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For the Love of Music: Yuri Lily Funahashi shares the gift of collaboration

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*For the Love
of Music*

Yuri Lily Funahashi
shares the gift of
collaboration

By Mareisa Weil

A virtuoso is quietly going about her business in the classrooms of the Bixler Art and Music Center. Yuri Lily Funahashi, accomplished chamber musician, assistant professor, and Music Department co-chair, is strengthening and inspiring her students' relationship with music.

Born in Kyoto, Japan, Funahashi was started on the piano at the age of three by her parents, and they immediately recognized that she had an aptitude for music. Over the rest of her childhood, as her family moved back and forth between the United States and Japan for her father's medical career, music would remain a constant, driving force in Funahashi's life.

"It's about teamwork; it's about creating something together with other musicians," Funahashi explained.

That excitement is something that Funahashi is eager to share with her students, many of whom she knows may not go on to pursue careers in music.

"She was so generous with her time and support," recalled Qainat Khan '11.

Khan, a freelance journalist and gender studies and music double major, took classes with Funahashi soon after she joined the faculty in 2009. "I knew this was the last time I would be able to study music like this—to just spend hours pouring my whole soul into something that resonated so deeply with me. And Lily really allowed me to explore every facet of that—as a solo pianist, as a collaborative pianist, and as a collaborative cello player."

Funahashi knows about pouring your soul into music. She finished her undergraduate music studies in three years at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, and then set out for California to study at the University of Southern California with pianist John Perry. It was at USC that Funahashi began to truly immerse herself in chamber music.

"I started to play with some very fine violinists and cellists—Jascha Heifetz's studio was there," she said. Once

she discovered her passion for ensemble-style practice and performance, she says, "I have not let go."

Funahashi's passion for creative collaboration blossomed at Juilliard, where she earned her doctorate and studied with renowned instructor Adele Marcus. Her experience at Juilliard was life-changing, not only because of the caliber of students and professors, but she also met her husband there, Steven Pane, now a professor of music at the University of Maine, Farmington. The pair studied together and worked together with the Boys Choir of Harlem locally and internationally. (That gig also landed Funahashi on an episode of *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood*.) After graduation, the two musicians sought a place where they could raise a

family and be in nature but also be close enough to major cities—New York and Boston—so that they could continue to perform. Maine, she said, was the perfect choice.

In a quintessentially Colby turn of events, Funahashi and her Music Department co-chair, Steven Nuss, were undergraduates at University of Wisconsin, Madison at the same time but never met.

"Because of our mutual ties to Wisconsin and Japan," Nuss said, "our frantic days as department administrators are filled with lots of laughs, inside jokes, and finishing each other's sentences. I can only imagine what my undergraduate life would have been like had I met Lily during our undergrad days. But I can certainly say that I am extraordinarily grateful that we finally connected and that I get to see her work magic every day."

For Funahashi, the magic is in the music.

"I've learned so much from the musicians I work with. You end up having this very enriching experience where you bring your ideas, and each member will bring their experiences and their ideas, and then you have to create something together combining all of that. And I guess that's what makes it exciting for me."



It's about teamwork; it's about creating something together with other musicians."

**—Yuri Lily Funahashi,
assistant professor of music**