



Lang Lang with PS 334 Anderson School students in New York City

EDITORS' NOTE In 2009, *Time* magazine named Lang Lang one of the top 100 "Most Influential People in the World." This young man from industrial China became the first Chinese musician to be engaged by the top orchestras in the world and has performed for numerous international dignitaries and major world leaders. Outside of the concert hall, he has appeared in performances at the Nobel Prize Ceremony, the Davos World Economic Forum, and as part of the opening ceremony of the 2008 Beijing Olympics. Lang's charitable efforts led to the launch of the Lang Lang International Music Foundation in October 2008 in New York City's Town Hall. Lang studied piano with his father in Shenyang and later moved to Beijing to train at the Beijing Central Conservatory of Music. At age 13, he immigrated to the U.S. to continue his studies at the Curtis Institute of Music.

ORGANIZATION BRIEF The mission of the Lang Lang International Music Foundation (www.langlangfoundation.org) is to inspire and educate the next generation of classical music lovers and performers. Founded in 2008 by classical pianist Lang Lang, the Foundation strives to design innovative and unique music education programs that make classical music fun, relevant, and accessible to children. Through its Young Scholars program, the Foundation identifies talented young pianists and supports them in the delivery of live piano concerts to children in underserved communities. In an effort to build young audiences in local communities, 101 Pianists celebrate their love of playing, experiment with musical collaboration, and enjoy the social nature of piano. The Foundation also seeks to bring harmony in difficult times by supporting social causes that are in need of awareness building and fund-raising.

Why did you create the Lang Lang International Music Foundation and how do you define its mission?

Classical music changed my life so dramatically that I want to try to help it open doors for other children. Unfortunately, there's a stereotype of classical music being very old and, therefore, boring. But classical music can be exciting, interesting, and, most importantly, fun and engaging for kids. So Lang Lang

The Power of Music

An Interview with Lang Lang, Founder
Lang Lang International Music Foundation



International Music Foundation's mission is about inspiring and educating the next generation of classical music lovers and performers.

I hope that I can encourage kids to give classical music a chance and see it as a form of self-expression, and a window of opportunity. If children hear classical music in unthreatening ways, the beauty of the music will become more apparent to them, and they will appreciate it and engage with it. I want to help to revitalize a passion and interest in classical music in young children.

You have devoted your time and resources to giving back to children for over 10 years. Where did this focus on assisting young people come from?

I'm motivated in a unique way by the charitable work that I do with kids. For every educational music interaction that I have with young children, I get way more back from it than I put in. I've had a chance to give back to kids around the world in different countries and with many different music education partners through many kinds of events. I've played music for sick children in hospitals and delivered classical music recitals in underserved and remote communities. I've donated my time to help fund-raise for benefit concerts for many disasters or important causes, I've led mass piano events and personally mentored rising young talented pianists, and I have given master classes for young pianists.

The experience that touched me the most was my trip to Africa. I took a piano keyboard and started playing with kids in the middle of Tanzania on a field trip as a UNICEF International Goodwill Ambassador. I was so touched when I saw young kids – who had never heard classical music before – get so excited about what I was playing. They didn't speak English or Chinese, but we connected through the music alone. And it was a key turning point for me to decide that I wanted to find a way to give back to kids in a meaningful and committed way.

I launched a second career with my foundation, and I look forward to continuing to help it grow and inspire and educate even more kids around the world.

Lang Lang International Music Foundation has a Young Scholars program. Would you describe this program and some of the young scholars you have worked with?

Young Scholars is a music education program designed to identify and support talented young pianists in delivering live performances to other kids their age with the

goal of inspiring and educating the next generation of classical music lovers and performers. Every two years, the foundation partners with a financial sponsor to select and support exceptionally talented young pianists between the ages of 6 and 11 from around the world to be part of its Young Scholars program. Each young musician agrees to "Play It Forward" by participating in a series of live music education events that include pre- and post-performance workshops aimed at developing an understanding and appreciation for classical music among their peers. When children see other children doing something they never thought someone their age could do, it can be exciting and empowering.

We just hosted an in-school concert in partnership with VH1 Save the Music Foundation at the Anderson School for 350 students to kick off the New Year in New York City. Three of my talented Young Scholars performed with me, and we played a few solo pieces and some with all four of us together.

I currently have five incredibly talented Young Scholars who are working with my foundation: two in Germany and three in the U.S., and two more being selected in Hong Kong this spring. These kids are really going to help us reach our mission because we are creating meaningful opportunities for them to perform in schools and at music concerts for young kids. They will reach the young kids and inspire them to realize that through hard work and dedication, everyone can achieve their dreams. Hopefully, the children in the audience will develop an appreciation of classical music and will become lifelong listeners by being exposed in an unthreatening way to the great sounds of the past.

What is the role of music in opening up opportunities for communication, understanding, and acceptance?

Music is a universal language of the world. People of all backgrounds, genders, races, and ethnicities can connect through music even when they don't speak or think the same language. My foundation believes that a society with fluency in music is open to more opportunities for communication, understanding, and acceptance. That's why we strive to ignite a passion for music in youth so the next generation can become leaders in bridging cultural divides and help unite local and global communities. Our hope is that the cultural exchange through music education programs will help make the world a better place. ●