

Angela Lin

The Sound of College Station: Profile of Jirong Ye

Fifty-two white keys, 36 black keys, 88 keys altogether make a standard piano.

Jirong Ye, 66, is a pianist and harpist. Ye teaches both the piano and harp to all ages. She usually charges for private lessons but eventually offered free lessons and volunteered her time to those who could not afford instruments.

Ye was born in China and grew up there with a mom, dad, and brother. She was raised in China but never got to experience anything besides work and homeschooling; her family was poor. Not being able to afford school meant there were no extracurricular activities she could engage in. Ye's parents thought that it would be a better life for her in America.

Ye's interest in music began while still in China when her mother took her to a theatrical play as a surprise treat. A lady played a harp beautifully in the background.

Soon her family migrated over to America looking to start a new life.

Around the age of fourteen, Ye got another taste of music when her father came home one night with a record player and a few records. Right when the needle hit the black spinning record, Ye was in awe. One of Beethoven's popular songs, "Für Elise" played.

"The song sounded so soothing in the beginning that it almost lulled me to sleep," Ye said "But then it picked up and had an exciting beat. It just sounded so beautiful I wanted to attempt it myself."

After purchasing a used keyboard, Ye had no idea how to even begin learning this instrument. “It took me a couple of weeks to learn the notes by ear and a few months to learn the entire song, Fur Elise,” Ye said.

All her hard work paid off when she got a chance to hear that song again, not by the hands of Beethoven, but by her own.

Ye taught herself multiple songs within the classical era, which she loved. Knowing that if she wanted to expand her skills, she would have to take a few lessons on proper techniques, learning to read music and music theory.

For 30 or more years, Ye had charged people for the exact same thing she paid for when she first started out. Up until a few years ago, she made it free for any child who wanted to learn the piano or even just about music but still charged the adults.

Ye thought that by volunteering free lessons it would help kids keep busy after school, which gave them less opportunity to end up hanging out with the wrong crowd.

“It’s fun to play the song chopsticks while I wait for my mom to pick me up after work,” current student Lioncel Lin said.

After getting a chance to learn, Ye wanted others to experience the feeling and emotion behind music as she did.

“I joined the American String Teacher's and Music Teacher's Association, which has given me the opportunity to teach,” Ye said.

After getting her certification to teach, Ye invested in her own studio. The studio hosts many students wanting to learn.

“Miss Ye has taught me more than music but also patience and discipline,” former student Annie Lin said.

With a good amount of kids coming in and out, she couldn’t keep up with everyone.

“I have many former students who volunteer there time by my side teaching these kids,” Ye said.

A former student, Judy Wang, dedicated a few hours out of her day to aid in lessons. “I’ve learned enough to be able to teach myself and teach little kids the basics. It’s exciting to see when they learn a song,” Wang said.

Parents of current students also had a few positive things to say about the effects of the change Mrs. Ye had made.

“The free lessons are perfect because my son had always wanted to learn since his older sister had taken lessons from Mrs. Ye. We just could not afford it after his sisters went to college,” said Ai-Hua Lin, mother of current student Lioncel Lin.

“It just shows you how much they matter and how much the community matters,” Ye said.