

Comments from Former Students of the CRHS Orchestra Program

Ben Chai (violinist, Class of '07) writes:

[Cincinnati Conservatory of Music] is great, but incredibly intense! It's really, really funny how all these years all the students who have graduated before me have always said how prepared Cinco makes you. Well, it's the truth. Cinco is a HARD SCHOOL. I have never felt more over-prepared in my life. Although all of my classes are completely different because I'm in a conservatory program, it's just really amazing to see how much work ethic I have and the people I knew from Cinco have compared to the kids here and in colleges everywhere.

I'm not saying it's easy, though! I'm taking thirty hours a week of class, plus homework. And for the kids who complain about sectionals or Monday night rehearsals, I have rehearsals every week Monday-Friday from 6 PM to midnight and Saturdays and Sundays from 9 AM-1 AM; roughly 75 hours of rehearsal per week. So I'm kept pretty busy, but I'm loving it! Do what you want to do and you'll succeed, don't do it just for the money, you know?

I really, really miss Orchestra. I re-visited the "alumni" page today and it brought back so many great memories! I love how the kids always complained about EVERYTHING but goodness when we worked we were a TEAM! Someday, I hope everyone will realize the deep appreciation they have for Orchestra, 'cause it's there no matter what they say. Music is definitely another language, and the great thing about it is the fact that it hasn't been broken into a billion different pieces like the spoken languages have. What I love is how Orchestra has trained me to be able to engage in FRIENDLY competition along with being able to incorporate leadership into working with others without being a dominating or a controlling leader, you know what I mean?

I've got so much more to say, so I will definitely be typing some more in the future. Thanks for being such a great role model, Mr. Nelsen, really. Best wishes to your family at home and your family at school. Aipeace.

Ed Castillo (cellist, Class of '07) writes:

Simply put... high school was better. I truly, actually, honestly miss being an upper-classman in the CRHS orchestra. I can say with absolute confidence that no orchestra will ever be as fun to be in as the program at CRHS.

By the way, the orchestra here is much better than I had anticipated. I have heard descriptions from other Cinco grads in the past about the orchestra programs at their schools and didn't have very high expectations, especially considering that I'm going to oot-sa. This group is not quite as good as the Cinco full orchestra. I can't

honestly say that they are better, because they are not. But the cello section? Holy crab cakes, Batman, I need to practice.

There really is more to life than your class rank and GPA. Well, as long as it's not lower than mine was. I think that should be a new amendment to the "class rank and GPA" saying. "...As long as it's not lower than Ed's."

Say hello to all the orchestra kiddos for me. Tell them to work so very hard to honor me. Yes, me. And if the cellos slack off... I'll know. Believe me, I'll know! AND THERE WILL BE HELL TO PAY!

Susan Su (violinist, Class of '07) writes:

Tell all the high-schoolers that I miss them and being in orchestra. College really is different from high school. You have so much more freedom in choosing and going to classes.

Christie Ferguson (violinist, Class of '07) writes:

Received 12,000\$ in scholarship money and I am playing in the UTSA orchestra.

Ryan Zuckman (violinist, Class of '07) writes:

Hello, I'm Ryan Zuckman, the curly-haired rock n' roll violinist! The Cinco Ranch High School Orchestra is, in my opinion, one of the best, most rewarding experiences you'll have in your high school career, so cherish it!

Caitlin Cima (Harpist, Class of '03) writes:

The night of May 12 will actually be my commissioning ceremony for the Air Force. My job will be as an Intelligence officer--I guess that's what speaking Arabic gets me, especially when they decided I was too short to fly. I'll be heading to Intel school in San Angelo, Texas until January, and then after that I'll be off to my next base, wherever it is the Air Force chooses to send me. I've got a required 4 years that I have to pay back to the military, and I know I'm not doing career--I doubt I will stay in any more than 10. I'm not looking to do unless the Air Force starts shuttling grad school my way, I'm going to do just the minimum and get out... I've been looking into Georgetown's school of public policy, UT's Islamic studies program... I'm not sure yet what my focus is going to be on post-Air Force, but I have even tossed around the idea of non-profit law... could you imagine me as a lawyer? I've been contacted to go back out to Africa and work at a refugee center in Cairo, a few friends of mine from Egypt are doing archeological dives in the Mediterranean, and I have also been offered a job leading American tourists in horseback riding tours next to the Pyramids... makes me hope I don't get stuck behind a desk working for the Air Force. I'm just trying to take everything in stride... since Egypt, everything has been falling into place, and I think things will continue to do so. I've got a pretty serious boyfriend, and there has been talk of making that more serious, so I'll keep your address around in case I have to send out wedding invites. :)

Hope the kids these days are giving you as much hell as we used to.

Katie Tepper (Violinist, Class of '06) writes:

Great job at UIL! I loved the Rhapsody in Blue (and the other songs, but this one was my favorite). My mom loves it too. Afterwards, she kept trying to be like Kenneth and basically she just looked stupid, but she was just trying to relive it. College is going great so far! Classes are pretty easy, and I've already joined a bunch of clubs. I also started playing the violin at church. I like it because you get to play pretty music, but it's easy so you don't have to practice. You don't realize how huge of a school Cinco is until you move out of Texas. Well, I've got to go eat dinner--yummy dorm food yay! and then study for a test tomorrow and watch the Cardinals game. Everyone here is a Cards fan, and the dorm gets pretty loud when they play.

Mai Li (Violinist, Class of '05) writes

Hi Mr. Nelsen!

How are you? I was just doing some research for a paper (or at least "trying" to do work) and thinking of food, and all of a sudden I thought of m&ms, which led me to think about the m&m machine, which led me to think about the orchestra, which led me to wonder how everyone's doing. =) I hope everything at Cinco's going well! Oh yes and I hope this makes your day: there's an orchestra concert this Sunday, and I'm planning on going! I'll tell you how it is :D

I hope the school year is going well! I miss everyone tons. Please keep in touch, Mr. Nelsen!

-Mai

Wei Shan (Violinist, Class of '05) writes:

Dear Mr. Nelsen,

I started major sequence for chemical engineering this semester. I must say I'm actually really enjoying my engineering classes and am finally convinced that I've picked the right major. It's harder than anything I've done, but I like it, and it'll all be worth it in the end. If things work out, I should be interning in Houston in the summer with one of the oil/chemical companies. How's orchestra going? Hopefully I'll be able to make it to a Cinco concert this year, would be nice to relive the good days. I found out that the University Orchestra's playing Slavonic Dance at their concert tomorrow and got really excited...the last time I went they played Mars. It was awesome to be on the other side of the stands =) I brought my violin up with me this year, but haven't really had much time to play. I'd hoped to have enough time to join orchestra next semester, but I don't think it's going to happen. Such is the life of an engineer... Send my regards to Mrs. Nelsen, Ethan, and the orchestra kids (the handful that know me...how sad that in not too long I won't know any of them). and keep telling those kids to stop playing like they drive.

Rgds,
Weishan

Wei Shan Koh (Violinist, Class of '05) writes:

I even re-picked up piano, now that one's accessible, and actually occasionally use the guitar that i got 3 Christmases ago. sad, i know, that i never found the time in high school to have fun. most of high school i remember as falling asleep on some textbook in the middle of the gamer oom at 4 in the morning. probably could've done half as much work and still ended up where i am. <insert Nelsen's i told you so> i totally admit it, your whole gpa and class rank shpiel (sp?) was right. even i, not to mention everyone else here, don't really give a crap about what my grades in high school were.

Isabelle Vargas (Violinist, Class of '03, moved after 1999) writes

Mr Nelsen,

I'm not sure if you remember me but my name is Isabel Vargas (Izzy). You taught me at Beck Jr. High and Cinco Ranch High School from 1996-1999 before I had to move to California. I was friends with Tysha Aspoor, Bethany Telle, and Sarah Lieung. I wanted to write to you for a number of reasons. First, I want to thank you for your wonderful teaching and passion to help students achieve to the best of their abilities. After leaving Cinco Ranch and attending a few other High Schools, I really missed the quality of music education and the techniques that you used. I was more advanced than the other students that started in the same grade as I did, and I had a greater appreciation for your program as well. Fortunately, we found a very good private lesson teacher to keep me up on my skills once I attended a school without a music program.

The past few years have been a journey indeed. I've switched my major a few times and even dropped out for a semester to see how I liked life without college or education. One semester of working retail and office jobs made me ever so enthusiastic about coming back to this university with a good head on my shoulders-and I was ready to buckle down! We just adapted a music major here, and the orchestra director let me join the strings program as an elective. I write for my school newspaper, deliver newspapers every morning at 6 am, and work from 9 to 5 while taking on a 16 credit course load. I will definitely email you when I know for sure when I am coming to town to visit my family, so I can come see the orchestra and how everything is with you!

Hillary Prescott (Violinist, Class of '08, moved after 2006)

Hi Mr. Nelson,

I just wanted to let you know that I tried out for the Northshore Youth Symphony Orchestra and I am 1st chair 2nd violin in the Senior orchestra! Thanks for your teaching the past 2 years!

Hilary Prescott

Kelson Gent (Bass, Class of '06) writes:

I actually really miss having an orchestra class and my bass (It definitely wasn't going to fit in my dorm room). Also, music gave me a connection with my roommate (He is a drum player), we were actually sitting around trying to figure out how to count out a 13/16 time signature the other night. It's also pretty cool to be able to walk around UT, see people from Orchestra in previous graduating classes and have them remember you.

Sarosh Sualehi (Cello, Class of '04 moved after 2003)

My mom and Sarah are great. Sarah is a junior at the American school here, and my Mom keeps busy with the house and us. We all still miss Cinco, but it's not as bad as it used to be.

I am currently an accounting and finance major at the Lahore University of Management Sciences (its about 10 minutes from my house) and I'll graduate in 2008. It's the Harvard of Pakistan. Senior year sucked. Moving to a new school an entire continent away for the last year of high school is not an advisable move. Most of the kids had been together since kindergarten, so you were still "new" if you'd only joined in junior high. At the American school, there was a music class that consisted of drums and xylophones. The teacher was a cellist from New Zealand. The only thing that's really different is the people. Here, staring (at women, children, men, anything) with your mouth open is a national pastime. But people don't generally bother you if you don't bother them, and I have developed this horrible habit of staring back and sometimes making faces. So it goes! Take care, and update me a little on the Nelsenator's activities over the past few years when you get some time.

Yours,
Sarosh

PS: Please say hello to Jessica Peng and Thomas and Jessie and the Lams and Andy Waller if you see them. Good kids, the lot of them, even if you know better.

Debra writes:

Dear Mr. Nelsen,

I decided to drop you a note while I was looking up the phone number to CRHS so I can call the registrars tomorrow to yell at them about why it is taking over three weeks to send me my transcript (I apparently need my GPA and class rank for my medical school applications -and I thought there was more to life than GPA and class rank but apparently it matters to these med school admissions big shots...) and I was just thinking back on the time that's passed since it is hard for me to believe that I am about to start my last year of college, amidst all this medical school applying stress and uncertainty. It really seems like it was just yesterday that I was 16, going to Monday night rehearsals and those Tuesday afternoon sectionals and you breaking your baton yelling at us to stop playing like we drive.

I have to say that being in orchestra was the pinnacle of my high school career and I really miss the people and all the good times we had. I have to be honest and say that I have barely touched my instrument since I graduated. I did play at two weddings last summer though -Ian's older sister's wedding, and my cousin's.

I also just returned from studying abroad on the Great Barrier Reef at Lizard Island, Australia through a UT program. Coincidentally, Katie [Saunders] also was accepted into the program as well! We both had an amazing time out there.

I hope your family is doing well, especially Ethan, and that you are enjoying your summer.

Best,
Debra

Daisy Wang (Violin, Class of 2004) writes:

We had an orchestra concert last Thursday. Went pretty well, considering that we played in the Chapel where acoustics are wonderful, so you can't hear any mistake unless it's the ending of the song... Other than that, nothing exciting about orchestra. We don't even have t-shirts here! and Emily didn't even notice! so we might try to whip something up. I need to work on something fun tho, do you have any song suggestions? They have lots of music in the library here, but I have no idea where to start choosing music! I was also thinking about switching from symphony orchestra to a chamber ensemble but I'm not sure. I'd have to see how they sound and what they have exactly. Anyways, just a little update, I am taking Bio 1 (apparently even if you got a 5 on the AP exam, you still have to take the class....bc they say it's "Different". and it really is) Anyways, hope you are having a wonderful year so far with those crazy students of yours!

Rehearsals was....disappointing. :(I think I was expecting too much coming from Cinco and the rest of the music is kind of boring. I talked to Emily and she said she felt the same way when she got here, but that you just get used to it. That's so sad! But of course we were just sight reading the music yesterday. Even so, I could feel the lack of passion my director seemed to lack. Emily said I was right. Then we talked about how we missed Cinco orchestra and having Nelsen as our awesome director. Anyways, tell everyone in orchestra how AMAZING Cinco orchestra is and how incredibly lucky they are to be apart of such a wonderful program. OH, ha ha, and tell them my FULL orchestra is about the size of our string orchestra and I am one of the FOUR Asian people in it :) i bet they would find that interesting.

Sofie Goshu (Bass, Class of '04) writes:

Hi Mr. Nelesn

how are you? you will never guess what I'm doing.. I had orientation at my school and I decided to check out the orchestra program.. just to see what they have... I was not planning on doing nothing about it.. and I talk to the director... guess how many students they have in the program!! you'll never guess only 25 students.. I always thought you were just playing when you say we're lucky to have such a big program.. and the lady told me she really, really needs me to join.. but I told her how bad I am .. I told her I'm not good at all.. she told me she is gone put me in a class to get lessons... but i don't know how that's gone work out.. but you are right... Cinco does have a really great program.. I'm getting some kind of scholarships for it.. i don't know though.. anywayz.. I hope your having a great year. I know how busy you get.. I just thought you should know you really have great program..

Andy Deal (Class of '06 moved in mid 2005)

I've become very good at sight reading, especially in front of crowds, since I have been playing with the choir at the church I go to here, and I've almost never seen the music before, so it makes life interesting. About my opportunities to play here, they have been sadly limited but wonderfully diverse. My school has no other strings, at all, unless you count guitarists. So most of the music I've played here has been jazz and blues and much more contemporary stuff, which has been interesting. I have a regular teacher, who's British and has helped me a lot, and is trying to get me into a youth orchestra, although the first one she tried would only accept Brazilians. Grrrrr..... Actually, I did get to play at a wedding once, which was nice. I would never have expected to be playing Elton John's Your Song as the bride walked up the aisle though. Interesting. All in all, diverse and fun. A lot of treble clef....

Two brief things about music class here. We have to compose here, which is great, I love it. I'm currently finishing up a work for string orchestra and harp. Quite bizarre to say that really. Also, we have to analyze in depth Bela Bartok's Concerto for Orchestra, which I have to say is a brilliant piece. Its fascinating to really look at something so closely.

Well, hopefully I'll get a chance to give you more details and stories in New York. Have a marvelous day and good luck with the orchestra! I hope the rest of the Nelsens' are doing well also. Ethan must be what...almost 3 now? And Suzuki book 4?

One movement short of a symphony,

Andy