



The Teachers Who Made All the Difference

Ask emerging artists what has been their biggest influence, and they will cite that one inspirational teacher—or two or three—who not only gave lessons in technique and art, but provided a lifelong approach to music and sometimes a career boost, too.

by Steven Brown



Zlatomir Fung with teacher Richard Aaron at the Juilliard School, December 2018. Fung says that Aaron “turned me into a cellist.”



Cellist Zlatomir Fung salutes a series of teachers who have molded him. “Every teacher has been right for that moment in my life,” Fung says. “I’m really lucky and grateful.”

ZLATOMIR FUNG

Cellist Zlatomir Fung, a Juilliard School undergraduate who already holds a fistful of prizes, says his good fortune with teachers began when he was 3 years old. “Somehow or other, the town where I was living—Corvallis, Ore.—happened to have this brilliant Suzuki cello teacher. And I just fell into her lap,” Fung says.

Ann Grabe, a cellist in the Eugene Symphony, devoted Fung’s first year almost entirely to such basics as the correct finger position and bow hold, and the thorough grounding paid off from there on, Fung says. And when Grabe presented her class recitals, her students had to be on their toes. “Say you had been working on Suzuki book two,” Fung says. “She would get onstage, and she’d have a hat. It would have the names of all the pieces in the book. You had to draw a name. So you would never know which piece you’d play. You’d have to be ready with all of them.”

When Fung moved east to study in the New England Conservatory Preparatory Division, faculty member Emmanuel Feldman honed his technique and introduced him to major cello works. Fung says that Juilliard’s Richard Aaron, who began teaching him when Fung was in high school, “turned me into a cellist. He encouraged me to start thinking artistically about the instrument.” Aaron showed his pupil how to break down technical challenges into manageable pieces. And he encouraged Fung to discover as many possibilities as he could for shaping a given phrase or note.

“He’s a lucky kid who had very good training,” Aaron says. “All I did was nurture what was there already.” When Fung entered Juilliard, Aaron suggested sharing the teaching duties with Timothy Eddy. “It’s better for students to have as many inputs as possible,” Aaron says. He predicts a stellar future for Fung. “He’s one of the most brilliant cellists I’ve ever heard in my life,” Aaron says.