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Bringing Classical Music to Life Gomez is the First Ever MHS String Player Accepted to the Colorado All-State Orchestra

Montrose, CO – The Colorado All-State Orchestra has been providing memorable performance opportunities for the state’s top high school musicians since 1952. Selected high school students come together for three days of intense rehearsal to put on the finest high school symphony performances of the year. Senior Li Gomez is the first ever Montrose High School (MHS) string player to be accepted to the Colorado All-State Orchestra. She will be playing violin on February 3, 2024, at the University Center for the Arts, Griffin Concert Hall, in Fort Collins, CO. Details for the concerts and tickets are available at <https://www.coloradoallstateorchestra.org/>.

The talent needed to achieve this level of success is remarkable, and Gomez’s journey is even more astonishing considering that there is no string program in the district. Nevertheless, MHS Director of Bands Sheridan Lloyd has fully supported and encouraged Gomez’s dreams. Fortunately, there two strong local non-profit organizations, the Valley Youth Orchestra (VYO) and the Valley Symphony Association (VSA), that have helped to develop and mentor Gomez’s extraordinary talent.

She has been playing violin for almost 15 years—starting while just a toddler—the majority of which she spent studying under the tutelage of Debra TenNapel, the former VYO Director and VSA Concertmaster from 2005-2022.

“Debra introduced me to the VYO, which I’ve been a part of for 12 years, both as student and mentor,” Gomez said. “I have been teaching kids ages four to eighteen, helping them adjust to the complexities of orchestra, as well as teaching violin techniques and music theory. I’ve found rewarding growth in helping others and amazing opportunities to improve my leadership skills.”

In 2021, Gomez joined the VSA Orchestra and immediately loved the energy and community. “Through the VSA, I’ve been able to expand my level of sight reading, technique, and ability to blend with a wider range of musicians,” she said.

While the violin is Gomez’s main instrument, she also plays percussion (section leader) in the MHS Marching Band and in the Montrose Community Band. “Learning to play percussion has really benefited my skills with the violin.”

Once Gomez decided she wanted to audition for the Colorado All-State Orchestra, she had help every step of the way from Lloyd and still more from the VSA's Music Director and Orchestra Conductor Troy Raper.

"Li needed only a little bit of guidance from me on the application process and the music she wanted to play for the audition," says Lloyd. "Frankly, it is incredible to have a string player qualify for All-State without a string program, so it is a testament to groups like the VYO and VSA that she's learned her craft. Because she participates in so many musical things outside of school, she brings the knowledge she gains back to class, which motivates other students. In fact, Li often takes over teaching the percussion section when I can't be right there. We are so proud of Li's accomplishments!"

With a 31-year career as a teacher for the Mesa County District 51, Raper has helped many students apply for the Colorado All State Orchestra. More than that, he spent 10 years as chair and board member for the Colorado All-State Orchestra Governing Board, so he knows intimately how the process works and was able to guide Gomez through the application and audition process.

"Li's acceptance into the all-state orchestra speaks to her determination in searching out the opportunity itself," says Raper. "Because she's from a school district without a string program, she typically wouldn't be allowed to even audition under the Colorado High School Activities Association (CHSAA) eligibility bylaws." CHSAA is the governing body for all high school activities throughout the state of Colorado. "However, because she's involved in a school music program as a member of the MHS Marching Band, she discovered a pathway allowing her the opportunity to tryout, so, while her eligibility comes from being involved in a school music organization, her string music training comes from her experiences with the VYO and VSA."

"I can attest that a majority—around 85%—of all-state students come from large metro areas with very strong string programs, and I can also state that the audition process is rigorous and unforgiving," Raper said. "So for Li to have completed and achieved this goal is tremendous and noteworthy: to have a student from a small town in Western Colorado audition—and make it—is rare, and we on the Western Slope should be truly proud of Li."

Besides performing with the Colorado All-State Orchestra in Fort Collins, Gomez will play in two upcoming VSA orchestra concerts: *A Night at the Movies* (Feb 24, 6:30pm, and Feb 25, 3pm) and *Rites of Spring* (Apr 20, 6:30pm, and Apr 21, 3pm).

In addition, once VSA Chorus Conductor Katy Kristoffersen learned about Gomez and heard her play, "I just had to create a way to include Li in our upcoming March VSA Chorus concerts, *Heaven & Bluegrass*," Kristoffersen said. Gomez will perform as a violin soloist for the two performances (Mar 30, 6:30pm and Mar 31, 3pm) that will also feature local bluegrass band, The Black Canyon Boys.

And finally, Gomez will also be on stage with the VYO for their *Dark Skies & Bright Stars* (March 9, 4pm) and *Music on the Move* (Apr 28, 4pm) concerts at the Montrose Pavilion. Visit ValleyYouthOrchestra.org for details and tickets.

“I met Li when I started working with the VYO and really appreciate her leadership and musicianship,” says VYO Conductor Laura Payne. “She's willing to offer her talents back to the community and is fully committed, whether it's playing in the VYO, VSA Orchestra, chamber ensembles, or for the MHS Marching Band. She's intuitive, creative, and enjoys a challenge. It's been a privilege working with Li and being part of her musical journey. The VYO is so proud she's representing Montrose at All-State Orchestra!”

Besides her talent, perseverance, and drive to create opportunities for her own development, Gomez has sound-color synesthesia, the ability to see colors produced from sound, which has served to inform her as a musician. “Synesthesia has allowed me to feel music on a much deeper and more personal level, and I've been able to use that to overcome challenging situations,” she said. “Finding my path and what music means to me, away from any expectations, has allowed me to know that music is something I wish to pursue for the rest of my life. I want to be able to help people discover the joy in music,” Gomez said.

In considering Gomez's ground-breaking, against-all-odds accomplishment, TenNapel was hard-pressed to not recall her early years instructing Gomez as a 4-year-old—and beyond. “Since our first meeting, when I had to set Li up on a baby stool and start her with ‘Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star’—knowing that all these years later she'll now be taking on Dvorak's “New World Symphony” as part of the All-State Orchestra—I've marveled at her sheer talent, along with her consistency, grit, determination, and dedication,” TenNapel said. “She is so willing to work hard—really hard—and creatively and cleverly seek out opportunities to grow, be it as a musician, a leader, or a human being. Li takes serious ownership of whatever she's involved with, and to see her reach this pinnacle in this chapter of her musical career is so rewarding and special.”

“When Li called me about her plans to audition, I offered some technical guidance and lots of encouragement,” TenNapel said. After Gomez sent TenNapel a copy of the audition tape, “I listened from start to finish. Her audition was beautiful. She just nailed it. Li is so very special, and I'm so very proud of her—and we all should be, too. I can hardly wait to see what's next.”

“We are amazed at how the web of musical organizations in Montrose and on the Western Slope work together to support each other and musicians in the community and to develop and mentor a young talent like Li Gomez,” VSA Board President Hartland H. Clubb, Jr., said. “We are proud to be part of the musical community that is bringing classical to life!”

For information, visit the VSA on Facebook @valleysymphonyassociation or at ValleySymphony.net. Tickets for all season 52 concerts at the Montrose Pavilion are also available online; in Delta at Clubb's (417 Main St); and in Montrose at season co-partner Cimarron Wealth Management (1731 E Niagara Rd) and Colorado Smiles (601 S 3rd St). Other inquiries may be directed to 970-765-8323 or info@ValleySymphony.net. Help us reach 1,000 subscribers by logging on and subscribing to the VSA's new YouTube channel (Valley Symphony Association - Montrose, Colorado).

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About the Valley Symphony Association

Since 1970, the Valley Symphony Association has culturally enriched the community and its members by bringing together some of the best volunteer musicians from the Uncompahgre, North Fork, and Grand Valleys to discover and present works of great composers, past and present. Performances range from classical orchestral to upbeat pop, from purely instrumental to purely choral, to a combination of both.

Our goal is to ensure that future generations will enjoy the legacy of live orchestral and choral music that so magnificently celebrates the human spirit.

About Our Season Co-Partners

Cimarron Wealth Management strives to simplify your financial life and give you confidence about your future so you can focus on your passions. It starts with the foundation of investment, estate and tax planning discussions, but our passion is honest conversations about purpose, legacy and generosity.

The David Mize Family has quietly and generously supported all types of Western Slope non-profit organizations for decades and is a longstanding donor to the VSA.
