to Portland, he became acquainted with Thomas Lauderdale, who had just started Pink Martini, and Meyer started playing with them.

He met Ellis, a top-notch producer who helped develop his sound and put players around him to form an actual band. Meyer had transitioned into a rock violinist, far from his classical roots and from what his father taught him, but Meyer had always remembered what his father told him.

“You’re trying to be the best,” Meyer says.

Meyer, 43, has become a household name in the Portland-area music scene. He tours, teaches and does about 20 performances each year in Oregon.

“I’ve taken my classical training, technique and hard work and applied and combined it with world music and rock,” he says. “Tim was a master of rock. It’s a true collaboration.”

Meyer now fronts a nine-piece rock orchestra of horns and strings, and “everyone’s a crazy good player.”

Adds Meyer: “Tim’s a mentor now. He’s picked up where my dad left off.”

The elder Meyer taught his son the value of passing on knowledge, and Aaron Meyer has taught the violin to young people for two decades.

Last year, the two Meyers recorded the CD “Father & Son.”

“He’s my dad, he loves me no matter what, but violin was his passion. Now it’s mine,” Meyer says. “He loves being part of my music.”

His father, having lived, taught and raised a family in the Philadelphia area, now lives near Rebecca in Boulder, Colo.

The Fannings, meanwhile, helped get him back on track to make violin his career. Meyer felt he had reached a goal by age 11, playing with the Philadelphia Orchestra, and needed more inspiration.

“What got me going was the music camp. My best memories were from that camp,” Meyer says. “It was a special time in my life.

“Music lessons in the mornings, and afternoons filled with hiking, swimming and bonfires — all in the incredibly beautiful setting of the Green Mountains.”

He adds, of the Fannings: “This will be their first time in Oregon, and it takes me back 32 years. I thought it’d be great to pay homage to people who have been influential to me, except now I get to boss them around.”

Meyer has a new album, “Hang On to Your Pants,” which features covers, including “Bohemian Rhapsody” and “Devil Went Down To Georgia.” It was recorded at Kung Fu Bakery Recording.

Speaking of baking, just for fun, Meyer’s wife, Renee, gave her husband a cake a couple years ago.

It was in the shape of a violin.