



*Yeou-Cheng Ma, an accomplished musician and child developmental pediatrician, has led the Children's Orchestra Society since 1984.*

## Inspiring childhood wonder through the language of music: Yeou-Cheng Ma '77

*By Chelsie Lim*

*A mischievous little girl, the type impossible to teach classical music to, grew up to receive a PhD in cello performance at the Royal Academy. Another young violinist, who was utterly unable to learn through traditional visual or audible cues and instead had to have her fingers lifted for her, went on to study medicine and open her own pain clinic.*

*Both of these students were members of the Children's Orchestra Society in Syosset, New York, directed by Dr. Yeou-Cheng Ma, an accomplished musician and child developmental pediatrician. Compelled by the sole goal of "teaching children the language of music," she continues to leave a tremendous impact on young musicians, to whom her witty, catered teaching methods foster both joy and discipline.*

*If life is a piece with every temptation for the player to rush, Dr. Yeou-Cheng Ma has succeeded in persuading her own tempo. The resilience required of her from her professional violin training in Europe, to studies at Harvard Radcliffe and Medical School as a woman in the '70s, to working in both medical and artistic spaces filled with eager children; is perhaps not conducive to the utterly generous patience she offers students who so fervently appreciate her.*

*Her father offered her the reins of the youth orchestra when she was still amidst her medical training: "I do. But I'm a pediatric intern," was her response. She explained, "We worked 120 out of 168 hours of the week, so there was only 48 hours for everything else; you know, sleeping, eating. So despite the fact that I was very energetic, I knew that I couldn't take that on at the time."*

*The critical strength of Dr. Ma is her trust in timing. Combined with her unwavering love for music, she never lost sight of her wish to share it with the next generations, after what she calls a "long detour in medicine." Nevertheless, her practice in developmental pediatrics has grounded her effective teaching by providing her the knowledge of how children do and don't learn. "My belief is that if you want to do something badly enough, you'll get to do it—maybe not immediately, but at some point!"*

*Barrie Kolstein, a longtime friend and violin maker who partnered with COS, continues to be stunned by her level of dedication and expertise from working in both fields. "Her giving—it has no bounds," he said. "She's tied the two—her medical experiences and talents—together so thoroughly."*

*Another supporter of Children's Orchestra Society, Daniel Chang, is both the father of two alumnae and a board member. He was so touched by Dr. Ma's impact on the students that he continued his support through fundraising efforts and by leading the program's recent partnership with the Garden of Hope, a nonprofit that aids victims of domestic violence and human trafficking in the Chinese community. He reflected, "I realized that Dr. Ma's teaching method in the way that we use music—not just teach[ing] music itself, but us[ing] music to give them a voice and give them a tool to channel their anger, their happiness, their sorrow, all of their emotions; but also, more importantly, let them feel that they are blessed—that's a real rationale behind it."*

*Her love for children is, indeed, the spirit that propels the Children's Orchestra Society mission. She thinks we all have a lot to learn (or, perhaps, unlearn) from observing children. "If you can recover that childhood wonder about everything, everything will make you happy."*

*Dr. Ma is living and thriving proof of how rediscovering our curiosities can allow us to make peace with our priorities through prime practice, patience, and pedagogy; from the practice room to public service.*

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